

Song of Mourning, Song of Hope, Song of Joy

by firefly124

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: This was written for the Trading Places challenge at the Lupin_Snape community on [InsaneJournal](#) and [LiveJournal](#). The prompt was the following picture by Skitty_Kat: [Bribing the Ferryman](#). Many thanks to ubiquirk for beta-reading and helping me find my way out of some of the corners and plot holes I wrote my way into, and to Saracen77 for Brit-picking. Any remaining errors are mine.

June 1997

The last echoes of phoenix song had faded some time ago. Remus wished it had lasted longer. Perhaps if the bird had sung for another hour, or day, or month, his heart might have begun to be healed.

Dumbledore was dead. Severus had killed him. *Severus* had killed him. If the phoenix had sung for a year without ceasing, Remus doubted it would have been enough to heal that.

It was unnaturally quiet in the Hospital Wing now. Every sound seemed magnified. Fleur was still sniffing on Molly's shoulder, and Poppy's shoes clicked hollowly against the stone floor.

Remus finally met Tonks' eyes. She was so young, so earnest, and the emotion on her face was so genuine.

There wouldn't be guessing games with her. She wouldn't expect him to translate a snarl into an endearment, wouldn't behave like a completely different person when they weren't alone. Wouldn't use his lycanthropy against him. Wouldn't turn out to be a traitor.

He should hold firm. It wasn't fair to her. None of it was. But he'd never been particularly strong-willed. If he had been, maybe things would be different. Perhaps he would have stopped James and Sirius' bullying behavior. Perhaps Severus wouldn't have been driven to join the Death Eaters. Perhaps Dumbledore would still be alive.

Regrets were useless, he knew. Somehow, that wasn't enough to stop him having them.

He pried her fingers from the front of his robes, fully intending to push her away. But he'd never been particularly strong-willed. Instead, he pulled her close, letting his tears

fall into her hair as hers dampened the front of his robes, and he abandoned the last shred of hope that had been murdered tonight.

~*~

May 1998

The fog was almost impenetrable. When had it got foggy? And why was it so quiet? Was it all over? Remus looked about him, but there was nothing but gray.

A shock of purple hair cut through the mist.

"Dora?"

"Hmm?" She seemed to be just waking up too.

"What're we doing in a boat, love?" At least, he was almost certain that was why everything seemed to be rocking a bit.

"A boat?" The purple became streaked with green and moved out of sight and into the fog.

Then suddenly, the fog was gone, and wherever he might have been before, Remus was now standing in the Forbidden Forest, looking at Harry. More surprising, he was also standing next to James, Sirius, and Lily, but they didn't look quite ... solid. Looking down at himself, he realized he didn't either.

Ah, so that's it. I'm dead. But what ... ?

"Quicker and easier than falling asleep," Sirius said, apparently answering something Harry had asked.

Taking in the bleak look in Harry's eyes, Remus suddenly knew what the question had been. He looked, as he always had, to James, who nodded.

"And he will want it to be quick," Remus said, abruptly certain what Harry needed to hear. "He wants it over."

"I didn't want you to die," Harry said. "Any of you. I'm sorry right after you'd had your son ... Remus, I'm sorry..."

"I am sorry too," Remus answered, his heart aching for little Teddy, who'd apparently lost both his parents in one shot, much like Harry had. "Sorry I will never know him ... but he will know why I died and I hope he will understand. I was trying to make a world in which he could live a happier life."

There was more, of course. He loved his son, certainly, and wanted a better world for him. And yet, there had been a sort of fatalism in him. A certainty that he would never get to see that future. Perhaps Dora had seen it. Perhaps that's why she'd come after him. He closed his eyes in shame.

When he opened them, the others were surrounding Harry as he walked through the woods to give himself up to Voldemort.

"I thought he would come," Voldemort said in his eerie, high-pitched voice. "I expected him to come. I was, it seems ... mistaken."

"You weren't."

Harry dropped something, and Remus felt himself jarred. The Forbidden Forest disappeared, replaced once again with a gray but thinning mist, and he fell forward onto his wife.

"Where'd you get to?" she asked. "Didn't you hear what I said?"

"Get out," a voice ordered.

Turning, Remus saw a disturbingly normal-looking man, who had apparently been punting the boat across the water. Someone who brings you to your afterlife should look ... well, Remus didn't know what he ought to look like, but he shouldn't look like someone you could bump into at the Leaky Cauldron.

"Get out, I said. You're the ones had to go having a war today, so there's plenty more waiting." The man put a hand on his hip and glared.

"What's he on about, Remus?" Dora shoved him off of her to get up and look around. "Where are we?"

"I think ... we're dead." A strange mixture of relief and regret washed over him. The regret he understood. The relief puzzled him.

"You think we're ... don't be daft! We can't be dead, not both of us! What's poor Teddy going to do?"

The hackles on his neck rose. "Well, you might have thought of that before you went tearing into a war zone!"

"If *you* hadn't've gone off looking like you were actually out to *find* an *Avada* with your name on it, maybe ..."

"I said, **get out!**" the ferryman roared.

He wasn't quite sure how it happened, but it seemed to Remus that a blast of wind picked them both up and threw them out of the boat and onto a wooden jetty, where they both fell back into a jumble, his shoulder slamming hard into the wood beneath them.

The ferryman turned his boat around, mumbling something about never transporting married people together again. Soon he was out of sight, swallowed by the fog that thickened a few yards out from the dock.

Scrambling to get up, Remus reached for Dora and gave her a hand. She was obviously still furious, as evidenced by the streaks of magenta in her hair. She really hated when it got that color, but it always did when she was upset. Despite everything, some part of him thought that was rather endearing.

"So what are we supposed to do now?" she demanded.

"I ... I'm sorry?" He looked around. There didn't appear to be anything *to* do other than walk across the jetty to the shore and see where they were.

"How do we get back? Look, you probably think he's better off without you or some rot, but I don't! Dammit, Remus, Teddy needs parents!"

"I ... I'm not disagreeing." He sighed. He started, thinking for a moment that it was odd that sighing was possible whilst dead. "But I don't think we can just go back. Don't you think James and Lily would have ..."

"I don't know what they would have, but I know we have to!" She crossed her arms firmly over her chest. "Maybe they couldn't for some reason. Because ... because it would have been too obvious. Can't just have famous dead people walking around not dead, right? But I'll bet if we can get back fast enough, they'll just put it down to us not really being dead in the first place. It's all chaos anyway."

"Well, maybe, but how are we supposed to do it?" he asked. The shore seemed rather deserted, for all that the ferryman had said it was a busy day. Why wasn't there anyone here to meet them? At the very least, James, Sirius, and Lily must have known he was coming. Or were they still with Harry?

"You're the one's supposed to be the Dark Arts expert." She huffed, turning to walk away from him. After about two steps, she tripped over a large pile of something black that neither one of them had noticed before.

Remus hurried over to help her up, arriving just in time to hear the pile speak in a raspy but chillingly familiar voice.

"And now I know this truly is hell after all."

Dora rolled off quickly and stood, taking a defensive pose and reaching for her wand ... which she didn't have. Remus' own wasn't in its accustomed place in his sleeve either. Not that he had any idea what good it would have done them to have their wands. Magic might not work here at all, and at any rate, they were already dead.

"Stay right there, Snape," she ordered in her best Auror voice.

"In case you had not noticed," he croaked, "that is what I was doing before you used me to demonstrate that death is no cure for clumsiness." He shifted, and Remus got a glimpse of his face, paler and gaunter than it had ever been, though the expression of disdain was painfully familiar.

A surge of anger boiled up in Remus' chest. Anger and something else he couldn't name, and the twinned emotions threatened to overwhelm him.

"What are you doing here, Severus?" he snarled.

"Surely even you are not that stupid, Lupin," the other man choked out. "We are all dead, or hadn't you noticed a difference?"

Remus huffed. "That's not what I meant. You can't be here. I'm willing to believe I deserve to end up in the same place as you, but not Dora! She's done nothing to deserve that!"

"Except marry you," she muttered.

"And I told you that was a bad idea!" he retorted, abruptly unsure whether he was furious with her, with Severus, or simply with the fact they were all dead and apparently stuck in the same afterlife. He wasn't sure it was possible for the place to be big enough for the three of them. Possibly not even for any two of them.

"Merlin's balls, will you both shut up?" Severus appeared to be trying to push himself up.

Why is he so weak? We're both fine. Remus tried to ignore the ache in his chest. Sympathy had no place here. *He betrayed me. Betrayed all of us. He should be suffering!*

Severus groaned. "Why don't you both just leave? Just go enjoy your honeymoon of an afterlife."

Remus felt his accusing gaze like a knife through his heart. *He has no right! He gave up the right to care what I did when he betrayed us!*

"What?" Dora asked sharply. "What's wrong with you now, Remus?"

He tore his eyes away from Severus to look at her across his crumpled form.

"No." She shook her head and sliced her hands through the air. "No, no, *no!* You ... That's why, Remus? *That's* why you were avoiding me until after ... It was never about you being a werewolf at all, was it?"

He hardly saw her move before she was right in front of him and smacking his face. Wincing less from the pain in his cheek than what he saw in her eyes, he stammered, "I ... I'm sorry. You have every right ..."

"Oh, you had better believe that I know I've got every right!" she snarled barely an inch from his nose. "You should have just told me, Remus! No wonder you left!" She stepped back. "Well, you've got each other now. Have a nice eternity." Hair now a violent red, she stomped to the edge of the dock and looked out over the mist-covered water. Obviously she'd decided Severus was no longer a threat, which was clearly true. It did hurt, Remus thought, that she'd put her back to him as well.

"What do you think you're doing?" he demanded.

Without turning to look at him again, she answered, "Going back. I told you I'm not staying here."

"And how do you propose we do that?" He couldn't let her do this alone. And if there was a chance to get back to Teddy, he had to take it, even if something he couldn't quite name still felt very wrong about that.

"Who said anything about *we*?"

"You'll need music," Severus rasped.

Remus snapped his head around to look at him in shock.

"To get past the Cerberus on the other side. Music puts it to sleep."

"How do you ...?"

"Does it matter?"

Remus turned to face him fully. "Perhaps not. But why should we trust you?"

"There's no *we*," Dora muttered loudly.

Severus coughed and turned his face away. "You shouldn't."

With a regretful glance back at her, Remus knelt by Severus' side.

"Get away from me, wolf. Go back to your *wife*."

"In a bit," he replied, ignoring the twin pains that barb caused. It seemed that even in death he could not stop hurting those he loved or, in Dora's case, tried to love back. "There's no sign of the boat yet."

Remus' hand reached out seemingly of its own volition, and his wrist was caught in a weakened grip that should have been a steel vise. *What is wrong with me? How can I still feel anything but hatred for him?*

"Don't." His hand was pushed back at him. "You have no right."

Remus rocked back on his heels. "Why would you help us? Do you think we'd bring you too?"

Would we? Could we? And then what, send him to Azkaban?

Severus closed his eyes and tried to roll away.

"Moony!"

Remus looked up and over to the shore end of the jetty. It was Sirius, leaning up against one of the pilings looking for all the world as if he'd simply been waiting for Remus to come back from a trip to the loo. He was nearly the most welcome sight Remus had ever seen.

"What took you so long? We expected you awhile ago!" He extended a hand, and Remus automatically reached out to shake it.

"Moony, don't!" From seemingly nowhere, James rushed up to them. "Don't touch him, Sirius!"

"What? Why not?" Sirius pulled his hand back, and Remus did as well, shocked.

"Because once you step onto the ground or touch anyone who's been on this side, you can't leave," James explained. "And you have to go back, Moony. I heard what Harry said about your son."

"But ..." He ran his fingers through his hair, torn. *Can we really go back? I thought Dora was just being ... Dora.* Hope flickered within him. *I could be there for Teddy after all. If Dora lets me now. But how?* "If that's even possible, James, why didn't you and Lily try it?"

His friend winced. "We didn't know. Believe me, we would have made sure at least one of us got back, if we'd had any idea we could. Dumbledore's only just told us while he was explaining about Harry."

"Wait, shouldn't Harry be here soon, too, then?" Surely Voldemort had killed him not long after they'd left.

"Dumbledore said he chose to go back, but it wasn't here that he came to first." James furrowed his brow. "I still don't really understand that part."

Remus looked back towards the water. Severus hadn't moved much, if at all.

"That's ... that's good, James, right?" he asked without taking his eyes off the still black form.

"Of course, it's good!" Sirius put in. "Poor kid deserves to have a Voldemort-free life."

"Right, that's ... So where'd he go, then? Is he here too?"

"Who?" James asked.

"Voldemort."

"Not here, that's for sure," Sirius replied with a snort. "This here is the Elysian Fields, if you can believe that. Heroes only." He puffed out his chest, looking for all the world like he hadn't just fallen through that veil practically by accident.

Suddenly, the penny dropped.

"Then Severus ..."

That bit of hope that had felt like a newly lit candle suddenly flared bright. *Did he really not betray me? Was he really on our side? Was it all some convoluted plot of Dumbledore's all along?*

"Is that who that is?" James asked with a frown that became a grimace. "I guess Lily was right after all, and he did come around. Eventually."

"What's he doing lying down there?" Sirius made a disgusted noise. "Guess he's still a bit of a coward, even if he did manage to do something to get himself here."

Remus finally turned back to Sirius and James with a snarl. "No, you great prat! I don't know what Voldemort did to him, but whatever it is, he's still hurt!"

Sirius held his hands up. "All right, all right. No need to let the wolf out." He grew thoughtful. "Don't know how that'll work actually. Have you seen the moon here at all, James?"

Frustrated with Sirius' attitude, Remus turned back to James.

"So, Dora and I can go back, so long as we can get the boat to take us?" he asked. "Just us? Or can we bring ...?"

"You'd want to bring him back?" Sirius scoffed. "What for? Maybe he finally did something heroic, but he's still a greasy, nasty git."

Remus snarled again. "You ever think maybe he deserves a bit of a Voldemort-free life too?" Then he decided to take a different tack. "Or would you rather we left him here with you?"

"He's got a point, Padfoot. Apparently he's going to be around here eventually. Why rush it?"

"Well, if you put it like that." Sirius shrugged.

"So," Remus asked, "how are we supposed to get this ferryman to take us back across? He didn't seem too keen on us as it was."

"Some of the old stories suggest he can be bribed, though I've never seen it happen," James said thoughtfully. "Not that we hang around down by the river every day, mind. Dumbledore didn't say anything too specific though, only that you could try to go back as long as you didn't touch anyone here on land."

Remus crossed his arms over his chest. It wasn't as though they'd had anything worth using for bribery on them when they'd died, and even if they had, well, their wands hadn't come with them, so probably nothing else would have either. And what would someone who ferries the dead all day want for a bribe?

"You look like you could use a rest," he heard Dora say.

Turning, he saw that the ferry was back. A couple of people he didn't recognize stepped out of the boat, spared the lot of them barely a glance, and ran along the jetty and onto the shore.

"Of course, I could use a rest," the ferryman said. "It's slowing down a bit, but there're still plenty of people dying."

As Remus watched, Dora reached up to place a hand on the man's shoulder.

"It's bloody unfair, that's what," she said. "Really, I think you're definitely due for a ..." She did something Remus couldn't quite see. The man slumped, and she caught him, easing him awkwardly onto the jetty. "... nap."

Shocked, but realizing the time had come, Remus turned back to the other Marauders. "I've got to go."

"Tell Harry we love him," James said.

"Tell him we're proud of him," Sirius added.

Remus nodded. "See you again someday."

"Not too soon, Moony!" Sirius retorted.

Remus ran back towards the water as Dora was easing the ferryman onto the jetty and taking off his cloak. Not allowing himself to think, he bent and grabbed Severus as he went.

"What in Merlin's name are you doing, wolf?" he rasped. "Put me down, damn you!"

"In a minute. You're not exactly light," Remus said.

"What do you think you're doing?" Dora echoed as she donned the cloak and shifted her features to mimic the unconscious ferryman.

"Coming with you."

"And you're bringing *him*? I think not." She stepped into the boat and took up the pole.

The pain in her eyes seemed even sharper somehow. *I warned her she deserved better. But she's right. I never told her the real reason. That she didn't deserve to be always second.*

"Listen to the woman. She has more sense than you obviously do." Severus pushed feebly against Remus' shoulder.

Why is he so weakened compared to us? No time for that yet.

"Didn't you hear what the others said? He's not evil. And ... I can't leave him."

Her eyes softened ever so slightly.

"I'm sorry I never told you."

"Get in," she said. "And make it quick before I change my mind."

Remus scrambled into the boat, nearly dropping Severus at least twice.

"You're not forgiven, you know," she said as she pushed off.

Struggling to get Severus into a more comfortable position, he finally had to say, "Look, you'll tip us both into the river, and I doubt it's just plain water, so stop it!"

At last the other man stilled and said, "You should have left me."

"I couldn't." Remus cradled Severus' head against his shoulder. "You were in pain. Are in pain. I couldn't leave you like that."

The fog grew thicker as they went, and Remus wondered how or if Dora knew where to go.

Would I have left her? If she weren't the one making this happen, would I have made sure she came?

He realized he would have, but more because she was Teddy's mother than anything else.

"If you ask me," Dora said, "not that anyone did, it seems we've got two Dark Arts experts and an Auror here, trying to break out of the afterlife, and maybe we ought to be trying to plan what we're going to do."

"I've told you all I know," Severus mumbled. "If there's a Cerberus guarding the way out, and there ought to be, you'll need music to get past it."

"Well, that's easy enough," Dora said. "But that can't be all of it."

"It's all that I know."

Silence fell again.

"Do you think we'll already be solid?" she asked. "Or will we have to go find our bodies?"

"I don't know," Remus answered. "But if we're not in our bodies now, then where will we be when we get back?"

"Somewhere in Hogwarts, I suppose. It hasn't been long enough to start moving people very far yet," she said, certainty in her voice. "And they'd leave the dead or presumed dead for last anyway."

He looked down at Severus, who was feeling at his neck. "Where were you when you ... died?"

"Your shack."

Remus winced. Of all the horrible places for it to happen. He felt as guilty as if he had somehow arranged it himself.

"I'm sorry," he said.

Severus didn't respond.

"You're saying that a lot today," Dora observed. "You realize you're going to have a bit to do to prove it to us both."

Remus noted that Severus shot her a brief, unfathomable look, but he couldn't worry about that. Severus was still feeling at his neck, and something about that chilled Remus to the bone.

"Why do you keep doing that?" he asked.

Severus' hand dropped. Before Remus could press the issue, Severus was nearly jarred out of his arms. Remus tightened his hold.

"Bugger," Dora said. "I can't see a bloody thing, but I think we're on the other side."

Squinting, Remus could see that the nose of the boat had, indeed, run aground. Getting out was going to be tricky. He gathered his strength and made to stand.

Perhaps tricky wasn't quite the right word. The urgency of getting into the boat before Dora poled it away had fueled him before, but standing up with another man in his arms once that had worn off was another proposition entirely.

"Can you stand at all?" he asked Severus.

"Apparently not, or hadn't you noticed?" Severus sneered. "In case you've forgotten, I told you to put me back down."

After some struggle and a bit of surprising help from Dora, all three of them were finally on shore, Severus propped between the other two. Remus noted that Dora made it a point to avoid touching him.

"D'you think the fog'll let up if we walk a bit?" Dora asked. "I don't remember anything before we were in the boat."

"Nor do I," Remus admitted.

"I did not awaken until I was put onto the jetty," Severus said. "However, it seems there are few other options, if any, than to walk and see where we find ourselves."

"Hang on a tick," Dora said, leaning Severus' full weight onto Remus. She took off the cloak, tossed it into the boat, and shifted her features back into her own. "Not much point in staying disguised when we're not in the boat."

Remus privately thought there'd been little point to the disguise while in the boat; however, he wasn't about to say anything. They couldn't have been certain, after all, that they wouldn't encounter anyone or anything that would challenge a stranger punting them across.

She maneuvered herself under Severus' other arm.

"You don't have to do that," Severus muttered.

"I've got you this far, haven't I?" Dora asked with a snort. "Besides, it's not your fault Remus is an idiot."

Remus felt the arm across his shoulders stiffen at that and wondered how to interpret it. He could picture Dora's expression even without being able to see her. She would be angry but determined. Severus ... he no longer felt he knew well enough to guess.

Time enough to sort that out once we're back. Or not. I wouldn't be surprised if neither of them want to see me again, and perhaps that's best.

As they inched forward together through the fog, he wondered if it would be. Best for Severus, at any rate. What would he be going back to? He was a masterful spy. He might have died a hero, but Remus was willing to bet that no one else knew that. If he was returning to charges of war crimes, he would need someone, though he would be unlikely to admit it.

Funny how I just assume Dora will be all right. We'll have to divorce, obviously, but she'll have her mother and as much of my help as she'll allow in raising Teddy.

Dora was getting a bit ahead, and Severus' arm pulled at Remus' shoulders.

"Keep up," Severus muttered, "or is that too difficult for you on two legs instead of four?"

Remus didn't bother to reply, but picked up his pace a bit, firmly resolving to stop woolgathering and even more firmly resolving not to wonder whether this was the last time he would be this close to Severus. After all, he'd thought as much years ago, and he'd been wrong.

The fog was beginning to thin. Ahead, a stand of trees was barely visible, and as they drew near, Remus could make out an archway formed by the entwined branches of the two largest trees closest to them.

"Didn't you say something about this being guarded?" Dora asked.

Severus' head snapped up sharply, and Remus felt tension ripple through his arm. "It should be."

"What if it's not the right way?" Remus asked.

Severus shook his head. "It may lead to many places once one passes through, in either direction, but there is only one gateway."

"How..." Remus began.

"Do you truly need to ask?" Severus sneered.

Remus supposed not. After Voldemort's return, Harry had reported something to the effect that he'd bragged about seeking immortality. So of course Severus was well-versed in the afterlife. He'd have had to learn all it was possible to learn.

By unspoken agreement, they hurried toward the archway. At least, Remus and Dora did. Severus' feet were now dragging as he tried to move with them but failed to keep up.

As Remus opened his mouth to ask why he was so weak, a vicious snarl filled the air.

"Run!" Dora yelled, completely unnecessarily.

"No!" Severus gasped. "We can't outrun it. You have to put it to sleep!"

"Well, then, sing something, damn you!" she snapped.

The ground shook as the gateway's guardian got closer. Remus shot a glance over his shoulder. He'd known, intellectually, that a Cerberus would be huge, particularly the one guarding the gateway to the afterlife. It had just never occurred to him to wonder exactly how huge. Even if, by some quirk of this place, he could transform into his wolf-self, he'd be no match for this three-headed monster. He whipped his head back around and ran faster.

"I thought," Severus bit out between gasps, "that you had some plan. 'That's easy enough,' I believe, were your exact words."

They weren't going to make it. The beast was catching up with them faster than they were getting to the trees and the gateway they formed. They would never get back, never get to see Teddy as he grew, never have the second chance that had seemed so tangible just moments before. A Dementor could hardly do a more effective job of sucking every last bit of happiness from him, Remus thought as hot wind blew up his back, the Cerberus' rank breath nearly choking him.

A clear note sounded. Then another. It was the purest, most beautiful sound Remus had ever heard, and he'd heard it only once before.

A huge thud sounded behind them, and the ground shook so hard that all three of them nearly fell over. But the growling stopped, and the music continued.

As they hustled through the gateway, the birdsong swelled and echoed through the trees. It was a song of pure joy, and Remus felt as though all the hope he'd thought lost had been given back to him threefold. Tenfold. They would make it. He would get to know Teddy, get to see him grow up. He and Dora would figure out how to deal with each other for Teddy's sake. And he and Severus would ... he didn't quite dare think it, but even that partial thought was filled with promise. They stumbled a bit further into

the trees until they seemed safely away from the gateway and its guardian, then found a clearing with a fallen log and some stumps on which to rest.

It took some doing to prop Severus up, and eventually they settled for seating him on the ground with his back against a tree, Remus by his side to ensure he didn't fall. Dora plunked herself on the log and promptly fell over backwards before deciding that one of the stumps was a safer bet.

The song ended as a vision of scarlet and gold flew into the clearing, lighting on Severus' knees and tilting its head to look at him curiously.

"That's never..." Dora started.

"Fawkes," Remus breathed.

Severus extended a weak hand to stroke the bird's feathers. Fawkes made a clacking noise with his beak that Severus appeared to understand, as the shadow of a smile ghosted along his lips. It was the most beautiful sight Remus had seen, save only his first glimpse of Teddy, and he greedily tried to etch it in his memory.

A sigh from Dora brought him up short. Turning to face her, Remus saw she didn't appear angry any longer. Instead, she seemed resigned, as though Fawkes' song had healed something for her. Perhaps it had.

"I should've known there was more to it, Remus," she said. "You've never looked at me like that."

"I truly am sorry," he said. "And yes, I will try to prove that to you."

"Just ... we can figure all that out later," she said with a dismissive wave. "For now, what do we do when we get back?"

Severus looked up at her. "How did you die?"

"Killing Curse," she said with a shrug.

He looked at Remus, who answered, "The same."

Severus nodded. "As I understand it, you should both simply wake up once we travel far enough from the gateway. Our souls will be drawn back to our bodies, and you will simply resume breathing."

"And you?" Remus asked warily. "You said where you died, but not how."

Severus rubbed at his neck again. "The Dark Lord's snake."

Remus gaped in horror, remembering Arthur Weasley's brush with Nagini. "Is that why you're so weak and we're not? Will you just bleed to death all over again? How can I get to you in time if I'm waking up over by the lake or wherever they've put my body and you're in the Shrieking Shack?"

"You can't." Severus stroked the phoenix again. "I don't think you'll need to."

Unspoken but evident were the words, *I don't need you.*

Fawkes let out a harsh chirp that seemed to contradict this, hopped up onto Severus' shoulder, and nuzzled his temple.

"What is it?" Remus asked, daring to reach out a hand to touch a golden tail feather.

The phoenix squawked at him, then nuzzled Severus' temple again.

"I believe he either has already or plans to heal my physical wounds," Severus said. "But there is ... something else." He looked down at the leaf-covered ground, clearly disgruntled.

Remus gave him a moment to explain and then, when he didn't, demanded he do so.

"I gave the boy ... Harry ... a large quantity of memories," he admitted after another long silence. "Perhaps too large, but it was necessary. He had to know ... had to know what he was required to do. And ... I wanted him to know why."

"Why?"

Severus looked up sharply, and Remus was stunned at the depth of the pain in his eyes. Then he realized just what Severus had meant.

Perhaps I'm not the only one who failed to say that my heart already belonged to another.

"It took most of my magic to release the memories after that blasted snake bit me," Severus said with chilling calm. "I believe that is why I am so debilitated. Perhaps in time it would have returned."

Fawkes chirruped encouragingly at Remus, who asked, "Would it be enough to get the memories back?"

The phoenix let out a trill that sounded like assent, then turned and launched himself into the air.

"Think we're supposed to follow?" Dora asked, hurrying over to help Severus rise.

"I imagine so," Remus replied, gathering his feet under himself and pulling Severus' arm back over his shoulder.

Fawkes flew back to them and made an impatient sound before turning to fly away again.

The three stumbled along behind him through the woods. Severus seemed a bit stronger now; Remus could tell he wasn't leaning nearly so hard on them. In fact, every step seemed to become easier instead of more difficult as one might expect, and the light filtering through the leaves grew stronger as they went.

When he turned to ask Severus about it, Remus noticed that both he and Dora appeared less solid to him now, almost as he, James, Lily, and Sirius had looked when they'd gone to Harry. And before he could form a question, Remus felt himself dissipating. It was as though he were dissolving into the air and the light and soaring on the wind.

~*~

Remus found himself suddenly lying on a cold stone floor instead of walking out of the woods. He opened his eyes carefully and looked around. It was quiet and dark, though he'd been standing in nearly full sunlight just moments ago. He felt stiff and sore as he pushed himself to sit up, and he realized that he was in the Great Hall at Hogwarts. Next to him, Dora sat up as well. There was no other sign of movement.

"See?" she said. "I told you they'd be busy with the wounded."

Then Remus saw who was laid out beside her. It took him a moment to be certain, to remember to look at the ears. "Fred," he murmured.

Dora pressed her lips together tightly and shook her head.

They were in the middle of a long row of corpses, and Remus could barely bring himself to look at any more of them. Why couldn't any of the others have come back as well? Why hadn't they *seen* Fred or anyone else they knew?

"I have to get to my mum and Teddy," Dora said, scrambling to stand up. "She'll have been told by now. I have to ... I have to just tell her it's not true."

Remus nodded slowly. "We were mistaken for dead. It's ... a much more palatable explanation for everyone else who lost someone." He rose and patted his sleeve, relieved to feel his wand's presence there. Dora, he noticed, did the same. "And I have to get to Severus."

But first I need those memories. Where ... ?

He tore off in the only direction he could think of.

He was surprised that he didn't encounter anyone as he raced first for Dumbledore's ... no Severus' office, praying that Minerva wouldn't be in there now. Severus said he'd given the memories to Harry, but Harry would have needed a Pensieve to view them. Remus only hoped they were still there, assuming Harry had viewed them at all.

When he reached the gargoyle, his heart sank. It was lopsided, looking as though it had been knocked over and rather hastily put right, but it still guarded the entrance to the stairs.

"Damn you, Severus! What would you use for a password? If you were Dumbledore, I could at least stand here guessing sweets!"

Shockingly, not to mention haltingly, the gargoyle slid aside, allowing him to step onto the spiral staircase.

Not bothering to question which word had worked, Remus bounded up the stairs and into the Headmaster's office. There, on the desk, was the Pensieve. Remus had only seen it once before, many years ago, but there was no mistaking it. Fortunately, he knew at least intellectually how it was used, and transferring the memories to another object ought to be simple enough. Beside it was the crystal flask Harry must have used to bring them here.

This was Severus' office all year. Who else could they belong to?

He ought to make certain. If being without this quantity of memories and it did appear to be an astonishingly large amount, a fairly good reason to suspect they were his was what had weakened Severus even into the afterlife, then returning the wrong memories to him could be disastrous.

He will hate me for seeing any of them. But at least he'll be alive and sane to do so.

Stirring the silvery contents with his wand, Remus concentrated on the one memory he was certain had to be in there. Harry would never have trusted anything Severus had given him without an explanation of why Severus had killed Dumbledore, and Severus would have known as much. Remus wasn't sure it was enough to focus on what the subject of the memory ought to be, but it was all he had to go on.

He set his wand aside and lowered his face into the Pensieve.

When he dragged himself back into Severus' office, he was livid.

He had that little regard for Severus' soul? It wasn't enough that he was risking his life every time he went back to Voldemort? How much of that weakness had already been caused by being forced to commit murder, even aside from giving up this many memories?

Picking up his wand, Remus dipped its tip into the silvery pool and drew out thread after thread, transferring them to the flask until the Pensieve was empty. Furious as he was, he handled them as though they were priceless china. He wouldn't risk any further damage.

Once finished, he looked around the office. All of the portrait frames were empty, save one. Directly above and behind the desk, Dumbledore's image had been watching him for Remus knew not how long. The placement suddenly struck Remus as sinister, overlooking the Headmaster's chair, perfectly positioned to pull Severus' strings, as it had surely done for the past year.

"What do you hope to do, Remus?" it asked. "The battle is over."

"The one against Voldemort," he agreed grimly. "That isn't the only battle today."

"You shouldn't be here," the portrait said. "You will only..."

"Your real self told us how to come back," Remus shot back. "Not directly, but he made sure we were told. Maybe a painting can't learn to regret using someone and throwing them away, but apparently the real you can."

"I have never used you, Remus," it replied.

"Not me." Remus turned his back on the portrait and left the office, unwilling to waste any more time.

The trip to the Shrieking Shack was so familiar, his feet could have made the trip on their own. This was fortunate because Remus' mind was so filled with conflicting thoughts, he might actually have lost his way had he tried to steer himself consciously. When he arrived in the room where Severus lay crumpled on the floor, looking very much as he had on the jetty in the afterlife, all other thoughts fled.

Fawkes was bent over the fallen man, and as Remus watched, Severus' chest rose and fell raggedly. The phoenix looked up, hopped back, and chirruped.

Taking that as encouragement, Remus knelt next to Severus' head and smoothed his hair away from the temples.

"Can you hear me, Severus?" he asked. When there was no response, he continued. "I'm going to give you back your memories now. I'm not sure how to do it other than the way I took them from the Pensieve."

A glance over his shoulder confirmed that Fawkes was supervising the proceedings, and Remus wondered if the phoenix would have to assist him in some way. It seemed not, however, as the silver threads simply melted into Severus' temples and disappeared as soon as he touched them to him.

When the flask had been emptied, Remus sat back on his heels and waited.

How long will it take? Will he wake up the way we did? And then what?

Remus didn't kid himself that everything would suddenly be better, that they could pick up where they had left off so long ago. Dora was right that he had a lot to prove, both to her and to Severus. For that matter, Severus had some proving to do as well.

Impulsively, Remus leaned forward and brushed a kiss against Severus' lips. He was startled, when he pulled back, to see Severus' eyes open and narrowed.

"I'm not Sleeping bloody Beauty, Lupin," he snapped.

Eyes wide, Remus could only answer, "I'm not so sure about that. It looks like it worked." He decided not to mention that he hadn't exactly thought about the possibility.

Severus groaned and pushed himself up to sit.

"Did that do it then?" Remus asked. "Do you have your strength back?"

With a grunt, Severus answered, "Not all of it. It couldn't have occurred to you to grab some Strengthening Solution whilst you were at it?"

"We can go back for it." Remus felt a silly grin nearly split his face.

"Yes, I look forward to walking into a nest of Aurors and being hauled off to Azkaban," Severus sneered as he grudgingly accepted a hand up. "You should go to your son, not be caught with me."

This time Remus rolled his eyes. "Dora won't want me there yet. And I don't know for certain what happened," he said, "but the evidence suggests Harry viewed those memories. He'll speak up for you if he hasn't already."

At least I hope so. He's never been particularly reasonable about Severus, though he was appalled at the way James and Sirius treated him.

The air in the room seemed to drop several degrees.

"I only looked at one," Remus protested quickly. "Just enough to be sure they were *your* memories, Severus."

He met Severus' disbelieving stare.

"If you need proof, you may look," Remus said.

A moment passed, and Severus' expression thawed. He nodded once and turned to leave. When Remus didn't follow right away, he turned back.

"Aren't you coming?" he asked. "Or do you miss this miserable place that much?"

The grin back again, Remus followed him out of the Shack.

~*~

June 2002

Remus lunged under the coffee table, but Teddy was too fast and popped screeching out behind it to run into the next room. Pulling back and rising a bit too quickly, Remus hit his head on the edge of the wooden table and saw stars for a moment.

"Get back here!" he yelled. "Your mother will be here any minute, and you need your shoes on!"

He'd known it wouldn't work; the chase was just too much fun. Just like every other week, Teddy would surrender when he was good and ready, and that meant approximately thirty seconds before Tonks arrived. How he knew when that would be, as it was never quite the same time twice, was a mystery.

Of course, Remus knew exactly where he would be, but he made a show of looking through the kitchen before finally venturing into the study.

"Have you seen Teddy?" he asked.

Severus looked up from the Potions journal he was annotating, presumably in preparation for a scathing dissection of the article in front of him, and replied with a knowing smirk, "No, I have not *seen* Teddy in several hours. As often as you misplace your son, Remus, I am surprised his mother still allows him to spend his weekends here."

A suspicious rustling noise came from underneath the desk. Perched on the back of Severus' chair, Fawkes ruffled his feathers as if to cover the sound.

"Careful, Severus," Remus said. "I believe there may be a Boggart under your desk."

"Indeed?" The other man pushed back his chair and drew his wand with a flourish. "I shall just have to hex it then."

A small form capped with cerulean hair flew up from under the desk and onto Severus' lap

"I'm not a Boggart, Uncle Sev'rus," Teddy said, laughing as Fawkes trilled a few cheerful notes.

Remus looked fondly at Severus' raised eyebrow.

"And how can I be sure? Perhaps you are a very tricky Boggart."

"Cause you're not a-scared of me!" Teddy announced.

"Perhaps I am afraid of what your mother will say if she arrives while you look like this," Severus pointed out.

Teddy didn't appear to believe that either, though he looked a bit less certain than before.

Remus came around the desk holding Teddy's shoes and noticed that somewhere along the way he'd lost one of his socks as well. Drawing his wand, he Summoned it, then settled in to getting his son's feet properly shod.

A knock sounded at the door.

Remus scooped Teddy up from Severus' lap and brought him along to greet Tonks.

"Mummy!" he cried as soon as he saw her, his hair turning the color of sunshine as he lunged into her arms.

"Wotcher, Teddy," she answered, giving him a loud smack of a kiss. "Were you good for Daddy and Uncle Severus?"

The boy nodded solemnly, and when Tonks looked to him for confirmation, Remus shrugged. He'd been as good as a four-year-old boy could be expected to be.

"I might be a bit late bringing him Friday," she said. "Or maybe it'll be Saturday morning. Kingsley's warned us there's to be a meeting, and I don't know how late it'll run."

"That's all right," Remus answered. "We'll just play extra hard to make up for it, won't we?"

Teddy giggled.

"All right then. Got to run," Tonks said, scooping up his bag of clothes and the toys he insisted on bringing back and forth with him.

"Bye, Daddy! Bye, Uncle Sev'rus!"

Remus smiled as he felt Severus' arm come about his waist possessively. He always gave them the first few moments alone, but he never failed to come out to say goodbye and, apparently, assert his claim.

After the crack of Disapparition signaled Tonks' and Teddy's departure, Remus turned and looked up into Severus' wickedly gleaming eyes.

"Whatever shall we do?" Remus asked. "The house is always so quiet once he leaves."

In answer, Severus pulled him in closer for a searing, demanding kiss that might be part of their weekly ritual but would never be routine. Their tongues danced as Severus pressed him against the door, and when he pulled back entirely too soon, leaving Remus panting and aroused, he said, "I do not believe it will be quiet for long."

Fin