

When She Was Seven

by Jenwryn

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nebulous memories of the past effect our aching perception of the present...
Remus/Tonks, Remus/Sirius.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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[1980/1996]

Tonks knew. She wasn't stupid. Oh, clumsy and maybe slower than some when it came to nitty Arithmancy, but that didn't mean she was stupid, and she ~~new~~ knew. She'd always known. Maybe because she'd grown up taking it for granted.

She couldn't remember a time without Remus Lupin in her life. He and the other Marauders had been Sirius Black's best friends, and Sirius had been her mother's favourite cousin. Tonks could remember the very day that the news had arrived declaring that Sirius had run away from home. No-one ever believed that she could remember it because she'd only been three at the time. But she *did* remember it. The owl had arrived while her mother was in the middle of reading her a story. Her mum had put the book down and said, "Just a minute, pumpkin," and had opened the letter then let out a shriek and stood up and done a crazy little spiteful dance of mad amusement. She'd sent the letter spiralling to the floor and seized up Tonks, and squeezed her, and laughed so loud that it had made Tonks's ears hurt, and declared, "Oh, *Merlin*, Dora my doll, that'll show her. Poor arrogant, preposterous Aunt Wally, she never did learn where Sirius was concerned..."

Tonks had never seen her mother act quite so madly neither before nor after; she remembered.

By her seventh birthday, Tonks was floo-powdering her way regularly back and forth between her home and Sirius's flat. In hindsight, she could see that it had given her mother a chance to be active with the Order; at the time she hadn't much cared why, but had just been relieved to get permission. Though at first, it hadn't been at all sure that she *would*. Her mother had stalked around Sirius's flat with a disapproving look on her face and then ended in his cramped little kitchen with her hands on her hips where she'd launched into a lengthy and stern lecture.

"... and there's to be no smoking of unusual substances. Or drinking of alcohol. Not by her, Merlin forbid, and not by you, and not by anyone else in her presence. And you're to keep an eye on her, do you hear? She's always getting into sticky situations I'd rather she flooded home each time with all limbs attached and the same number of them. No underage magic, no lending of wands, and I don't care how many charms you've got up around this place. No watching that Muggle television thing either. I've seen what it does to their children. And if she stays the night she's to be asleep at a decent time and preferably in a bed. Teeth are to be brushed. And if she comes home swearing like a garden gnome, that'll be the end of it. Do you hear?"

Sirius had just stood there and nodded beneath the flow of his cousin's tirade, but then, the moment she had Apparated away, he'd wriggled his eyebrows in Tonks direction, dragged open the heavy door of the old refrigerator, and pulled out a beer. He'd flicked off the lid on the edge of the work bench which was chipped and worn for that very reason, downed a mouthful, and then placed a finger in a tapping motion against the side of his nose as though to say, *we can keep our secrets, eh?*

And Tonks, bursting with excitement at the branch of adult equality she was being proffered, had almost exploded with the force of the grin on her face and had earnestly tapped her own nose in conspiratorial agreement.

Merlin, but she relished the days and hours spent at Sirius's flat. She was fascinated by the strange smells of it: the weird blend of blue hazed smoke, and damp dog hair, and dusty pages of old books, and worn clothes tossed over chair backs, and the strange incense that burnt slowly along thin wooden sticks and crumbled into a dish held by a pot-bellied little Buddha. She was seduced by the sounds of it: the wizarding radio at times, or music from the expansive, crookedly-arranged collection of Muggle records and cassettes that lined two whole shelves along one wall; Tonks could sit and listen for hours to John Lennon even though most of what he sang didn't make a scrap of sense, at least, not in any way she could understand. She adored the way that Sirius served her up any old thing to eat, or just sent her off to raid the fridge herself, and never so much as raised an eyebrow when she'd reappear with a bowl laden high with chocolate ice-cream and whipped cream, and ate it with a fork and the aid of her small fingers, and called it breakfast. And she thrived on the fact that he didn't even mind if she sat perched on the front steps, feet bare and dirty in the evening light, and watched him work on his motorbike. Not infrequently she returned home with a face smeared in oil and grime as he taught her how to tinker. He dubbed her affectionately his little grease monkey.

Put simply, Tonks loved everything about his place, and she escaped there whenever she could, so much so that her mother would regularly pull amused faces and ask Sirius why he didn't just adopt her. At which point Sirius always laughed and picked Tonks up and swung her around, even though she was too big for that kind of thing, and declared that he couldn't adopt her because he and Remus were planning on marrying her as soon as she came of age. It always made her mother laugh. Tonks would laugh too, though outwardly her hair would flare a magnificent magenta at the thought, and inwardly her tummy would do that odd little flip-flop thing.

You see, one of the best things about Sirius's flat was that she knew it wasn't really Sirius's flat at all, but Sirius-And-Remus's flat, all bunched together like that in one long, breathless word. None of the adults ever called it that, and she didn't know why, but in her head, she secretly named it that way. Sometimes, even, she dared to think of it as Remus's alone.

Tonks liked to sit on the lounge-room window sill amongst the dead pot plants, bare feet dangling outside, and gaze down at the street two storeys beneath her, just because she knew that sooner rather than later Remus would appear. He'd walk up, and ruffle her hair affectionately, and hook his hands under her armpits as though worried she'd fall, and chide gently, "You know your mother would have a fit if she saw you doing this, don't you?"

Then Tonks would lean her head back against him, and grin cheekily at him upside down, so that he'd shake his head at her and lift her off the sill and into the room and mutter, "You are *just* like Padfoot."

Tonks liked it when he said that.

Because she knew. Oh, it was a very nebulous knowledge, like looking at something through gauze curtains, but it was still there inside her head just waiting for the day it would make sense. She knew that it gave her those odd little lurches when Sirius made his joke about him and Remus marrying her. And she knew that if she were like Sirius, then that would mean to Remus well...

She just knew.

Sometimes she'd sit and watch them. Usually it would be late and they'd have half forgotten she was there because she could be quiet when she wanted to be, when she was tired. Especially on long winter evenings when she'd spent the day getting soaked to the bone in the snow with Padfoot-the-Dog (and that was another thing she liked about visiting). Those winter evenings, when the lounge-room was hazed with Sirius's cigarette smoke, and the heater ticked and clunked to itself in the corner, and the fogged-up glass in the window panes made strange little creaking noises. Then Tonks would sit on the threadbare rug before the unused fireplace it was full of wobbly stacks of books and worn comics; the flooing fireplace was in the kitchen wearing a pair of Remus's old woolly socks pulled up to her knees to try and take the blue out of her toes and wrapped in a doggy-scented blanket with a pile of parchment and a box of Muggle coloured pencils spread out in front of her. And in theory she'd be drawing pictures, but in practise she'd be watching them. Sirius would be perched on the arm of the lounge-chair listening to the music sliding beneath the smoke, observing Remus with half-closed eyes and a faraway expression. He'd stay there like that until Remus noticed. Then Remus would lower his book and raise his gaze and smile a small, private little smile. And sometimes Sirius would reach out a hand and touch his face. And sometimes he'd lean in and kiss him.

Tonks *knew*.

She knew, but she never said anything because somehow she understood that it was like the cigarettes, and the brown bottles of beer, and the watermelon eaten carved from the skin like a bowl, and the walking barefoot in the snow, and the frolicking with Padfoot-the-Dog, and the hanging upside down from the balcony, and that if she spoke about it at home then it would all come to an end, and there'd be no more visits to Sirius's flat, and she'd be stuck at home with her mother, and her mother's bitter complaints, and her mother's resentment of the world. Tonks understood that, and it was one of those understandings that made Remus and Sirius turn from where they sat together on the lounge, and look at her, and remember her. And Remus would smile slowly in her direction, and Sirius would tap his finger against the side of his nose and wink. And Tonks would tap her finger against her own nose in sombre seriousness and sort of squint back at them because she hadn't quite got the art of winking yet, despite the fact that she'd spent hours sitting in their bathroom sink straining her eyes in the lopsided mirror to try and figure out how to make the one eye move whilst keeping the other eye still.

At seven, it had all made perfect sense. At seven, she'd more than half believed Sirius's joke that they would marry her one day. At seven, she could imagine a life spent with them in that flat eating tomato and radish sandwiches, and reading Sirius's comics upside down on the lounge-chair, and listening to John Lennon. She even had the vaguest, most cloud-like of ideas about how one day she'd make Remus's face twitch into that strange, private little smile like Sirius did. Because at seven, that sort of thing made perfect sense in the sketchiest of ways.

At seven, she'd understood that they were in love.

She *knew*.

And it was that knowledge that dug into her at twenty-three when she stood in the doorway of the basement kitchen of Grimmauld Place and watched them together. She wondered sometimes if she were the only one who did know. Harry seemed utterly oblivious to it. Molly was in many ways such an innocent. Most of them were too busy saving the world. Only Mad-Eye suspected, or at least, Tonks believed he did because she'd catch his gaze shifting back and forth from Remus to Sirius, and then it would flick over to her, and she'd stare away in the other direction with an embarrassed, painful ache.

At twenty-three, things just weren't as simple as they'd been when she was seven.

How to explain that she still carried the memories of that year and three quarters where she'd practically lived with them, carried them, carried them clung close to her heart? How to explain that what had been nebulous then appeared as clear now as a frost-bit morning's light?

There were days when she longed for nothing more than her mother to arrive and ask Sirius why he didn't just adopt Tonks so that he could make that old joke and she could show them with her eyes that she was willing. Oh, more than willing. More than willing.