

Perspective

by darsynia

The day after the events in the Shrieking Shack, Remus Lupin contemplates the life-changing things he's learned about his friends. Minerva McGonagall points out the difference between truth and perspective. Friendship Fic.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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He sat and stared at it, watching the branches twitch and sway as though a furious gale were howling through them, but the grass in which he sat hinted at the true story. The long green tendrils showed no indication of wind; indeed, Remus couldn't hear or see any signs of life except for the large, gnarly tree several meters in front of him. The tree had a life of its own, a destructive one at that... and it had been planted there because of him.

Lupin had never done this, never taken the time to actually examine the Whomping Willow. During his years as a student, he'd never appreciated its existence, only saw the thing as a painful reminder of what made him different from his friends. Remus had loathed the seemingly malicious plant with increasing intensity as he grew older; the image of the tree silhouetted against the forest at sunset was practically seared into his memory after so many trips from the castle at dusk. He couldn't help seeing it as a mocking symbol of a peaceful creature corrupted into a blind, vicious thing--exactly as he'd seen himself before the potion. His hatred of it had eventually begun to heal when the three friends closest to him bridged the gap between man and beast, providing Remus with an amazing affirmation of their caring for them--while having risked their lives in the process.

He smiled ruefully--he doubted that James in particular would have been able to stand for anything less.

Remus thought there was a kind of aching poetry to the night as he sat cross-legged and motionless in the grass. This was the very spot that Prongs used to pose dangerously in the moonlight, his front hooves clawing at the air while the full moon traced the shadow of his glorious antlers. It had all been sheer madness really--not simply their irresponsible adventures but the risks that they took in acting on them as well. They should have been caught--either from the dangerous trips the four of them took into the Forbidden Forest or Potter's inability to resist transforming on the very grounds of Hogwarts (knowing full well what the penalties were for being an unregistered Animagi). Peter's descriptions of the stag had been so lavish, and James' boasting had piqued such interest that Remus had begged Madam Pomfrey to take him down to the Willow an hour early one evening late in their sixth year. He'd persuaded her he wanted to grab what little sleep he could--but in reality he'd snuck down along the passageway under the Willow, hoping to catch a glimpse of James before the moon's rays could rob him of full consciousness.

He'd never told them, of course. He'd never let the three of them know of his battles for control, how he would lay awake in bed begging the powers that be *just one night* after which he could remember everything. All three of them had worked so hard and been so eager to give him a reason not to hate the full moon...and they had *mostly succeeded*, Lupin thought to himself with grim irony. He had stopped dreading it--at least, much less than he dreaded the next day's recap. The three illegal animagi would go over how much fun they'd had while he would sift through his own blurred sense-memory looking for correlations.

The Willow's leaves rustled in the growing wind, and as the rushing air eddied at the foot of the huge trunk, Remus just barely spied the knothole that Dumbledore had spelled to render the tree immobile. In a burst of melancholy, he wondered if there were still tiny rat footprints on it--the only remnants of a life cut short by betrayal. He supposed that there probably were, as no one had any use for or even knew of the hidden passageway beneath the Whomping Willow, and no student--not even a

Gryffindor--would be brave enough to explore its trunk just for kicks.

Remus sighed and leaned back, his emotions warring within himself as he thought about Peter. Part of him wanted to experience the painful memories, to open that newly blocked part of his heart and let the brisk wind that rushed across the grounds act as a salve--but another part of him wanted to shut it away. With that pain came the fact of the twelve years of thinking that *Sirius* had been the betrayer. He wanted to *hate* Peter for that, for taking away *all* of them in a single night, for forcing them to think of an innocent man as a killer, and the killer a martyr. Remus decided that there wasn't a wind that had ever blown on the campus of Hogwarts that could ease the wounds caused by *that* line of thinking. What did it *mean* that he had been on the outside of those events, he, the only Ministry-classified 'monster' of the group?

Lupin shifted his position slightly, his muscles groaning and his new wounds aching. He was surprised to find that it wasn't as painful as he'd remembered. The Wolfsbane Potion had literally changed his life--job opportunities, living quarters, social circumstances--but Remus had expected to see himself differently. For the first time in his adult life, he didn't turn into the boogeyman under the bed, the Lamia out to eat innocent children... but it had only changed the way *others* saw him.

This had been crushing, the realization that he still *felt* like a werewolf even without the literal transformation.

A soft rustling sound penetrated his reverie, and Remus lifted his head to see a tabby cat with unusual markings around the eyes pick its way primly across the grass in his direction. He made no move, knowing that by approaching him in this way, his colleague was offering him a strange sort of condolence. She had to know by now that his friends had studied under her very nose to become illegally what she was by gift of talent...

The cat made no move to pause as she walked directly up to him and brushed her head gently against his hand, just once. Remus held himself completely still except for his head as he nodded gravely to her, his eyes misting over with unshed tears. Minerva McGonagall moved past him, her tail held rigidly straight. He knew that it wouldn't be long before she shifted back to her human form, and he waited to hear her stern voice chastise him for sitting in the wet grass alone in the middle of the night.

"Have you made peace with it?" she asked instead, her tone more compassionate than he'd expected. Remus wasn't sure whether she was referring to the tree, his unexpected transformation the night before, or the sudden and surprising news of Sirius' innocence and Peter's guilt. It didn't really matter, however--his answer was the same for all three.

"I don't know if I ever can," he said simply.

"There's no peace to be made with grief, Remus," Minerva said--and he was glad she had remained behind him, for he was no longer able to contain the quiet tears that coursed down his face to land on his arm. The salt stung in the scratches he'd inflicted on himself, but he let them fall, relishing the pain as part of the punishment for his carelessness in forgetting the potion.

"I know it might sound strange to you, but I've always viewed that tree as a symbol of victory," she said, her voice barely audible over the sound of the wind. "After every short-sighted proclamation issued from the Ministry, every inane question owed to the Headmaster from the Minister for Magic, I've gone to a window and looked at the Willow and smiled."

He turned to look at her then, touched to the quick at the look of fierce happiness on her face as she stared at the tree thrashing its branches wildly into the night sky. He knew she expected him to ask her for an explanation, but he just waited. After a moment, she shifted her gaze to his and her eyes blazed with the sort of mischief he would have expected from Albus--or James.

"Because you came first, Remus, not the Department of Magical Creatures, not the Werewolf Registry--a small boy who needed an education, *got* one, come hell or high water," McGonagall said defiantly. "Children shouldn't have to be held accountable for what happens to them," she added a beat later with a deep sigh. Lupin caught her meaning instantly.

"Harry hates his aunt and uncle's house as well," he mused.

"The Muggles have a saying," the older woman said. "'One man's trash is another man's treasure.' It's all about perspective."

"Neither of us are likely to treasure--" he began, but she cut him off brusquely.

"Don't discard the memories with the rest of the rubbish, Remus--that's all I'm saying," Minerva said in a strangely tender voice, squeezing his shoulder tightly as she walked past him toward the castle.

The dew had already formed on the ground around him before Remus Lupin was ready to get up and follow his colleague into the building. As he did so, the werewolf turned and watched the sun's first morning rays strike the tops of the trees around him. It had been the first time he'd watched the sunset from the perspective of the grounds just outside the Whomping Willow in fifteen years.