

# On the Shores of Darkness

*by purpleygirl*

Only through the Dark can Remus be saved. SS/RL.

## Part One

*Chapter 1 of 2*

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**Notes:** I want to dedicate this to **Klynle**, my fantastic beta, without whom, honestly, I would never have had the guts to try writing slash. ::Ginormous hugs::

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*"...Aye, on the shores of darkness there is light ..."*

- *To Homer*, John Keats, 1818.

When Snape had casually asked Lucius why he wanted the Wolfsbane Potion, the last thing he had expected was this.

He recalls how Lucius had grinned when he invited him back to his house the first time Snape has seen Lucius's new home since the end of the Dark Lord. Snape knows that Lucius has been forced to dispose of his precious manor house to buy himself out of Azkaban and that he has settled on a small (for his rich tastes) house on the outskirts of Hogsmeade as the only all-wizarding town currently in Britain, he knows Lucius simply has to live there. One must uphold one's pureblood heritage, after all. Even if your wife has divorced you and moved abroad with your only son and heir. In spite of the air he likes to give, Lucius is not the catch he used to be. A few years in Azkaban has sent his once proud appearance the way of his late sister-in-law's.

Lucius takes him through the cluttered kitchen and toward the cellar door. Snape falters, begins to worry that Narcissa is not in fact somewhere in Europe but sequestered down here at her husband's mercy. Merlin knows what he needs the Wolfsbane Potion for. Lucius's taste for revenge is known far and wide.

Lucius pauses at the door that leads down to dark steps and turns to him. "Really, I think you'll enjoy this."

Snape makes a feeble attempt to curl his mouth in eagerness. He despises the Death Eaters who have bargained their way out of prison. Lucius deserves much more. And to add insult to injury, though the Dark Lord is finally gone forever, the corruption in the Ministry goes on blithely as before perhaps even worse. A blind eye is turned to what some, such as Lucius, get up to. As long as it does not involve any new Dark lord, the Ministry reasons, it is only proper that these generous benefactors are forgiven their crimes and lauded for their magnanimous donations to the various (and rather dubious) funds set up in the war's wake.

Snape has not been so lucky. With barely a Knut to throw at them, he managed to only just scrape through his sham trial without garnering the suspicion of his ex-comrades in the process and earning him a traitor's death at their hands after his Ministerial reprieve. Funny how it had been Potter's actions that in the end had brought about the acquittal. No doubt if Potter had survived the war, the boy would instead have blindly pursued his old teacher's incarceration, disputing his *own* role in Dumbledore's death to the end.

But since then, Snape has been forced to keep up appearances in front of the likes of Lucius Malfoy. And to think, once upon a time, he had dreamed of being free of the lot of them after the Dark Lord's final defeat.

Snape bares his teeth in the hope that Lucius will take this as a hearty grin. "Let's see what you have, then." He follows Lucius down into the cellar.

To his relief, a sliver of light does poke through from somewhere, enough for Snape to see by as his eyes grow accustomed to the gloom.

The room is cold .... And bare, as far as he can tell not even a collection of elf-made wine stashed away. Though the bleak light fails to reach every corner, they are clearly too small to be concealing anything significant.

He turns an expectant gaze on Lucius, who raises his eyebrows and smiles. *Lumos!*"

At once, by the light of Lucius's wand, the bare bricks of the walls are thrown into sharp relief. Snape cautiously peers around the room.

He pauses at a far corner that has previously been in deep shadow. Something does seem to be there. A heap of something. He feels his heart begin to beat faster. Narcissa is abroad, surely. Though he has never received any correspondence...

As he narrows his eyes at the mass of tattered material, he grows more and more sure that it is indeed in the shape of a human body. "What is this, Lucius? You bring me here to show me your dirty laundry?"

Lucius laughs. A loud, self-satisfied guffaw. But the mound in the corner remains still.

Snape's concern grows a building sense of dread that he is about to see another corpse. Merlin knows he has seen enough of them to last several lifetimes.

"My dear Severus, you are not *looking*."

Snape looks more closely.

Lucius makes a melodramatic sigh. "Take a closer look. It won't bite." He smiles. "Well, not in this state, at least."

Reluctant to have his back to Lucius, Snape stays to his side.

"Oh, really," Lucius says in exasperation. "Look." He strides over to within a few feet of the heap. "See?" he says, looking back at Snape.

Now Lucius is comfortably in front of him, Snape steps nearer. At Lucius's back, he trains his gaze on the mass in the corner.

The torn material is indeed tatty robes. And now, with Lucius's wandlight focused on it, he can make out its or his legs, and arms, brought up to his chest, and ...

He feels the blood drain from his face and glances at Lucius, who thankfully seems more concerned about keeping his wandlight on his newest acquisition.

Of all the creatures Lucius could have bought. Of all the things he could have shown him. Why did it have to be him?

Snape makes sure his voice will be steady before he speaks. "You brought me all this way to show me ..*him*?"

Lucius turns to him then with an enquiring gaze. "I thought you'd find it interesting. You did ask what I wanted the potion for. Well," he says, turning back to Lupin, "here's your answer."

Snape follows his satisfied gaze. Lupin does not seem to be restrained in any way, though he is right in the corner, facing the adjoining wall. His arms seem tight around him, and his legs are drawn up to his chest, as though cold. Or in pain. His robes seem even shabbier than normal, and Snape thinks he can make out dark staining around some of the gashes, as though blood that has dried.

Though Lucius's light is trained fully on him, only a few feet away, Lupin has not made any move, nor any other indication that he knows they are here.

But his eyes are open.

"That apothecary is ripping me off," says Lucius. He appears somewhat annoyed as he gazes at Lupin. "That's why I wanted to try a more direct source. You're much cheaper, Severus."

Snape breaks his gaze from Lupin's blank stare to scowl at Lucius's back. "Indeed."

"So. What do you think?"

Snape hasn't given much thought to the ridiculous werewolf laws the Ministry, in its infinite wisdom (and instigated by their detestable promoter, one Dolores Umbridge), brought in a few years ago.

But now, it seems, Lucius has made the most of it ... has seen a way to gain from it, as usual.

"It's a werewolf," Snape says. A werewolf 'acquired', completely legally, through the Ministry's mass 'clean up' of the 'less than desirable'. The unemployable, the dangerous, the 'leeches' on the post-war society.

Oh, yes let the rich Death Eaters go free. Restrict the movements of the beasts that fought so viciously alongside the Dark Lord. Reduced to nothing more than house-elves lower, in fact, since whereas elves at least have their own, wandless, magic, all werewolves' wands have been snapped in two.

Since then, Snape has come across werewolves only in the form of slave labour what most of them are now used for most recently on building a brand new all-wizarding village in North Wales. He has seen those at a distance, in passing. And none seemed to be mistreated.

Until now.

And it has to be this one. When will he be rid of crossing paths with this damned creature?

"But not just any werewolf," says Lucius, as though answering his thoughts. "He used to be one of Dumbledore's, didn't he?"

"One of the Order of the Phoenix, yes."

Lucius seems to be waiting for him to say more. "Really," says Snape, deciding he ought to inject some emotion into his voice. "I had no idea you would stoop so low as to keep this in your cellar."

Lucius stares at him. "What?" he says flatly.

Snape begins to wonder if he has gone too far. "Well, a wild beast, Lucius? Whatever do you want it in your house for?"

"Oh, I see." Lucius brightens. "You're under the impression I actually *paid* for the thing. Good grief, no." He pulls a disgusted face. "No, the um, charity, I recently donated to decided to palm him off onto me. As a *gift*, you see."

"I see."

"Of course, I had to accept. Makes the taxman happy, or something like that. Anyway, he does have his uses. I do get bored sometimes knocking around in this house on my own. And I do miss the Muggle games we got up to in the good old days," he adds in a lower voice as though the werewolf is bothered and he leans in to Snape, who catches a whiff of alcohol.

"Yes." Snape does indeed remember the spot of Muggle torture Lucius did enjoy so much. Much to Lucius's chagrin, these days even the Ministry draws the line at allowing its donors their old favourite pastime.

Lucius sighs. "One mustn't allow the lack of a decent subject to let one's Dark Arts become rusty."

"No, indeed." Snape frowns at the prone form of Lupin on the filthy floor. Lucius clearly isn't about to give up his free plaything any time soon. Not before he has finished with him.

"Oh but, you're a little out of practice yourself, aren't you? Come on, admit it. We haven't had a decent run since '98."

"Well ... I don't suppose we have, no."

Lucius gives a feral grin. "Tell you what. I still owe you for what you did for Draco, don't I? Just let me know when you fancy it, you can come around any time you please. It really is a good way to vent one's frustrations, I find. And I know you and this one in particular have a certain history."

Snape tries to look compliant. So this is the reaction Lucius has been waiting for. Everyone knows all about the Whomping Willow incident from his schooldays now since the endless gutter-press reports during his trial. It is a source of much annoyance, and Snape knows right here and now that he would much rather curse Lucius to oblivion than Lupin any day.

"Very generous of you, Lucius."

"Any time. Really." Lucius pauses and brightens suddenly. "Even better!" He moves in to Snape, who tries not to cringe at the scent of Firewhisky that surrounds him, and says in a low voice, "I wasn't going to tell anyone else this. But ... well, we're old friends, aren't we?"

"Of course."

"A few of us are planning on having a little get-together on the 27th. Rookwood's bringing a 'guest'... a young one, from some village somewhere. If you know what I mean?"

"But the 27th is a full moon."

"Yes, exactly."

Out of the corner of his eye, Snape watches Lucius stare in that feral way again at Lupin. "Do I take it my Wolfsbane Potion is not going to be in use for that night?"

"You do indeed." Lucius smiles wider. "I think it will be very interesting. And it's perfect if the Ministry discovers the Muggle child, they won't find a single curse on her, only the marks of a werewolf."

It sounds to Snape as though Rookwood has already found his victim. He wonders how young the child will be this time. "Very clever indeed."

Lucius smiles and takes a step back. "So, how about it? I'm sure the others won't mind one more joining our little soiree."

"Well, I wouldn't want to intrude."

"Not at all! Come on, I do owe you, Severus. What do you say?"

Snape shifts his gaze back to the grimmest area of the tiny, bare-bricked room. Like all injured animals who know death will soon come, or wish it will, Lupin is cowering, curled up within himself, in the darkest corner he can find.

"I'll have to see what I am doing that night."

Lucius gives a small smile, and Snape sees his gaze regard him as though doubting his calendar is all that full in the evenings. "Of course," Lucius says. "Just Floo me."

Snape nods, and Lucius turns to the stairs.

He knows one thing: the event Lucius has planned at the next full moon will destroy Lupin. As sure as if they set a Dementor to suck out his soul, there will be nothing left of him after the 27th.

Snape casts a final glance at the dark corner. He has absolutely no intention of joining their little gathering. He will not find it too difficult to think of some excuse.

He follows Lucius back up the narrow stone steps.

Once back in the kitchen, Snape eyes the pile of dirty crockery in the sink. Surely Lucius isn't above a simple dishwashing spell?

"Heard from Narcissa?"

Snape studies Lucius's careful expression. When did he begin to show grey streaks in his hair? "Now, Lucius. You know the Unbreakable Vow I made to your wife my apologies, your ex-wife means that I cannot knowingly place Draco in danger."

"Danger?" Lucius's laugh of dismissal is becoming less and less convincing each time. "What possible danger could he be in from his own father? I'm not angry with him."

Snape sees the unspoken words in Lucius's steel-grey eyes: "... for failing the Dark Lord, then deserting him to run away behind his mother's skirts."

"Besides," Lucius goes on, narrowing his eyes, "I still say that Vow was completed."

Snape waves this off and smiles. "You know very well I have heard nothing from Narcissa nor Draco since they left. Now " he moves past Lucius to the door " I must get back."

"Not so fast."

Snape turns.

Lucius raises an eyebrow. "My Wolfsbane Potion."

"Ah. Of course." Snape frowns and reaches into a pocket. "I'm not sure what you need it for when you are not planning on administering it to him for at least another six weeks."

"One must always be prepared when dealing with a dangerous animal, Severus." Lucius hands him a bag of Sickles. A very light one.

What one has to sacrifice for erstwhile associates. Will he never be free of the pretence?

"Let me know if you hear anything," Lucius says as Snape finally succeeds in making his way to the front door.

"Of course," he says over his shoulder as he steps outside.

"And Floo me on the invitation!"

Beyond the Apparation boundary, Snape steps behind a rosebush, away from Lucius's view. Damn him for reminding him. And damn the blasted werewolf for getting into Lucius's clutches. Damn them all. Will he never be free of his past? Will he never be allowed to just get on with his life his ordinary life?

He is to blame, he knows he did ask Lucius what he wanted the Wolfsbane Potion for. And he now finds himself regretting it considerably. He could have lived without knowing what lurked in Lucius's cellar.

But now he does know. The very man who had given the Wizengamot information on Potter; given them at Snape's trial the indisputable memory of what Potter told the werewolf before the boy's death. The only person who knew about the boy poisoning, weakening Dumbledore before the Headmaster fell to his death at Snape's deliberately unsuccessful Killing Curse. The man whose information brought about Snape's acquittal. That very man is here now, at Lucius's mercy.

And now against his wishes Snape feels that same compulsion, that same indestructible, inexorable pull of duty, the same one that brought him to the Dark Lord's side on leaving school and that kept him at Dumbledore's side those long years since that very same one, it seems, still holds him in its death grip today. Old habits, apparently, do indeed die hard.

Snape stares at a delicate pink rose on the bush. *Damn them all!* He hisses a curse, and the petals at once begin to shrivel and bleach under his furious gaze.

He sneers at the withered flowers and Apparates home.

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Someone seems to be arguing.

He tries to curl back within himself, but his joints ache too much. He stiffens, listening to the harsh voices somewhere in the dark.

At once, the one that always brings with it pain, hot, searing pain, bellows through and into his world. "You'll do it here, then." Reflexively, he shifts nearer to the cool wall, but in doing so, he brings fresh agony to his limbs.

"Now see what you've done!"

The other man is now shouting. "I cannot bring all the potions I need to test here. Allow me this, and we are even."

He presses his face to the wall. *Shut up! Why won't they shut up?*

"Can't you wait until afterward? It's only four days away! Why didn't you ask sooner?"

"I shall make it worth your while...."

At last, the voices begin to drift away, and soon Remus feels himself float away with them as the comforting heat of the all-consuming fire bears him aloft and far away in its tender, blissful arms.

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Remus coughs.

Then he hears someone scream as his stomach suddenly sears. The liquid in his throat is cold. Too cold.

And the pain is growing stronger by the second.

But the liquid keeps on coming.

"Swallow, damn it!"

Though the order has not been given in the usual voice, a new wave of pain surges through him, and he feels obliged to comply.

He lets out a shuddering breath as the onslaught of cold stops, and he feels a force hold him back against something too pliable for a wall.

He blinks as the light begins to blind him. It is too much. Then he hears his own ragged breathing, loud and horrible, like a runaway train careering toward him, growing louder....

"No!" He turns his head from the light, but the same voice that has given him the order is now speaking again, its whispers like some creature's wings by his ear. Some foreign phrase he doesn't understand.

Then all at once, the pain stops.

His eyes still tight shut, his head to the soft wall, Remus hears his breath ease. He tests his eyes against the light, carefully, bit by bit.

A room comes into view. Curtains drawn over a small window. This isn't ...

He opens his eyes wide, fear surging through him. The fear that the eternal warmth had saved him from, rushing back in. He hears his heart begin to pound.

He puts out a hand. What he had thought a wall seems to be the back of a chair.

This isn't Malfoy's cellar.

A sound turns his head.

And that isn't Malfoy.

His pulse beats faster as he freezes and stares wide-eyed. Snape wears a deep-set frown, his gaze on him intense.

Where is Malfoy?

"Where where ?" Remus stammers.

"You are in my house."

But where is Malfoy! Malfoy had taken him to the dark place, the place of surrounding warmth. Why is he here, in this place of so much colour, so much brightness?

Snape suddenly rises, and panicking, Remus draws back into the sofa. "Malfoy..." He will rescue him. He will shut out all of this. Remus watches as Snape stiffens and clenches his jaw.

"Lucius is far away."

Snape is going to torture him. Snape is going to murder him. For their schooldays. For the Whomping Willow. For everything!

*Where is Mr Malfoy?*

"I think you need more Reviving Draught." Snape produces from his robes a fresh bottle of liquid and brings it near.

"No." Remus shrinks away, further into the sofa. "No "

The bottle is moved away. "I don't have time for this." Snape sounds angry. "Lucius expects you back by the end of the evening. I need you alert."

Why is he in Snape's house? Why has Malfoy let Snape have him here? Perhaps Snape has stolen him? "He'll know.... He'll know it was you.... Let me go.... I want to go back...."

Snape frowns angrily. "Listen to me, Lupin. If you want to go back to Lucius, that is up to you. I have arranged you to be here so that you can know what he has planned for you. Now listen to me." Snape sits opposite and fixes him with his cold, black gaze. Remus finds it hard to turn away. "At the next full moon in four days Lucius intends to keep the Wolfsbane Potion from you. He is going to throw a little party for a few friends bring a Muggle in place of a bottle with you as the central entertainment..." Snape leans forward. "...Do you understand?"

Remus breathes hard. "Why are you doing this?"

"Are you listening to me?" Snape's voice is low and furious, and Remus begins to feel sick. "In four days' time Lucius and his friends will watch as you tear apart a small Muggle child for their amusement."

Remus tries to quell his rising nausea, suppress his weakly shaking body as he presses himself into the confines of the sofa. He shakes his head, pushing away what Snape is saying.

He begins to lose focus as he squeezes into himself, his chest tight and hot.

"Drink this."

The bottle is back *or is it slightly different?* and Remus can't hold on to his senses enough to stop the liquid going down.

Everything is silent for a few moments his nausea begins to sink, then vanishes altogether.

He blinks.

Snape is staring at him from the chair opposite, his eyes narrowed, scrutinising him. Remus hears again the words he said and this time they begin to make more sense, images begin to form around them, horrible, bloody.... Malfoy isn't his friend, Malfoy.... *Oh, God.*

He searches for the safe confines of his insensate world, but Snape's potions have robbed him of it.

He looks across at Snape resignedly. "Why did you bring me around?"

Snape gives him a sharp look. "Would you rather stay in your pain-induced delirium for the rest of your life?"

"It's better than knowing what he has in store for me. Or is that your idea of torture? More sophisticated than his, isn't it? *Less* rude."

"How dare you. If this is the gratitude I get.... I should have remembered you would clearly much rather indulge in your self-pity than accept help."

"Help? You call this help? Telling me that that man is going to set me on a little child. Watch me as I...." Remus stops himself and turns his gaze away. He fights to control his breathing. He bows his head and feels a sharp pain shoot up his back and into his neck. He winces.

"Most of your injuries are internal. Lucius is sometimes not as stupid as he appears." Snape seems to have reverted to his professor's lecturing voice. "I have given you a temporary potion for the pain though I have some potions that would heal your injuries."

Snape remains immobile, and Remus looks across wearily at his blank expression. "What do you want?"

"The question is, what do *you* want."

Snape's impassive gaze is making it increasingly difficult for Remus to think, sapping his thoughts just as he tries harder to organise them. "I don't understand."

Snape rises and crosses to the window. He peers out behind the curtain. "Lucius expects more injuries on your return, not fewer. He believes I am testing some newer potions on you this evening. He was unwilling to let you out of his sight before the next full moon, until I promised to slip you something to make you more ... vicious."

Remus can't breath. "You did what?"

Snape turns and meets his gaze. "He needed some assurance that he would gain something from the arrangement. It was the only way he would let me bring you here tonight. That and the fact that he still believes I know where he can locate his wife and son."

Remus shifts his gaze to the chair opposite. "Are you going to give it to me? The potion?"

"I intend to give you nothing."

Remus turns back in time to see Snape's face crease into a frown. "However," Snape says, "some token effect may be needed to allay his suspicions. That will be up to you."

"Me?"

"Depending on what you decide." Snape's dark gaze bores into him.

"I don't care what you do," Remus says, turning away. "Give me whatever you want. In four days it won't matter anyway."

He hears Snape move away from the window.

"Not necessarily."

Remus gazes at the table. He is tired of trying to work out Snape's intentions for bringing him here. Tired of trying to work out how to get out of what Malfoy has planned for him. "There's nothing I can do. He knows exactly where I am, and he can get me back any time he wants."

It seems hopeless. It is hopeless. All Malfoy has to do is use his magic to summon him, and he will have to Apparate to Malfoy's side or die resisting it. But perhaps such a hideous death is preferable to becoming a murderer? Why has Snape told him the horrible fate that awaits him? Does he really hate him that much?

"There is something."

Remus looks up. "But nothing can break the control he has over me. It's completely legal."

"Nothing *can* break it. It is the strongest binding magic in use today. Even than the Unbreakable Vow. Complete ownership. It cannot be cancelled unless Lucius agrees to transfer possession of you. And he's not about to do that. Certainly not before he has had his blood sport. No. But there is one way one chance to sidestep these obstacles. It can be overridden by one stronger."

"But you said it was the strongest one."

"In use today. But I have found one stronger. Only one. While not used any more, it is still legal. Your bond to Lucius would technically still remain nothing and no one could take it away or break it but Lucius himself but he would find it overridden by this stronger one. There would legally, magically, or otherwise be nothing he could do about it. With this more powerful magic in place, he would simply have no control over you any more."

Malfoy will have no control over him any more. It sounds too good to be true. "But who.... I mean, if it's just another bond on top of the old one, won't it need someone someone else, other than Malfoy, to bind me to them?"

"Indeed."

But wherever will he find someone willing to do that? "But who...?"

Snape raises an eyebrow and Remus's breath comes out almost as a gasp as he stares.

Snape's eyebrows lower; his expression darkens. "Or perhaps you have someone else in mind who would be willing at such short notice if the idea is not to your liking?"

"But I you you're willing to do this? For me? I mean, after what after what happened at school? You're willing to have a werewolf in your home?"

Snape looks confused. "Which event at Hogwarts do you mean?"

Remus stares back. "Don't torture me, Severus. You know what I mean. When"

Snape raises his hand. "Stop."

It is Remus's turn to feel baffled now.

Snape lowers his hand slowly and watches him. "I removed a memory to my Pensieve earlier."

Remus stares. Snape has taken out his memory of the Whomping Willow? Snape can't remember the night he nearly found the wolf in the Shack? "Do you think that's wise?"

Snape looks unperturbed. "I have no idea, not knowing what it was. I can only assume I knew what I was doing at the time."

Remus stares at the floor. Of course Snape wouldn't have been able to offer to take him in with that memory.... But then he will put the memory back and then what? Remus exhales. "Thank you," he says uncertainly.

Snape only frowns *Of course*, Remus thinks, Snape doesn't know what he is thanking him for.

Remus gives him a weak smile. "So, what kind of binding magic would this be?"

"It is based on the *Connubium In Manum*."

Remus frowns. "Isn't that a kind of marriage bond?"

"This one is much older than modern-day versions. These days it is confined to dusty Dark texts."

"Dark? You mean it's based on Dark magic?"

Snape meets his gaze unflinchingly. "Yes."

Remus shakes his head firmly. "I don't think I like that idea."

Snape raises an eyebrow. "Beggars can't afford to be choosers. And besides, you of all people..."

He knows what Snape is getting at. He knows he is not a normal person he is a werewolf but he has never gone so far as to see himself as a 'Dark' creature. Not like that. He isn't in the same league as the Inferi and their kind. And he certainly never had been like Greyback and his ilk. The Ministry was unjust and indiscriminate when it lumped them all together after the war. Remus had played his part in infiltrating the werewolves, just as Snape had spied on the real Death Eaters. Why, then, can Snape now live a free life and not him?

"But how would it work? If it's Dark?"

Snape begins pacing again, as though lecturing in a classroom. "The *Absque Sponsalia* was originally used to override legal guardians' refusal to allow their daughters to marry. Then it was further evolved by husbands and used to control their wives, to ensure their compliance, fidelity, to..."

Remus almost chokes on his dry throat. "Wife?"

Snape turns and raises a questioning eyebrow.

"In case you hadn't noticed, I'm not exactly *...female*."

"And sometimes, wives would use it on their unfaithful husbands."

This is getting ridiculous. What *is* Snape talking about? "But how would you adapt this bond? How would it work?"

"The same way."

Remus sighs. "But it's not the same, is it? We're not married, we're not a couple. We're not...." He stops and glances at Snape. Surely not. Snape doesn't mean....

Snape folds his arms. "This is the only bond stronger. The *only* one that can supersede Lucius's hold over you. It does not rely on him giving his consent. Any other legal bond would require his agreement as your legal guardian and owner." Snape lets the last word hang in the air for a long moment. "It is entirely your decision. If you decide against it, you shall merely be back at Lucius's by the end of the evening."

*And in four days he'll bring a child as the full moon rises....*

If only he can keep his human mind! "Can't you give me some Wolfsbane Potion?"

Snape only frowns.

"If I can keep my human mind, everything will be all right. Just for that night."

"Aside from the fact that you need to take it over the next three days and there is no means for me to bring it to you without arousing Lucius's suspicions.... If he didn't get his blood sport this month, he would almost certainly try again next month. And the next."

Snape is right, of course. They can't fool Malfoy. Not for long. Remus knows he must either go through with Snape's proposal or face being Malfoy's pawn allow Malfoy to make him into a murderer. A child murderer.

He doesn't really have any choice at all.

"Does this does it need some kind of third party? To conduct it?"

"No. It was originally used by a couple without the need for anyone else's consent parent, guardian, third party or otherwise."

There is that word again. Couple.

"If it's if...." He looks at Snape, but his typically inscrutable expression is giving nothing away. "I need to know what would be *involved*."

Snape's lip curls. "You needn't worry. Once the bond is in place, I assure you I don't foresee myself enforcing some of its more ... unsavoury ... aspects."

That is something of a relief, then.

"Certainly not after its consummation."

Remus's gaze snaps back. That word does not allow for any misinterpretation. He swallows dryly.

Snape makes a move to the door. "I have given you the option. Yes or no, it is entirely up to you." He glances at the clock over the fireplace. "You have half an hour to decide."

Remus watches wordlessly as Snape sweeps through the door and out of sight.

He turns to the clock on the mantelpiece as it ticks the seconds away. Five past eight.

He needs more time. He needs Snape to stay and explain to him what will be involved. He needs.... He needs to know Snape won't treat him like Malfoy, once the magic is in place. How will he know Snape won't really use him as a guinea pig for his potions? How can he be sure Snape isn't lying to him so that he can use him whenever he wants?

Maybe he is even lying to him about the child.

Remus rises and crosses to the fireplace.

But Snape isn't simply taking him against his will he is giving him the choice. And Snape has hated him ever since he came close to the wolf at school why would *heant* him in his house, even as a guinea pig?

But then, the opposite also applies why does he want *tohelp* someone he hates?

Remus grips the mantelpiece. He can't think! How can he come to a decision on this?

He raises his head and gazes at the clock. Twenty minutes left.

It all boils down to one thing in the end: is he prepared to become a murderer? Will he be able to live with himself, knowing he has killed eaten a child?

Remus shuts his eyes on the merciless hands as they tick down. But he knows he can't shut out the insistent sound.

There is no choice, really. He has no decision to make.

He retakes his seat and watches the time tick away.

~ ~ ~

Snape returns at half past eight.

Remus feels his dark gaze linger on him for a moment.

"Have you made your decision?"

"What choice do I have?"

"You haven't answered my question."

Remus turns to him. "Just tell me one thing. Why are you doing this? Why are you helping me?"

Snape gives him an annoyed look. "You know why. You know what would have happened if it hadn't been for your testimony at my trial."

"So, this is all about ... what? Duty?"

Snape makes an impatient noise.

"But it's not the same," says Remus. "This is much more than simply testifying in a court handing over a memory. That was over in a matter of minutes for me. This.... What you're proposing...." He stares into Snape's eyes. "You're offering to accept me into your *home*."

Something crosses Snape's face then, and Remus wonders whether it is the beginnings of doubt, whether Snape has only now properly realised the full implications of what he is suggesting.... Whether he has already taken back the memory of the Shack.

"So ... *why* are you doing this? How do I know you won't..." *.hurt me, poison me ... treat me like Malfoy.*

Snape sends him a sharp look. "I am not Lucius." He continues to watch him for a long moment. "You saved me from the Dementor's Kiss," he says at last. "It is only right that in return I give you the chance you gave me."

"What do you mean? It won't be the Kiss.... I wouldn't be..."

"What Lucius has planned for you.... Afterwards who would know the difference?"

Remus looks at his blank face, his serious expression. He is right Snape is right, and Remus knows he has made the right choice. He can never, ever knowingly do what Malfoy wants and be the same afterwards. "But the cost for you.... This would be so much more."

Snape waves this away impatiently. "I'm used to it."

Remus looks at his irritable gaze. He knows Snape has given so much in the war, given his entire life, all chance at any kind of normalcy, and received nothing in return but a trial. This is in fact nothing to Snape, compared to that. He is right it is just the kind of thing he is used to. It is almost second nature to him. "But I have nothing to repay you with."

Snape looks annoyed, casts a cursory glance around the small front room. "As you will be staying here, perhaps you could do something with this place. It will not take a great deal of looking after. I have no time to keep it. I spend most days in my workshop in the centre of town." He turns back. "So. Your decision?"

"You just said it. You know what I have to do."

"I need to hear it from you."

Remus turns his gaze to the floor. "I ... I agree to your proposal." He feels the blood drain from his face *Proposal*. Merlin, it *is* just like a marriage bond a *fidelity* bond. Perhaps if this weren't such a serious thing, he might actually be laughing at the sheer absurdity of the situation.

"Very well." Snape's voice is emotionless, serious. "We should get started."

"How long will it take?"

Snape's eyebrow seems to rise a little, almost unconsciously. "Hopefully, it will be over quickly. But we should start now to allow for any problems."

"Problems? What kind of problems?"

At first, it doesn't seem as though Snape is going to answer. He stares at him for a long moment, then he casts his gaze away. "How experienced are you?"

"In what?"

Snape sighs. "This is going to be a long night." He turns and meets his eyes with a look of determination. "There is no ... easy ... way to set this out. So there is little point in beating about the bush. How much experience do you have with men?"

Remus turns his gaze back to the floor hastily. "You mean in a..."

"In a sexual way, yes."

Somehow, Remus's hands have found their way to the sofa's edge. His fingers sink around the threadbare cushion. "Not a great deal."

"What does that mean? How many?"

He can't do this.

"I need to know. How many?"

"One. Just ... one." He focuses on the patterning on the old-fashioned carpet. How long has it been here, he wonders. Probably decades, by the look of it. It is even beginning to wear away by his feet. Perhaps the sofa, too, hasn't been moved from this spot for decades....

"Black, I take it."

Remus looks up then. "No."

That seems to surprise Snape. "Really? Who, then?"

"I don't think that's any of your business."

"Was it a long-term relationship?"

"Why are you asking this? What's this got to do with...?"

"I need to know what I'm getting into."

Snape looks angry, but Remus is in no mood to let him ask all the personal questions. "What about you? Isn't it more important how much experience *you* have?"

Snape narrows his eyes. "I have enough."

"What does that mean?" Remus throws his words back at him. "How many?"

Snape's face grows pink. "Fine. Let no one say I didn't try."

He reaches into his robes and pulls out a small bottle. He frowns at it as he swirls its contents within, then he unseals it.

"What's that?"

Snape glances across as he brings the bottle to his mouth. He downs its contents then pulls his face into a sour expression and places the empty bottle on the table. "Aphrodisiac."



Remus feels his mouth fall open as he stares at the empty bottle in front of him.

Snape is crossing the room to a bookcase. Remus looks up as the shelves begin to move aside. He blinks as a narrow staircase leading up into darkness is revealed.

*Oh, God.* This surely is just a practical joke. Yes that is it. This is Snape's way of getting back at him for his schooldays for the joke Sirius played on him.

But Remus's breath doesn't slow down. No relieving laughter is rising up within him. Malfoy's cellar is very real. And Snape is deadly serious.

He can turn back now. He can change his mind. He can....

But he can't. He cannot knowingly take an innocent child's life. He will not let Malfoy have his fun. He cannot allow the beast within himself to have its first victim.

Remus takes a moment to steady his breath. He heaves himself from the sofa.

Snape is waiting for him to go up first.

Remus stares up the narrow stairs and begins the climb. He just needs this to be over with, then by the end of the evening, he will be free of Malfoy.

At the top, Snape leads the way into a small room to the left.

The bed, with its stark flatness, seems to wait for him, like an offering to Lucius.

*Better me than the Muggle child.*

*Stop it, Remus.* This is doing him no good at all, such morbid thoughts. It is a bed. Just an ordinary bed ... one on which Dark magic will be performed.

Remus shuts out these thoughts and turns to see Snape take out another bottle from his robes and place it on a dresser.

"What's that?"

Snape turns to him. "For if you had said no."

Remus looks at the green liquid some kind of token poison to reassure Malfoy of Snape's activities this evening....

"Don't dwell on it," says Snape, and Remus shifts his gaze to him. Remus would not have been able to dwell on it if he had wanted he watches, his stomach turning over, as Snape begins to unbutton his robes. Remus stands mesmerised as Snape's hands move down.

"Lupin."

His gaze snaps up. Snape is already down to his shirt. How long has he been stood there, just ... watching? His face feels hot. His whole body is burning.

Snape's eyebrows raise in a question. Remus swallows. He forces himself to move. As he lifts his arms to his collar, he twists to his right, away from Snape's line of sight. Across the room, he hears Snape continuing to undress. Remus's hands shake as his fingers twist awkwardly around the buttons down his robes. They slip under the pools of sweat forming around them. It is taking him an age, and he realises the room has gone silent but for his heart hammering in his chest. He feels more blood rush to his head.

He senses Snape approaching, and he glances up.

Snape is still in the old-fashioned, loose-necked, buttonless grey shirt, the hem trailing down, covering him to a few inches above his knees. Remus feels somewhat grateful for this if it is a conscious gesture on Snape's part. Beneath the grey fabric, he can see the aphrodisiac potion is already taking effect.

"Do you need any help?"

"I can manage." Remus turns back to the last buttons, fumbling over them even more in his haste.

Snape, thankfully, stays back.

Remus tries to laugh it off as he twists out of the final button. He stays turned to one side, away from Snape's gaze, as he peels off his robes to reveal the old shirt beneath. He looks down at it in wonder. Tonks gave him this one Christmas their last Christmas. He recalls how she told him how sexy he looked in it as he tried it on for her. She traced the florid blue pattern down its cream front with her delicate fingers and smiled, her eyes sparkling.

Now creased and twisted, the blue swirls have faded almost to nothing, the cream colour soiled by years of grime, sweat and something that he knows must be dried blood around the seams.

He must have been wearing it when they took him away. Tonks's last gift to him. Faded almost beyond recognition. He feels a sudden surge of guilt that he has let it become tainted. He should have left it lying crisp and clean, unused in its drawer....

"Lupin?"

Remus raises his eyes.

"Do you still want to do this?"

Remus smoothes out his frown and blinks. He nods. "Yes." His voice sounds hoarse, and he clears his throat.

Snape steps nearer, and Remus steels himself.

"Are you certain?"

Remus lets out a breath. "Please. Just...." He falters. He wishes Snape would stop trying to give him chances to get out of it. He has to do it. ~~Has~~ to.

Snape has almost closed the gap between them.

Remus searches his gaze. There is an unfamiliarity beneath the impassive surface. A potion-fuelled sense of purpose.

Remus suddenly feels jealous fearful and jealous of Snape's potion.

His gaze falls to Snape's clean grey shirt, and he glances down at his own. "Perhaps I should...." He tries to laugh, though it comes out sounding mirthless and nervous. "I can't remember the last time I had a wash."

He sees Snape's gaze rake over him, taking in his condition, and a wave of embarrassment sweeps through him.

"If you must." Snape turns to the chair behind, folded neatly across which are his robes, where Remus guesses his wand is stowed.

"I can manage," Remus says hastily.

Snape turns back. "The bathroom is down the hallway on the left. But there is no hot water."

"It's fine. I'll just I won't be long." He turns and leaves the room, following Snape's directions.

The bathroom is cramped and dominated by an old bath, grimy with age. He steadies himself on the sink and looks into the mirror.

He hardly recognises himself. How long has it been since he has looked in a mirror? Dark shadows circle his eyes, which appear sunken and bloodshot. The grey streaks running through his hair have advanced greatly, startling him. A fine stubble peppers his chin and upper lip. He is gaunt he knows he had a sickly appearance before because of his lycanthropy but now he looks like a hollow shell of his former self glazed, unrecognisable eyes stare back at him from the dust-smeared glass.

*No wonder Snape needs to take an aphrodisiac.*

A burst of choking laughter rolls up through his chest and throat as he looks at the weary-looking stranger before him.

He peels off his stained shirt. By the bath, he finds a cloth, which he soaks and uses to hastily wipe himself down. It will have to do. He doesn't suppose Snape will be picky he isn't doing this for the sex, after all he is doing this for him.

Remus pauses at the mirror. Snape *is* doing this for him. Snape is allowing Remus into his home, where he will be relatively safe from Malfoy, freely and without any kind of payment, and Malfoy what will Malfoy say to Snape when he finds out what he has done?

Remus takes up his shirt and returns to the bedroom.

Snape is standing by the bed, still in the grey shirt that tents the effects of his potion. Remus pauses briefly at the door then sees Snape's gaze turn on him as he slowly approaches.

He places his shirt carefully on the table next to the bed then turns to Snape. "I I just want to say thank you. For everything. Because I know just how much this is costing you. Taking me in. And Malfoy you're still you still associate with him.... He won't exactly be happy when he finds out."

Remus thinks he sees the beginnings of a faint smirk cross Snape's face before the stony seriousness returns. "I can deal with Malfoy."

A heavy silence descends then. Remus breathes heavily, peels his gaze away and lowers himself onto the bed.

He settles himself until he is lying full length on the heavy covers, then he squeezes his eyes closed and waits.

Less than a moment later, he feels the bed dip and creak under Snape's weight. Then there is the heat of Snape's body as it shifts over him.

A cold finger passes across his burning hip, and Remus feels fabric move over his skin as his pants are tugged down his legs.

Snape moves back up over him. Remus keeps his eyes closed, the sound of his own heart hammering beginning to overwhelm him, already pools of sweat gathering across his hot body.

There is a sudden rustle by his head, and Remus opens his eyes to see Snape holding a pillow near his waist. "Lift up."

Remus arches his back to allow Snape to place it beneath him. He realises then that Snape has already removed his shirt unable to place his gaze anywhere with comfort, Remus settles on returning to wait in darkness.

Then, without warning, a coarse hand curls around his limp cock. Remus's eyes snap open and immediately stare up into fathomless, dark depths. "What...?" he stammers breathlessly. Snape's hand is now moving steadily up and down his length, coaxing it into life.

"First you must give yourself to me. Symbolically," Snape's voice is even, almost clinical, as though reciting in class. "On doing so, I enter you metaphorically taking what you give me and the binding magic is secured."

Remus tries desperately to think through the familiar sensation of draining wits while blood rushes to his groin as rough fingers rub his length. If he has to come, why hasn't Snape given him some of the aphrodisiac as well? He tries to form the question but it dies on his lips with a twisted groan as a thumb swirls across his tip.

"You must do so of your own free will for this to work. No potions, no spells."

*Hardly completely my own free will,* Remus's struggling mind cries out as Snape continues to stroke relentlessly, chafing his increasingly sensitive flesh.

Snape begins muttering something then, something in Latin that Remus doesn't recognise.

He barely felt exactly when Snape began to press a finger inside him. Still reeling from the sensations at his cock, he is dimly aware of being stretched as Snape pushes in another exploratory finger, preparing him. And through all this, Snape's whispered chants continue, lulling Remus into surrendering to the mounting sensations.

Remus's breaths come in shallow gasps, and he tries to fight the rush of feelings that begin to overwhelm him. He hasn't felt like this in so long, and in spite of knowing this is what was intended, needed, Remus feels out of control in the face of the sudden onslaught of pleasure. He is aching with need, the need for release, but at the same time he wants it to last forever. He never thought he would ever feel like this again, and all the images of his so-called owners leave his mind, as though that had never been him in the first place.

Snape continues to work his fingers inside him. They find his prostate, and a sudden, desperate, gasp escapes Remus's lips.

But then just as quickly they leave him, and Remus hears himself moan for their return.

He feels the bed dip as Snape adjusts his position, one hand still sliding over his cock, Remus arching into each movement, and then he feels something bigger Snape pressing at his entrance.

Remus bends into his stroke, but Snape stays where he is, barely outside Remus, and Remus tries to curve into the excruciatingly light pressure.

Snape circles his weeping tip, and in a shuddering gasp, Remus feels himself begin to fall. Panting and bucking, Snape enters him as he comes spasming around Snape as he thrusts deep inside milking Snape's hardness until they have both shuddered to a breathless stop.

Snape pulls out quickly and shifts his weight to the side. Remus lies still, in the dark, finding his breath.

He has never experienced anything like that before he *knows* he hasn't. It had been like a rush of ... like a rush of...

He snaps his eyes open. Like a rush of *magic*.

It is the Dark magic.

He lets out a panicked breath. Snape is already up and beginning to dress, pulling his shirt over his head.

"I felt it."

Snape's shirt falls into place. "Yes," he says simply. Then he turns for his robes. "I shall fetch the necessary healing potions. The one I gave you was only temporary it will wear off any time now." He finishes dressing, then leaves.

Remus feels cold air brush across his skin. He replaces the pillow at the top of the bed and slides beneath the covers.

At the back of his mind he hears Snape's chants again. He turns them around in his head, but he doesn't understand them. They are Dark. Too Dark.

"This is your room, by the way." Snape is back in the doorway, his black robes firmly in place, buttoned up to the collar once more. He places three small bottles on the table next to the bed.

Remus swallows before he can speak. "Right."

"Take these before you sleep."

"Right." He feels Snape's gaze heavy on him.

Then he sees Snape produce his wand, and Remus instinctively recoils, shifting further up the bed as he eyes its tip.

"Lupin."

Remus jumps slightly at the commanding tone.

"I am only checking the magic."

Remus closes his eyes and waits, willing his heart to calm down. This is Snape, not Malfoy. Snape.*Severus*.

Snape lets out a breath. "Good. It is there."

Remus opens his eyes to see Snape's wand disappear back into his robes. "Will it ... hold?"

Snape's black eyes regard him. "There is no reason why it should not."

As Remus nods, he feels a hot tingle creep down his neck and into his upper back. The earlier potion is beginning to wear off. He inches himself down again beneath the covers, edging them back over his chest, and reaches for one of the bottles.

Snape turns to leave. "Get some rest."

"Thank you, Severus."

Snape glances back briefly before closing the door.

~ ~ ~

Remus wakes to the soft touch of bed linen.

He rolls onto his back and looks around the small room.*His* room.

The morning is already sweeping in through the window. In the harsh light of day, he wonders how long this will last. How long can he stay here now? How long before Snape realises he made a terrible mistake letting a werewolf *this* werewolf in his house?

He sits up and tries to recall when he has last seen daylight. Such a simple thing. Remus wants very much to stay here, in this house.

He rises and puts back on his old, worn clothes from the night before. He must find some way of paying Snape back for the expense of keeping him. He makes a mental note to mention this to him and makes his way downstairs, revelling in the almost intoxicating feeling (while at the same time condemning himself for being so silly) of being able to walk through any door he pleases.

Snape is already up and at an old-looking table in the kitchen, frowning into the folds of the *Daily Prophet*. When Remus enters, he looks up, apparently startled. A second later, his frown has returned. "There may be some tea left in the pot." He glances behind where a stained teapot stands.

Remus smiles tightly and takes a seat opposite. "I don't want to impose on you, Severus. And, obviously, I need some new clothes." He glances up to see Snape frowning at his dirty robes. "I'll try to find some work somewhere. I don't want you to be out of pocket because of me."

"Don't be ridiculous. Even before the new laws, people were hardly falling over themselves to employ you. Besides, you would need my permission for any kind of employment."

"Why?"

Snape has put his nose back in the paper. "Because what little they would pay would be to me, not you."

"Of course." Remus gazes across the table at an empty plate scattered with crumbs.

Snape folds up his paper with a rustle. "The Ministry deemed to allow me a small amount of compensation after that farce of a trial. I'm sure they wouldn't object it being put to use on a werewolf who is more than qualified for reparation on their part. And I'm sure you'll have noticed this house needs ... some attention. The last so-called assistant was more of a hindrance than a help.... Rather ... verminous." He curls his lip a little then turns his gaze to Remus. "You'll stay here until I've dealt with Malfoy."

Malfoy. He almost forgot. Almost. "But he doesn't have any right to me any more."

"That won't stop him trying, I'm sure." Snape glances at his watch. "He should be round soon."

Remus's heart plunges into his throat. "He knows where you live?"

"Of course. Why shouldn't he?"

"Couldn't you put it under a Fidelius Charm?"

Snape narrows his eyes. "Don't you think that would be somewhat suspicious?" He rises from the table. "Go back upstairs until he has been. As long as he does not think I

have taken you from him to spite him as long as he believes you are still being ... mistreated ... he will be content."

Remus stands up as Snape makes his way to the door. "Are you going to pay him off? Severus..."

"Of course not." He frowns. "Don't you think if I could have afforded to, I would have chosen that route instead?"

Remus holds back. *Of course Snape would have.* Remus feels embarrassed for talking about money so much.

"No," Snape goes on, "I know how to deal with Malfoy. As long as he continues to believe I have certain information he wants, he will respect my wishes."

"But how are you going to explain it? I mean, what are you going to tell him when he wants to know why you did it?"

"I shall simply tell him that once I had you here I realised I needed something more permanent to test future potions on. I'll describe in fine detail the various debilitating and painful effects of those I administered to you last night, and he will leave relatively satisfied. I'll tell him I had to have you after our history."

Remus blinks. Snape has replaced the memory already. Though he knows he would have had to some time, Remus can't help half-wishing he could have left it in the Pensieve forever.

"After all," Snape says as he turns back to the door, "he hasn't lost out financially apparently your previous owners couldn't wait to be rid of you they had to palm you off onto Lucius under the guise of a gratuity."

~ ~ ~

Malfoy is gone. Remus recalls hearing an argument break out briefly, the harsh words reverberating through the floor up to his room.

He'd wanted to creep nearer to listen on the stairs where he knows the bookcase will conceal him.

But he hadn't dared when he heard Malfoy's raised voice.

Venturing downstairs now there has been silence since he heard the front door slam Remus finds Snape with the dregs of a wineglass, another barely touched sits on the rickety table.

"He will not be coming around here again."

"What did you tell him?"

Remus thinks he sees Snape's lip curl. "I sent him on a wild goose chase across Europe."

Remus stares, but Snape doesn't offer further explanation.

"He wasn't unhappy with what you did?"

Snape frowns. "Of course at first." He drains his glass, then removes Malfoy's and rises from the chair. "But the fact remains there is nothing he can do as long as the Dark magic overrules his."

Remus nods uneasily. Though Malfoy may be in Europe, he could summon Remus to his side any time he pleases Remus prays that the binding magic will hold.

~ ~ ~

Snape steals out of the house half an hour before the full moon rises. It is only three nights after Remus has arrived, and he is under the effects of his Wolfsbane Potion. Snape Apparates to an old, relatively cheap, haunt in Knockturn Alley and allows the sordid memory of the bond to dissipate, all thoughts of wolf fur filthying his old bedroom vanishing as the night's heat builds.

After the moon falls, he returns warily, and though he knows his Wolfsbane is perfect and Lupin must have retained his human mind, his racing heart tells him to expect torn chairs, half-eaten books, danger in the dark corners.

He replaces his wand in his robes only after he has gone through the house and, edging open Lupin's door, seen the room seemingly untouched ... Lupin, naked, curled on the bedspread, apparently fast sleep after his transformation back.

Only here is there the stomach-churning smell of werewolf.

Lupin does not mention his absence Snape assumes he stayed in his room, out of his way.

Snape decides that next time he will not allow the werewolf to drive him out of his own house.

~ ~ ~

Remus finds his nights are almost miraculously comfortable, although he still finds himself waking to terror and imagined curses, the feeling of his chest being crushed. But the nightmares seem to be lessening. Snape never misses his regular healing potions, and he sometimes wonders if he slips some Dreamless Sleep Potion in them.

Perhaps those screams he hears in his head are in fact voiced and disturb Snape's nights? Remus is never quite sure whether it is the imagined pain or the growing sound of terror that wakes him.

But Snape was right Malfoy has not been back since. Snape has few visitors, and when he does, he tells Remus to go to his room until they are gone.

But one day, Remus steals to the stairs and listens in the dark, cramped space.

He hears laughter and the sound of wineglasses as Snape and his guest share reminiscences. As they recount past glory days scenes of Muggle torture, rape and slaying Remus finds himself unable to move from the stair in spite of the images being thrown up in his mind images he thinks he has escaped. He waits, wanting to hear some indication in Snape's voiced agreements, in his own gruesome descriptions even in the proud narration of taking Dumbledore down of underlying disgust, guilt, regret.

When he hears them toast their fallen Dark Lord, Remus creeps back upstairs.

Snape is away most days. Remus knows he cannot go far from the house without Snape knowing through the Dark magic that binds them. Snape returns in the evenings reeking of potion fumes from his workshop, irritable from apothecaries' unreasonably high expectations and late, sometimes non-existent, payments.

Remus tries at first to dispel the dark atmospheres with choking humour aiming to impress on Snape that at least he is a free man. But he soon learns how much Snape despises self-pity.

This evening, he listens with a strange sense of detachment as Snape recounts his day, the people he has encountered, their trifling exchanges, the work he found difficult to achieve, the rain that fell heavy and hard on him as he closed his workshop and made his way to Apparate home all told with a scowl as Remus dreams.

"Why can't I leave the house? It's been over a month since Malfoy came."

Snape regards him with the same scowl. "Perhaps so. But where do you plan on going? Hogsmeade? If anyone sees you alone and healthy he will know I have been far from truthful with him."

"I'm going crazy stuck in here on my own all day." Remus is beginning to understand how Sirius must have felt years ago but then, perhaps the feeling of isolation is worse, the bigger the house.

"Really?" Snape's voice is condescending. "I would have thought it would be preferable to being stuck in Malfoy's cellar day and night."

Snape never seems to let him forget what he has saved him from, and sometimes Remus resents it, with an underlying feeling of guilt. He still feels a prisoner here, perhaps even more so, as here he is always conscious, never drugged or cursed into hazy delirium. And he feels somewhat angry that Snape can't see it. "Well, of course it is. But I need to do something."

Snape rises, suddenly. "You will stay here until I say otherwise. I will hear no more about it." He leaves the room, and Remus is left alone.

~ ~ ~

Remus had already begun to suspect before he hears the familiar voice.

He places his book face-down on the bed and all but hurtles from the room.

But only silence meets him on the stairs. Pushing into the sitting room, he peers around expectantly, and Severus regards him impatiently. "Do you want something?"

"I thought I heard...."

Snape stays silent, and Remus knows then that his suspicions are true. "No one knows I'm here, do they?"

Snape's glare is stony, but Remus presses on. "Arthur that was Arthur Weasley I heard, wasn't it? Does he know I'm here?"

"Of course he does not know you are here!"

It is the first time Severus has raised his voice, and Remus finds his insides recoil in expectation of pain.

"Why should he know you are here? It is as much in Lucius's interests as ours that no one else knows where you are. Do you not think that Rookwood would simply try to persuade me to partake in his games once he discovered I have you here?"

"But but I don't understand why Arthur..."

"No one must know!" Snape storms out of the room in a billow of black robes, and Remus wonders whether he is protecting him or whether he feels embarrassment at keeping a creature, a werewolf, in his home or shame at the Dark tie that overpowers Malfoy's right to him.

~ ~ ~

It is the third full moon since Lupin arrived.

Though he knows he still cannot sleep across the short space from him, Snape finds it easier to read further than a few pages into his book this time. He sits on the sofa, nearest the front door, his wand by his side.

His thoughts shift to the man who sits silently in the evenings in the chair opposite, listening willingly to his opinions on the latest ridiculous Ministry restrictions on perfectly harmless potions, Snape increasingly forgetting his presence as they absorb themselves in their respective books.

He finds it difficult to reconcile this man with the shuffling sounds above that cause him to glance up, to the bookcase concealing the stairs.

A floorboard above creaks softly, and Snape frowns into his book, focusing more deliberately on the words.

~ ~ ~

"Damn it."

Remus hears the door close on the curse, and he hesitates as he watches the pan come to boil. Severus is distant all evening when he returns home angry, and Remus always feels particularly needful of company on the nights before and after a full moon. The next is only two days away.

He hears a deep sigh from the doorway. It is laced with frustration, and Remus forces himself to turn a beaming smile on the man he knows will be glaring back.

Snape barely looks at him. "What are you doing?"

"Dinner. Pasta."

"I'm not hungry." Snape hasn't yet removed his cloak.

Remus tries to hold on to his weak smile as he feels it begin to slip.

"I'm going out."

"But you've only just come."

Snape turns. "I shall be out all evening."

Remus stares at the empty doorframe as the front door slams. He knows Severus shuts him out the days he takes the Wolfsbane Potion, and he understands why, though those are the times he yearns for human companionship the most.

He thinks of his old friends who used to keep him company at each moon, and the cosmic irony occurs to him he, who had once turned a blind eye to his friends' actions toward the eccentric boy they singled out ... unable to afford losing their friendship, their help every month ... too selfish to speak up now finds those friends are long gone and that same peculiar boy has grown into the man who eases his affliction with his Wolfsbane Potion, helps him with his Dark magic and that man now pushes him away, allows the scars to fester between them.

He turns back to the simmering pan, his appetite gone, and finds himself wishing once more that Snape had never recovered the memory from the Pensieve.

~ ~ ~

Sometimes Remus succeeds in eliciting a grudging response from Snape as he stares into a book or a glass of wine. Remus knows one of the only comfortable topics of conversation is the Order they once fought for. He likes to reminisce of the old members careful to avoid Dumbledore, for now at least and Tonks.

When he recounts the welcome Sirius's mother used to bestow on them on their entrance to the old headquarters, his laugh is even met with a retort, pointing out how he was always among the first to whip the cover over her bellowing portrait.

Remus smiles into the fire. He knows it is perhaps only the wine that is loosening Snape's mind and tongue, but he relaxes back into the soft chair, and their talk moves on to Hagrid and his many foibles.

~ ~ ~

When Snape enters the kitchen as the moon casts its cold light across the floor in the instant before he burns it away with his own, he notices that the dish Lupin usually takes into his room with him for water during the night is sitting on the floor next to the cupboard. He frowns at it. Perhaps Lupin has taken up another.

Lupin has not been so careless before, and Snape feels irritation building at the thought that another bowl one that he himself eats from is being contaminated by the filthy creature. He will have to throw it out tomorrow.

But Snape continues to frown at the dish on the floor. Lupin agreed to use this one alone, and Snape has noticed how Lupin seems to recoil when he raises his voice to him. The bowl is in clear view it is unthinkable that Lupin has simply chosen another in its place. The only reasonable explanation is that Lupin has forgotten to take any with him tonight.

Snape's thoughts turn to what the wolf will do if it is thirsty in the middle of the night.

His stomach clenches involuntarily.

His mind assaults him with images of the beast wandering down the stairs, around his house, its pointed snout in every corner, sniffing him out...

But he knows it isn't possible. He'd checked the inside of Lupin's door just like he had at Hogwarts, he remembers not even the smallest scratch. And yet.... Though the bedroom door isn't locked, can a wolf pull down on the handle? Perhaps with a human mind...? But then if it that were so, there is no danger....

Snape tries to stop his circling thoughts. He uses his Occlumency training, but still, he knows it is no use now. Each silence will bring him back to these thoughts. At least if he can hear its shuffling above, he knows where it is.

He realises the last sound he heard was some time ago now, perhaps ten ... twenty minutes. He withdraws his wand, then edges to the doorway, looks to the bookcase. Nothing has moved.

But the wolf in the room above is still silent.

*Damn it!* He will not be able to sit here for the rest of the night without imagining the wolf. Leaving the house leaving the creature to wander through his home is out of the question. He will never be rid of the smell, of the thought of it creeping around the house...

He takes a deep breath and exhales deeply. It has been what? four months now since the wolf arrived. It is about time he took it upon himself to assert himself in his own home. It is about time he let the wolf know who is master in this house. He will not let the wolf run riot in his home, he will not let it get away with this unforgivable oversight.

Snape turns and marches to the dish. He fills it with water from the tap and takes it through to the sitting room. He moves the bookcase to one side and ascends the stairs, keeping the brimming dish steady in his right hand and his wand, lighting his way with a *Lumos* spell, in the other.

He does not stop until he reaches the door.

He listens, but the only thing he can hear is his own breathing, the rush of his own blood. He leans in.

Nothing. Not a sound.

He swallows. In order to free a hand with which to open the door, he must either put down the dish or put away his wand.

He bends and places the dish on the floor, to the side. He listens again as he straightens. Still nothing but the sound of his own.... No, this is his house, this is not the blasted Willow. He is not a foolish teenager, and Lupin is not without the Wolfsbane. *His* Wolfsbane, and he always makes sure it is perfect. Perfectly safe.

Snape places his hand on the cold handle and eases it down, edges the door forward. It seems dark inside, only a sliver of moonlight pools on the floor through the drawn curtains, fluttering gently in a breeze.

Snape breathes quietly and edges the door a little further. Just a little further ... until he sees the edge of the bed ... until he sees fur.

He stops, holds his breath as his heart begins drumming a loud protest.

It is wide enough. He makes sure the door is in place and lowers himself carefully to the floor. Slowly, he brings the dish around ignores the way the water's edge shifts against the sides, like a rising wave and pushes it through the doorway.

With one swift movement, he stands and pulls the door closed, only slowing to ensure its click does not disturb the wolf.

He turns to the side and leans on the wall. Now he can finish his book in peace.

~ ~ ~

The musky aroma of animal surrounds him as he awakens. Each time he wakes to the small room, with its old, patterned wallpaper, he finds himself thankful. He knows he has been safe he knows he has not hurt anyone here.

Remus stretches, cool morning air wafting across his bare skin, and he shifts and slides himself beneath the bedspread. He closes his eyes and relaxes into the soft pillow, vague dreams of pads pacing bare floorboards before curling into a warm ball in a corner breaking through his sleepy mind.

He feels more relaxed than he normally does these mornings after transforming. He could sleep all day, the feel of the soft pillow against his head, happy to dwell in thoughts of the wolf. He recalls the warm snugness in the corner, the exultant way he had devoured the water in his burning thirst.

Remus opens his eyes.

He sits up and looks across the room, to the wall beneath the window. But the dish is not there it is beside the door, and Remus can't recall why he placed the water so far from where he normally sets it for the wolf.

~ ~ ~

It is a new moon, and Remus is happy. He is talking of the books he has read in Snape's absence he had never been much good at Potions at school, but now he feels he knows a hundred times what he had thought there was to know. He finds the delicate manipulation of movement the careful stirring, the measured chopping entrancing in a way his adolescent, flitting, mind never had.

Severus points out that all he knows is theory, that books are no substitute for the real thing. But Remus thinks he detects some spark of approval even as Snape states that his new-found knowledge is practically worthless.

"Perhaps you could show me how to make one some time? I haven't made a potion *iryears*."

"I haven't been a teacher in years. And I have no desire to return to that tedium."

Remus curls his mouth teasingly. "I promise to be a good student. I'll complete all my homework promptly, and I swear I won't be any trouble in class. And I wager I'll be the top of the class in no time."

Remus thinks he sees a flicker of amusement pass through the dark eyes that watch him. His words begin to run away with him as he describes the potions he will make with an almost childlike wonder.

He is halfway through recounting the mess he used to make at school, the time his table nearly disappeared as his Shrinking Draught spilled over the sides of his cauldron, when he hears Snape interrupt with his name.

It takes a moment for Remus to realise it was spoken in anger, and that it was the second time Snape had said it or perhaps the third.

Snape is frowning, his face set, his posture tense, and Remus notices that his hands are balled into fists. Remus's mind feverishly works over his words, and he curses himself for letting his enthusiastic talk get so out of hand and become so frivolous he knows how much Snape hates it how could he have let himself go on for so long?

"Lupin." Snape's voice, still angry and low, has a rough edge that Remus has never heard before. He knows it is better to keep silent when Snape is angry and unpredictable, and so he waits.

But when he turns his dark eyes on him, Remus sees something else besides. A subtlety that appears to match the strangeness in his voice. Something akin to ~~perhaps~~, *but it can't be* fear?

Snape's mouth is a thin, taut line, and Remus, confused at the conflicting emotions he thinks he sees in Snape, tries to form an apology he doesn't know what for but he is disconcerted at Snape's stiffness, his silence as his gaze bores, almost pleadingly, into him.

But Snape suddenly rises with a look of determination. "We need to go to bed."

Remus stares up at the dark figure that towers over him. "Wh what?"

"Now."

Remus knows he can't have heard right. "I don't What do you mean?"

"It is quite simple." Snape exudes anger now that and nothing else. "We are going to bed. Now."

Snape is already moving around him, and Remus stands to follow his figure as he makes his way toward the stairs.

But Snape doesn't stop to look back as he casts the bookcase to one side and disappears into the darkness.

Remus has no choice but to follow if he is to learn Snape's meaning. He finds him in his bedroom, and Remus stands in the doorway and stares in disbelief as each button is flicked from the dark robes.

"Wh what are you doing?" Remus is afraid of the hoarseness in his voice.

"What does it look like I'm doing?"

Snape does not meet his gaze, and Remus feels resentment rise to the surface at Snape's games. "I know what you *think* you're doing. The question is why."

Snape's grey undershirt billows as he places his robes on the chair.

"Why, Severus? I'm asking you a question."

Snape has his back to him. "Get into bed." His voice is even and low, and Remus feels the back of his neck prickle.

He forces down his dizzying fear with a surge of anger. "You've been taking the aphrodisiac!"

Snape twists around then, and black eyes, radiating fury, meet his. "I have not!"

Remus stares back angrily, incredulously, at Snape's tense figure, his furious, pink face, his hands back into fists at his sides. He can see for himself that Snape shows no sign, as yet, of taking the potion.

"If we do not do this, you will go back to Lucius."

Snape's words hit Remus in the stomach, hard. "You're threatening me?"

"It is not a threat! It is a simple fact! This must be done now or the magic that supersedes Lucius's hold over you will be gone."

"What? But you said you said it would hold."

"I said I did not think it wouldn't."

"So what are you saying now? Why is it disappearing? Why is I don't understand."

"There is no more time to waste. It may already have begun to break down because I have not followed my ur..." Snape's mouth clenches back into a thin, angry line.

Understanding dawns then the magic is based on fidelity Remus's fidelity and the man's Snape's needs must be fulfilled when they arise. "You you knew this would happen."

"I did not know *this* would happen." Snape takes a step toward him. "Get undressed."

But Remus stays rooted to the spot as he stares into the dark eyes. He searches them but all he finds is anger and loathing. "Severus."

"Get undressed or I shall do it for you."

"Severus." Remus finds himself staring at the tip of Snape's wand as it points at his chest. He has stirred want in Snape tonight, led him on with his mindless chattering, and he has every right to be angry with him. Remus steels himself, bile beginning to rise.

"*Merlin*." Snape turns away suddenly with clenched jaw and slams his wand down as he leans on the dresser, lank hair falling over his reddened face. His breaths are laboured. "I do not know how long until Lucius realises it has broken."

His legs too weak to hold him, Remus turns slowly and sinks to the bed. "He'll summon me." He knows either he will Apparate to Malfoy's side or die resisting his owner's summons. He holds his head in his hands. "You promised me you wouldn't do this."

"I am not Lucius."

A bitter laugh chokes in Remus's throat. He raises his head but doesn't meet Snape's gaze. "You're right, he never did this. But do you really think this is better than what he did?" His breath is sharp in his dry throat as he draws it in. "You promised you wouldn't use me."

Remus's deep breaths fill the silence.

"Am I so repulsive?" Snape's voice does not seem quite as hard as earlier, there is an unfamiliar undertone, and Remus finds the black eyes that lay heavy on him.

He feels his mouth open and close uselessly, stupidly. "No." Remus frowns and gives a tight shake of his head.

Snape's level tone breaches the stillness that has fallen between them. "We have wasted enough time."

Remus closes his eyes in silent agreement. In the months he has been here, he has grown better at gauging Snape's mood, at decreasing the distance Snape places between them, and he feels they have become almost comfortable in each other's company. Remus does not want tonight to destroy the small, painfully wrought victories, to reimpose the barriers he has struggled to break through.

He reaches up, hope swelling his blind determination, and begins to undress.

## Part Two

### *Chapter 2 of 2*

Only through the Dark can Remus be saved. SS/RL.

Remus feels Snape's gaze return to his chest as he prepares him.

Snape does not seem as confident as before he is not touching him, neither does he search out his gland, and Remus waits, willing himself to relax. This is not the instigation of the bond, with its accompanying chants and predetermined ritual only its reinforcement, and Remus does not know what to expect this time from Snape, drug-free and unhindered by procedure.

He sees Snape's eyes rake briefly over his chest again as he withdraws and repositions himself over him.

Severus begins to inch into him, and Remus, feeling each minute stretch as Severus starts to fill him for the first time without the rip of orgasm obliterating all else, hears himself gasp and moan.

Severus stills and his eyes snap up, and Remus sees them search his own. His gaze is charged with tension, and Remus realises there is none of the easy air of before there is no sign of any potion this time. Remus replies in his own way to the unvoiced question. "Touch me."

Another question appears to pass through Severus's eyes before a resigned understanding seems to glaze them as they unfocus and move away from him again as his body shifts.

Remus feels rough skin curl around his hardness, and he sucks in a breath at the touch even as he reluctantly reaches down to remove Severus's hand. "Not there." He places the warm palm where he had seen Severus's glance returning earlier, and Severus stares in wonder at the pale hand where it rests on Remus's chest.

Remus closes his eyelids and feels the still warmth penetrate his breast with each rise and fall.

A moment later, he feels the heat push down uncertainly on his breath as Severus begins to move again, further into him.

Without the anxiety of the spell the first time, without the drugged haze of the Calming Draught and pain-killing potions Snape had given him against Lucius's torture, Remus's senses explode ... Snape, against his skin, Snape pushing into him, withdrawing, pushing again. Snape's breaths at his chest, Snape's hair brushing over him, Snape's pale arms braced either side of him. The smell of potion-brewing all around him. Each inch, each breath, each smell...

Snape stills and shudders, and Remus feels Snape swell inside him.

Then already he is withdrawing, and Remus opens his eyes to see him fall languidly to the side.

Remus lies still, listening to Snape's laboured breathing, listening to his own aching need.

The bed dips as Snape pushes himself up. He pauses as he reaches the edge, and Remus sees his glance.

Remus closes his eyes and wills him to leave.*Please just leave.* Remus holds on feverishly.

At last, the bed creaks back into place as Snape rises. There is a brief rustle as Snape gathers his clothes too quick for him to have dressed fully followed by the click of the door.

Remus opens his eyes to the empty room.

He has left the scent of sex behind, the room is still hot, and Remus shuts his eyes once more and reaches down, enfolding his need in his hand, soothing it, bringing it to completion to the feel of a careful heat on his chest.

~ ~ ~



Remus wonders if Severus knows he is his first. He knows he must feel tight. He has only had one, brief, encounter, with a man whose name had not mattered and who did not know his. Remus's sole aim had been to satisfy the feelings he had for his friend to stem the pain each time Sirius smiled his way knowing the roots of his smile never reached as deep as his own. Sirius the height of cool ... the ladies' man through and through ... unknowingly stoking his lust with his unattainability.

But he was young and foolish, and though he knew the full moon was weeks away *knew* it as the man with Sirius's dark hair caressed his skin and explored inside him with his limber fingers, Remus became afraid of the rising animal passion that began to overtake him afraid to come round to bloodied sheets, bloodied mouth.

He escaped and emptied his stomach in a dark doorway as a drunken crowd of youths laughed at his cowardice.

Only Tonks, brave, sweet Tonks, succeeded in convincing him his vulnerability was less of a danger than he thought.

But he knew there was no man that he could have trusted, no man worth the risk. No man who would not have balked, despised him, turned from him in disgust and fear if he had told them his true nature. Only Sirius knew and accepted him for what he was. And Sirius was the impossible something Remus knew he could never have. Remus knew then that the impossible was his fate, following him everywhere he went, surrounding him like a cage.

~ ~ ~

He does not know what he had expected perhaps the wolf in the centre of the room, sat in a pool of moonlight, baying at the window?

Snape's wide gaze lingers over the sleeping creature sprawled out on his *its* bed.

He sees the pointed shape of the snout, leading down to its wet nose. Its tufted tail another unmistakable hallmark of the werewolf.

He does not know why he is here. The first time had been out of necessity to prevent the wolf from snuffling through his house in search of water. This time ... this time it seems to be pure whim. A morbid curiosity.

Snape's whole being speaks of danger as he stands here in the doorway, his wand tight in one hand, the other gripping the door handle. A gulf of terror, almost tangible, like a paralysing wall of flames, seems the only thing between him and the creature, pulling and pushing, both preventing him from stepping forward from the doorway and stopping him from leaving.

But he hasn't felt so alive for a long time, not since the end of the Dark Lord, since the end of his deep-rooted subterfuge.

He stands and revels in the adrenalin coursing through his veins.

Only the shiver of a memory brings him finally to his senses, and he edges the door closed and gathers his nerves in the hallway.

~ ~ ~

"Some people say I'm mad, keeping them in my house, when there's ample space on the grounds somewhere, in the barns. But," Waddock leans in a little over the counter and lowers his voice, "I admit I find danger rather seductive." He straightens. "And why on earth should I be made to feel embarrassed about that, I ask you?" He lets out a derisive laugh. "No. Let them keep their safe little lives, with their loyal wives and two-point-four children. Me, I prefer to live a little." He turns his bright eyes on Snape. "Don't you?"

Snape gives him a sardonic glance as he hands over the Wolfsbane.

"That musky aroma," says Waddock as he takes the bottle heedlessly, too arrogant to see Snape's careful mockery. "Seductive, don't you think?"

Snape curls his lip in a sneer. "If you say so." Waddock is well-known for his penchant for young women, strings of which can often be seen paying him visits. Snape keeps his expression carefully neutral. What the man does in his own time is his own business.

"The musky scent. The danger." Waddock is gazing into the distance now, his eyes unfocused. "Werewolf." His tongue caresses the word, curving around each consonant, drawing out the vowels, tasting it, savouring it. "All mine."

Waddock blinks, then, and refocuses on Snape. He gives a slight self-effacing laugh. "Where was I? Ah, yes, how much do I owe you for this?"

He hands over payment in Galleons and Snape gives him his change, and as he leaves, Snape stares across the room at a pile of dusty old books. He thinks of labelling potions, scrubbing cauldrons. He thinks of his damp and filthy cell in Azkaban. He even tries to imagine Mad-Eye Moody naked in his bed, his magical eye wandering....

But it is no use, he knows. The urge had been there. The magic will have begun to collapse, and no matter how he feels now, he knows it will not stop until he does something about it.

"Fuck."

He closes his shop and Apparates to the alley next to Spinner's End.

When he flings open his front door, he hears the crawling sound of the wireless and sees Lupin reclined in the chair, a book resting on his chest, his eyes closed and mouth open slightly. Lupin is breathing heavily, and Snape feels his irritation grow with every rasping sound. He slams the door closed behind him.

Lupin gasps as he comes to, wide-eyed. He gathers himself quickly, catching the book before it falls to the floor, and his surprised gaze lands on Snape. "Severus? What is it evening already?" He glances at the clock. "It's only half-past two." He jumps to his feet, apparently still a little shaky with sleep. "Is something wrong? What's happened?"

Lupin sounds worried, he is looking at Snape anxiously, and Snape can't bring himself to form the necessary words. The idea of what he has to do is far from his mind right now, and he finds his humiliation at turning up out of the blue building.... But, to his relief, Lupin appears to have already deduced the reason for his sudden arrival. Lupin's eyes are round as he asks in a low voice, almost a whisper, "Now?"

In reply, Snape marches to the staircase.

He hears footsteps on the stairs behind him as he enters Lupin's room. On the threshold, as he waits, he notices for perhaps the first time that subtle scent of animal. Musk. It seems to grow stronger as he stands there, and the memory of Waddock's lecherous smirk earlier, still fresh in his mind, assaults him again.

He hears the rustle of Lupin's robes. He turns. "Not here." He strides past Lupin the short distance across the hallway to his own bedroom. He has never allowed Lupin in here, but it will have to do for today.

~ ~ ~

Severus lifts his spent weight from him and scowls. "Why didn't you wash today?"

Remus regards his sour expression with uncertainty at the strange remark. "But I did. This morning."

Snape's glare deepens, disbelievingly perhaps, and his face turns a shade of pink around the edges. The bed dips violently and creaks in protest as Snape rolls to the side

and immediately stands to dress.

"Going back to work?" Remus asks tentatively as he draws the bedcover over his exposed skin.

"I still have orders to fulfil today."

Remus watches him pull on his robes. *Orders*, he thinks. *You always seem to need orders to follow, don't you, Severus? Even when you took it on yourself to save me from becoming a killer, you felt you were following unspoken orders of unrelenting, endless duty....*

Remus's thoughts return to earlier the panic he felt at waking to the unexpected sight of Snape's tense, dark figure by the door. The way Snape regarded him emotions warring in him as he stood there, until Remus thought he saw, to his surprise, his expression turn to one that had been almost ... apologetic.

"Severus," he says now. "Can I ask why you know. You've never.... This is the first time you've ... when I haven't been anywhere near you."

Severus still has his back to him as he continues to dress in silence.

"It's none of my business, of course." Remus pulls the covers higher. He watches as flakes of snow drift out of the white sky and kiss the windowpane.

"Someone came in for some Wolfsbane Potion," Snape says grudgingly, and Remus turns back to see him pulling his cuffs straight.

"And you thought of me? But ... you must handle it a lot ..." Remus feels he shouldn't have said that, somehow. Somehow, there is more to what Snape has said, and Snape has already granted him more information than he cares to.

Severus turns to him, and Remus sees a muscle in his jaw twitch. "You're right. It is none of your business." He strides over to the window and opens it wide. A blast of air chills the room, and Remus grips the bedcover.

At the door, Snape pulls his face back into a sour expression. "Change the sheets."

~ ~ ~

Remus turns and watches Snape dress, grey and black sliding over pale skin. Is it his imagination only, or does Snape seem to be joining him in his bed more and more often? He wonders if it is just his mind playing tricks on him.

Because it does seem to be getting easier. It does seem to be becoming almost pleasant ... enjoyable. Even though Severus has not touched him since that first night.

Perhaps Remus is simply thinking of the next time already perhaps he is beginning to look forward to Snape's heat over him, inside him? He is always careful not to hold Severus's back for fear that he will give him cursed wounds (*or is it because he knows Severus will not allow his touch?*) But perhaps he is beginning to want it to need it not just for reinforcing the magic that keeps him from Malfoy but selfishly for himself, too?

Severus scowls down his robes at a button that refuses to comply with his pale fingers as he rushes to dress.

Remus wonders when his gaze had first begun to linger over those harsh creases that always form between those dark brows when he is angry.

~ ~ ~

Slowly, carefully, so as not to disturb the wolf, he steps forward and reaches out.

The scent of wolf is stronger, filling his nostrils, as he brings his hand closer. Steady fingers brush fur and Snape's heart misses a beat the hair feels bristly, coarse. Old. He brings his hand up higher, toward the head, nearer danger. Snape stops.

Did he see the eyelids twitch a little?

The wolf exhales suddenly, a blast of warm air rushing from its flaring nostrils, and Snape jumps back, his fingers tight around his wand.

He stands still, silent, but the wolf makes no further sound. It is still asleep, its rib-lined belly rising and falling slowly, and Snape releases his breath slowly, mockingly. To think he spent these last few moons by his front door like a stranger in his own house while the thing lay here dozing.

He edges out of the room, his eyes fixed on the slumbering mass of bristly fur, and he closes the door with a click on the beast that terrorised his teenage dreams.

~ ~ ~

Remus knows he sometimes dreams as the wolf. In the sliver of time during transformation as the wolf's mind battles his for supremacy before the Wolfsbane sends it cowering away, he feels its strength, its relentless hold over him its death grip. And he pushes away the images it tries to tempt him with, its insatiable need for blood.

While in wolf form, he allows his more innocent dog-like nature to pervade his human mind in its stead. He likes to allow himself to dream in that state, to dwell as the innocent creature who imagines bounding through tall grass in the rain, stopping only to send the drops flying from his body in urgent twists, his happy tongue loose and long and free.

Last night he dreamed of a calming touch descend briefly to his head, and a familiar scent pervaded his nostrils, bringing with it a sense of belonging that trickled deeply into him and sent him breathing out long and deep.

~ ~ ~

Even as Remus draws his finger slowly along the edge of the sturdy table, tracing each scratch, each depression, even as he feels Snape's gaze heavy on him, he doesn't stop.

He is surrounded by the pungent scents of potions, and between the dark corners are cramped shelves filled with greying parchments, well-used books, their spines in various stages of decay, even worse than the ones Snape keeps in the sitting room at home, glass bottles housing animal, plant and Merlin-knows-what-else parts. Cauldrons sit by the base of one wall, where he knows Snape is attending to a maturing potion, parchment in one hand.

The workshop is a treasure trove of potions. It positively reeks of brewing.

Severus has become tired of Remus's complaints about being stuck in the house. This morning, Remus asked him once again about his day and the place where he works in the centre of town, and so Snape has brought him here so that he can see for himself. Snape will permit him to assist him for a while, and perhaps later he may let him attempt a potion he has read about in one of Snape's books.

Remus knows it is only to shut him up, but he feels slightly excited nonetheless.

He recalls how Snape Apparated them to a stone stairwell leading to the columned terrace on which the shop is set, one of many identical ones around the Muggle courtyard two floors down. He remembers stepping through the shop door and immediately inhaling the overpowering scent. It is Snape times a hundred and Remus feels he could stay here forever. At first he shakes this strange thought away, uncertain where it comes from.

But he can't help but become immersed in this atmosphere, this pervasive darkness, this odour, this ... Severus.

"Is this the table where you work?" Remus hardly dares to ask the words he wonders how his voice will sound. But Snape's gaze is already on him. He feels it. And he traces each cut in the table. Each one made by Snape. Snape chopping roots, Snape's fingers measuring each part carefully, Snape studying each ingredient.

*I have my urges too, Severus.*

At last, he hears his name spoken with that strange, rough edge that more and more seems to send a shiver and a thrill simultaneously through him, and Remus now feels his guilt wrestling with his need.

A rustle of robes and parchment as Snape moves from his potion forces Remus to turn. He mustn't make it too obvious. He faces Snape with an enquiring gaze, though inside he is almost giddy with need.

But he feels the wave of guilt as he sees Severus's anxious expression, the emotions warring in him.

His stomach lurches. How could he have been so foolish, so callous?

But it is too late to turn back now. He has done this he alone has set the protective magic on its downward spiral and now he is forcing Severus to reinstate it. Because of his own selfish desires.

What the *hell* was he thinking?

Severus blindly sets the parchment he is still holding to one side and steps forward. Remus searches for an apology, but how can he say sorry for this? How can he make this all right? "Severus..." He sees Severus pause and swallow, and it occurs to him that Severus is interpreting his anxiety the wrong way.

*It's my fault. It's my fault! I wanted this.* But he is too much of a coward to tell him.

"Let's go home." Remus turns to the door.

"No." Severus swallows again. He is still facing the worktable. "It must be here."

Remus feels his stomach twist painfully at the anxiety in Severus's voice. He has done this to him. "Severus." He steps toward him, not knowing what to say. "I..." He looks into Severus's black eyes, only a foot from his own. "You aren't forcing yourself upon me." His voice is barely a whisper. "I want you to know that."

Whatever Remus expected to take the place of the worry in his expression a softness, perhaps (*polish Remus!*) he finds himself now recoiling from the anger that he sees building in those dark eyes.

"Bend over the table."

In his shock, Remus stumbles backwards until he touches the table. Severus is bearing down on him. "Turn around."

*He saw you! He knows!* Everything inside Remus screams at him that he deserves this.

But something else, something borne of being around Severus so often, the part of him that is still learning Severus's ways, tells him that Severus is protecting himself. That he is erecting a barrier because Remus crossed a line with his last remark. That he is angry at himself, not Remus.

"Turn. Around."

But Remus finds this voice difficult to hear through his turmoil of emotions as he presses back against the table. He didn't want it to be like this. In truth, he didn't really know what he expected it to be like. He is a fool.

An apology forms on his lips, but he bites it back and turns to the table, leans over it. Why make Severus even angrier?

He feels his robes being lifted and gathered around his waist, and he steadies himself on the scratched, stained surface.

*This is what you wanted, wasn't it? Why aren't you enjoying it?*

Remus squeezes his eyes closed. His bare thighs press against the table edge as Severus slides two fingers into him. At least he is preparing him first.

*It's more than you deserve.*

His breaths slow as Severus feels inside him then withdraws. A moist hand falls on his hip as he feels Severus's heat behind, closer.

And then he is inching into him, pushing him into the table. Slowly. Remus has chance to adjust to each stretch, to keep his breath slow and deep. He leans down, his forehead almost at the table. With every breath he inhales more of the smell of potions, with every inch Severus gains inside him, he feels more of his heat behind.

At last, Severus is filling him. He stills.

Remus wants him to move, but he dares not show his need. He keeps as still as Severus, his own deep breaths loud in his ear, echoing off the table's surface below.

Then the unthinkable happens.

At first, Remus believes he must be dreaming as he feels the rough skin brush his hardening cock. But it is real it must be fingers curl around him and he dares himself to look down. He rests his forehead on the table and holds his breath as he watches, in the dim light, a pale hand work itself down his length. Remus closes his eyes and revels in the feeling.

It is the first time Severus has touched him of his own accord since their first night. The first time that it hasn't been necessary.

He lifts himself back onto his hands, fingers on the rough surface of Severus's worktable, as Severus begins withdrawing.

Severus's hand stays in place as he moves slowly into him again, establishing a rhythm, rocking him into the table edge, and soon Remus can't hold on to his senses any longer. Severus is all around him his scent his touch his heat his sound as he pants above him even the table Remus breathes heavily against is littered with signs of Severus Remus's thighs pounding into its worn edge. Severus is all around and inside him, and Remus comes with a gasp and a cry as he spills himself over Severus's worktable, leaving his own scent across the place where Severus spends his days.

Severus thrusts a few more times before he stills deep inside him and exhales above.

He pulls out a second later, and Remus hears him mutter a few cleaning charms. Remus straightens and pulls down his robes.

Though Severus has already cleaned the worktable, Remus knows his scent is embedded into each tiny scratch, mingled with each potion stain. Inseparable.

A deep warmth fills him.

~ ~ ~

He occupies his mornings with tackling a little more of the dust accumulated over the years, the sad state of some of the furniture, the crockery, even the haphazard arrangement of Severus's books. Remus does not read many of them, of course he has never had any interest in Dark magic, and Severus frowns horribly when he does express a polite interest in his reading material. Only the ones on potions seem vaguely interesting, and some afternoons he drifts off to the droning words. But Severus still does not seem to have noticed their new organisation according to subject, and Remus does not know whether to be relieved or dejected at this. (Though Remus *does* notice, with a little annoyance, that every so often he is forced to replace some in their proper location.) One part of the house he makes sure he never, ever ventures, however not since that one and only time is Severus's bedroom.

It is on one such morning, a bright, blue-sky morning, that Remus heaves back the threadbare sofa in the sitting room. The accumulation of dust here is shocking, dampening his spirits. And it comes as little surprise that he discovers a few odds and ends among the dust. It's at times like these he wishes he had a wand. But of course, the Ministry would know straight away. A werewolf with a wand, uttering a harmless cleaning spell? What a crime! He sighs and pushes away such debilitating thoughts.

He bends to gather some of the more interesting-looking items he counts at least ten Sickles. Spending money. If only he had somewhere to spend it....

As he peers beneath the sofa's edge, something white catches his eye. He leans down further and makes out a small corner perhaps a piece of parchment. It is just out of reach, and he has to twist and reach his arm underneath, feel around in the dark before his fingers touch a sharp edge. He brings it out and holds it to the light.

Far from being a piece of parchment, it seems to be a photograph, of a woman and child. Remus frowns. They aren't moving. Not even a slight change in their expressions.

It is altogether an odd photograph. The seated woman wears a slightly sullen expression under her heavy brows and seems to have been caught off guard Remus feels uncomfortable watching her never-changing expression of surprise and the child ... the boy....

Remus blinks and rises, bringing it closer to the window. The boy is sallow, dark-haired greasy-looking.... But it is the hooked nose that settles it*Merlin*.

If this is Severus in the picture, if this is his mother, why aren't either of them moving?

But that isn't the strangest thing.

Remus looks up in thought. It occurs to him that not only can he not recall seeing any moving photos in the house, he can't recall seeing*any* photos in the house.

He lowers his gaze back to the boy. In contrast to his rather irritated mother, he is looking straight at the camera with a calm expression.

It gives Remus the impression that he is in cohorts with the person behind the camera that he has set his mother up. Yes is that a slight curl he sees at the corner of his mouth? Severus can't have been more than about seven or eight....

Remus turns the picture over. The words 'SUMMER, 1967' are inscribed on the back. The same year, the same age that Greyback came for him...

When he stole his childhood and made him into a monster.

Remus returns his gaze to those black, care-free eyes. He feels a pang of sadness as he imagines the irritation sliding from his mother's face as soon as the camera is down.

He focuses instead on the boy's gaze as it stares into him, not accusingly, not pushing him away from their private scene, but almost ... welcoming, as if they are sharing a secret together. Remus finds a muscle in his cheek twitch as he copies his barely discernable smile.

He turns and leans on the wall as he shares this moment with the eight-year-old boy.

But if Severus had been close to his mother, then why do there not seem to be any photos in the house now, none on display anywhere not even in Severus's bedroom, that one time he had been in? Why is the only picture of Severus's family underneath a dusty old sofa?

Remus ventures the question that evening.

"You know, I can't remember seeing any pictures of your family around the house."*In frames*, he adds silently. *I'm not lying, not really.*

Severus doesn't look up from his paper. Remus waits. Severus turns a page.

"Didn't you get on?" Remus asks.

There is a pause, but at least Severus answers this time. "I don't see that is any of your business," he says evenly.

"I just thought it was odd. I would have thought one might have*caught my eye* by now ... you know..."

Severus turns his black eyes on him. "Very subtle, Lupin," he sneers. He makes a derisive noise as he watches Remus grow uncomfortable. "It took you long enough." He turns back to his paper.

"Took me long enough for what?"

"To work out that I have no house-elf, that there are no magical fixtures in the house." He glances wryly at Remus. "That there are electric light switches on the wall of virtually every room. None working, admittedly," he adds, frowning into the *Prophet*, "but there nonetheless."

Remus watches him as he reads. Of course Remus has noticed the strange switches on the walls, by the doors though he assumed that Severus simply moved into an old Muggle house. He has ventured outdoors a few times without Severus's knowledge, of course and from what he can see, the area is mostly uninhabited, in a dilapidated state. It would make the perfect place for someone to hide out.

But is Severus saying instead that his family lived here? What*is* Severus saying, exactly? "Not every family has a house-elf," is the only thing Remus can think of to say.

Severus throws him a weary glance.

Well, Remus's parents couldn't afford to keep a house-elf he knows for a fact the Weasleys couldn't still can't ... probably. He sighs, tries to recover his train of thought.

Severus's family. The photo. He looks across Severus's eyes are skimming the paper. "So what are you saying?" Remus asks at last. "This is your family's house?"

"What do you think?" Severus sounds irritated.

"I don't know. Yes?"

Severus looks up again, his annoyance showing as his gaze pierces into Remus. "Weren't you there when the Wizengamot dragged my parents' names through the mud?"

"I must have missed that part." Remus gives him a wry, sympathetic smile, but Severus turns back to the paper.

After mention of the trial, Remus isn't sure how to broach the subject anew. Is Severus suggesting that one of his parents perhaps both were Muggles? "I feel like a hot drink. Tea?"

"Not for me."

"Would you mind if I had some cocoa?" He moves to rise, taken over by his sudden thought. When was the last time he tasted chocolate?

"Be my guest. But you won't find any in the house."

"Ah." Remus sits down again. "Never mind." He takes a quick breath. "But why don't you seem to have any pictures of your family?"

Severus keeps his gaze on the paper, but Remus sees his eyes come to a stop and his jaw clench. "Because my father was a filthy Muggle and my mother was a pure-blood traitor. I destroyed every single picture, burnt every single one of their belongings." Remus sees the paper crease around his tight grip. "Surely it is not that difficult to work out, even for you?"

Severus's voice is harsh, signalling the end of the conversation, and Remus keeps his hand from moving instinctively to his robes where the photo is concealed.

He chooses to remain silent. The boy didn't think those awful things about his parents, no matter what his words are today.

Remus decides then that he will not let him destroy it. He will not let him reduce the boy's fleeting happiness to nothing more than ashes. He will be safe with Remus.

~ ~ ~

Severus is in a mellow mood for Severus. He and Remus have finished nearly an entire bottle of elf-made wine between them, and Remus has barely touched any of it.

Remus has asked him about his workshop, and Severus tells him it used to be his father's. Remus remembers he told him his father was a Muggle. He thinks of the boy who shares his secrets with him after an evening of silence with Severus.

Remus glances at the nearly empty bottle. "You don't really think that about your parents, do you?"

Severus does not look up from where he reclines, eyes shut, in the chair, a half-full glass in his hand, resting on his chest. "Think what?"

"That your father was a filthy Muggle and your mother was a blood traitor."

Severus's eyes snap open then. He leans forward and places his glass on the table. He makes a derisive noise as he fixes his dark gaze on Remus. "What *do* you think, werewolf?" His voice is low. Remus hates it when it gets this low when he calls him werewolf. "Did your parents care for you?"

Remus looks at him in surprise. "Of course they did."

"And when they discovered what you are, did they still?"

"Of course. Yes."

"Though they treated you differently, yes?"

Remus stares at the cold gaze, his breaths hot and ragged. "Isn't it enough you hate your parents? You won't make me hate mine..."

"You're not *listening* to me." Severus stares into him. "When they understood what you are, they felt the same inside, though they treated you differently."

Remus feels his breaths slow, cool, as he searches Severus's angry gaze.

"More distant," Severus continues. "And when everyone else around condemns, you follow blindly, agree." He turns away. "A foolish teenager following blindly until it is too late for the truth to be heard."

Then Remus thinks he begins to understand. "You destroyed everything?"

"To keep the truth from my new family," Severus spits bitterly.

"You don't have anything?"

"I have my memories."

Suddenly, in the angry man before him, Remus sees something of the boy, staring sadly at the table. Remus finds his hand slipping into his robes, almost of its own will. He slips the small square of flimsy card to the table and slides it along.

Severus's gaze falls on it, and Remus sees his eyes widen, freeze in recognition.

"I found it underneath the sofa last month while I was doing some cleaning."

Severus's voice is hoarse, hard. "Take it away."

"Severus..."

"I said take it away. Take it away!" He jumps up and strides toward the kitchen.

Remus grabs the picture and follows. "Severus. You don't need to hide the truth any more. The war is over."

Severus turns to him angrily. "It is never over. Not until the last one of us who can remember it is dead and gone."

Remus looks into his eyes, at the raw emotion the most he can ever recall seeing in Severus's carefully guarded face.

"I don't accept that," Remus says. "I think that its control over us ends as soon as each one of us chooses it to end." He slides the picture into Severus's hand, turns and slips from the room.

~ ~ ~

He misses him, the boy who exists only in the moment. Who understood his eight-year-old self's fears for the future. Shared his loneliness, shared his silence ... shared his secret smile in the dark.

It is silly, he knows. But Remus finds he can't help but ask after him and his family. "Do you still have that photo?" he says, genially, casually, one day at breakfast.

Severus eyes him carefully. "Checking it is still intact?" He reaches into his robes before Remus can answer and slams the picture on the table.

Remus finds himself face to face again with the boy searching each other his familiar, secret smile holding him ...

"When did you say you found it?" Remus raises his gaze to see that Severus's eyes are narrowed. "A month before you showed it to me?"

Remus feels guilt creep over him. The horrid guilt of a secret pleasure being uncovered, dismantled. He has miscalculated just how much he has been missing that strange smile on that pale face.

"Like little boys, do you?"

Remus's breath catches. Severus's coldly suspicious gaze raises an offended fire in his belly. He feels sick at Severus's accusation.

"Of course, your kind do have the taste for children 'bite them while young'..."

Remus's chair flies back. "You *bastard!*" He is shaking with fury; Severus's meaning is unmistakable. He runs from the room and doesn't stop until he is behind the door, against the wall, heaving burning breaths.

*How could he ?*

Remus shakes against the wall.

~ ~ ~

He knows his eyes must still be raw from that morning when he enters the room.

Sounds filter through from the kitchen as Remus sits. He will not let Severus's words make him hide forever.

He hears a rustle of robes as Severus comes through to the sitting room and sits in the chair opposite. There is a hollow thud as he places a mug on the table.

"I found some at the back of a cupboard."

Remus looks up then, at the mug filled with a brown liquid. Recognition and thirst sets in.

He knows Severus is lying he'd checked everywhere, craving chocolate. He hadn't realised Severus had paid any heed to the passing remark he made over a month ago. Remus stares at the steaming cocoa set in front of him.

"I was wrong to say what I did." Severus pauses, but Remus keeps his gaze on the cocoa. "You're nothing like that monster Greyback."

Remus turns away, his throat dry. "I don't want to hear his name."

"He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, then?"

Remus looks across at him. Though one eyebrow is raised, and his mouth seems to curl slightly, Remus thinks he caught a passing hint of something in his eyes ... something like anxiety .... But his implacably neutral gaze is already back in place.

Remus wonders why he has never noticed before just how much of the boy in the picture is left in the man.

He slides his gaze to the mug that Severus has made for him.

"It's just cocoa."

Remus cracks a smile and lets out a half-hearted breath of laughter at Severus's attempt at reassurance and at the same time Remus finds himself unable to ignore the rough dryness in his throat. Reaching, he takes the drink from the table. He looks up and meets Severus's gaze. "Thank you."

As Remus sips the cocoa *chocolate! How he has missed it!* he sees Severus settle back into the chair.

He curls his hands around the hot mug and gazes into it. "You were my age," he says, his breath disturbing the rising steam. "In the photo. The same age when ..." He takes a breath. "... when I was bitten." He watches the vapour swirling, inhaling the sweet scent. "You look happy there. Do you remember who took it?"

"My father."

Severus doesn't offer further explanation, and Remus doesn't want to pry. He takes another drink, healing chocolate warming his insides as it goes down.

"Take it."

Remus looks up to see that Severus is holding out the picture. He searches Severus's inscrutable eyes. "I I can't. It's yours," he says firmly. "It's the only one you have."

"I have my memories."

Remus glances from the boy to the man and back again.

He feels the heat from the mug Severus has made for him warm his hands and tastes on his tongue the chocolate Severus has bought for him. He shakes his head firmly. "It's yours."

Severus pauses, searches his gaze, then slowly takes back the picture, looks at it with an almost critical eye. He moves to place it back in his robes ... but then pauses ... glances at it again with a strange expression, an almost determined look. Then he rises from the chair, and Remus watches as he strides to the fire.... Remus nearly cries out as his hands begin to slip from around the mug.... But instead Severus raises the photo to the mantelpiece above.

As Severus gazes at the picture propped up against the base of the clock, Remus relaxes a little. He indulges in more of the heavenly chocolate, sure he has never tasted a better cup.

~ ~ ~

Sometimes Remus hears Severus's soft mutters as he wandlessly checks the magic after spending time in his bed.

Tonight, Remus feels himself begin to drift off to the cadenced sound of Severus's whispers over him.

A sudden change in the rhythm draws him back.

"It can't be."

He looks up into Severus's serious expression. "What? What is it?" He sits up.

"Stay still!" Severus's breath is harsh, urgent. He starts the low murmurs again as he stares into him.

"Tell me what's wrong."

Severus curses and brings his eyes to his. He moves from the bed, his loose cotton shirt billowing as he paces across the room. "It isn't possible." He rummages through his robes and brings out his wand.

"What isn't? Tell me!"

Severus draws his wand over him, his lips moving almost silently beneath his deep-set frown.

Remus can't bear it any longer. "For God's sake, Severus, please tell me what's going on."

Severus lowers his wand and exhales harshly. "If you would keep still and silent, perhaps I could find out."

"Find out what? Is it the magic?"

"It isn't possible," Severus repeats as he draws his hand through his hair and stares into Remus.

"Isn't it working any more?" Severus brings his gaze to his, and Remus's stomach drops. "Oh, God."

"Oh, it's still working." Severus frowns. "At least, it seems to be."

"Then, what's the problem?"

Severus pauses. "It is working. But I don't know how. The magic we put in place ... something is wrong with it. For all intents and purposes its power is gone.... *It should* be gone. Yet there still seems to be some magic something still keeping Malfoy's down. I don't know what it is and I don't know how it came to be there."

Remus searches Severus's sober gaze as this sinks in. "For how long?" he breathes. "How long will it keep Malfoy's from working?"

He feels the colour drain from his face as he looks into Severus's eyes Severus doesn't know.

"I will find out what this is," Severus tells him. "It is holding whatever it is." He grabs his robes and dresses hurriedly.

"Can I help?"

"You know nothing about Dark magic, Lupin." He turns and holds his gaze. "*I will* find out what is wrong."

Remus stares after him. He doesn't want to go back to Malfoy. He doesn't want to leave Severus's house.

~ ~ ~

He drops the book on the floor and picks up another. Something ... there must be ~~be~~*something* ...

He scans through the pages, flicking through them furiously. His dark eyes skim over the familiar terms obscure and Dark horrid and gruesome ...

In a rage, he flings it down and stares at the scattered books at his feet all useless. All of them utterly useless.

He has never seen anything like it before. The Dark magic was supposed to stay in place ... it was supposed to be strong enough to override Malfoy's claim how could its power have simply vanished? And what the devil has taken its place? Has Malfoy done something?

Snape leans back a little in the chair and rests his elbow on the arm, holding his head in his hand *Think! There must be something I'm missing .... Something obvious ....*

He looks up. *Perhaps ....* He stands and strides to one of the bookshelves that line the room. Flicking his wand at the topmost shelf, he watches the thick, brown leather-bound volume arc slowly away from its neighbours, toward his outstretched hand.

Carefully, he turns the fragile, aged pages within.

He finds the chapter. *Dark Possession*. He scans through the section headings. *Causes ... Ways to Enforce ... How to Suppress Attempts to Surmount ... Undesirable Outcomes ... Secondary Effects ... Long-Term Behaviour ...*

He exhales and returns to the third section.

No, no, no! all the methods listed here that a victim may try to use to overcome such Dark magic need spells, incantations ... and because the binding magic is still between him and Lupin, it must be something they have done together .... But they have done nothing like this...! He grips the leather cover and growls in frustration. He *will* discover what this damned supplanting magic is!

*Dark possession ....* This is a binding form .... Something that relies on two-way magic .... Snape flicks forward again to section four, 'Undesirable Outcomes'. He skims through the rhetoric impatiently. When he reaches the top of the next page, he stops.

He rereads the paragraph. And again. And again. He swallows.

The reference is so small almost a passing mention he could easily have missed it.

*But of course it is*, he thinks, his eyes unfocusing. This is a book on Dark magic some of the very Darkest. Such a reference has no place in here.

Almost involuntarily, his gaze strays to the bookcase concealing the stairway.

How is he going to explain this to Lupin?

~ ~ ~

Remus gets up at a quarter to six, unable to lie there staring at the ceiling any more.

When he enters the kitchen, he is surprised to see Severus at the table, his head on his arms, apparently fast asleep. He stirs, and Remus notices that he has been lying on an open book.

Severus raises his head slowly, as though stiff from sleeping over the table. Remus sees that his robes are undone at the top it does not appear as though he has been to bed at all last night.

"Lupin." His voice is rough from sleep; he clears his throat impatiently.

Remus takes the seat opposite. "Did you find anything? Well?" he asks when Severus doesn't answer.

Severus stares and slides the book he has been lying on toward him.

Remus takes it questioningly. It is obviously a book on Dark magic a very old one judging by the flowery language and old-fashioned script. He shakes his head at it and looks up at Severus.

"The top paragraph on the right."

Remus reads the words, not understanding any of them. This is all beyond him. Dark. He hates it. He exhales a hot breath. "How old is this?" he asks, leaning back and staring at the sepia pages with a frown. He looks up.

"This is ancient..." Severus glances at the book. "...power."

Remus searches Severus's distant expression. "I don't understand it," he implores.

A spark passes through Severus's eyes. "You never were any good at Defence Against the Dark Arts, were you?" He clenches his fists and stands, turning to the small window behind him. Remus stares at his taut back and waits. "Do you remember..." Severus says at last, his tone distant again, "...the Dark Lord's end?"

"Of course I do."

"His body dead ... with only his final Horcrux remaining to take refuge in ... he possessed Potter."

Of course Remus remembers it. The horrifying sight of Harry trying to hold on in the face of so much pain as Voldemort sought to expel Harry's soul from his body.... And after all that, after finally vanquishing Voldemort, bringing everything to an end, it had been a stray spell from a vengeful Death Eater that had felled Harry. "I remember it," he says heavily.

"Then you remember how he finally defeated the Dark Lord, threw him out nowhere for him to go but through the veil, to his end?"

Everyone knows how! "Yes," Remus says impatiently. "Is this going anywhere?"

"It was his final mistake. 'The power the Dark Lord knows not.'"

Remus closes his eyes tightly against the surfacing memories. "If you're not going to tell me what..."

"The magic we put in place remains. Only, its Dark element has been replaced by something else. Something more ... powerful. Something the Dark little understands." Severus turns and points. "Read."

"I did. I read the whole paragraph. I don't understand it."

"Read it again. The last sentence."

With a sigh, Remus turns from his impatient gaze and reads.... *One instance moste vile is noted, whereby the Noble Magick had been ridded by means of weakness of will, reciprocative solicitude, all gracious strengthe seized by the feeble usurper.* "'Feeble usurper' what does that mean?"

"It is a book on the Dark Arts what do you think it means? Its enemy the Light! The Light!"

"But what does that..." Remus stares at the book, tries to understand. The Dark element of the magic has been replaced by one of Light? "How..."

Severus strides forward and brings his finger down onto the page. "There! That, there!"

Remus looks down where Severus is stabbing his finger. *Solicitude* .... Solicitude? He glances up at Severus.

"The power that Potter used," Severus says through gritted teeth; his urgent stare is almost piercing.

"But Harry used He defeated Voldemort by by thinking of his parents, Sirius, everyone he'd lost believing their deaths would have been in vain if he gave up ... and all the people he'd leave behind to Voldemort if he surrendered.... That's..." Remus looks down at the page, "...solicitude?" He laughs bitterly ... nervously. "That's the Dark way of putting it, is it? So clinically almost ... disparagingly?"

"The Dark way is not to put it any way at all, if possible."

Remus stares at the words ... then his gaze falls on the preceding word, the modifier *reciprocative* and its meaning hits him ... *reciprocal*. But that would imply ... that Severus ...

Remus strains to keep his eyes on the page before him. He feels Severus's gaze heavy on him. Remus has known his own feelings for a long while now, unmistakable, undeniable, and he is glad that Severus knows, it is a relief .... But this ... this means that Severus now too .... Why Remus should feel rather sick right now, he doesn't quite understand *it weighs heavy, feels like guilt* but he keeps his head down and prays for the feeling to pass.

After a moment, Severus moves to retake his seat, and Remus glances up. Severus's expression is empty of emotion, serious. He looks tired from lack of sleep.

Remus thinks of the implications on the magic of this new information Severus says it is the same, only less the Dark. No not the same ... more powerful ... stronger. As long as it holds, of course .... As long as .... But Remus tries not to think of that. "So," he says quietly, "does this mean that when you ... we don't have to ...?"

Severus looks at him. "No. We don't."

Remus drops his gaze as Severus looks away.

So, that is it, then. Remus knows him Severus will not allow himself to be vulnerable in Remus's bed voluntarily, without any sense of obligation to do so ... without the associated duty.

And they had never even kissed.

Remus finds he now regrets this the most. They have been swept along, driven by the belief that they were doing it simply out of necessity for the magic when all this time ...

"I shall make some tea." Severus rises from the table.

Remus closes his eyes. In spite of what the new magic means, he feels he has lost him.



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Remus glances at the clock. He knows he doesn't really need to the night is setting in. It will be time soon, and he feels it in every muscle about to tear, every bone about to break.

He glances at Severus, deep in his book. Remus gets to his feet with a weary sigh and heads into the kitchen. After filling the dish with tap water, he returns to the sitting room.

Severus is standing thoughtfully by the sofa, his book in his hand, a thumb between the pages. He looks up as Remus enters. Remus gives him a small smile and makes his way to the stairs.

As Remus reaches the bookcase concealing the steps, there is a flash of black and a pale hand suddenly slides in front of him, against the shelves, barring his way. He looks into Severus's face. "What are you doing?" His voice is light, but he begins to feel a vague sense of unease.

Severus stares at him with an almost wild expression. His black eyes seem to search him. "Stay here," he says at last in a voice so low that Remus thinks he must have misheard.

"What?"

"Stay here." Severus steps closer. "Stay down here."

Remus looks at him nervously. "Don't mock me, Severus."

"Do I look like I am?" Severus steps nearer still, bringing himself further between Remus and the door.

"Then you mustn't be thinking straight!" Remus bursts out in fearful anger as he is forced to take a step back, spilling some water on the carpet. He searches Severus's resolute expression. "I haven't ... No one has ever..." He shakes his head desperately. "Not even James ... not even Sirius saw me. They always waited outside the Willow until I'd transformed. I couldn't take that risk. I wouldn't let them."

"Nymphadora?"

"No. Never." Always, she had accepted his plea that it was too dangerous.

"No one at all?"

"My parents .... Some quack they took me to as a child. But always behind a glass wall, in another room. Never in the same room. Don't you understand?"

"What about that time at Hogwarts when you were professor there? Black saw you then."

He stares at him, incredulous with anger. "But I nearly killed them! I hadn't taken the Wolfsbane."

"And have you tonight?"

"Of course I have."

"Well, then."

Remus stares. "But when I transform, I can*feel* it the wolf wanting control over me."

"Are you saying I don't make the Wolfsbane adequately?"

"No. You always make it perfectly. But it's always the same it's always worst in those first few seconds...."

"Seconds. A passing feeling." Severus moves his hand further along the door. "Stay."

Remus looks in fear at the fierce determination in his eyes. Severus doesn't intend to let him through. He has to make him see sense. "What am I, a pet dog?" Remus laughs weakly a feeble attempt to defuse the tension. "Please, Severus. It's too dangerous."

Severus stands his ground, his jaw clenched.

Why is Severus doing this, Remus asks himself. Why when he has never even been to bed with him since that night he, who hates the thought of being vulnerable? Why is he now willingly exposing himself to such real danger?

"You always seem to be fast asleep on the bed most of the night anyway."

Remus tries not to give himself away, but it is too late.

Severus narrows his eyes. "What did you do?" His expression lights with realisation. "You took something." His voice lowers angrily, his face nearly at Remus's. "You mixed potions! I gave you that sleeping draught in good faith. You stupid..."

"I looked it up. I made sure first, I'm not an idiot. It works fine with a human mind."

But Severus's gaze still burns with fury. "Why?"

"Because there are only two doors between you and the wolf! Why do you think? I can't take any risks. Now do you see?"

Severus stares, his black eyes boring into him. Remus turns away. He must make him see.... But something occurs to him. "How do you know I'm on the bed?"

He looks into Severus's implacable expression. He feels himself pale. "You you ..." He shakes his head, turns and frowns, his throat dry. "They weren't dreams," he whispers. "You came into the room, didn't you?"

"What do you mean, dreams?"

"How could you be so stupid? Why didn't you tell me what you were doing?" He refuses to look at him. He feels sick with fear at the thought of Severus being so close to the wolf ... touching it...

"If I were ever in any danger, I would not have gone anywhere near the wolf, believe me."

Desperate, Remus turns to him. "Don't do this. Please." His breaths come in urgent gasps. "Have you forgotten what this wolf is to you?"

"I have not forgotten."

"Then please don't do this to us."

Raw emotion suddenly flares in Severus's eyes and he grabs Remus's arm, the dish flying to the floor, the water spilling out, as he turns him and holds him to the shelves, and then Remus's breath is gone as Severus presses his lips against his.

Remus has no choice but to give in to the insistent pressure and allow Severus entrance, let his tongue explore inside him, his taste fill him. He tries to hold on to it as all too soon it withdraws and the lips are removed.

Severus takes a step back. He looks at him thoughtfully. "It is up to you. If you choose to stay, you are welcome." He levels his gaze with a look of resolute defiance. "But ten minutes after the moon has risen, I am going to come and collect you."

Remus is speechless.

"Have you taken any of the sleeping draught yet?"

"I No. I take it just before." Remus swallows and blinks, beginning to recover his senses. He gazes into Severus's eyes, realising he is waiting. "I'll get hairs all over your furniture," he says, a last-ditch plea, half-serious.

"I shall put a blanket down."

Remus searches his face. "What about you what will you do while the wolf is sat near you, in the same room while it is wide awake?" He tries to emphasise the last words, but Severus looks unperturbed.

"I have my book to finish." He folds his arms and raises an eyebrow. "Anything else?"

Remus feels the pall of defeat. But Severus's determination fills him with hope as well. He edges toward the opening in the shelves and swallows. "Give me half an hour."

"It does not take you half an hour to transform." For a moment, Remus holds his breath as Severus studies him. Then at last Severus says, firmly, "Twenty minutes."

Remus gently lets out his relief. That will give him more than enough time. "And promise me you'll let me go back before the moon sets?"

Severus sighs. "Very well." His black eyes scrutinise him. "I shall wait outside your door until you are done."

Remus stops at the join in the shelves and watches him. Does he can he mean...?

Severus raises his eyebrow in a question, and Remus feels an overwhelming desire to taste him again.... But the moon will rise soon, any moment, and he worries where that thought comes from. He turns, and pulls the bookcase away.

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A thick exhaustion fills every part of him, as it always does after a night as the wolf. He pushes himself up and drops his legs over the edge of the bed. Fatigue wants to claim him for the coming day.

But Severus is waiting outside the door. Remus smiles. He remembers dozing in a blanketed warmth on the chair while Severus quietly read his book on the sofa opposite.

His limbs are stiff, but Remus manages the few short steps to the door. He rests his weight on the door as he pulls it open.

Severus's eyes widen slightly as he takes him in. Perhaps he hadn't expected him to be unclothed. Severus raises his eyes and looks into his face. There is a hint of concern in his voice. "You look tired. Perhaps..." He begins to turn, and Remus can't bear it any longer. He musters all the strength he can and reaches out, pulling Severus into the room and holding him to the wall as he shuts the door behind him.

He stifles any protest Severus might make, tasting him, taming his tongue.

When he pulls back after a moment to catch his breath, Severus is staring from where Remus still holds him. The look in Severus's eyes intoxicates him, and he slips his hands over Severus's chest and begins to unbutton his robes, ignoring the tremble in his fingers as he hurriedly makes his way down, revealing the grey shirt inch by inch as he goes.

Severus's breaths come fast and shallow under his fumbling, heated efforts. "Are you sure the wolf is gone?" he asks.

Remus stops and raises his gaze. But if Severus has any fear any anxiety all Remus can see is his own need reflected in Severus's glazed eyes. Severus's mouth is still open slightly, and Remus devours it.

He peels the black robes from Severus's shoulders and tastes the pale, salty skin above the collarless grey shirt beneath. He feels Severus's hands around him, sliding over his hot, wet back, and Remus reaches around as Severus draws away from the wall. Remus nuzzles past the black hair and sets a mischievous smile below Severus's ear. "Make solicitude to me," he whispers into it before tracing each of its folds.

Severus pulls away and looks into his eyes. "No."

Remus's grip on his robes falters.

Black eyes trail down his front. "It looks as though you are very much in control here."

Remus's heart catches as he grasps his meaning. "But ... I ...." He shuts his mouth in fear.

Severus studies him before a slight curl tugs at his mouth. "I think you will know what to do."

Remus hesitates. He knows Severus's earlier remark holds some truth the wolf does still linger he can feel its ravenous hunger though he knows his fears are unwarranted now the moon has set.

But Severus leans in to his neck before Remus can tell him. "This magic has *reciprocal* nature, Lupin. I think that should be respected."

Remus curves into Severus's touch ... the feel of his tongue against the back of his neck ... his hair brushing his skin .... Remus pushes him back, against the wall. "My name is *Remus*."

If Severus is startled, he doesn't show it, and the same maddeningly intoxicating look fills him. "Remus," he breathes, as though testing it. "You still smell of the wolf."

His words are rough, whispered, almost as if he hadn't meant to say them, and Remus hears the unmistakable need they convey. Though at first he is disbelieving, Remus's chest burns with fresh, almost unbearable desire. He curls his mouth carefully and paws Severus's cotton shirt, dragging the low neckline down just a little as he fixes his attention on the black eyes above. His heart leaps as he sees them respond, reflecting equal want.

Remus falls into the black depths and claims the mouth that curled around his name.

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Remus made short work of the rest of Severus's clothes.

He exposed his pale flesh and dragged him to his bed. He growled as he buried himself in the scent of Severus. He panted as he began to thrust faster and harder.

And when he came deep inside him, his low howl tore the name spoken for only the second time from the lips he greedily devoured.

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## Epilogue

Remus was surprised early one evening to see Arthur accompany Severus as he arrived home.

"But what about the laws?" Remus asked him when he suggested the Ministry might soon grant him a reprieve.

"Ah, Umbridge is on her way out. Some scandal to do with goblins her days at the Ministry are numbered." Arthur raised his eyebrows.

Remus hardly dared to believe. Since the Ministry had deliberately overlooked his work for the Order deciding he was one of the werewolves who had fought alongside Voldemort ... so undercover they couldn't or wouldn't see the difference ... and the few who survived had been too preoccupied with picking up the pieces of their own lives Remus had almost given up all hope of earning a reprieve. Getting a wand of his very own again. Being free.

"Goblins?" Remus asked, bemused.

Arthur gave Severus an odd smile and Remus thought he caught Severus's eyebrow rise ever so slightly.

"I'll make some tea." Severus turned and strode into the kitchen.

Arthur turned to Remus with a cheerful smile. "How are you, Remus? Been treating you well, has he?" He glanced toward the kitchen.

"What Oh, yes. *Very* well." Remus smiled back, felt some colour rise to his cheeks and made his own, discreet, glance toward the door.

"Good. And this magic thingie he used to override Malfoy...." Arthur's brow creased in concern. "How does it work?"

Remus fumbled, his face growing warmer. "Well ... it's, er, some kind of Dark magic..."

"Dark, you say?" Arthur's frown deepened. "I'm not sure I like the sound of that, Remus."

"Oh, it's not as bad as it sounds. And it was the only one that would have worked."

"All the same. He can cancel it, can't he?"

"What?"

"Snake. He can end it easily enough, can he when the Ministry finally see sense about you?"

Remus stared at Arthur's waiting gaze. "I suppose so." Cancel... end it.... If Severus 'ended' it, that would mean.... Remus felt his chest tighten defensively. This was one 'bond' he wasn't ready to be rid of.

But what if Severus could cancel the underlying bond, the Dark one they had initially set up, what would that do to this one? Would it destroy it in turn? Would Severus feel differently about him? Remus frowned. He was being silly again, he knew. Paranoid. How Severus felt and how *he* felt about Severus was not dictated by any magic.

The rustle of robes and clink of cups signalled Severus's return.

"We were just saying," Arthur said, taking his tea, "about this bond thingie. You can cancel it, can't you?"

Remus caught Severus's glance.

"Of course," Remus put in, and Severus turned his gaze on him. "Of course it can easily be stopped." He met Severus's eyes. "*Very* easily. *All too easily*."

Arthur was still waiting for Severus's reply.

"Well," Severus said, turning to address Arthur, "we shall cross that bridge when we come to it."

"Yes, indeed." Arthur reinstated his cheery smile as he beamed at Remus. "Hopefully it won't be long now."

Remus smiled back, though his gaze returned to Severus as soon as Arthur turned his attention to his tea.

He searched Severus's guarded expression. Though it would not be based on magic any more, what they had together would still be here. But he knew there would be many other bridges they would need to cross. He would have to let the binding magic go, sooner or later, he knew that. That was what freedom was all about, after all. And he owed Severus that the freedom to choose once Remus had his own freedom. The freedom to be. He owed Severus a lot more. But most of all, he owed him the choice.

"Funny, how that thing about the goblins got out," Arthur mused over his mug.

"Decidedly." Severus sent Remus a meaningful glance and for the first time Remus saw the living, breathing eight-year-old Severus looking back at him ... the secret, hardly-there-at-all smile ... the shared amusement in the glistening black eyes ... *everything* was here. And Remus knew, whatever happened, whatever Severus felt, whatever he decided once Remus was free, that what they had right now, right here, was as strong as it could be. That, while magic could bind and break, there were some things that were yet much stronger.