

Moonlight Investigations

by red_day_dawning

Private Investigator Remus Lupin investigates a series of grisly murders in Hogsmeade, only to discover the last man he would have ever expected to see close to the crime scenes... Snape/Lupin

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Author's notes: Beta-read by the lovely and talented Persevero, who works miracles! All mistakes are my own.

Walking through the puddles on the front step, he approached his office door, marked by a discreet plaque engraved with the name *Moonlight Investigations R. J. Lupin P.I., Discretion Assured*. All seemed clear, so he unlocked his office door with both key and spell some of his clients were Muggles, and it would hardly invoke confidence if they observed him opening the door with a wave of a wand and muttered words. He could open the door with a non-verbal spell easily enough while jiggling keys. Two birds with one stone.

Entering the office just a single room with a desk, three chairs, a bookshelf and a filing cabinet he flicked on the light switch and cast a warming charm on the room. The damp chill from the night-rain seemed to infiltrate the room; he strengthened the charm and hung his dripping fedora and trench-coat on the hooks, then sat and read his paperback while he waited.

Alerted by the wards long before the knock at the door he checked who was there and then opened the door to Madam Rosmerta and the young woman with her.

"Brr... Remus, what a wet, chilly night!" said Rosmerta, sitting in the chair he indicated. "It's good of you to meet us this late. How are you, love?"

Gesturing to the young woman to sit also, Remus examined them. Rosmerta's characteristic smile seemed brittle; her sunny charm seemed forced. The other woman, who appeared somehow familiar a tall, big-boned, handsome woman, still had said nothing. Her silence appeared habitual; he sensed she would speak less than she listened. Her sullen, distant manner disguised a sharp capacity for observation; with a pang of grief he was reminded of Severus Snape. And with that thought he recognized her: she was one of Snape's Slytherins, from the same year as the Malfoy boy. Bulstrode, that was her name, Millicent Bulstrode.

"I'm fine, Rosmerta. But you didn't have to come all this way. I could have come to you and saved you and Miss Bulstrode the journey."

Bulstrode gave Remus a sharp look, while Rosmerta sighed and said, "No, it's probably better if we come to you we would prefer it if it weren't known that we were seeking your help."

He nodded. "How do you think I can help, Rosmerta, Miss Bulstrode?"

"It's those ghastly murders, Remus. The Aurors seem to think Millie is involved."

Millie? Remus thought, surprised.

"The Hogsmeade murders? Why do they think you're involved?" he asked Bulstrode, curious to hear what she had to say.

She shrugged, replying in a surprisingly sweet voice, "They have a Slytherin to blame; everyone knows all Slytherins are murderous Death Eaters why look any further?"

The statement was quite bland, delivered without overt rancour.

"What is the connection between the murders and you, though, Miss Bulstrode? Do you live in Hogsmeade?"

Rosmerta blushed a little, her cheeks rosy, and then smiled, a genuine smile this time. She reached out to hold Bulstrode's hand, pulling it to her lap. "Millie lives with me, Remus. She started staying in one of my rooms and helping out on the busiest nights, after getting an apprenticeship at the Hogsmeade Apothecary. And, well, now she's with me," she added, looking affectionately at the woman who returned her smile in full measure.

He blinked and then said, "I'm glad for you both." And he was. Although Rosmerta was everyone's friend, and if the fancy took her, anyone's lover, he had only known her to be in one committed relationship before. And that was with the Hit Wizard, Hestia Jones, a fine woman and a brave warrior in the Order of the Phoenix, cruelly killed by a group of Death Eaters shortly before the Battle of Hogwarts. He hadn't known her well, but he had great respect for her and he knew Rosmerta had grieved long and bitterly after her death.

Frowning as he thought it through, he added, "But what connection is there between the murder victims and you, Miss Bulstrode?"

"Please, call me Millicent, Professor. But not Millie, for Merlin's sake, there's only one person on the planet who gets away with that. Even my mother would never dare."

"All right, Millicent but call me Remus. I'm not a teacher any more. But go on what connection have the Aurors made between you and the victims?"

"They were all murdered after they left the Three Broomsticks."

The *Prophet* hadn't mentioned that. "No other connection?"

"None," she replied firmly. "But the Aurors seem to think that having a Death Eater father who died in Azkaban and a mother who was imprisoned proof enough."

He nodded. "My sympathies, Millicent, on your father's death. It must have been very difficult for you losing your father, and having your mother imprisoned."

She shrugged whatever she was feeling was clearly not for public display. He could understand that. Life post-war had been harsh on all the former Slytherins. They had all been judged as Death Eaters. From what Remus knew, Millicent would have been one of the few who managed to find employment. Blaise Zabini had left Britain; Draco Malfoy was practically under house-arrest; Goyle was in Azkaban, and Pansy Parkinson's fate had been the subject of more than one Rita Skeeter article. And they were the lucky ones. The Nott boy had been killed by a mob eager to take vengeance on Death Eaters, and Daphne Greengrass and her baby brother had been brutally murdered by some ignorant thugs who thought someone should pay for Voldemort's crimes.

"And are they the only connections the Aurors have made?"

Both women nodded. Rosmerta fiercely said, "I'm sure that they wished for more connections. They seemed most disappointed that they couldn't drag Millie off to Azkaban. We didn't dare tell them that Millie's mother is often at the Three Broomsticks they would have made too much of that. But really, the poor woman with her husband's death, and the imprisonment, and the Ministry taking all the estates and income... I'm just glad I can help out a little. She's a marvel in the kitchen. She comes and goes no-one really knows she's working there. Does her cooking magic I've never received higher praise for the food we're serving! But the Ministry would love to make some sort of fuss. The only Auror who treats Millie decently is Tonks; the rest of them act as though Millie has done something wrong, just by being alive. Guilt by association saves them having to think," Rosmerta added fiercely.

Rosmerta was right. The Aurors Department seemed riddled with self-doubt and over-reactive suspicion and arrogance. Most of the Ministry's Aurors and Hit Wizards had not fought against Voldemort, restrained first by Fudge's stupidity and later by Voldemort's control of the Ministry after Scrimgeour's death. After the Battle of Hogwarts, they had been vilified in the *Daily Prophet* perhaps not altogether fairly. But still, they could have joined in with the Order, Remus thought with no little resentment. They must have seen how things were at the end. Since then, though, the Aurors had been marked by an attitude of belligerent intolerance. Despite Kingsley's best efforts, all too often evidence of criminal involvement seemed an optional prerequisite, and many arrests were conducted with brutal force. And their favourite targets were those suspected of having Death Eater associations, mainly Slytherins.

"So, what can you tell me about the murders themselves? Where were all of the victims murdered after leaving the inn? How far from the inn were they found? Who found the bodies? Where the victims local or from elsewhere? Did you know them all, Rosmerta? What did they have in common? Do you know how they were killed?"

It appeared there was quite a lot of detail left out of the *Daily Prophet* reports: all the victims had been murdered after leaving the Three Broomsticks, and found in the street and the lanes near the inn. The bodies had been found by different individuals some were not discovered until the morning by locals rising for the day; others were stumbled upon by inn patrons soon after death. Most, although not all, of the victims were local and all were known to Rosmerta. They were a varied bunch both men and women, ranging in age from young to ancient, some sympathetic to the Order during the war, others not. The causes of death were the biggest surprise for Remus some had seemingly been killed by a vampire, with the distinctive bite markings.

"So let me get this clear all of the victims looked as though they had been attacked by a vampire, with bite marks on the neck, and yet none were actually... bled dry?"

Millicent and Rosmerta nodded gravely.

"Anything else I should know?"

Rosmerta glanced at Millicent. "There have been some sightings people are saying that they've seen a vampire."

"Hmm, what did they see, and when did they see it?"

"This vampire's been seen by a few locals, always at dusk and dawn. A dark figure, heavily cloaked, wearing black, disappearing as soon as he's seen."

"Disappearing as in 'vanishing', or disappearing as in 'making himself scarce'?"

"Instantly vanishing, from what I hear."

"Hmm, interesting."

"Do you think you'll be able to work out who, or what, is doing the killing, Remus? Or find the murderer? The sooner the real murderer is found, the sooner the Aurors will stop harassing Millie. And people will stop being so frightened all of Hogsmeade is fearful now, waiting for the next murder to occur. Even the inn is empty at nights, what with everyone too frightened to be out after dark."

"I'll see what I can do. But I can't promise success. At a fresh crime scene, yes, I'd have some advantages. The only real advantage I have at the moment is that I'm not pre-disposed to think a Slytherin must be responsible."

"That'll do," said Millicent gruffly. "Appreciate it."

Remus nodded in acknowledgement, just as Rosmerta was asking him if he wanted to stay at the Three Broomsticks while investigating.

He agreed, although staying at Hogsmeade would mean he had to leave his beloved fedora and trench-coat behind.

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Tying up the last few details needed to complete a couple of unfinished cases, Remus sent off the reports together with the invoices for payment, and grabbing his trunk, he apparated to Hogsmeade.

Although it was not yet nightfall, the streets of Hogsmeade seemed unusually empty in the twilight grey.

The few people Remus could see seemed fearful, glancing back over their shoulders as they scurried to their homes and businesses.

Remus pressed on to the Three Broomsticks through the evening chill. Opening the door, he braced himself in anticipation of the impact of the noise and smoke habitual to the inn. There was no need even the inn was quiet tonight, with a few hardy regulars gathered together around the fire. As he entered, all eyes were upon him, all action frozen to assess the newcomer.

Rosmerta rushed forward to greet him, abandoning her desultory glass-washing to call out, "Remus, so glad you decided to come and stay. It's been so quiet; Millie and I could use the company."

"I'm glad to be here. It's good to get away for a few days."

"Interestin' timin'," muttered a voice from a seat near the fireplace. "Just what we all need, 'nother dark critter, then."

"Oh, shut it, Magrog, unless you want to find another place to drink. This is Remus Lupin honestly, his name should speak for itself," Rosmerta said fiercely.

"Wolf's name for a wolf," someone else said quietly.

"Yes," said Remus, facing the huddle of men near the fire. "I am a werewolf, it's quite well-known. But I haven't eaten anyone yet, and quite frankly I don't think I'll start. The Three Broomsticks' cooking has a much greater appeal."

That raised one chuckle from the largest of the old blokes, who called out, "Can't beat our Rosie's stew, mark my words, lad. Sit down and have a drink."

"Thanks, I will. What are you all drinking? Rosmerta, would you mind? And come and join us if you've a minute to spare."

"Ta, Remus. I'll bring over a tray," Rosmerta said, smiling.

Thanking her, Remus noticed that once she'd brought the drinks over, she unobtrusively returned to the bar. Remus settled in to chat to the locals.

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Rosmerta shut the inn early that evening no customers wanted to risk being out too late. Millicent, Rosmerta and Remus settled down to a potato and leek soup with fresh-baked crusty bread and a sharp-flavoured cheddar. They ate in companionable silence and then settled down to eat the lemon tart Millicent's mother had baked earlier.

"Hardly surprising," Millicent responded in a friendly tone, after Remus complimented the baking. "Most people with a talent for potions can cook well, and I'm certain my mother would have been an excellent potion-maker if she'd had the chance. It just wasn't possible for her, as a pure-blood wife, and now, well, she's lucky that Rosmerta has been so good to us." Smiling wickedly, she added, "I'm certain the Professor would have been an excellent cook."

But that train of thought took Remus to places he did not want to go. Hastily dismissing all thoughts of Millicent's 'Professor', he said, "My drinking companions only had one piece of news to tell tonight. Apparently, last night, the 'vampire' was spotted by a couple of people: briefly glimpsed on the outskirts of town."

"And you were working late last night at the apothecary, Millie, and walked home alone," scolded Rosmerta. "You shouldn't take such risks, love."

"It's a short walk, Rose. I was in no danger," Millicent replied in firm, certain tones.

Remus was impressed by her certainty; she did not sound foolhardy, she sounded confident. He briefly wondered where such confidence came from had she learned how to duel and defend herself to be so sure of her safety?

"I think it would be wise for everyone to be more cautious at the moment at least till we have a better understanding about what is occurring here. Have patrols of the streets been arranged?"

"Hmm, that's a fine idea. I'll speak to Aberforth about that tomorrow, and we'll organize something," replied Rosmerta.

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The streets of Hogsmeade were empty. A chill breeze ruffled the edges of Remus's cloak as he slowly walked towards the outskirts of the town, where the 'vampire' had been spotted several times now. He placed himself in the shadows, sniffing the breeze and listening to the night. When his senses confirmed that he was alone, he settled down to wait.

Remus jerked himself upright from the half-collapsed, half-propped position he had fallen into while dozing. Something had changed he took a slow deliberate sniff of the night air some-one had arrived. A bitter, dusty, musky smell: hauntingly familiar and surprisingly appealing. He saw a tall, dark, cloaked figure approaching, then hesitating, scanning the area. The man came closer, closer still by his scent no vampire, but a living, breathing man. A living, breathing man who was said to be dead; a living, breathing man whose scent Remus knew well.

Severus Snape was alive and here in Hogsmeade!

And suspected of being a vampire during a time when there were vampiric-appearing deaths. Remus sighed. It seemed that there was quite a lot to this mystery he did not understand.

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Severus was still scanning the area cautiously. Remus thought he appeared reluctant to step forward into the brightness of the Hogsmeade streetlamps. Remus stepped forward soundlessly, then softly coughed.

"Severus," he said, holding his hands away from his body so that it could be clearly seen he wasn't holding his wand, "I'm so very glad you're alive."

Severus spun around to face him, pointing his wand so quickly Remus failed to see the movement. "Lupin," he growled. "I might have known. How did you know it was me?"

"Scent," answered Remus, pointing at his nose. "Would you mind pointing that wand elsewhere? It makes me a little nervous."

The wand trembled a little, as though Severus wasn't certain whether to lower it or not. "Are you here alone, Lupin?"

"Alone, as you can see."

Severus lowered his wand; Remus was certain he had not put it away. Caution was a way of life for Severus.

"What are you doing here, Lupin?"

"Keeping my eyes open for the alleged vampire people have been spotting."

Severus snorted. "Ah, yes. I've heard of this vampire. I suspect I've been spotted once or twice. Might be more amusing if the sightings of me did not coincide with alleged vampiric murders, though."

"Yes, I find that a somewhat disturbing coincidence myself. What can you tell me about the killings?"

"Are you making an accusation?"

Remus snickered. "Hardly. If you were responsible for these deaths, they would either be convincing vampire kills or would look they had died of natural causes or appear otherwise entirely unconnected to you."

Severus laughed, a lighter, easier sound than Remus had ever heard from him before. "Quite a high opinion you have of me, Lupin."

"I do," Remus answered, entirely serious.

Severus moved a little in surprise, and then he quickly said, "Just allow me a few minutes to run an errand, Lupin, and then we can Apparate to my place to talk. If you trust me, that is."

Remus again said, "I do." He added, "I trust you completely. But why are you here, Severus? It seems risky if you don't want anyone to know that you're alive."

Severus hesitated, finally answering, "I required some potion ingredients. It's a little difficult for me to procure reliable magical supplies I have made other arrangements though, and I don't believe I shall have to return. Tonight was the last visit to Hogsmeade."

Remus nodded and then said, "Well, I'll wait for you here then, while you go and collect whatever it is you have arranged with Miss Bulstrode at the apothecary."

Remus felt Severus freeze on the spot and stare at him probingly. He concentrated on keeping his expression casual and his mind filled with images of his favourite foods.

Severus laughed shortly and then said, "All right, Lupin. You never were quite as stupid as you looked. Wait here and I'll return to take you to my home. Perhaps I'll even cook for you, if you're that hungry."

Remus chuckled softly he wasn't hungry at all it was just that he found thinking of food focused his mind marvelously as he concentrated on smell, taste, sight and texture.

Severus moved away without another word. Even Remus's superb night vision had difficulty seeing him as he melted into the shadows and disappeared into the night.

~*~

Severus's safe-house was a comfortable cottage in a northern location Remus could not recognize. He knew he was still in Scotland by the weather and the sky and the smells of nature, but Apparition gave no clues about location or distance travelled to the person being conveyed side-along, and Remus thought it might be better not to press Severus on the matter.

Once inside, Severus dropped the glamour obscuring his features and lit the fire.

"A drink or something to eat?"

"A drink would be lovely, thank you."

"Firewhisky?"

Remus nodded his assent and casually glanced around the room. Furnished with plain but comfortable armchairs, the room was distinguished by an abundance of books. Every available wall-space held bookshelves, from the floor to the ceiling, all filled with books. Codices, grimoires, volumes hard-bound with leather, even Muggle paperback novels.

Severus swallowed his drink in one great gulp; Remus had to look away to stop admiring the lovely lines of his long, pale throat. Severus poured himself another drink and then said, "Well, Lupin. What do you want to know?"

"Why did you risk discovery by going to Hogsmeade?"

Severus scowled. "I told you. I needed some ingredients for a potion."

"And what potion was so important that you were prepared to risk discovery?"

"None of your business, Lupin," he snapped. "I thought you were interested in the murders."

"Very well," Remus said evenly. "What can you tell me about the murders?"

"Probably less than you're hoping for. Not much more than what I've read in the paper and heard from... a Hogsmeade resident. Clearly not the results of a vampire attack, though, since their blood has not been consumed," he added thoughtfully, swallowing the last of his drink and pouring another, then lying back against the sofa, his long, lean legs outstretched.

Tearing his gaze away from those lovely long legs, Remus nodded. "I have to agree there. It seems a surprisingly clumsy attempt to implicate a dark creature but I'm struggling to find a motive. There's too much I don't know."

Stroking his lips with his forefinger (Did the man have to do that? Remus thought. It was... distracting), Severus said, "Yes, there's something there, a motive we have no idea about, that prevents us from placing the murders within a context."

"Yes, I think you're right," Remus said, striving to keep his mind on track. "Anything else you've observed patterns, connections? You're a trained observer I value your opinion highly."

Quirking one eyebrow, Severus smirked at him. "Really, Remus? I had no idea you had a high opinion of me. How high?" he purred.

Speechless, Remus gazed at Severus in surprise. *Was Severus flirting with him?* Clearing his throat, Remus said, his voice hoarse, "Very high. I didn't think my opinion of you would mean much you've shown no sign of being interested before... interested in my opinion, that is."

Gulping down the last of his drink, Severus abruptly stood. "The times didn't allow me the liberty to follow my interests, Lupin," he said wryly. He stared at Remus without speaking for a minute, and then he softly said, "Perhaps I've said enough. It is only an illusion, a delusion if you like, that I am even now at liberty to follow my... interests." He hesitated briefly while Remus stared at him, confused and speechless, then he continued harshly, as though his throat was too tight to speak, "It seems I've had too much to drink. I cannot Apparate you safely back to Hogsmeade. There's a spare room; please make yourself comfortable for the night. If you require anything, please help yourself. I'll take you back in the morning." And without another word, he left. Remus heard the firm decisive click of his bedroom door shutting.

What just happened? Remus wondered. His skin was still warm and tingling in reaction to the earlier conversation, but he was shaken by the turn it had taken. *What on earth was going on?*

~*~

Remus woke shortly after dawn. He lay in bed for a while, running the previous night's conversation with Severus through his head. Deciding that he might never fully understand this strangely appealing, enigmatic man, Remus sighed and rose to shower.

Smoothing the soap across his body, Remus couldn't help but think of last night. The intensity in those dark eyes, the way the voice purred across his skin, the lean, graceful body, those long elegant fingers how would they feel touching him, stroking him? With a gasp he grabbed his cock more firmly and stroked. He came surprisingly quickly, his semen arcing onto the tiles, Severus's name on his lips. He collapsed against the cool tiles with a melancholy sigh. His release hadn't satisfied him at all; his longing for Severus ached within him as strongly as before.

Once out of the shower and dressed, Remus was surprised to smell the tempting aroma of a cooked breakfast and coffee. Severus had not struck him as the domestic sort, nor had he suspected him to be a dutiful host.

Following his nose to the kitchen, Remus cheerfully greeted Severus, "Morning. That's a lovely spread keep this up and I'll get the impression you like me, Severus."

Severus responded with an enigmatic scrutiny, his dark eyes intense but unrevealing.

Remus smiled sheepishly. "Sorry, Severus. It's too early in the morning for my feeble attempts at humour."

Severus snorted and poured him a cup of coffee, dark, rich and fragrant.

"Oh, gods, that's marvellous," Remus said, inhaling before taking a sip.

The response was another snort, somewhat friendlier-sounding, Remus thought, no stranger to the challenging art of interpreting Snape.

"Are you well?" Remus asked, suddenly concerned at the other man's pallor and the strange, almost-clammy look of his skin. "Are you unwell from the alcohol last night?"

"I am well enough," was the terse response. "The legacy of Nagini's parting gift to me," he added, smiling bitterly. "But there are potions that can alleviate the worst of the symptoms, providing I take them regularly. Last night's alcohol was nothing I am a skilled enough brewer to make an efficacious sobering potion."

"I meant no disparagement of your skills. But your symptoms, is there nothing else that can be done?"

"I am considerably better than I was some months ago. I have adapted the potion extensively and am constantly improving the formula. You wouldn't have been able to bear the sight of me a year ago," he said, his voice tight with bitterness.

"I think you'd be surprised what I can bear. Certainly when it comes to you," Remus said, his voice low and hoarse, as he reached out his hand to touch Severus's arm resting on the table.

Severus jerked his arm away from contact. "Don't," he said, his voice tight and fierce. "You have no idea..."

Slowly standing, Remus cautiously reached out and extended his hand to rest it on Severus's shoulder, approaching as carefully as he might a wild creature. "I thought perhaps we might finally become a little closer. After all these years of knowing each other, and you know, Severus, how highly I think of you. And I thought perhaps you were learning to like me. A little, at least."

Severus stood up, his eyes blazing. "I don't like you. I don't like you at all, Lupin. You've always got under my skin like some bloody irritating splinter, pushing in deeper and deeper until I can't get you out without damaging myself beyond repair. That's what you feel like a fucking splinter I can't ignore!" Severus snarled. "I hate you, and you drive me insane, and, gods, I hate you so much." And then he pushed Remus against the wall and kissed him hard.

"Oh," said Remus and melted into the kiss; it was everything he wanted and more. Severus's lips, soft and subtle, pressing against his, his tongue coaxing, entwining, swirling around his own. Their bodies pressed together, writhed and rubbed; Remus was shamelessly panting and moaning.

"Please," he said and slid his hand down to cup Severus's erection.

Severus bucked against the pressure and began to thrust against his hand; then he held Remus still. "Slow down," he whispered, "or I'll come right now."

Remus laughed and unfastened Severus's trousers and slid his hard cock out, chuckling as it eagerly twitched towards him. He knelt before Severus and nuzzled at his cock and balls while he loosened the trousers, pulling them down with the pants, then slowly licked Severus from base to tip, sliding and swirling his tongue under the foreskin, before opening his mouth to slide the hard cock inside.

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Severus gasped and tried to force himself not to pound into that inviting wet warmth. He looked down, and the sight of his cock smoothly thrusting in and out of Remus's pink lips almost undid him and then the sight of Remus unfastening his trousers to fist his substantial erection did undo him, and he came and came, bucking deep into Remus's mouth, biting his lips to stifle a howl as he watched Remus's hand worked furiously until he too erupted in great arcing spurts.

~*~

Remus licked his lips to savour the salty taste and looked up at Severus through his lashes, smiling to see him leaning weakly against the wall.

"That was brilliant, Severus," he said huskily.

Severus closed his eyes and said in a pained voice, "I should not have done that."

"What... why not? You wanted this, didn't you?" asked Remus, bewildered and concerned, standing to place his arms on Severus's shoulders.

"Yes, I wanted this, Lupin... Remus. Very much," Severus sighed, his eyes still closed. "But I told myself that it wasn't fair, that I couldn't do this..."

"Wasn't fair what are you talking about? Look at me, Severus," Remus said evenly, but feeling the first stirrings of fear and anger.

Severus opened his eyes and looked at Remus, his face a bleak and despairing mask. "I wanted to explain first before we did anything please Remus can we sit down?"

"Of course," Remus said, hastily fastening his trousers as Severus dressed.

Together they sat on the sofa.

Severus cleared his throat and said, "I told you that I'm still affected by Nagini's venom? Without the potion I have developed, the effects are grotesque. Beyond grotesque. Monstrous. Before I began work on the potion, I had begun to transform. Become snakelike. Cold-blooded and scaly. Unable to speak without sounding like a Parselmouth." Lowering his voice, he added, "Even my pupils had begun to transform." He shuddered. "I looked in the mirror and I thought I saw Voldemort. You can't even begin to imagine..."

"Oh, Severus. I can imagine how you must have felt. But you're talking to a man who becomes a monster every full moon. It's not your fault, no more than I am to blame for the attack that made me a werewolf. Please, I don't say this lightly, but it does not change anything."

Severus looked at Remus in disbelief. "You don't know what you're saying you're still intoxicated by this," he said, gesticulating towards their groins.

Remus softly laughed and grasped Severus's hand. "Well, yes, it was very good but no, I don't believe it's clouded my mind entirely. But tell me, were the transformations just physical? Did you notice other changes? In the way that you thought? Or in urges or desires?"

"Other than the fact that suicide was a more desirable option than ever before? No, Lupin, I noticed no other changes. I thought scales and a snake's lisp and a perpetual longing for warmth were changes enough!" Severus said dryly.

"Well, then, I think I can cope. If you can cope with my fur and fangs, I'm sure I can deal with your scales. But you look no different your skin is not scaled now."

"No, the potion keeps it at bay. I have made some progress, but I cannot hope to effect a complete cure. But you cannot mean what you are saying," he protested. "I cannot allow you..."

"Shh," Lupin interrupted, placing his fingers against Severus's mouth. "You can and will allow me to make my own choices. And I choose you, Severus Snape," he said, leaning forward to kiss this infuriating man, the sweetness melting them both into honeyed languor, their tongues swirling and twirling, to tease and delight.

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Arriving back at the Three Broomsticks in a remarkably cheerful mood for so early in the morning, Remus found himself suddenly enveloped in Rosmerta's arms.

"Oh Merlin, Remus, I was sure you had been killed where have you been?"

"Shh, Rosmerta, it's fine. I was following some leads." Smiling down at her, he added, "I wasn't aware I had to be in bed by a certain time, Rosmerta. Don't you think I'm a little too old to need a curfew?"

Rosmerta whacked him across the back of the head. "Sorry, Remus," she said, immediately smacking him again and looking remarkably unrepentant. "I've been driving Millie and Mrs. Bulstrode nuts with worrying about you, you git! They kept telling me you were sure to be fine, but... no-one I'm close to has been harmed by this madman, and I didn't want you to be the first."

Leaning forward to kiss Rosmerta, Remus said, "Thanks for your concern, Rosmerta. But there was no need to worry I was fine."

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Remus was relieved to find that no-one had observed the 'vampire' entering Hogsmeade and that no-one had been harmed. His priorities caused him a little concern but it was only natural he'd care for Severus's safety, he told himself. He ignored the little voice that dryly told him Severus had successfully survived, against the odds, without any help from him in the past. The wolf had tasted Severus now and would allow no harm to come to the man he was beginning to think of as his mate.

Thinking to himself that he really ought to have discovered what Severus could have told him about Millicent and Mrs. Bulstrode earlier, Remus thought he would pay a visit to the Hogsmeade Apothecary to see Millicent.

The Hogsmeade Apothecary was an old and valued institution, Remus discovered. It said so, in gold lettering written across the front glass window-pane: '*The Hogsmeade Apothecary: An Old and Valued Institution. Serving Hogsmeade since 1648*'. He shuddered a little at the discordant jingle of bells that rang out as he opened the door and entered the shop. Millicent came from out the back, wiping her hands on the white apron she wore.

"Remus, nice to see you safe and sound you should have heard Rosmerta fussing this morning when you didn't come home. I ran away and left her to Mother's dubious care," she said, smirking.

"Yes, well, I've already seen Rosmerta and have been duly chastised," Remus said with an answering grin. "You here on your own today, Millicent?"

"Yes, Master Richarde has gone to London for supplies we're running low on some of our exotic and hard-to-procure items."

"Wouldn't have anything to do with a certain midnight customer, would it?"

Millicent stared at Remus appraisingly. "A certain midnight customer?" she asked, her face expressionless.

"Yes, indeed. A former... mentor of yours."

"I think I might know who you mean. But what do you know about the... this former mentor?"

"Bumped into him last night."

Millicent scrutinized him without expression and then suddenly and startlingly grinned. "Hmm, bumped into him, did you? And would that account for your alarming absence last night and a certain bounce in your step and sparkle in your eye today?"

"Couldn't say, Millicent. I'm sure it's nothing as devious as your Slytherin mind could imagine, though. My failure to return last night had more to do with an excess of alcohol than anything else," he added, quite honestly.

"Hmm, most sobering potions don't make the imbiber quite so merry, I must say."

Remus simply smiled pleasantly at the girl.

She rolled her eyes, "Very well, Mystery-man. Let's attribute your jolly air to alcohol. Was there something you wanted at the apothecary today?"

"No. Just thought I'd drop in. Rosmerta was fussing, and I decided to run away."

"She can fuss, can't she?" Millicent grinned. "Come in and look around," she said, gesturing him behind the counter and into the rear rooms.

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After checking in with Rosmerta and confirming that she and Aberforth Dumbledore had made arrangements for the streets to be patrolled by groups of local citizens throughout the night, Remus returned to Severus's isolated safe-house. He paused at the low dry-stone wall bordering the herb-garden and admired the surrounding landscape: the wide open sky; the starkly-outlined bleak Scottish hills, softened only slightly by heather and moorland plants; the copse of trees gathered in the small valley

past the rill at the rear of Severus's property all in all it would be a very good place for a wolf, he decided.

Alerted by his wards, Severus came to greet him, looking strangely hesitant. Remus stepped through the open doorway to embrace Severus, kissing him until the guarded look was gone from his face and his hard black eyes had softened to dark velvet.

"Remus," Severus said, in that voice that vibrated to his groin, "come inside, you idiot wolf."

Smiling happily but reluctant to release him, Remus complied, stepping inside and waiting only until Severus had closed the door to resume kissing.

"Tea?"

Remus interrupted his kissing long enough to murmur "Mmm, no, just you," as he gently guided Severus onto the sofa and landed softly on his lap.

"Mmm, what did you do today?" Remus asked, writhing on top of Severus.

"Ngghh," responded Severus, grinding his erection up against the press of Remus's body. "Made potions. And you?"

Remus gasped, further aroused by the feel of their erections rubbing each other. He stammered, "Got scolded by Rosmerta... ran away, left her to the untender mercies of her almost-mother-in-law... visited Millicent... asked questions."

"What are you talking about, almost-mother-in-law? Oh... mmm." Severus subsided as their flesh warmed and heated.

Grinding his arse against Severus's substantial erection, Remus moaned, "Talk... later."

Severus buried his face against Remus's throat, licking, biting, kissing, licking. Remus moaned and rocked, his arousal fed by Severus's, his arousal feeding Severus's, till they were caught in a spiral of lust.

"Clothes... off... now," gasped Severus. "Before I come."

"Oh, gods, yes."

Severus muttered a few words, and their clothes were whipped away. Holding both of their erections in his hands, he rubbed them together, velvety smooth skin slick with pre-come, sliding and gliding.

"Oh, gods, Severus. Fuck me, just fuck me now?"

Raising himself from Severus a little, Remus let him whisper the words to lubricate and prepare, and he slowly, so slowly, lowered himself onto Severus's cock.

"Gods, stop. Wait, Remus. Just be still, or I'm going to come."

Remus lowered his head to nestle in Severus's neck, moaning, "Oh, you feel so good." When their breathing had slowed, a little, Remus began to move again, first slowly, and then faster and harder. Remus couldn't think; there was no thought, just himself and Severus and the magic they moved with. Through some alchemy of his own, Severus had instinctively mapped out and conquered the territory of Remus's ecstasy; he had been so perfectly shaped and formed and sized, his cock filling him created a magic of its own he matched him so perfectly that every breath was rising ecstasy and every touch joy.

Severus thrust himself up into Remus, and Remus ground himself down, crying out every time Severus's cock hit his prostate, and Severus was crying out too, as Remus tightened and clenched around him and came, spurting onto Severus's chest until Severus came deep inside Remus with a howl.

As their breathing slowed, and he could feel Severus softening inside him, Remus leaned forward so that

their faces touched, feeling the brush of eyelashes against his cheek and the slow slide of tears down his cheek.

"Severus?" he asked, greatly concerned. "Are you hurt? Or... why are you crying?"

"No you haven't hurt me, you idiot wolf. I'm not crying, I'm just..." Severus paused, his lie exposed by the slow slide of one last tear down his cheek. "I'm just, well, I liked this. I didn't think something like this could happen."

Remus laughed, softly. "Oh, Severus, I more than liked this I more than like you. I..."

Severus silenced him, touching his fingers to Remus's lips. "Shh, don't talk. I can't hear it. Please."

"OK, I won't talk," Remus said, melding his body into Severus's. "Mmm, just perfect."

They sat together, Remus squashing Severus until finally Severus said, "Enough. Get up, Remus, I think I've lost all feeling in my legs. Shift."

Remus laughed as he stood and slowly began to dress himself in his scattered clothes, aware of Severus's gaze upon him, his eyes dark and melting and velvety-soft, a hunger or a longing warming their depths.

Collecting himself and clearing his throat, Severus said, "So what did you say you did today? I believe I was a little distracted earlier."

"Only a little? How disappointing," Remus laughed. "Well, let's see I was scolded by Rosmerta, I ran away, leaving her to the dubious comfort of Mrs. Bulstrode, I had a chat with Millicent..."

"Wait. Did you say Mrs. Bulstrode? Cassiopeia Bustrode? Millicent's mother?" asked Severus, abruptly standing and hastily completing his dressing.

"Yes, that's right. Rosmerta has taken her into the kitchen at the Three Broomsticks. I believe she comes and quietly prepares food for the inn daily without anyone finding out she's there and harassing her. Rosmerta's very happy with her cooking."

"Millicent's mother has never been the most stable of women she's distantly related to the Blacks, you know a cadet branch of the family. Millicent's pragmatism is wholly inherited from her father she's a remarkably level-headed young woman. But Mrs. Bulstrode, well, since her imprisonment and the death of her husband, she has been very disturbed. Deranged, or even psychotic, you might say. And while I couldn't begin to guess what her motive might be, I'd have to say she's a likely candidate for a murderer."

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They agreed to approach the situation of Mrs. Bulstrode's possible involvement in the gruesome murders circumspectly. It would not do to make unfounded accusations and involve the Aurors, nor would it be wise to alert Mrs. Bulstrode to their suspicions and upset Millicent and Rosmerta.

They hammered out a plan of sorts. If Remus could somehow place a magical trace on Mrs. Bulstrode, they could be alerted to her location if she was in the Hogsmeade vicinity. Remus persuaded Rosmerta to keep the inn open late by telling her that, with the patrols, the risk would be reduced. With the Three Broomsticks remaining open late, they could stake out likely areas for an ambush, based on the previous killings. Severus and Remus were also prepared to protect any customers leaving while keeping a watch on Mrs. Bulstrode.

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Word about the night-patrols had spread quickly through the village, and the Hogsmeade population celebrated. As though to make up for the past few nights, Rosmerta's inn was crowded and merry. Customers left the inn in groups, escorted by the night-patrol, so that no-one wandered the streets alone.

Remus knew that Severus, concealed with a Disillusionment Charm, was observing and shadowing the patrolling groups.

Rosmerta called out, "Last round, fellows", Millicent standing at her side with her hands on her hips and her expression fierce. The last few die-hard drinkers were emptying their glasses when Remus felt the distinct 'ping' that let him know that the trace spell he had placed on Mrs. Bulstrode had just been activated by her return to Hogsmeade. Knowing that Severus would be returning momentarily from the last patrol escort, Remus agreed to accompany the last drinkers home.

After escorting the last drinker home, Remus paused, trying to assess how close Mrs. Bulstrode was by the strength of the tingling sensation delivered by the tracer. All of Remus's instincts were shrieking that Cassiopeia Bulstrode was the one responsible for the murders and that she was very close.

Stepping into the shadows near the cottages, Remus paused to allow his senses time to assess the night.

All was silent, but he could smell Cassiopeia Bulstrode nearby. Where was Severus?

Remus heard the sound of hasty footsteps approaching. Severus? Out of the darkness from his left Remus heard a shrieked "*Impedimenta*." He leapt out in time to see Severus dodge the hex, although he stumbled a little. Yelling, "*Stupefy*," Remus charged towards the shrieking voice, only peripherally registering that Severus had joined him, his wand outstretched. Yelling, "*Stupefy*" again, this time in unison with Severus, they followed the streaks of light from their wands to find a form crumpled on the ground.

Severus's silent Lumos revealed Cassiopeia Bulstrode, lying motionless, her wand lying limply in one hand and a set of skeletal human jaws with elongated fangs, glowing an eerily luminescent green in the other hand.

Remus roused the nearby residents, asking that a Floo-call be placed to the Aurors and another to Rosmerta and Millicent.

Almost immediately, Aurors began to Apparate in, wands outstretched. Remus turned to Severus in alarm.

"Do you want me to deal with this alone while you get away?" he asked.

Severus shook his head, "No. Kingsley knows, and now that... well, it will probably come out soon enough anyway."

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Back at the Three Broomsticks, all was chaos. There were Aurors everywhere, many of them pointing their wands at Severus. Remus leaped between his sneering, snarling lover and those Aurors surrounding him and bellowed for Rosmerta to contact Kingsley immediately. The Aurors looked all too keen to apprehend Dumbledore's killer. He heard Rosmerta talking to Kingsley and felt the welcome solid presence of Millicent standing staunchly beside him, and then to his surprise and relief, Tonks joined them. "Calm down, everyone," Tonks said firmly. "Just stay calm. You," she said, pointing to one of the Aurors, a younger man, red in the face and belligerent, "Put that wand down now. Yes, I'm speaking to you, put down that wand before I make you swallow it. Now!"

To his relief, most of the Aurors seemed to be obeying Tonks, even the overly-aggressive idiot she had spoken so forcefully to. Tonks had really come into her own strength and authority, he idly thought, since the days of the Order of the Phoenix and her own emotional confusion about him. To his even greater relief he saw someone exiting the fireplace, and heard the deep, commanding tones of the new Minister.

"Kingsley," he called. "Over here! Get your idiot Aurors to stand down and stop pointing their wands at Severus before someone gets hurt."

Kingsley was at his side immediately, appraising the situation with calm efficiency. "Remus, Tonks, Bulstrode," he nodded, greeting them. And then stepping closer to Severus, he said, "Snape. Good to see you out of seclusion. I take it Remus and you are responsible for apprehending the Hogsmeade killer? Good work, man, good work," he said, clapping Severus's forearm as he greeted him enthusiastically. He whispered urgently, his voice so low only Severus and Remus could hear him, "Try not to hex them; I'm not sure the Department can handle the loss of any more Aurors. We're short-staffed already." Severus snorted in response.

The Aurors had all backed away, responding to Kingsley's friendly greeting of Severus and his obvious approval of the man. Relieved, Remus moved away to where Cassiopeia Bulstrode lay, still unconscious, Rosmerta at her side.

"Oh, Remus, is it really true?" Rosmerta asked, tears trickling down her cheeks. "Is Mrs. Bulstrode really responsible for those deaths?"

"It certainly looks that way, Rosmerta. Millicent," he said, nodding at the young woman who had followed him, now that Severus was unlikely to be engaging in battle with the Aurors. "I haven't spoken to her, but from the looks of that Dark Artifact - the vampire jaws there - and from what little I could understand, it seems she did commit the murders. Millicent, did your mother know Severus wasn't dead?" he asked.

Her face set in grim lines, Millicent nodded. "Yes, I told Rosmerta and Mother. They both knew I'd been seeing him after work, to supply him with potions ingredients. Master Richarde knew too. He remembered the Professor well and didn't mind me helping him. But what does that...? Oh..." Millicent nodded to herself. "Mother thought the Professor was responsible for Father dying and her imprisonment, didn't she? This was somehow meant as an attack on him, wasn't it?"

"It certainly seems that way, Millicent. I'm sorry."

Millicent shook her head sadly, her eyes glistening with unshed tears, "It's not your fault, Remus. And we couldn't let her just run around killing people." She moved closer to Rosmerta, who tightly embraced her, murmuring words of comfort and stroking her hair.

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Kingsley sorted out the entire situation with his usual calm authority. Cassiopeia Bulstrode was taken to St. Mungo's with an escort of Aurors: she'd recovered consciousness and had been shrieking foul imprecations at Severus; her insane ranting reminded Remus of her distant kinswoman, Bellatrix Lestrange, a resemblance that made Remus shudder in recollection.

Rosmerta and Millicent accompanied the Aurors Apparating to St. Mungo's. Remus was relieved to see Tonks joining those guarding Cassiopeia Bulstrode. He knew he could count on her to behave fairly.

Locking the doors of the inn, as Rosmerta had requested, Remus turned to face Severus, pouring them both a glass of Rosmerta's finest brandy.

"What a night," sighed Remus.

Severus did not respond, accepting the glass of brandy in silence.

"Severus, is something wrong? Is it because it's now known that you survived?"

"In part. And the thought of all those people killed as part of a twisted plot to gain revenge upon me - that doesn't sit well with me, Remus."

"You're not to blame for the actions of a madwoman, Severus. You know you're not responsible for her actions, regardless of her motives."

"Yes."

Remus sat still, staring at Severus, silently hoping he would say more. Finally, unable to bear the silence that dragged between them, he said, "Severus? Would you like to come upstairs? To my room, I mean. To sleep?"

"Sleep?" asked Severus, one eyebrow archly raised, his fine, expressive lips moving in the approximation of a smile.

"If sleep is what you wanted, then yes, sleep."

"And if I wanted more?"

"Whatever you want, Severus."

"That's a large offer whatever I want. What if I want you, for much more than one night?"

"One night, two, a year, the rest of our lives... whatever you want, Severus, I mean it."

"Let's start with one night, hmm, then maybe two," Severus purred, leaning forward to capture Remus's lips with his own. Twisting, tangling and twining his tongue in Remus's mouth, till the desire rose so strong they could barely breathe, Severus murmured, "The rest of our lives?"

"Come upstairs," growled Remus. "Now."

~fin~