

Fire and Rain

8th May 1998

Hermione's throat burned so badly that it felt as if she had swallowed an entire handful of razor blades. She bit back a groan at the sight of the potion Madam Pomfrey held out to her, but forced herself to smile gratefully as she accepted the Medi-wich's offering—then winced as she forced herself to swallow the sludgy, brown liquid.

“Good, Miss Granger. I know that one is particularly uncomfortable, but it is, thankfully, the last of your dosage. You will still need to take the daily regimen for a while to get your nutrients back up, but no more of this mud,” Pomfrey said, smiling brightly at her.

Smiling,

Everyone kept smiling at her.

People were dead.

Everybody was dead.

Harry, fucking Potter was DEAD.

Yet the few who remained were so worried about *her* fragile state of mind that they were tiptoeing around her with fake smiles plastered on their faces.

The healers had decided she'd simply succumbed to the stress of the battle and suffered from a psychological break. All *so very muggle* of her, really, Hermione wanted to argue.

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She wanted to scream, and kick, and fight to be heard. She wanted to demand that they go back to the drawing board and come up with a real answer. She wanted to calmly explain that it wasn't in her head, really, and if they'd just listen, please, because there was this feeling, you see...

That feeling... that feeling...

It was as if something had torn inside of her and ripped its way out of her chest. She struggled to even wrap her mind around how intense it had been. The way it had felt like —

Hermione's focus was wrenched from her musings by the sudden clearing of a throat. "Sorry," she said sheepishly as she shook her head to clear her thoughts, "I sort of... zoned out. Could you please repeat that?"

"It's quite alright, Miss Granger," Minerva McGonagall reassured her. She stepped up to her bedside and placed a hand on Hermione's shoulder — a gesture that she was sure her former head of house *meant* to be comforting. "It's been a tough week for everyone. Poppy has just informed me that, now that you are able to stay awake and are capable of moving around without issue, she is going to discharge you this afternoon. I'm sure it will be a relief to get to go home to rest and recover."

"Oh," Hermione responded, blinking in surprise. "Yea — yes, Ma'am. Home. Of course. That will be lovely, thank you."

Home.

Hermione nearly scoffed at the thought. She didn't have one of those anymore — hadn't for nearly a year. After she had obliterated her parents, she, Harry and Ron had stayed at the Burrow before they fled to Grimmauld Place, and then ultimately wound up spending months in a tent.

The tent where they laughed. Fought. Cried. The tent where she and Harry danced on Christmas.

Harry.

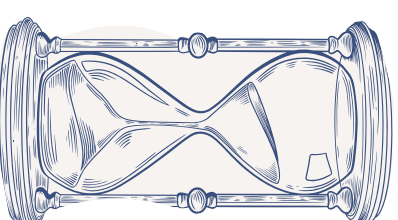
Harry was gone. Everybody was gone. Molly — gods, she had lost half of her family in a single day. Hermione couldn't even bear to think about the woman who had been like a second mother to her without the floodgates trying to open again.

Trying, but never quite succeeding.

She kept trying to cry, certain that if she were to just... break, then she could finally begin to heal. Alas, she had not shed a single tear since her first night in the hospital ward.

Hermione had been gone, completely feral, when Ron had rushed into the hospital ward cradling her still-screaming form in his arms as he begged Madam Pomfrey for help. According to the account she'd been given, she had screamed for hours. She

ACT I All That's Left



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In her distracted state, Hermione did not bear witness to Luna Lovegood and Dean Thomas taking their last breaths just down the corridor at the hand of Lucius Malfoy. Nor was Hermione present when The Chosen One fell for a second - and final time - in perfect synchronicity with the moment Voldemort splintered into pieces.

It had once been prophesied that neither could live while the other survived.

The funny thing about prophecies, you'll find, is that they are far too often taken at face value.

And so, the war was won.

Seventy-Four people who had fought valiantly for the side of the light were dead.

And in the Hogwarts hospital ward, Hermione Granger lay in a small bed, staring blankly ahead as Poppy Pomfrey informed Minerva McGonagall that neither she, nor the healers from St Mungo's who had volunteered their time to assist the injured, could discern a reason - medical or magical - for what ailed The Golden Girl.

This is where our story begins, and this is where our story ends.

Twenty years after it started and stopped.

And yet, it is far from over.



So, I try to say goodbye, my friend

I'd like to leave you with something more

But never have I been a blue, calm sea

I have always been a storm

STEVE_SUNSHINE

fought, and kicked, and clawed while they cast spell after spell and showed calming draughts and a variety of other tonics and potions down her throat, but every attempt they made to draw her out of her hysteria only seemed to agitate her more.

Finally, Professor McGonagall, of all people, had the good sense to slap her across the face, which finally shut her up. This, of course, gave weight to the theory that she had, in fact, simply gone hysterical for no good reason.

After that, she had entered into a catatonic state for four days, though she could not remember much of it at all. A few faint memories pulled at the edges of her mind—random bits of conversations from those around her, the faces of the few who had come to visit—but it was all rather fuzzy. According to the healers, she had just stared blankly ahead the entire time, no matter what was going on around her.

Hermione had no explanation for a single moment of what had occurred. She just knew, in a deep, intrinsic sort of way, that she had lost a part of herself the moment that she fell to that floor.

Though not to be mistaken, she *would* figure it out.

Of course.

She was Hermione Fucking Granger.

But in the meantime, she refused to allow herself to dwell. She had to get out of here, figure out where to stay, and get through all of the funerals. She needed to face the trials of the coming weeks and keep putting one foot in front of the other, just as she always did—because pushing through is what *made* her Hermione Fucking Granger.

“Miss Granger, you have a visitor,” Pomfrey told her as she peered around the curtain that separated her bed from the rest of the ward. “Mr. Weasley, of course.”

“Of course,” Hermione nodded. Ron had been in to see her every day, without fail. Even despite everything that was going on, despite the loss of Harry, of Luna and Dean, of over half of his family, he had shown up for her, and he had kept showing up.

Arthur. Percy. George. Fred. Gods, even Ginny. The best—and *only*, really—female friend she'd ever had. They were all gone. But Ron was Ron, and he was the kind of guy who showed up no matter what, so he had, indeed, shown up for her.

She was nothing if not grateful for his steadfastness.

Or, rather, she *should* be grateful.

She *would* be grateful, were she capable of feeling anything at all, and so she was quite determined that once she *was* able to feel anything, she would make sure that showing her gratitude to Ron was amongst her top priorities.

Madam Pomfrey and the healers from St Mungo's, who still visited every day to keep up with the few patients that remained in the hospital ward, kept telling her that the numbness was a side effect of all of the potions she had been taking to restore her health.

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They also insisted that, given the fact that her condition was *psychological in nature* it would simply take time for her brain to regain the ability to rationalize everything that had happened.

It was all in her head, after all.

"Hey, 'Mione," Ron said gruffly as he folded his tall, lean body into the chair next to her bed.

"Hi," she croaked back. She reached for the cup of water on the bedside table and took a small sip to ease the ache in her throat, still raw from her screaming. "Are you... gods, it's hard to... Nobody is okay, of course. But how are *you* doing today?"

"It's... we made the plans. Just gonna do all five at once. Tuesday, it'll be. Then Harry..." Ron's voice cracked, and he trailed off, pressing his lips together tightly as he screwed his eyes shut. Hermione waited patiently for Ron to gather his thoughts until, finally, he spoke again.

"Um... Godric's Hollow. Of course. That'll be Wednesday."

"Good. That's good. That's where he'd want to be. It's... hard, that he won't be near Gin, but he'd want to be with his parents. She'd want that for him, too."

Ron nodded, then turned his head to the side and stared out of the window. The weighted silence loomed between them like an anvil waiting to drop in the old cartoons she used to watch when she was just a normal, muggle girl without the weight of a war on her back.

Hermione could tell that he had more to say, but she waited. All of this was horrible. All of this was hard. Logically, she was aware of that.

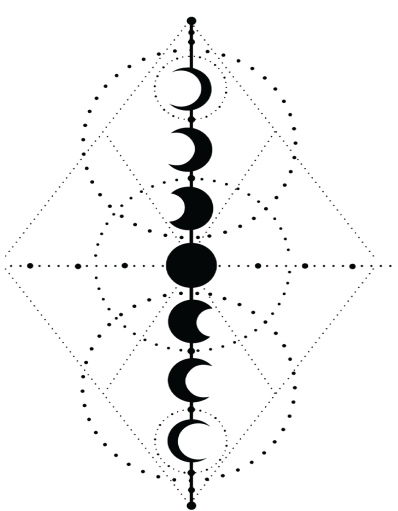
They were talking about burying Harry. They were making plans to put half of the family she had come to love as if they were her own flesh and blood in the ground.

They were discussing things that Hermione knew were absolutely, soul-crushingly devastating, yet she was still just... numb. She wondered, idly, if the feelings would ever come back. If, in part, this really was in her head, in the way that some people tended to react to trauma by entering into a state of shock.

When Hermione was ten, her grandmother died. Her mother's mother. She was young and hadn't quite grasped the concept of death yet. She knew that she had lost something major, but couldn't quite wrap her mind around the permanence of it all. It wasn't until weeks later that she finally broke — over something as innocuous as picking up a book off of the nightstand in her grandmother's bedroom while her family packed the house away, at that. Even now, when she thought back to that day, she could feel the way the raised lettering along the spine of the book felt under her fingertips as she stared down at the book in her hands.

Persuasion.

Prologue



Storms

2nd May 199

When George found the bodies, he froze, forgetting his training for the briefest of moments - a mere second, really, yet just long enough for a nameless Death eater to fire a killing curse straight to his back.

Bellatrix Lestrange, cackling with glee, took great pleasure in the way Molly Weasley screamed when she slit Arthur's throat with a well-placed Diffindo.

That pleasure, however, could not hold a candle to the pure euphoria Bellatrix felt over the fact that the woman went catatonic, unable to utter even the faintest of sounds, when she did the same to Molly's only daughter.

When Antonin Dolohov raised his wand to call out a killing curse near the base of the old astronomy tower, Remus Lupin, battle-worn and still weakened from the recent full moon, moved a mere half a second too late.

His lifeless form crumpled to the ground, eyes wide and unblinking, as if he were simply staring up into the night sky, just as he had done from that very tower so many times in his youth.

Across the grounds, inside of the castle, and three floors up, Hermione Granger took one single step forward before she fell to the cold, stone floor, screaming in agony whilst Ron Weasley desperately tried to find the source of her pain.

Hermione had been with her grandmother the day she bought the book. Grandmother had told her that she'd never read any Austen books, and was so excited to start this one. She swore that she would pass the book along to her only granddaughter, once she had read it—if, of course, she deemed it appropriate for a girl Hermione's age.

As Hermione stood in the dim light of the bedroom, looking down at the book, she finally cracked. Splintered. Fell to pieces, all over the realization that the bookmark was only a third of the way through. Her Grandmother would never finish the book she had been so eager to read.

The bookmark would never move again.

Grief was funny like that. It had a way of creeping back up to strike out at you when you least expected it. She knew that the grief of the battle, the weight of all of the lives that they had lost, would hit her eventually. She just wished, so desperately, that she could articulate her feelings in a way that would make someone else understand.

She was numb from shock. Sure. She was in the denial stage of grief. This was also true. But more than that, something had broken inside of her. Something that could not be repaired—at least, not in any way she could seem to decipher. She nearly laughed at the thought of how many times she'd laid in this bed and squeezed her eyes shut as she tried to envision the inside of her chest knitting itself back together, as if she could repair her hollowed-out heart on the force of sheer willpower alone.

"Mum is insisting that you come stay at the Burrow." Ron told her in a resolved, matter-of-fact tone as he turned his head to look at her and offered a soft, reassuring smile.

The Burrow. With Molly and Ron. Charlie and Tonks. Bill and Fleur, maybe. She wasn't quite sure if they would be staying with the rest of the family or if they would have already gone back to Shell Cottage. Regardless, the idea of being there, of staying in Ginny's old bedroom, of letting Molly dote on her—which she knew the woman needed, but she wasn't sure *she* could handle—it was all too much.

"I can't do that, Ron. I won't ask that of your family, but I do appreciate the offer," she said kindly, casting her eyes down to stare at her hands where they lay in her lap atop the thin, scratchy, white blanket.

"Oh, come on, 'Mione, you know it's not asking too much. You're family. You're my—you're family." Ron insisted, then, in a lower voice, added, "Merlin knows we have plenty of room now."

Hermione squeezed her eyes shut, trying to bite back the guilt—apparently, she could still feel some things - and then tried to reason with him.

"I know I wouldn't be putting you all out, Ron. And I really do appreciate it. Your Mum is so, so good. I love her dearly. I just... being there, now, I can't... I need to be

SELLING FANFICTION IS ILLEGAL.
DON'T DO IT.
IF YOU BOUGHT THIS, SHAME ON
YOU.
IF YOU BOUND THIS YOURSELF.
IM SO PROUD OF YOU!

XOXO -8ENNA



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somewhere else. Just for a while. I'll sleep a few days, take all the extra potions, kick this little psychological break thing, and then I'll come by, okay?" She reached out and squeezed his hand, trying both to reassure him, and to get him to drop the subject.

She chose to ignore the way that the action made bile rise in her throat, and willfully ignored how it made her chest constrict, as if she were seconds away from losing it all over again.

"Fine, I guess. If that's what you think is best," Ron acquiesced. "But we just want to help you. Look out for you, you know? Where will you even go, 'Mione?"

She bristled at his question, though she knew he wasn't wrong. Perhaps she'd just rent a room in a muggle hotel for a few days. If her accounts hadn't been frozen in the time that had passed since she'd fallen off the face of the earth for the past year, that was.

She wasn't sure where she would go—or, to be exact, where she *could* go. She didn't have anybody left, save for the Weasleys. Her mind spun as she began to doubt her resolve and wonder if she was making the wrong choice. Maybe she should just suck it up and accept the offer. She'd have to, really. This was certainly no time to be picky.

She sighed in resignation and opened her mouth to tell Ron she'd come home with him, but before she could speak, they were interrupted by a sharp voice as someone approached the end of her bed.

A savior.

"She's coming home with me."

A man Ronald wouldn't argue with.

"Plenty of space. Dark and quiet so she can rest. Rooms already set," The man said with a tone of finality.

A white knight in black leather.

"*Sirius*, " she breathed out in relief.

"Hi-ya, Kitten."



Hermione couldn't help but smile at the rugged man as he stepped forward and gripped the footboard of her small, uncomfortable bed in the hospital ward.

Sirius was a beacon of hope. An out, at the exact moment she needed it.

She loved the Weasleys. Truly. But she simply could not imagine being in that house, sitting with so much grief. Hermione was far too self-aware to be capable of pretending she wasn't the person that she was.

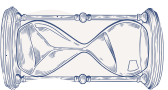
A natural caretaker.

A leader.

Keeper of the Moon: The Complete Collection Volume 1

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Relationship is Hermione Granger Remus Lupin
Rating: Explicit
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Remus Lupin took his last breath.
Hermione Granger forgot how to breathe.
After she collapsed on the third floor of the castle, screaming in agony, neither Madam Pomfrey nor the healers from St Mungo's could diagnose what ailed the Golden Girl.
And so, the war was won, but Hermione was alone. Harry was dead, along with half of the Weasley clan. When she's taken in by Sirius Black, truths are uncovered. Now armed with the weight of a vow and a bond, Hermione knows what must be done.
The world was broken, and so were

Cover Page Art by: Setlune (@setlune_illustrations) |



STEVE_SUNSHINE

Were she to go stay with the remaining Weasleys, she already knew all too well how it would play out. She would feel the need to help. She would be desperate to be of use so she felt as if she were earning her keep. She would need to be strong for everyone else. A role which she would have, in any other circumstance, stepped into willingly, and without a moment's hesitation.

However, given her current state of mind, the thought of trying to care for others when she felt so out of sorts, so broken, so numb — she simply could not bear it.

"Oh, you don't have to worry about her," Ron said dismissively. "She can come to the Burrow. No sense in putting you out, Sirius. She's already stayed there loads of times, and Mum will be happy to have the distraction."

A distraction. One that Molly may need, that much was true. But Hermione didn't have it in her to *be* that distraction. As numb as she may have been, she was still self-aware enough that she knew she was utterly incapable of being anything to anyone right now.

"This isn't up for debate," Sirius said firmly.

Hermione sighed and turned to look over at Ron. "I'll be okay, Ron. Tell your Mum thank you. I truly appreciate her offer, and I promise I'll come round to the Burrow in a few days once I've rested more. Just tell her..." she trailed off and squeezed her eyes shut as she fidgeted with her hands in her lap, "Tell her I can't... be there. Not yet. She'll understand."

Ron shook his head slowly as he rose from his chair. "You'll send me a patronus if you need me and I'll come get you right away, okay?" he asked Hermione as he leaned down to smooth her hair back from her face and planted a kiss atop her head.

She sucked in a sharp breath, forcing herself to school her features even as she fought back a grimace, and smiled up at him instead, nodding in agreement. "I promise, Ron. Thank you."

Staring at his back as he walked away, Hermione furrowed her brow in confusion. She had been so into Ron, for so long. Her years of crushing and pining had finally culminated in the two sharing a brief, passionate kiss in the Chamber of Secrets, something she had dreamt of for years. But when it *did* finally happen, it had been...

Weird.

Wrong.

Gods, it had been so bloody strange and uncomfortable. It was reminiscent of when she'd had her first and only other kiss, with Viktor Krum, the night of the Yule Ball during her fourth year. Instead of the butterflies she expected, she just felt a prickling, unpleasant sort of knot in her stomach.

But where that chaste goodnight kiss had left her feeling just a little bit off, the intense — albeit brief — snog with Ron had left her feeling deeply unsettled. Now every time

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he touched her or even got close to her, it felt as if some deep-seated, integral part of her very being was screaming over how fucking wrong it was.

Ron was wrong. She wasn't supposed to be kissing him. He wasn't...something.

There was something missing that she couldn't quite put her finger on. She supposed it could have been simple. They'd been friends for so long, and while she'd carried a bit of a crush for a long while, they were simply too solid in their position as friends for anything beyond that to NOT be weird.

She shook her head, chalking it up to the aftereffects of her little breakdown, then turned to look at Sirius.

"How are you?" she asked politely as he took the chair Ron had just vacated, and—in a very Sirius Black move—leaned back against the wall, crossing his arms behind his head as he stretched out his legs and proceeded to prop his muddy, dragonhide boot-clad feet on the white-linen covered bed.

"So refined," Hermione quipped, rolling her eyes as a small laugh bubbled up out of her mouth.

Sirius waved his hand dismissively, then smiled at her again, "I'm alive. More than I can say for the rest of them, yeah? Burying Harry Wednesday. Fucking Godric's Hollow."

"I heard," she replied. Despite the gravity of the situation, she couldn't help the small smile playing on her lips at his demeanor. She was grateful, really. Sirius *could* be serious, of course, at times. But he also had a way of bringing levity to even the direst of circumstances that she needed more than she had realized. Everyone else had been treating her with kid gloves, tiptoeing around all red eyed and sorrowful. She understood their reasoning, of course, and she hardly faulted them for it.

It's just that she couldn't feel what they felt. She couldn't process it all. She couldn't even trust her own mind, right now, and they all just kept fucking looking at her with grief-ridden pity on their faces. It was suffocating.

"Madame Pomfrey said you've been here every day. I appreciate that, you didn't have to."

"I did. Had to. Needed to. Made a promise." He told her gruffly. She opened her mouth to question his meaning, but he cut her off as he continued to speak, "You'll come to Grimmauld. Godric knows the fucking place is big enough."

"Sirius, I appreciate the offer, truly, but I can't just—I simply refuse to put anyone out like that. Not when everyone is trying to heal, it's too much to ask that someone take me in. I'll be okay. I'm going to rent a room in muggle London for a bit, I think," she reassured him as she tried to decline his offer as politely as possible.



STEVIE_SUNSHINE

Despite the risks of being at Grimmauld Place — cursed objects, spaces that may still be warding against muggleborns, and a portrait that so very loved to insult her — the offer *was* tempting. The place was comfortable and familiar, but she simply couldn't allow herself to rely on anyone else right now. What good had it done her to rely on anyone, anyway? What good had all her efforts to be there for everyone else mattered, if it left her nothing but alone in the end?

"It's really not up for debate, Hermione." Sirius pulled his legs off of the bed and leaned forward, bracing his elbows on his knees. He looked her over, his steel grey eyes running over her face rapidly, as if he were studying her, then gave a slight shake of his head.

"It's on me now, Kitten. To take care of you, to make sure you're safe." He said softly. "I don't need anyone to take care of me," she sighed, shifting in the bed to face him straight on. "Really, I'll be fine. Everyone has their own grief to sort through, I won't put you out like this."

"I'm a fucking mess, anyway," she murmured as an afterthought, more to herself than to him.

"Then you're *MY* fucking mess to manage," Sirius barked out in a sharp tone, his voice so harsh that it made her jolt in shock.

"Shit. Sorry, listen, it's..." he sighed and scrubbed a hand over his face as he glanced toward the window, murmuring softly to himself for a moment before he looked back at her. "Look, Kitten, I fucking... I took the Unbreakable Vow, okay? If anything happened to him, if he didn't make it through this war and you did... It's my job to make sure you're safe now."

"The Unbreakable Vow?" she gasped, sitting upright on the bed. "You could die. Why on earth would you take the vow over *me*?"

"Because it *IS* you." Sirius threw his arms up in exasperation. "You were his fucking... you were so important to him, Hermione. Far more than you could even comprehend. So I suppose you'd better take my offer, lest you be the reason this old dog gets put down for good." He added, trying — as he always did — to make light of the situation. "I can't believe he did that," she said softly. She took a breath and settled back against the pillows as she chewed her lip and mulled over his words before she turned her head to look over at him and nodded.

"Fine. I'll come stay at Grimmauld Place. For Harry."

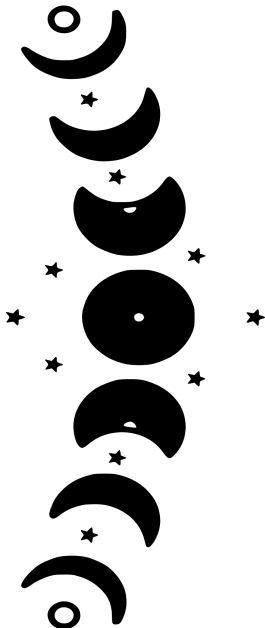
A strange look flashed across Sirius' face, so briefly that she would have missed it if she had blinked, but then he nodded and flashed her another grin, albeit one that didn't quite meet his eyes this time.

"Right. For Harry." He said, as he relaxed back into his chair.

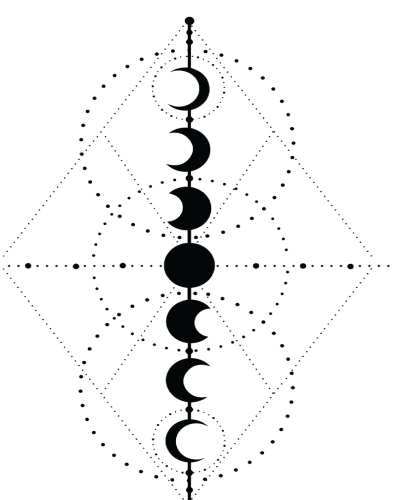
KEEPER OF THE MOON



*I've seen fire, and I've seen rain
I've seen sunny days that I thought would never end
I've seen lonely nights when I could not find a friend
But I always thought that I'd see you again*



Keeper of the Moon:
The Complete Collection
Volume 1



Comfortably Numb

8th May 1998

After Madam Pomfrey and one of the visiting healers from St Mungo's gave Hermione a final once-over and deemed her fit for release, McGonagall led her and Sirius to the headmaster's office and gave them access to the Floo, where they travelled straight back to 12 Grimmauld Place.

As soon as they arrived, he'd offered her some tea, then rattled off something about checking the wards, and left her to sit at the end of the long table in the small kitchen, staring down at the mug in her hands as she tried to steady her racing thoughts.

If she focused hard enough, she was almost positive she would be able to hear the ghosts of the past filling this room. If she turned her head to the side, she could so easily imagine a table full of people sharing one of Molly's infamous, delectable dinners.

Weasleys.

Harry.

The Order.

Everyone she loved, alive and well.

Alas, they were *not*, in fact, alive and well. Seventy-four were dead. Name after name, people who she'd grown up alongside since she was eleven years old. Professors and classmates. Friends and their families. *Her* family. Dead and gone.

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“Don’t do that.” She heard Sirius’ voice call out softly. Snapping her eyes to the doorway, she took in the sight of him leaning against the frame with his arms crossed over his chest, a pensive look on his face. In lieu of a response, she simply stared and waited for him to continue.

“Don’t sit with it like this,” he told her. Hermione watched, her eyes tracking his movements, as he pushed off from the doorframe. He strode into the room with purposeful steps and sank down into the seat across from her before he spoke again, “Hard not to, I get it. But you need to get through the funerals still. Hold it in, and break down after.”

“I just...” She began to try to explain, but trailed off as she struggled to speak through the lump in her throat. She swallowed roughly, drawing in a few deep, ragged breaths, then tried again.

“I can’t feel it, Sirius. It’s almost as if, on an instinctual level, I understand what’s happened. But I can’t *feel* it. The healers, Madam Pomfrey, McGonagall, they all say it’s just shock, but I just feel so godsdamn... empty.”

Hermione sighed, taking a long sip of her tea and carefully setting the cup back down on the light wooden table, then looked back up to meet Sirius’ icy, grey gaze.

“I think something happened to me,” she confessed softly. “They keep saying it was shock, or exhaustion, or a trauma response, or that I was simply exposed to too much magic all at once and it fuddled my brain. Every healer I’ve talked to seems to be rife with all these excuses that make it... not real.”

“Do you think—whatever it is—do *YOU* think it was shock or exhaustion?” Sirius asked as he rose from the table and moved to a low cabinet near the back door of the kitchen to pull out a bottle of firewhisky and two tumblers. Bringing his wares back to the table, he sat down and poured two fingers worth of the amber liquor into each of the glasses before sliding one over to her.

Hermione smiled by way of thanking him as she accepted the glass, then promptly poured the contents into her tea. Dipping her finger into the nearly scalding liquid, she stirred, then sucked the digit into her mouth before she raised the teacup to take a sip.

“Thank you,” she told Sirius after a beat of silence. “I truly don’t think it was in my head. Although I suppose one could argue that if I *had* just gone completely bat, I wouldn’t be able to discern what was real and what was not, anyway. Still, I just... I feel numb. This sort of...chilled emptiness that I can’t shake, like something is just gone. And I can’t...” Hermione trailed off and shook her head, taking another drink before she continued.

“Everybody is dead. *HARRY* is dead. Professor Lup—or, *Remus*. Gimmy, half of her brothers, Arthur. Professor Sprout, Flitwick, Penelope Clearwater, Cho Chang, Luna

STEVIE_SUNSHINE

and Dean and Colin and Parvati and Lavender—which, to be fair, I couldn't really stand the bitch, but I shared a room with her for six years, grew up with her, and now she's just gone. And it's as if I can acknowledge that those facts are sad and horrible, but when it comes to feeling it all I'm just..numb." She sighed propping her elbow on the table and dropping her chin into her hand as she began to drum her fingers on her cheek restlessly.

"It's true that grief can manifest itself in different ways. Stages, the muggles say. Denial, bargaining, so on and so forth," Sirius said as he stared down at the glass in his hand.

"I won't deny that I can see how that, in combination with what you've been through... Still, you say it was real. Tell me about it," he prompted as he set the glass down on the table and leaned forward, looking her directly in the eye.

"You said the healers were convinced it wasn't real. *I say the gits at St Mungo's don't hold every bit of knowledge in the universe. I'm not here to judge, Kitten. I'm just a broken old man holding up his end of a promise. But I *do* care about you. You were—you *are*, very important. I may not be one for flowery words and motherly affection but if you wanted that, I reckon you'd be at the Weasleys. Instead, you're here with me, and we're going to drink and bitch our way through this. So, bitch it out. Tell me what happened, how it felt."*

Hermione studied his face for a moment, then nodded slowly as she sat her tea back down and leaned back in her chair.

"Ron and I were on the third floor. We'd just come out of the Chamber of Secrets, and—" she sighed and brought a hand up to rub her temples as she contemplated exactly how much information to give the man in front of her.

"It's okay, Kitten. I want to hear everything. It might help you to unravel it if you walk back through it all. I won't push, though. We have all the time in the world. Just talk, until you're ready to stop, and then just...stop. And you can tell me more the next time you feel like talking about it. I'm not going anywhere."

"Okay," she said with a nod. "Okay, Ronald and I had gone down to the Chamber of Secrets to get basilisk fangs. We, of course, managed to destroy Hufflepuff's cup while we were down there, so there was a lot of nervous energy. And...Ron kissed me, which was..." she furrowed her brow, trying to discern how to put it into words.

"It was... brow-furrowingly awkward?" Sirius surmised with a laugh. Hermione shrugged and gave him a sheepish grin. "It was bloody *weird*. I always thought Ron and I would end up together when I was younger. Then the war hit, and it just wasn't something I had much time to think about. But when he kissed me, it was just... wrong."

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Sirius opened his mouth as if he were going to speak, but then quickly closed it and raised his glass, taking a long drink before he sat it back down.

“Okay. So. Chamber of Secrets. Weird kiss. Is that why you went all batty?” he teased.

“Oh, sod off,” she laughed, rolling her eyes. “No, so, *that* all happened, and then we kept moving. Fighting off Death eaters, working our way back through the castle to try to find Harry. We made our way up to the third floor and there was a large section of the wall that had been blown out. I was trying to see if the coast was clear down a corridor, and Ron stepped up to the wall to see what was going on out in the courtyard. He said Death eaters had people cornered near the astronomy tower, so he wanted to turn around and go down to help. And then I just collapsed. There was no...preamble. I turned to Ron when he spoke, and before I could even respond to him, I just... *lost it*.”

Sirius tore his eyes away from her and turned his head to stare at the fireplace on the wall behind her. The flickering flames cast a myriad of shadows over his face in the dim, candlelit room, and Hermione studied him, taking in the way his jaw ticked, but she opted to remain silent. She knew he was dealing with grief beyond anything she could even imagine, merely for the fact that this was the second war he'd fought.

“I'm sorry,” she said softly, then jumped when he shoved his chair back roughly, the wood scraping against the old stone floor as he leapt to his feet, running a hand through his long, shaggy hair.

“Fuck,” Sirius muttered, as he brought a hand up to cover his mouth.

“I'm—I really am sorry, I didn't think about how it might be hard for you to hear about all of this, I know you...” Hermione paused to collect her thoughts, and then continued, “You've been through all of this twice, and now Harry and Remus—he was your best friend, and I know he was one of the people that Ron saw down by the tower, those we couldn't get to in time. I can't imagine how you're feeling. We don't have to talk about it.”

“No,” he said gruffly with a shake of his head, “No, we need to talk about it. It's good to talk about it. I just...need a minute.”

He reached into the pocket of his shirt and pulled out a pack of muggle cigarettes with one hand as he used the other to hold up a finger up, as if asking her to hold on. She nodded, an automatic sort of response, then watched as he exited the kitchen through the back door, letting it slam shut behind him.

Hermione groaned and buried her face in her hands. She liked Sirius. A lot, actually. He was witty and uninhibited, sassy and fun. He had loved Harry like a son, and she had loved Harry like a brother. As much as she did feel a bit of guilt over not going to the Burrow and letting Molly fawn over her, she couldn't deny that she was glad Sirius had brought her back to Grimmauld Place.

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"I think you might be my new best friend, Kitten."

"I am," she agreed.

"Is she..." Sirius looked over at her with wide, hopeful eyes, his voice sounding smaller, in a sense—far more vulnerable than the teasing lilt she was used to. "Is she really gone?"

"I... I can't say for sure. It was just... she was yelling about muggles and my brain just went 'I wish I could destroy this bitch in the most muggle way possible' so the idea hit. It seems to have worked. If I had to guess, I would say the essence of her still remains and a simple spell would repair the picture, but I think that, short of restoration... she's gone."

Sirius looked at her and opened and closed his mouth a few times before he lunged forward and swept her into his arms. He buried his face in her hair, and she tightened her arms around his back as the two stood there for a prolonged moment, just... holding on.

He had become her anchor, and she his, in the few days she'd been here, but even, she supposed, before that. Sirius had always been comfortable. A safe space. Sure, he was brash and loud and mischievous, twenty years older, covered in tattoos, and was her now-dead best friends godfather, but things with him felt just as they had with Harry, in terms of connection.

Harry had been her brother. Through and through. Her platonic soulmate. And now, Sirius had filled that role seamlessly. And it was *killing* her. Every tick of his jaw, every far-off look, every time she saw him sort of... drift away, it killed her. Harry was dead. Everybody was dead. She and Sirius were left standing but, in a sense, they were dead, too.

She, with this strange, cold, gaping hole deep within the core of her being and he, with the ghosts of his past whispering in his ear. They were still here, sure, but they were merely half alive.

Half surviving.

The war had been won and the sacrifices were to a better end and all of the other plactions that had been spoken and printed in the last week were true.

But everybody was dead, and *they* were left behind and they weren't even really alive, and it was all so goddamned impossible.

Sirius pulled back and grasped her forearms, squeezing tightly before he stepped back and looked up at the picture frame again, shaking his head.

"She's fucking gone," he whispered incredulously, as if he were afraid to put any force into his declaration, lest his voice draw the previous inhabitants of the portraits back into their frames.

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He turned back to Hermione, his face etched with some impossibly jarring mixture of horror and relief, and then spoke again. "I'm free. She was the last. I know it was just a portrait, but still... being back here and hearing her parrot all of the bullshit she used to say to make me feel bad about myself when I was young, it's been..." He trailed off and shook his head, then abruptly turned to walk down the hall to the kitchen.

Hermione followed behind him and immediately walked to the end of the room, flinging the cupboard open as he settled into a dining chair. She looked over her shoulder and watched as he sat, fidgeting with a few of the numerous rings that adorned his fingers.

"Are we eating or are we drinking?" she asked as she continued to study his hands.

"I'm still full up on funeral food. D and B, methinks," he responded, throwing her a wink.

"D and B, coming right up." Hermione laughed and reached for a bottle of whisky before she made her way back to the table and plopped down in her now-usual seat across from him.

Sirius took the bottle from her outstretched hand with a grateful smile and summoned two glasses, then slid one across to Hermione.

"Do you think we're drinking too much?" she mused as she brought the glass to her lips and took a sip, savoring the tangy cinnamon burn of the amber liquid she'd grown accustomed to the last few days.

"Nah, I mean... I'm used to a few daily drinks anyway. Grand scheme and all, sharing a couple drinks a few nights in a row ain't bad. Little nip from the flask, bit of elf wine at funerals. We're just coping. Drinking and bitching," he reassured her. "I've got you, Kitten. If you become a wine-o I'll ward you into your room for a few days and detox your stubborn little arse."

"My hero." She held the back of her hand to her forehead and pretended to swoon, then giggled. "But don't tempt me with a good time. I'd take a few days in my room over all of the funerals and hugging and... whatever. Being locked away with two bookshelves and a cozy chair sounds like a good time."

Sirius laughed and took a drink, then pulled out his pack of cigarettes and lit one. At some point in the last few days, he'd given up the pretense of smoking outside. Hermione didn't mind the smell, and it was the only two of them in this big townhouse, so she didn't see why it made a difference anyway.

"So, you're liking the room, then?" he asked her.

"The room is lovely. I feel so at home there," she gushed. "You were right, I suppose. It's the perfect little swot den. Books and jumpers and that damn chair, it's all very cozy. I've bounced around so much the last year and it's nice to have a space where I

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feel a bit more... grounded. Centered. I think just knowing where I'm going to sleep that night helps a lot. It's far better than moving a tent all over the place."

"I'm glad you're comfortable here, Kitten. I think I'm gonna have to keep you around," he said with a laugh, then added casually, "Soooo... have you found any good reading material?"

"If you're asking if I've read the journals, I was intending to start tonight. I'm grateful for the access to so much information and I think you're right. *Someone* should read them, and if what he went through can help others..."

"Good!" He interrupted her, sounding a bit too excited, then cleared his throat and began again.

"I think that's good. It'll be good for your research for you to get a jump start, as it were," he continued on. "There's a lot there, though. What's your strategy for tackling... what, nearly thirty years of werewolf musings? I know the illustrious Hermione Granger must already have a whole plan in place. Are you going just, start to finish, or...?"

"Twenty-Seven. One for each year. And then there was another in the nightstand, but I haven't touched it yet. I think... that was probably his current one, so it will be unfinished." Hermione cast her eyes down to the table, rubbed her arm as she spoke. It still felt a bit unnerving to think about people in the past tense, though she supposed she'd grow more used to it in time.

"Anyway, I think I'm just going to skip around a bit, see what major points stick out so that I can start to figure out how I want to present it all. Then when I get closer to being ready to get to work, I plan to take a few weeks and go back through from start to finish so I can take comprehensive notes."

Sirius sighed and brought a hand up to cover his mouth thoughtfully, then shook his head and looked away from her toward the fire. He did that a lot, she noticed. He would seem affected by something she said, or would look like he wanted to say something, but then he'd pull back.

Hermione hadn't quite been able to decipher where his mind wandered off to when he got that tortured sort of look on his face, but she imagined it had everything to do with all of the loss he'd faced, and the years of isolation. So, as worrisome as it was, she refused to let it drive her crazy.

They were both broken, but they had each other now.

In lieu of continuing on, she changed the subject, channeling her inner Sirius.

"I think you might be my new best friend, Mutt," she said, adapting a teasing tone as she mirrored his words from earlier.

He looked up at her, his eyes shining with unshed tears, but smiled through them, his face breaking out into a broad grin as he nodded.

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They moved to the little downstairs study, agreeing it would be wise to try the method on a different painting before they moved on to the grand finale. Hermione dumped the turpentine on the old picture of Almach Black, Sirius's great-great-great something, and waved her wand to smear it around, the image within the frame distorted and melted away. With shocked gasps, they locked eyes for a beat, and then both took off at a dead run, nearly colliding as they slid back into the front hall and lunged for the bags to gather more supplies in their arms before they went completely batty.

Hermione pointed her wand at the enchanted record player and grinned when the whirring, futuristic intro to 'Play the Game' by Queen filled the air. Sirius paused and looked over at her with a playful glint in his eyes, and then slowly pointed his wand to skip the needle to the third track.

She threw her head back laughing, and they exploded into a flurry of activity, attacking every painting they could find as they sang along to the song Sirius had set to play on repeat.

Another one bites the dust

Splash — goodbye, crockety old uncle Castor.

Another one bites the dust

Scrub — Belvina Black, such a shame to see you go

And another one gone, and another one gone, and another one bites the dust

As the iconic voice of Freddie Mercury filled the air, they splashed and laughed, occasionally casting ventilation charms to stave off the fumes. Finally, with sore abdominal muscles and tears of laughter streaming down both of their faces, they stood shoulder — to — shoulder in front of Walburga's portrait, grinning maniacally as they each held a bottle of paint thinner in one hand and an old tea towel in the other.

A stain on my house! Should have tossed myself down the stairs. Destroying my noble house's legacy. Conspiring with filth! Walburga screeched, throwing out insult after insult. The two remained still, silently taunting her with their refusal to react.

Sirius nodded at Hermione, who nodded once in return, and they moved in unison. They uncupped the bottles and reached up to pour the entire contents onto the picture from the top of the frame. Hermione took a step back to give Sirius space while he brought his towel up with a shaky hand and began scrubbing at the painting, ignoring Walburga's indignant screeches as he began to smear and swirl the paint all over the canvas, leaving behind a kaleidoscope of abstract swirls in his wake.

He stepped back, covering his mouth with his hand as he tilted his head and studied the painting for a moment, then looked over at Hermione.

"You just muggle'd every asshole ancestor I have out of their frames."

"I did." She turned to smile up at him. "We did."

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tale of how James spent a week and a half in the hospital ward during their third year after teenage curiosity got the best of him and he cast an Engorgio spell upon a certain area of his personhood.

On Friday, Dean Thomas' funeral was held at a little muggle church near Borehamwood. Unlike the packed, busy memorials they'd attended thus far, Dean's was nearly empty. Sirius, Hermione, Ron and Neville were the only people from Dean's life as a wizard that bothered to venture out into the muggle world to support his family in their grief.



On Friday, Hermione broke.

They returned home to Grimmauld place and stepped through the front door to the always-lovely screeching of Walburga Black's portrait, with her typical bitching and moaning, all *"Ffilth! A stain upon my house! My blood traitor son playing house with a disgusting little blab blab blab!"* and the like, and Hermione—who had been silent the entire way home—snapped.

Without a word, she spun on the portrait, casting every spell she could think of that would inconvenience the painting as she caught it on fire over and over, blindfolded the evil old witch with a well-placed *Obscuro* and then, when inspiration hit, she apparated on the spot.

Sirius was still waiting in the hallway when she returned with four large bags from a nearby shop, and he watched her with an amused grin on his face as she plopped down on the floor and began pulling items out, arranging them neatly in front of her.

"Whatcha doin', Kitten?" He crouched down and picked up one of the large bottles she'd procured.

"Are you attached to any of the portraits here?" Hermione questioned, ignoring his query.

"Fuck no."

"Good. This," She reached over and tapped the bottle in his hands, "is paint thinner. I doubt it will work, but I've always sort of wondered if the trick to getting rid of that old hag would end up being something so simple."

"You want to attempt to... thin my mother's mouthy arse out of her portrait frame?"

"Yes."

"Well damn, Kitten. Guess we better get started," he laughed out, reaching a hand out to help her up as he rose to his feet.

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"I think so too, Kitten. I couldn't have imagined semi-adopting a swotty eighteen-year-old brat with a tumbleweed where her hair should be and a penchant for leaving her shoes all over the place, but I'm glad you're here."

"We're the only ones left," she said softly. "How do you... it just seems so odd, doesn't it? I know you went through this twice, so it's even worse on you, but everything just feels so strange and I... I've been numb, but today we buried Dean. *DEAN*. I know you didn't know him well, but Dean was just... so good. So pure. He fought without question, gave his life to defend this world, and nobody even fucking *CAME* for him." She shook her head incredulously.

"It's all fucked. I'm not surprised, though. There's so much division between the two worlds and—if I'm honest—I think it had less to do with people not caring about Dean and more to do with there being so many other burials happening that nobody had the motivation to go out of their way and learn about muggle funerals, find or transfigure clothes and so on. I don't think they even told his family about the war. His Mum said she couldn't believe he was taken so suddenly, and it just sat weird with me," Sirius responded.

Hermione went quiet for a moment as she catalogued all of the funerals in her head, the ones they'd been to and the few left to attend throughout the weekend, and then realization hit her.

"Sirius?" she asked tentatively, cocking her head as she looked over at him. "What did you do? With Remus, I mean?"

"What?" he asked gruffly. He sat up straighter in his chair, accidentally knocking the table with his knee in the process which caused the glassware to rattle and a bit of whiskey to slosh over the rim of the glasses and onto the tabletop. He quickly vanished the mess, then cleared his throat and ran a hand through his hair. Finally, he spoke again, his voice a bit softer and far more steady. "What do you mean?"

She eyed him skeptically for a moment, but ultimately brushed his reaction off. He was always a bit jumpy about certain things. She hadn't been able to string the reactions together well enough to discern *why* he was so squirrely, but she supposed it was simple enough. She wasn't the only one who had lost a best friend to the war, and the latest war wasn't the only one that had taken people from him.

"I suppose it must have slipped my mind. All of the funerals have kind of blurred together, and for some reason it never seems to register that Remus is gone, too," Hermione admitted sheepishly. "But I just realized I haven't heard anything about his burial. Did it happen while I was in the hospital ward, or has it not, yet? I know everything has been a bit crazy, but he was your best friend, and I just want to make sure you get that closure, you know?"

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“Closure.” Sirius snorted as he reached forward and lit another cigarette. He brought it to his mouth and snapped his fingers to conjure a small bluebell flame to light it and then shook his hand to kill the flame. Hermione patiently watched as he leaned back in his chair, giving him the time he needed to answer her question.

Finally, after he’d finished the cigarette, he leaned forward to stamp it out in the amber glass ashtray Hermione had transfigured for him two nights ago, and then he looked back up at her and spoke again.

“I can’t bury Remus yet. Maybe ever.”

“What do you mean? Was there... I’m *so* sorry, this sort of thing is impossible to ask in a tactful manner. Did they not... find all of him?”

“Nope. Found him fine. Avada curse, so there wasn’t any damage to his body. But the fucks at St Mungo’s haven’t released his remains. Apparently, since he’s classed as part beast, like you were talking about the other night, they get to just... fucking decide to study him.”

“WHAT?” Hermione roared. “You mean they’re just... what, fucking dissecting him? Studying him like —like a fucking lab rat, like he wasn’t a fucking PERSON? How?” she trailed off, scratching mindlessly at the scar on her left arm. Her skin was crawling at the implication alone.

In a very un-Hermione-like move, she reached across the table and grabbed the little box of cigarettes sitting between them, pulling one out and placing it in her mouth as she leaned forward and looked at Sirius expectantly.

He chuckled, belying the gravity of the situation, and leaned forward, snapping his fingers to light it for her.

“I may be corrupting you, Kitten. I think that’s the third cigarette I’ve seen you light in the last day or so.”

She waved her hand dismissively as she took another drag, and then picked up her glass and downed the rest of the contents. “I’m technically still a teenager, Sirius. I’ve smoked and drank before. That’s not... it doesn’t even matter, anyway.”

She leaned her elbow on the table and placed her forehead into her hand as she rubbed her temples and took a few more drags, letting the acidic burn of the cigarette turn her throat raw as she relished the physical ache. *Anything* tangible would do at this point.

“I get the need to do medical research. It happens in the muggle world, too. But what they’re doing to him —The fact that they can just decide to hold his fucking body hostage so we can’t —I mean, so *you* can’t have the closure of burying him, it’s grotesque.”

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be reborn through fire and her magic would go wherever it was needed most which Hermione thought was rather lovely.

Aside from a very emotional moment where Neville confessed to Hermione that, during the final battle, he’d finally told Luna he loved her —to which Luna, naturally, responded that she was aware due to the way his aura tinged a deep blush color when he looked at her, kissed him softly on the cheek, declared that she thought he looked rather fit in his cardigan, and then flounced away —the memorial was very... Luna.

A number of magical creatures wandered into the clearing in the woods where the humans were gathered —all dear friends of Luna’s, Xenophilius declared —and the witches and wizards who had come to celebrate drank elven wine and danced to some sort of strange fiddle music.

Hermione thought that perhaps Luna had the right idea. Where the other funerals Hermione had attended had been about mourning death, this celebration of life was a stark but beautiful contrast.

On Wednesday, they buried Harry.

Hundreds of people crowded into the cemetery at Godric’s Hollow, openly weeping and hugging Hermione and Sirius both over and over as they stood awkwardly, making faces at each other over the backs of the people who were grieving as if they’d known Harry at all.

Harry would have hated every moment of it. The noise, the crowd, the attention. Being dead, maybe. She thought he might not have liked the idea of that, but she supposed that it might be nice to be reunited with his parents.

As the funeral finally drew to a close, Sirius and Hermione remained behind, lingering long after the crowd dispersed. Wrapped in a blanket Hermione had transfigured from her scarf, they sat at the graves of Harry and his parents and passed the flask back and forth as she told stories of Harry from school and Sirius told her all about James and Lily.

He swore she would have loved them.

She didn’t disagree.

The next day, the Daily Prophet published a picture of the two of them, along with an article that drabbled on for ages about their shared loss and subsequent grief, spinning the picture of the two huddled close together while Sirius’s shoulders shook with laughter and Hermione wiped tears of mirth from her eyes as a poignant moment in which they wept openly as they mourned the beloved Chosen One.

A she used her wand to clip the picture of them out of the paper and then tossed the rest of the news into the fire, she wondered what Rita Skeeter would think if she knew that she had *actually* memorialized the moment directly after Sirius regaled her with a

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The two surmised that they just *knew* it was big.

On Tuesday, they gathered at the Burrow to lay five Weasleys to rest. Hermione and Sirius stood directly behind Molly as she watched her three remaining sons — along with Charlie's girlfriend, Tonks, and Bill's wife, Fleur — each used their wands to levitate one of the five caskets into the waiting graves.

Hermione noticed with surprise that the graves looked as if they'd been dug by hand. Most in the Wizarding world would have just waved their wands, and the Weasleys themselves had always been more than happy to welcome the ease that magic allowed in all things. But these graves were more... *neat*. She studied the final four redheads in front of her and realized as her eyes traced the movement of Ron's wand that his fingernails were jagged and dirty, and she could see a few faint traces of dirt still smudged over the white and pink scars that danced up his arm.

Unsurprisingly, she saw the same signs of physical labour when her eyes moved to Bill's hands, and then Charlie's. She liked that, she decided. Whether or not it was appropriate to like something related to burying over half of a family at the same time, Hermione couldn't be sure. Still, she did like the idea of this.

The three brothers that stayed behind, taking the time to dig the graves by hand.

It made sense.

They wouldn't have wanted to take the easy way out. It would have been important to them to do this themselves. She could even picture Molly standing at the window in the kitchen, dabbing at her eyes with a tea towel as she watched her sons pour their love and grief into the act of manually preparing the final resting place of their beloved brothers, father and sister.

It was nice. Sad, probably. Hermione couldn't be sure, what with the whole 'I've basically become an emotionless zombie' of it all. But it *was* nice.

After the funeral, everyone lingered for food and conversation. Hermione patted Molly's back and said all of the things she knew she should say as the woman wept into her arms. She reminisced about the fallen Weasleys, smiled as she told a story about Ginny from a few summers back. She scrunched up her face as if she were trying not to cry when Bill gave a speech about his father and exchanged at least thirty-seven 'is it appropriate to leave yet?' looks with Sirius before they finally said their goodbyes and headed to Lovegood House for the moonlight memorial Neville had helped Luna's father plan.

Luna's memorial was a nice change of pace. Apparently, she and her father had talked many times about things such as death, so her wishes were known, and honoured. She had requested cremation, believing that much like a Phoenix, her energy would

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Hermione slumped back into her chair and scratched that damned scar again — a nervous habit she'd picked up since that night at Malfoy Manor, but one that, apparently, was especially prevalent when discussing things such as bodily autonomy.

She had been numb for days.

On May 2nd, she had been brought into the hospital ward freaking out. For four days she'd been catatonic. For the week since she'd been released, she'd just been... incapable of feeling the weight of everything. But as she sat there, smoking and staring off into space, she felt her chest begin to crack.

She was still cold.

There was some part of her that had died, and she knew that. She fucking *knew* it, no matter what anyone tried to say. It *wasn't* in her head. But perhaps the heaters, and her own theories had been right to an extent. Perhaps some portion of the numbness was the shock of her grief, because with a crashing force, she finally felt the weight of it all.

Hermione looked over at Sirius as her eyes — *finally* — filled with unshed tears.

"My best friend is dead," she said softly.

"I know," he replied, his voice cracking.

"You can't even bury yours."

"I fucking know," he agreed as his own tears began to fill his eyes.

"Everybody is gone, and everything is wrong and I'm not... I'm not crazy, Sirius. I'm not. So many people died but something... something *else* died, too. Something fucking *broke* and the healers and Madam Pomfrey and Ron and Neville and —fuck, *everybody* keeps treating me like I just had a mental breakdown but I *didn't*! I swear, I'm not crazy, I'm not crazy," she rambled, shaking her head vehemently as tears began to stream down her cheeks.

On Friday, Hermione broke.

She collapsed forward and buried her face in her hands as her shoulders began to shake, days and days of unfelt emotions bubbling to the surface. She felt like her heart was being physically broken, the pain only highlighting that cold, empty space she felt like a gaping wound, and she sobbed, and sobbed.

Sirius, displaying a deft agility that stood in stark contrast to his aged, Akabam-weathered frame, shoved his chair back and crawled on to the table. He came to rest on his knees in front of her as he reached down and grabbed her face with both hands, tilting her head back and pressing his forehead to hers as his own tears fell.

"I know. *I know*. I'm here, Kitten. I know," he said soothingly as his own body shook with grief.

"I want them back. Everybody. All the fucking Weasleys and Ginny and Remus, he was always so fucking *kind* and he was the last person you had left and Luna and Dean and...

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Harry is dead, he was my fucking *brother* and he's dead and *I* died, or broke or... I'm not crazy," she sobbed, her voice so thick with emotion that it felt as if she were choking on the words as they rose from her throat.

"I know. Look at me. Hermione, look at me," he commanded as he pulled his head back and looked down at her. Her eyes snapped to his and she cried harder when she saw the tears staining his cheeks.

"Shhh, shhhh, I got you, okay. I'm here," he told her in a low, soothing tone as he brushed the tears from her cheeks with his thumbs.

"I'm not crazy."

"You're not. I promise. *I KNOW*. You're not crazy," he told her in a broken voice, fraught with devastation as his eyes bore into hers. "I wish... *fuck*. I know you're not crazy, okay? I need you to hear me when I tell you that. If nothing else, if nobody else believes you, I know that you are not crazy. I *know* that something happened to you. I know that it is not in your head. I believe you, and *I know*."

"Okay," she whispered, nodding her head.

"Remus is gone. And so is Harry. I'm so sorry. But they weren't the last people I had left. I still have you, and you have me. I know we barely knew each other before all of this but you're my fucking lifeline now, Hermione. The only thing that's keeping my head above water. And I'm here, and I'm doing what I'm supposed to and I'm trying to—**FUCK**," he raised his voice, then sat back on his heels and ran a hand through his hair as he looked down at her.

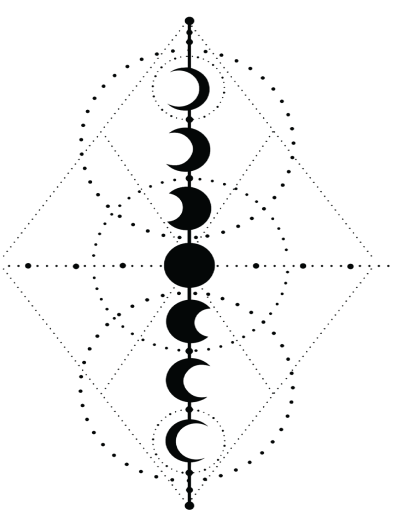
"We buried Harry and Ginny and... *everyone*. And Remus should get that, too. The fact that they can just keep your best friend's body from you because of what he was is fucked. I'm going to talk to Kingsley or—or storm St Mungo's myself or... *something*. But you're going to get to bury him. You deserve that," Hermione vowed solemnly.

"I believe you, Kitten. And I believe you when you say something real happened to you during the battle. I'm sorry I can't give you the answers you need but you are not alone, okay? We aren't alone."

Hermione nodded and rose from her chair, then leaned over the table to wrap her arms around him as the two steadied their breathing and calmed themselves.

Once they were feeling a little more centered, they settled back into their drinking and bitching.

The important things.



Another one Bites the Dust

14 May 1998

The funerals came and went in rapid succession.

On Monday morning a memorial was held at Hogwarts to honour the fallen professors, which included a moment of silence for the rest of the lives lost in the war. As the great Rubens Hagrid gave a long-winded, passionate speech about what it meant to defend Hogwarts, Hermione stared off into the distance as she watched an ordinary squirrel—a jarring sight, in a land full of magical creatures—collect nuts that had fallen from a nearby tree.

When Minerva McGonagall spoke of the lives that had been lost in both wars, of sacrifice and the power of love, of Harry and Harry and *Harry*, Sirius slipped a flask from an inner pocket of his robes and the two passed it back and forth, using the jacket Hermione had slung over her arm as cover.

While Kingsley Shacklebolt proselytized poetically about rebuilding the castle, the wizarding world, the ministry, and so forth, Sirius whispered in Hermione's ear about how he'd always thought Kings was rather fit, and would she just *look* at him in those purple dress robes. Hermione mused over what kind of man had the confidence to wear that much purple, let alone to a memorial service.

STEVIE_SUNSHINE

*There are plenty of wings
That you can hurt a man
And bring him to the ground*

STEVE_SUNSHINE

the familiar comfort, and quickly pulled the thick, cable-knit jumper over her head to let the cozy fabric chase away the chill of the old, drafty room.

Feeling far calmer, and infinitely more centered than she had before —thanks were, undoubtedly, due in large part to Sirius, to firewhisky, and to the comfort of the ‘stuff nerds like,’ as Sirius had so eloquently put it —she settled back into the chair, eager to indulge in a bit of escapism in the form of 19th century literature, a dead werewolf professor’s old jumper, and the coziest arm chair she’d ever sat in.



Come on now

I hear you're feeling down

Well, I can ease your pain

Get you on your feet again

KEEPER OF THE MOON

banish it to the abyss. Just do whatever you want with it all. But read those journals, yeah?” he asked pointedly as he stepped back out into the hallway.

“Sure, Sirius. I’ll get to them. Maybe in a few weeks when things are less... just, when things are *less*. Thank you, again, for giving me a place to stay. You’ve no idea how much I appreciate it.”

“We’re all that’s left, Kitten. Best to stick together, yeah? And hey, maybe when we’ve healed up a bit, you can help me navigate how to get myself back out there. I hear London has a wicked gay bar scene,” he said, flashing her a wink before he turned and headed down the hall toward his room.

Hermione closed the door softly behind him, a smile flickering across her lips as she shook her head. She knew things would get worse before they got better. The funerals would begin the next day, and eventually, this numbness would dissipate and she would have to feel everything, all at once. But for now, she was safe. And she had Sirius, who—even in times such as these—managed to make her feel like everything was going to be okay.

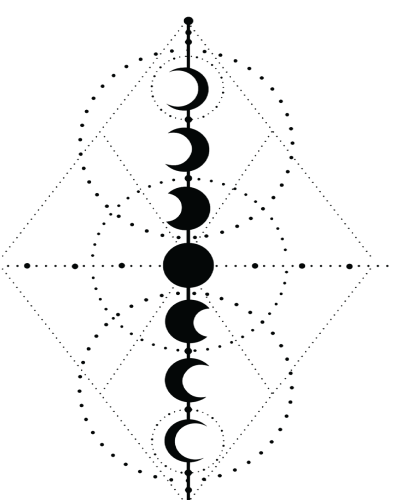
She moved toward her beaded bag where she’d discarded it atop the chest of drawers and retrieved the vials for her evening potion regimen. Grinacing, she swallowed the three different liquids in quick succession, before setting the empty bottles aside. Turning back around, she surveyed the room again and stepped back over to the bookshelf on the far wall. Her fingers danced along the spines of books until she selected the only Austen novel she had yet to read, *Persuasion*. She had kept her grandmother’s copy, but never could bring herself to open it and move that bookmark.

The book had become a sort of tangible object of her grief, but really, what better time to read the thing that might hurt than now, when she wouldn’t feel it anyway?

Setting the book on the writing desk, she returned to her bag and dug out a cozy pair of pyjamas, quickly peeling off the oversized sweatshirt and trousers Madam Pomfrey had scrounged up for her before stepping in to the warm, flannel set.

She moved back to the writing desk and picked the book back up, then climbed into the cozy armchair in the corner, tucking her feet underneath her in the seat. As she settled in, her arm brushed against something draped over the armrest of the chair. Her curiosity piqued, she paused and glanced down to discover an old, brown jumper—one she had seen Remus wear countless times. A soft smile tugged at her lips and she reached out to pull it toward her. She stared down at the jumper for a moment, running her hand over the soft, worn fabric, then brought it to her face and inhaled deeply as the scent of her beloved mentor washed over her.

She had always thought Remus smelled so good. Soothing, in a sense. Comfortable. Like old books, and chocolate, and the smell of the earth after a heavy rain. She relished



I'm So Afraid

May 14th 1998

Hermione bustled about her room, readying herself for bed as her mind flashed back to the conversation she and Sirius had earlier that evening. She still couldn't seem to shake the unease she felt over all of it. The idea of her beloved former professor being held in some dingy hospital basement, having his body studied and picked at by the very institution that had prevented his kind from seeking medical care while he was alive was just sickening.

He was being analyzed like some sort of fucked-up science project, and he couldn't even be laid to rest. Gods, it was so wrong. It was wrong that they could do this to anyone like him, but it was especially wrong because it was him. It was Remus and he was... he was Remus. It was the only way she could think to describe the way she felt.

He had been Remus and Remus had been important and they were disrespecting him and—

Hermione sighed and looked down to realize she'd been scratching at her arm again. She shoved the sleeve of her pyjama shirt up and stared down at the scar, wincing at the sight of the word etched into her skin. Mudblood.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

She may not know what it was like to be a werewolf. But what she did know, all too well, was what it felt like to have people think you were less than human, or treat you as if you didn't deserve to exist.

Remus had been human.

Remus had been real.

Remus had been a good man—one of the best she'd known, at that. He was kind and gentle, and an exceptional educator. He was also fiercely protective, had fought like a damn warrior for the Order, twice over, and had dealt with a level of loss and isolation that would have driven anyone mad, and still managed to remain good.

He didn't deserve what they were doing to him. She was going to fix it, though. She had to, to take care of him, even in death, he needed... She had to take care of him. And so, she decided she would storm the ministry first thing tomorrow and call in a favor to Kingsley.

Sirius had done so much for her, and while they hadn't been exceptionally close, Remus had been important to him. It was down to the two of them now, just Sirius and Hermione. He was her family, her friend, her life raft in the sea in which she'd been drowning since the battle, and she was going to give him the right to bury his friend, even if she had to go find Harry's invisibility cloak and steal the body herself.

She'd robbed a damn bank and stolen a fucking dragon two weeks ago today. She was hardly above a little muggle theft.

But tonight, she was going to heed Sirius' advice.

'Read the journals, Hermione.'

He was right. She had twenty years' worth of the inner thoughts and experiences of a werewolf at her fingertips, and she was going to soak up every bit of information she could. She was going to make Remus' life, and his sacrifice, count.

She'd take the summer and glean every bit of knowledge she could from the journals, and then she'd take that damn job at the ministry and make sure no other werewolf had to face the same disrespect and ostracization Remus had endured in his too-short life. For the memory of him, for her own peace of mind, for all the others turned against their will, for a million reasons. But for Sirius. He had lost everything, and she was going to make some portion of it fucking count.

She would turn the loss of Remus Lupin into a legacy Sirius could be proud of.

With her mind made up, Hermione walked over and grabbed a jumper off of the bed and pulled it over her head, then crouched down and grabbed the first in the long row of journals off of the shelf before she curled up in the reading chair in the corner. She took a deep breath as she opened the worn, brown leather notebook, and began to read.

STEVE_SUNSHINE

bag down on top of the chest of drawers near the door. Sirius grew quiet for a moment, then spoke with his gaze still fixed on the shelf in front of him.

"Read the journals, Hermione," he said softly.

"Oh, no, I couldn't possibly —"

"You should. Godric knows I'm not gonna sit and read twenty years' worth of Moony's Moody Musings, somebody should. *You* should." He turned and faced her, tucking his hands into his pockets and shrugging.

"He was a pretty big deal, you know? And he went through a lot. I know you haven't decided, but we both know Kingsley will give you your pick of positions at the ministry. Am I wrong in assuming you've still got your eye set on changing the world one species of magical creature at a time?"

"Well, no, you're not wrong. I definitely want to work in The Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures. I'd like to try to undo some of the harmful measures that wretched people like Dolores Umbridge passed. Such as the anti-werewolf legislation, of course, and then even aside from that, there's the dual classification issue. Werewolves are currently classed as both Being and Beast, depending upon which form they are in, which in turn creates even more roadblocks for them because they're essentially bound by two different sets of laws and where those laws intersect and contradict one another can be especially..." Hermione cut herself off and then gave him an apologetic smile.

"Sorry, I guess I'm not completely broken, as I'm *clearly* still capable of going off on a tangent nobody asked for. But yes, I am still very interested. I'm just not sure when I'll be ready to take that step."

"Makes sense. Let the dust settle, figure things out and go from there." Sirius nodded as he stepped toward the door.

"But in the meantime, you have access to twenty years' worth of journals from a werewolf. Read them. Maybe you'll find something in there that will help you make better sense of things. It, uh..." He trailed off and cast his eyes up to the ceiling as he ran his hand through his hair again—a frequent, nervous habit, it seemed.

"Well, if anything, I'm sure you'll find plenty in there that you can use as a reference point when you're ready to go toe-to-toe with the Wizengamot."

Hermione considered his words carefully, then slowly nodded. "You may be right. I'm not sure if... well it seems a bit strange, invading my former professor's privacy like that, even if he's gone now. But if I could use my findings to help other werewolves, then it would be worth it. I'll consider taking a look at them."

"Good, Kitten. You should. As for everything else in here... I can't do it. The idea of going through Moony's things... Consider everything yours, now. Keep it, burn it,

breath and was hit with a fresh, woody scent, with just a hint of the smell of chocolate, and couldn't help the small smile that played across her lips. As she continued to survey the room, she noticed — much to her delight — that despite the fact that the room was right across from the library, there were two overflowing bookshelves on the far wall, flanking a writing desk beneath a window.

She stepped up to one shelf and trailed her fingers along the spines of the books as she began to peruse the titles, then sighed in contentment.

"I can't imagine I'll encounter much muggle literature in the Black family library," she said with a laugh. "Professor Lupin — sorry, Remus, he was always correcting Harry and I over that when he stopped being our professor — anyway, he had lovely taste in books, so I suppose I can't complain about a room with a cozy chair and some good reading material. Thank you, Sirius."

"My pleasure, Kitten. Thought you might be more comfortable in here anyway," he told her, then quickly added in a teasing tone, "Books and old jumpers and all that stuff you swots like, figured it would be right up your alley."

"It is. I am," she said softly, smiling at him over her shoulder. She moved to the other bookshelf to scan the titles there. She stopped her perusal of the books that once belonged to her now-dead former professor/almost friend and cocked her head when she came across the contents of the lowest shelf.

She crouched down and ran her hand along the edges of the numerous identical, brown, leatherbound notebooks that were stacked vertically on the shelf, then turned her head back to look up Sirius, smiling gratefully as she pulled one of the books out.

"I can't wait to reread through some old comfort novels, and just... *he* , for a while. I know I've said it already, but I really do appreciate you taking me in like this."

She looked down at the book in her hands and ran her fingers over the leather surface reverently before she opened it up, then immediately slammed it shut and hastily shoved it back on the shelf. Sirius cocked his head and studied her face for a moment, as if he were taking note of her reaction, but he quickly plastered a smirk on his face.

"Did it bite?" he quipped.

"No, it just... it's a journal, I didn't realize. As an avid journal-keeper, I find the sacred privacy of journals to be of the utmost importance," she replied in a mock-serious tone. "Ah. Yeah. I think this whole shelf will be the journals, then," Sirius said knowingly as he stepped forward to get a closer look. "Moony kept one every year since he started Hogwarts."

"Well, I promise, I won't touch them. Even... even now, I think the dead deserve privacy too, you know?" Hermione vowed as she moved back across the room to set her



24th September 1971
Hedra, Journal.

I don't know you're supposed to write a journal? I'm not sure if it matters, because nobody will ever read this. Nor would they want to. Hedra, I don't even want to be writing this, I shouldn't have said Hedra, but if this is only for me, then perhaps I will use a lot of swear words. Thanks be fuck.

Hedra.
Shaw.

I won't tell if you don't, Journal.
Shedra.

Professor Dumbledore said I should start a journal to keep track of how I'm feeling every day, so I can pay attention to 'any patterns that may arise.' It's not a bad idea, I think there are things that happen around the same time every month.

Now that I'm older, it's easier to see some stuff, like how Albus says I'm mad before the moon and not after, but I'm sure there's more I have not learned yet.

I don't really have anything about being a werewolf. Yes, journals, I do, even 'year-old Remus John Lupin, son a boy, scary werewolf. She you of read? You should be.

I am.

I don't even know about werewolves stuff, except for that I feel like I need to eat most all the time, and sometimes my moods are strange because of the moon, like Albus says.

Oh, and there's the fact that sometimes all my bones crack and my skin is torn to shreds, and I become a dangerous monster. No big thing, really, it's just something I do for fun.

Thygnar on a week, I'm excited, I hate this.
Hedra. Hedra. Shaw.
—Remus John Lupin



1st September 1971
Journal -

Some boys on the train asked to sit with me. I was excited so I just bawled at them. The shorter one, James, shrugged and said it's okay that I'm quiet because the other ones, James, talks enough for everyone.

James brought us all Chocolate Frogs, I'm not supposed to have chocolate. Dad says boys are allowed to chocolate and since I'm a wolf and not a boy, and wolves are canines, it would make me sick. But Albus tells me I can eat it sometimes, and it doesn't make me sick. I like how in the winter when Dad is off work he makes me hot chocolate with a little peppermint stick and it makes me feel all warm and happy. I don't know why he says it will make me sick if it doesn't.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

I realized while I was writing it, the character, that even though I'm scared of school and I miss... Mom, my dad, even if I have to tell me I can't tell to the other kids or make me not eat chocolate or tell me I'm not a real boy.

So maybe I might like school. Maybe it will be an exciting good time. Is writing a word? Oh my? It should be.

The thought about Quidditch, I've never seen it played, but I've read loads of books, so I know a lot. Sirius and we're going to be good friends. James said to Lisa that it's only till when I know what I'm thinking about. He said I was different and that scared me because I was different, but I'm not supposed to tell anyone, so I didn't tell them because I don't want to scare them and then make them not want to be my friends.

We had a writing ceremony, and the final was uncomfortable, and the hall was so noisy and the smelled weird, and it told me it could be that I'm a werewolf and I would be well suited to Gryffindor.

I thought that I'm not very brave at all because I'm always scared, but the last night, 'what does being scared have to do with being brave?' and now I'm a Gryffindor, O/M/G guess what?

Sirius and James are in Gryffindor too, and I get to share a room with them and another boy named Peter who is very loud and has lots of words.

I think they might all be my friends. I think I have friends now.

Journal, what if I don't know? I'm going to write again.

Black.

Good.

Just I think I'll use some words when I write. Shouldn't I? I don't tell my Dad.

Slats, Linnets, Oh.

- Remus John Lupin.



Hermione closed the journal and wiped a tear from her eye. It was heartbreaking to read him talking about himself in such a self-deprecating way when he had been so godsdamned young. He was so innocent, and so scared, with nobody to help him — save for a father who told him he wasn't a real boy.

She was nearly certain Remus' father had passed years ago, which was fortuitous, because the urge she had to go find the arsehole and throttle him was impossibly strong, and she figured it was probably best that she not wind up stuck in Azkaban.

She sighed heavily as she sat the journal on the desk and rose from her chair to go back to the shelf. She knew she'd eventually need to comb through the journals page by page, but she wasn't sure she had it in her to absorb it all. So, for tonight, she just felt like exploring. She sat down on the floor and scanned the shelf for a moment before she grabbed another journal at random.



STEVIE_SUNSHINE

when they say this is all in my head. I think it would be foolish not to acknowledge that a major part of what I'm feeling has to be tied up in grief."

Sirius sighed and ran a hand through his hair as he rose to his feet, then held his hand out to her to help her stand. He looked down at her, his eyes scanning her face, and she noted with confusion that he looked... tortured, again.

"I'm so fucking sorry this happened, Kitten. I'm so sorry for everything," he told her softly, his voice low and reverent.

He pulled her in for a hug and rested his chin on the top of her head as he held her in his arms. Hermione wrapped her arms around him and leaned into the hug, and the two stood intertwined in the moonlight as they soaked up the lingering moment of comfort. By the time they stepped away from one another, Sirius had fixed his face and looked down at her with a smirk.

"See? We'll just keep doing this. We shall drink, and we shall bitch, and we shall get through this shit. Let's go find some food."



"I could just take the room I shared with Ginny before. I don't want to be an inconvenience," Hermione said as they ascended the stairs to the third floor of the townhouse.

"Nonsense," Sirius responded with a wave of his hand. "Not like Moony's gonna use it anymore."

"Shit." She winced and looked over at him apologetically. "I didn't even realize... I don't have to take Remus' room, Sirius. I don't want to make any of this harder for you."

"Shut up, Kitten," he commanded with an eye roll. "There isn't a room in this house that hasn't been slept in by someone who's dead now. He's not the first person I've lost. In any case, it's a good room. It's right across from the library. Holds the temperature well, unlike some of the others in this drafty old house, and it's nice and dark so you can get all the rest you need. Besides, we might as well be on the same floor since we're the only ones staying here."

Hermione nodded, then gave Sirius a grateful smile as he opened the door to the bedroom and held it aloft so she could step inside.

She let her eyes scan the space as she took in every detail. A simple double bed with an old burgundy and grey patchwork quilt, a plush armchair in the corner of the room, and various stacks of books and parchments scattered about the surfaces. It was clean, but had just enough clutter to give it that lived-in, cozy sort of feeling. She drew in a

KEEPER OF THE MOON

went to shit?" Hermione asked. He passed the bottle back to her and she turned her head to take in his side profile as she brought it to her lips.

"Uh. To an extent, but back then it was just sort of... don't ask, don't tell," he explained

with a shrug.

“Did your friends know, at least?”

"Yeah. I think Remus and James figured it out early on, but we just never talked about it, and I told myself I was being slick, so I was convinced nobody knew. Lily finally just addressed it head on a few months after we all graduated, so I got a bit of time there where those who mattered knew. And now the world's different, so I guess if I ever get back out there it'll be nice to get to be a bit more open about it."

"I can't imagine how challenging it was, in that time. But I'm glad you got a little time to be your authentic self with everybody before..." Hermione trailed off and took another quick sip before she handed the bottle back to him.

“Before,” Sirius echoed. He pressed the bottle to his lips and looked forward again, staring out into the night with a faraway look on his face.

Hermione let her head fall back against the house and looked up at the night sky, tracing constellations with her eyes as they fell into a contemplative silence, occasionally passing the bottle back and forth as Sirius chain-smoked. Finally, after about ten minutes or so, he spoke up again.

"You said you lost it. Earlier, when you were talking about what happened during the battle, I mean. What did it feel like?" he asked softly.

"It was... intense. Ron said we had to get down there and help, so I turned around because I was going to look out of the wall and get a feel for what was going on before we headed down — Ron has always been a 'leap before you look' kind of guy," she explained with a small laugh.

“Anyway, I think I may have taken a step or two, at the most, before I was hit with this feeling in my chest. It was *excruciating*, but it’s so hard to explain. I think that’s part of why the healers thought I was crazy, because it wasn’t... I guess I couldn’t discern whether it was physical or emotional pain. I was fine one minute, and then the next it felt like something was being ripped out of my chest. It was like this tearing sensation. A bone-deep sort of coldness, that somehow also felt as if I was burning up. Like I had been hit with Firendfyre and a freezing charm simultaneously.”

Sirius Muttered something to himself, too low for her to hear, then looked over at her. "Fuck, Hermione, that sounds... did that feeling go away, though?"

"Yes and no. I suppose the optimal way to describe it would be to say that it... settled. There's still this feeling in my chest, a sort of aching chill, that has not subsided. And I just feel so fucking *numb*, emotionally. Though the healers may not be entirely wrong

STEVIE_SUNSHINE

8th June 1978

22

James used to moved into the flat today. Still a bit down about James heading out at the last minute we even said I hope could move in too often, they're ready to retreat into their little love bubble. Quite stuff. They deserve it.

There's a mouse in the wall. I've expected in my sleep that the something and nothing around is about to drive me crazy & I shall endure, I must journal, because the room of that has a wall of built-in bookshelves & suppose it's more of a study, but it suits me well, as it's worth being driven crazy by a little critter.

Just now what we'll do with the other bedroom now, if you keep the space for when our friends get the school. I must write to rent it out. We forgot some things of mine. They're all so used to me by now, I couldn't count how many times I've had to remind them, 'My gosh, I don't usually neighborhood neighbors here, so I can't remind to that thing, thank.'

There were a few thousand in school. Jesus would come to me excited about a meal and I had to remind him I can't transform at will like they can, or when I find someone, get upset that I could have been when we were all drinking last week. Just a disgust. Oh, well, the way they all treat me like I'm normal. Clearly they're all insane, but I love them.

RT

30th June 1978

2

I'm worried about Jimmie. What he's doing, going to these parties at night. It's concerning. I wish he would choose a safer place, such as one of these clubs, but if he can't even tell us the truth then there's no hope that he'd be comfortable going somewhere like that.

As things we just need to tell him we know, but James said I have notified him through per se long and I don't think he understands the various layers of James & I's relationship from being a neighbor, being purchased, having that sort of a mother-in-law. It'll get better, I hope.

And in the meantime, I'll keep acting like a tallner and smoke on the ledge of the sitting room window so I can watch him leave the part and make sure he makes it home, I guess.

I wish we lived in a world where he could just be.

Suite. Court. 9^{re}.

- R_T 

Hermione stifled a yawn and stretched, then rose from the floor. Sirius had been right. She'd only read a few entries at this point, but her mind was already spinning with things that stood out, problems that needed solved.

Tomorrow.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

Tomorrow, she would talk to Kingsley, go to dinner at the Burrow like she had promised Molly, and then she'd sit down and start taking notes with these journals. She was going to make a difference.

For Remus.

For her former professor slash mentor slash almost friend. For the dead best friend of her dead best friend's godfather that was now her best friend. For the man who taught her how to cast a patronus charm and cheered for her when her little Otter appeared. For the little boy who deserved to know that he was still a little boy. For the man in the eighties who deserved access to food and basic necessities. For Remus, and for Harry, who had been like a nephew to him, and for Sirius, because it was her and him against the world.

Her best friend would be lauded for saving the wizarding world. Sirius' best friend would be dissected, called a beast, and forgotten about. It was sickening, in a bone deep, visceral sort of way, to think about him being used and exposed like that.

So, she was going to fix it, and make sure his body was put to rest, like he fucking deserved.



15th May 1998

"Hermione!" Kingsley grinned as he leaned back in his chair. "And Sirius, hello," he added, nodding to where Sirius stood behind her with his hands in his pockets, probably still internally grumbling over the fact that she had dragged him along to Kingsley's newly appointed office at the Ministry on her quest to save the day.

"To what do I owe the pleasure?" Kingsley asked.

"Remus Lupin's body is currently being held by research healers at St Mungo's. I would like you to send a patronus right now demanding that they cease all exploratory procedures and release him by noon tomorrow," Hermione stated firmly.

"Yes, I'd heard. I think it's a shame, truly," Kingsley said as he continued to eye her curiously.

"Good. I'm glad we're on the same page. A patronus should do, although if you'd prefer to visit the hospital in person, we are more than happy to accompany you so that we can take him home to lay him to rest today," she told him matter-of-factly as she clasped her hands in front of her.

"It's not that simple, Hermione. I'm sorry," Kingsley began with a resigned sigh. "Remus did not have any family, so technically speaking, there were no arrangements

STEVE'S SUNSHINE

Not only because it gave her a place to stay, or because it helped her avoid the aforementioned fawning, though those things were true. More to the point, she was just glad to be with him. She knew he was struggling with everything from losing everyone he loved for a second time, but despite what he'd been through, he had that easy sort of personality and quick wit that always managed to bring the gravity of a major situation back down to a more manageable level.

Sirius wouldn't tiptoe around her, nor would he make her feel as if she had to walk on eggshells around him. They could just be two broken, fucked up people, coexisting, without the expectations of what timeline their grief should be confined to or how much—or, in her case, how little—they were allowed to feel it. As he'd said, they could just... *be* here. Drink and bitch. She could be numb, in a comfortable setting, for as long as she needed.

So that's what they were going to do. Just as he was already trying so hard to be there for her, Hermione made a vow to herself that she would be there for him, too. With her mind made up, she stood and headed toward the back door, grabbing the bottle of whisky—fuck the glasses, she decided—along the way.



Hermione stepped out into the cool night air and took a deep, calming breath, then turned to where Sirius sat on the ground with his back against the exterior wall of the house. He looked up at her, his expression unreadable as he silently scooted over to make room for her.

She sat down, shoulder-to-shoulder, as she took a small swig from the firewhisky bottle and then passed it to him. Sirius nodded his thanks and took the bottle, gulping down the amber liquid for so long that she could practically feel her own throat burning. She wrinkled her nose at him, and he threw his head back, laughing at her half-disgusted, half-impressed expression.

"I'm a gay wizard who was a teenager in the 1970s, Kitten. I could down a whole bottle of this stuff and still walk a straight line," he told her as he lit another cigarette. "You had to be gay to drink Ogden's Finest back then?" Hermione teased.

"Nah, but you, uh...had to be able to blame the booze when you woke up with a bloke after a party, yeah?" He took another swig of whisky, followed by a long drag of his cigarette as he looked out across the back garden.

"Merlin, Sirius, I'm so sorry. That's *horrible*. And you were so young, you never—well, I don't mean to pry, of course, but did you ever even get to be... *out* before everything

KEEPER OF THE MOON

He tossed his cigarette aside and dropped to the ground behind Hermione, caging her between his legs as he wrapped an arm around her chest to pull her back against him.

"Breathe. It's going to be okay. I've got you, Kitten," he vowed, rocking her softly while she sobbed in his arms.

"I'm so sorry, I—gods, he was your best friend, I don't know why I'm reacting like this. I just think... I've been reading the journals and things were so hard for him, you know? And Harry's gone, and everybody else, and Remus is the last one to be buried and it's all just... so final. So heavy, and my chest hurts, and I—Gods, I swear I'm really not crazy."

"I know. I know. I'm so sorry. Is there anything I can do to help? Do..." Sirius trailed off for a moment, then asked, "You mentioned the journals again. Are there any more questions you want to ask me? Maybe talking about his life will help, like a real memorial, you know? I, um... I'd like it if you asked me more questions. I really think you should. It'd be good, to talk about him."

"Maybe, yeah. Let's just... let's just go, for now," Hermione rose to her feet, using the sleeve of her jumper to dry her eyes, then held her hand out to him. "Take me home, Mutt."

"As you wish, Kitten."



30th May 1998

"Get up," Sirius grumbled, digging his hand into Hermione's side and shaking her lightly as he sat up on the bed.

"Shut up," she groaned, flopping over onto her back and glaring up at him as she rubbed the sleep from her eyes. "What time is it?"

"Fuck if I know. Cast a tempus, witch. I think my wand is over on the bookshelf." Sirius waved a hand lazily, then added, "You're a blanket thief!"

"You snore," Hermione retorted as she sat up and reached for her wand. "It's past noon. We must have been up later than I thought."

"Yeah, but we're up to 1988 now," Sirius shrugged as he leaned forward and began to gather the various journals where they'd scattered about the bed after the two had—yet again—fallen asleep while reading.

They'd been at it for two weeks now. After they buried Remus, they'd come back to Grimmauld Place and had one of their usual kitchen talks, during which Hermione

STEVE_SUNSHINE

had decided that she really should just start at the beginning and read through all of the journals if she wanted a clearer understanding of how Remus, John Lupin went from an eleven year old boy excited over chocolate to a thirty-three year old professor who was so tortured and terrified—and, obviously, also still excited over chocolate.

Sirius had declared that he was coming along for the proverbial ride, and they'd taken to spending hours bent over a table in the library, spilled across the settee in the sitting room, lounging in the grass in the back garden, and tucked away in Hermione's bedroom, reading through the life and times of the wolly wizard while he answered any questions that arose and—quite often—told her stories about the youth he'd had with his beloved friend.

Sirius had begun sleeping in Hermione's bed somewhere around three or four days after the day in Godric's Hollow. She knew it was something nobody would understand, but—even aside from Sirius' sexuality, which he kept close to the chest—she knew she was safe with him, and things were purely platonic.

Even the smuggles.

He had, in a strange sort of way, become like a brother to her, just as Harry had been, and it was just as comforting to curl up in bed next to Sirius as it had been when she and Harry had huddled together for warmth in the tent.

While Hermione had sought comfort in Harry's arms to stave off the physical cold, being close to Sirius helped to push away the emotional chill, and she knew it was the same for him. He was her lifeline. Her anchor. Her very older, brash, sassy brother. She knew their friendship would raise alarms if anyone else knew a nineteen-year-old witch was sharing a bed with a thirty-eight-year-old wizard, she just couldn't bring herself to care. This time with him had healed her in ways she hadn't thought possible, and she would smuggle the man who had become the best friend she'd ever had if she so pleased, Godsdamnit.

"Breakfast? Er... lunch, rather?" Hermione asked with a yawn as she stepped over to the dresser and pulled a jumper over her head.

"No, I'm bored. Let's go do something... muggle. What would you do on a boring, rainy day in your little muggle life?" Sirius asked as he shook his hair out of his face and lit two cigarettes, passing one to her.

Hermione plopped down in her reading chair and tucked her legs underneath her, then picked up the ashtray from the little side table and sat it on her thigh while she began idly thumbing through the journal she'd left off on the night before.

"Stay home and read," she said with a laugh. "Sometimes I'd work on puzzles with my dad. If I did venture out of the house on a gross day it was usually to go to the cinema with my Mum."

KEEPER OF THE MOON

“Oooooohhh, I like that idea. I’ve never been to the cinema. Moony and Lily used to go watch films sometimes, but they always went to early showings while James was at work, and I was a bit of a night owl.”

“Because you were out cruising in the damn parks all night.” She shot him a glare.

“Hey! A young gay wizard from the 1970s had his needs, thank you very much. I wasn’t a dead gay wizard.”

“Fine. We’ll go to the cinema. I’m going to eat my body weight in popcorn and make you watch the sappiest chick flick they’re showing. And then I shall sob into your arms and snot all over your jacket.”

“If I can get one of those gigantic fizzy drinks, it’s a deal.”

“Hey, listen to this one,” she said, gesturing to the journal as she began to read aloud.



May 11th, 1993

Dearst Journal,

I had another dream last night. Different from the typical memories that flood me in my sleep, or the nightmares. It was one of the ones, good ones.

I was walking by a tree, back at Hogwarts of all places. I could feel the sun on my skin, smell the field late in the distance (as unpleasant as it always is, but tolerable all the same). I could also hear the sound of rain against wetted, rough, dark red stone.

I sort of felt like I was sitting on the sun, but I was somewhere else at the same time. Heavy, I think, through a storm.

Someone, on the dream, I had let my eyes drift closed for a moment, reading in the warmth I felt and then I opened them and it just disappeared. It felt so real.

It happened, and it was good.

I can't remember anything else, but it felt like something.

Of bits of love.

- RJ



He says it here, too. ‘It happened.’ Do you think this is related to whatever happened in 1993?” Hermione asked, peering over the journal at Sirius.

“Yes,” he said simply. “Bookmark that page, it’s a good reference point if anything else pops up about this... it.”

“Done.” Hermione slipped a bit of ribbon into the journal and set it back on the desk.

“Come on, Mutt. Let’s go cry at the cinema.



STEVIE_SUNSHINE

Remus John Lupin

10 March 1960 — 2 May 1998

We Were Heroes

“Heroes?” Hermione smiled as she read the inscription. “I like it.”

“Yeah.” Sirius crouched down and ran a hand over the stone. “Moony was a massive Bowie fan. ‘Heroes’ came out, uh... our 6th year, I think. And he listened to it a lot, during the war. It says —”

“We can be heroes,” she finished for him. “And you were. He was. Many times over. This is... this is good, Sirius. This feels right.”

Hermione paused and continued to stare at the stone for a beat, then reached a hand down to run her fingers through Sirius’ hair.

“Do you still have it?”

With a nod, he pulled out the little box Kingsley had given him and opened it. She used her wand to levitate the Order of Merlin, then cast a quick charm that embedded it in the front of the stone, directly above his name.

“That’s good, Kitten. It should be on display.” Sirius stood and wrapped an arm around her shoulders to pull her in for a hug. “Are you ready to go? I believe we have a hot date with Freddie Mercury and firewhisky.”

“We... you just... you want to leave?” Hermione asked, turning to look up at him as she fidgeted with the sleeve of her jumper. “We can’t just leave him here, Sirius it’s...” she trailed off, shaking her head rapidly as she felt tears begin to pool in her eyes.

“Hey, hey, you’re okay. We can stay a little longer.” Sirius reached down to rub her arm reassuringly. “You’re okay. We’ll stay.”

Hermione nodded and sat down next to the freshly covered grave. She grew quiet, mindlessly picking at the grass beneath her as she stared at the lettering etched into the grey stone for a few minutes, then sighed heavily.

“I don’t know what’s wrong with me. It just feels so wrong, to just... put him in the ground and walk away. Maybe it’s because he’s the last one to be buried. It’s... it’s all really over now. They’re all really gone,” her voice cracked as she cast her eyes over to Harry’s stone a few rows down.

“I don’t know how I’m supposed to keep going,” she admitted in a low whisper, burying her face in her hands as her shoulders began to shake.

“Fuck,” Sirius muttered. “I didn’t even think...”

information, he just said 'It happened, and it's bad.' And he really seemed to be affected by whatever it was."

"To be clear, are you asking me what happened on the day that Remus came to teach at Hogwarts?"

"No, I... I know you weren't there. I was just curious about whether or not it had anything to do with everything else that happened that year, with your escape and all." Sirius sighed and ran a hand through his hair, then slumped back in his chair as he lit a cigarette. He screwed his eyes shut as he drew in a long drag, a brief look of something Hermione couldn't quite place marring his features. Not anger, not sadness, just... something.

"I don't suppose it would have had anything to do with me, no. You should keep reading, Kitten."

"Yeah, I will. Absolutely. I'm invested now," she replied, then leaned over the table and took the cigarette out of his hand, taking a drag before she handed it back.

"See? I'm corrupting you."

"Nope. This is... D&B, part deux. Firewhisky and angst, cigarettes and discussions of a dead man's journals. It's all healing, yeah?"

"Yeah, Kitten. We're gonna heal. I promise." He nodded and handed the cigarette back to her as he lit himself another. "We've got an hour."

"Are you ready?"

"Is it possible to be ready?"



Godric's Hollow had been the right choice. Hermione had seen, even just from the small handful of journal entries that he'd written after their deaths, that James and Lily had meant a great deal to Remus. As had Harry. Given that he obviously knew Remus far better than she ever had, she supposed it was no surprise when Sirius insisted this was the only place he'd want to be laid to rest.

Laid to rest.

It couldn't exactly be called a funeral, or a memorial. They hadn't bothered to alert anyone else to the fact that it was happening. Hermione and Sirius stood alone next to the grave, holding hands and watching in silence as the two St Mungo's workers that delivered the body dug a hole with their wands, lowered the casket, refilled the hole, and left without a word.

Afterward, Sirius used his wand to transfigure the rock he'd brought into a modest headstone that read:

"Okay, but the scene at the funeral, when she comes out with the suitcase..." Hermione said, choking back a sob.

"I KNOW! The funeral at all, really. Why Ramona? I loved her. And little Berniece." Sirius sniffled. "She just wanted to be loved. But then the scene near the end, with the truck and the flowers!"

"Stop pushin', Mama," Hermione wailed.

"Why are you two crying?" A voice called from the doorway. Hermione looked up, then squealed in delight.

"Ronald!" She waved at him and bounced excitedly in her chair. "Ron, you don't get it. Sometimes you've gotta give hope a chance to float up."

Sirius snorted into his glass, then muttered, "Cream of corn ..." before descending into a fit of laughter, with Hermione quickly following suit.

Ron shook his head at the giggling pair and took the seat next to Sirius. He summoned an empty glass off of the little counter by the sink and then, picking up the bottle of Ogden's, tilted it to peer at the level of liquid left inside.

"You two are pissed, aren't you?" He asked as he poured himself a glass.

"Not yet sadly," Sirius responded as he lit a cigarette. "That bottle is left over from the other night. We're only on our second glass."

"Too true," Hermione nodded, taking the cigarette from Sirius as he passed it to her and lit his own. She reached over and grabbed his glass to refill it, then looked up at Ron.

"We're just emotional because we went to the cinema and watched the most brilliant, sappy, ridiculous movie. What brings you to our humble abode, Ron?" she asked him, smiling brightly.

"Well, a certain walking head of hair told me that I should come round sometime. I believe there was talk of booze and venting?"

"Drinking and Bitching?" Hermione yelled out to correct him.

"D and B, D and B, D and B, D and B," Sirius chanted, thumping his fists against the table.

"Ah. D and B it is, then," Ron laughed out as he shook his head at their antics.

"Mainly just wanted to come 'round and check on you two, but I needed to get out of the Burrow before I went completely mental."

"How is your Mum?" Hermione asked, her expression growing serious.

"Better. But she's... well, she's Mum. Cooking and cleaning and bustling about, fawning over everyone nonstop. And then the nights come, and she breaks out the photo albums and gets all weepy. I get it. Love her to death. But sometimes it's so hard to just..."

"To sit in it," Sirius finished for him as he reached over and squeezed his shoulder reassuringly. "Everybody processes this shit differently. Some people need to sit in it and reminisce. Some need a distraction. Welcome to the distraction, Ron. Hey, tell me—what do you think of the band *Queen*?"



"You're telling me Harry's Dad went streaking through the Great Hall? And they didn't expel him?" Ron laughed, shaking his head as he tried—and failed—to take another drink, more whisky spilling down the side of his face and on to Hermione's trousers than what he managed to land in his mouth.

"Hey! Watch your mess, Weasley! I'm wearing those trousers."

After a number of drinks and a good, long-winded bitch session from Ron, the trio had made their way into the sitting room, where Hermione and Sirius danced and sang along to the majority of 'Runners' by Fleetwood Mac as Ron cheered them on from the floor while he looked at old pictures Sirius had brought out, before they finally collapsed in a heap on the sofa.

Sirius sat at one end, with Hermione's head in his lap as she lay on her side with her legs curled up in a semi-fetal position. Ron had eventually clambered up off of the floor and draped his long frame over the arm of the couch with his legs hanging off the edge as his head rested on Hermione's thigh.

"I swear. Granted, I was naked too. I was just a far better runner than James," Sirius said as he stroked Hermione's hair. "We had a month's worth of detention, but of Minnie had a bit of a soft spot for the lot of us Lions."

Ron went quiet for a moment, craning his head to look up at Sirius and Hermione, and then smiled broadly.

"She's gonna hex me for saying this, Sirius, but thank you. I'm really glad you've been here for her. And Mione, for what it's worth, I'm sorry for pushing so hard for you to come stay at the Burrow. That was half Mum's influence, but I also just... felt the need to close ranks, you know? But you were as right as you always are. I can see this has been good for you two."

"Albeit a bit creepy, if I didn't know I was closer to your type than she is, Black," he added with a teasing lilt to his voice.

"I always did have a soft spot for redheads, but you're about a decade below my cut off," Sirius joked. "And don't mention it. Taking care of the Kitten here ain't all bad. I've needed her, too."

herself at the stove as she made fried eggs, sausage and toast, and then brought the plates to the table and took her seat across from Sirius.

"Thanks, Kitten." He smiled over at her, then reached out and summoned a cup of coffee for her.

"I've never been big on coffee until I came to stay here. I've always been a fan of peppermint tea, personally. But this isn't bad," Hermione mused as they began to dig into their food.

"I was raised on tea, like any good English boy. The coffee—and the cigarettes, believe it or not—were all Moony's influence. Full moon things. He'd always be tired for a few days after, so the coffee kept him alert, and the cigarettes helped with the twitching and the nerve pain. I think I started sneaking smokes with him during fifth year, and then the coffee habit came when we shared a flat after school."

"I read about that. What did you guys ever wind up doing with that spare room?"

"Ah, you've been reading them, then? That's—that's good, Hermione, I'm really glad." He looked down at his plate briefly, then cleared his throat and went on, "We didn't wind up doing anything with it. I wanted to rent it out but, you know... werewolf roommate. Just wound up being somewhere James and Lis crashed every so often when they'd be in the city drinking with us."

"That makes sense," Hermione nodded. "Actually... could I ask you a question, about something I found in one of the journals?"

"Please," Sirius said. He sat straighter in his chair, his grey eyes boring into hers with a rare seriousness as he looked at her from across the table. "Please. Anything you need to know, anything you see or have questions about... you can always ask me, okay? I insist."

"Okay, if you insist," Hermione laughed and set down her mug. "I've only been at it for a couple of nights, but I've been sort of skipping around and I saw an entry that concerned me."

"I see. Was it... back in the seventies, then? About the flat?"

"No, it was... the start of my third year."

Sirius dropped his fork, the jarring sound of the metal clanking against the ceramic plate causing Hermione to jolt.

"Shit, sorry. Haven't had a smoke yet today so... a bit shaky. Go on," Sirius stammered out as he picked his fork back up and continued eating, his eyes fixed firmly on the plate in front of him.

"Well, it's just that this journal entry, in particular, was different from the rest. He was always a little snarky in the others, and while there were many days where he was vulnerable, this was... bad. Actually, that's how he worded it. He didn't give much



15th May 1998

Hermione chewed her lip as she closed the journal. It was harder to read about her former professor's life than she thought it would be. She'd been bouncing around, reading different entries until she'd seen his entry from the first of September, and now she was trying to work her way through the journals from 1993 and 1994 to try and solve the puzzle that had begun to form in her head.

She couldn't figure out what had happened, but she felt it safe to assume it had to have had something to do with his lycanthropy, given how much he resented that side of himself. It was sad, Remus had been such a wonderful professor that year. He was so focused on his students, so kind and patient, so to know that he was struggling with something that was clearly a heavy weight on his shoulders, while still managing to be one of the best educators she had ever had, was equal parts devastating and inspiring. Despite his clear reservations about the position, he was born to teach.

She was sure of it.

She sighed and rubbed her eyes, then reached over to place the journal on the nightstand before she stood and set about getting ready for the day. She pulled on her trousers and twisted her hair up into a bun, shoving her wand in place, and then pulled a few tops out of her beaded bag, glaring down at the minimal selection. She really needed to go shopping, as she still only had the few things she'd carried through the time she spent on the run with Harry and Ron, but she didn't have the motivation for much of anything, let alone dragging herself to the shops and dealing with the crowds, the noise—no, thank you.

She shoved the shirts back into her bag and crossed the room to the dresser to pull open a drawer, mindlessly scratching at the scar on her forearm as she surveyed the contents—maybe there was especially something to be said about wearing a dead man's clothing when you'd be wearing it to his own funeral, but it was a chilly day and Sirius had told her that she could do whatever she wanted with the things left in the bedroom, so she couldn't bring herself to feel guilty as she shrugged on a—very old, by the looks of it, but ultra soft—cardigan.

Grabbing her bag, she headed out of the room and down the stairs, making her way to the kitchen to see Sirius already awake, nursing a cup of coffee as he stared off into space.

"I'll make breakfast," she told him by way of greeting as she crossed to the cooling cupboard and pulled out a carton of eggs. She buzzed around the kitchen, busying

"Not like you had any choice, Mr. 'I fucking took the Unbreakable Vow.'" Hermione snorted. She sat up and dumped Ron off of her lap as she rose from the couch and crossed to the mantle to grab a cigarette, then tossed the pack to Sirius.

"I still can't believe you're smoking now, troublemaker," Ron teased, then paused as the weight of her words seemed to hit him. He bolted upright on the couch, looking from Hermione to Sirius in rapid succession. "The Unbreakable Vow? Merlin's tits, somebody explain."

"Harry made him take the Vow to look after me after the war. I guess... well, I think he knew you had more people than I do and—shit that was insensitive, I just mean..."

"No, it's okay," Ron said with a wave of his hand, then turned to look at Sirius.

"Harry made you take the Unbreakable Vow? As in Harry 'Free Will' Potter? As in The Chosen One, Harry Potter, who would have eaten his own foot before he took the power of choice away from someone? That Harry Potter?"

"I took the Vow, yeah." Sirius stared down at the glass in his hand, gripping it so tightly that it looked as if he were about to crack the glass. Hermione furrowed her brow and ran her eyes over him, taking note of his stiff posture as she mulled over the vague response. She moved back across the room and sat down on the coffee table in front of him, cocking her head.

"Sirius, did you make the Unbreakable Vow with Harry?"

Sirius looked up to meet her eyes and stared at her for a moment, his jaw ticking as he clenched his teeth. "No, it wasn't Harry."

"Who was it?" she asked as she brought a shaky hand up to her mouth to take another drag of the cigarette. "Who on earth would have you vow to protect me?"

"I..." he began to speak, then went silent, looking rather pained as he opened and closed his mouth a few times before he shook his head.

"Sirius Black! Tell me who it was! If it wasn't Harry or Ron, then who else could it have possibly been?"

"It wasn't Harry or Ron."

"We've established that! Why are you being so... squirrely?"

"Uh, 'Mione?" Ron spoke up tentatively, causing Hermione's fiery gaze to snap to him.

"What, Ronald?"

"Maybe he... maybe he can't tell you who it was? Is that it, Sirius?"

Sirius looked at Ron and squinted, tilting his head to the side, then looked back at Hermione with a pleading look in his eyes as he began to nod aggressively. "Ask me, Kitten."

KEEPER OF THE MOON

“Sirius,” Hermione toyed with the cuff of her jumper as she leaned forward on the table. “Can you tell me who had you take the Unbreakable Vow?”

“I don’t think I can tell you until you ask me by their name.”

“Okay... Is there anything you can tell me about the Vow?”

“I can’t, um... I can’t tell you any specifics... yet.”

“Is there something I should know, Sirius? Is there... some sort of secret involved in the vow?”

“Yes,” He croaked out, pinching his eyebrows together as he gave her a look of pure torture.

“Okay, Okay.” She squeezed his leg, then kept her hand there, stroking his knee with her thumb. “That’s okay. We’ll figure this out. So, you can’t tell me any specifics yet. But if I ask you questions, you can answer?”

“If you... if you figure out the secret and tell me, or you, um, ask direct, clear questions, I think I can answer them.”

“Is the person you took the vow with dead? And if so, how is the magic of the vow still active?”

“Yes. The person I took the vow with is dead. But the binder is still alive, and because the person who acts as binder is the one who seals the bond, the bond survives even if one of the vowers dies.”

Hermione thought for a moment, carefully considering her words before she spoke again.

“Who acted as binder when you took the Unbreakable Vow to protect me?”

“Bill Weasley,”

“What?” Ron sputtered. “So, there’s some sort of... Hermione-centric secret that led you to take the Unbreakable Vow with my brother and somebody who’s dead?”

Sirius looked at him, blinking rapidly, then looked back at Hermione. “You have to ask the questions.”

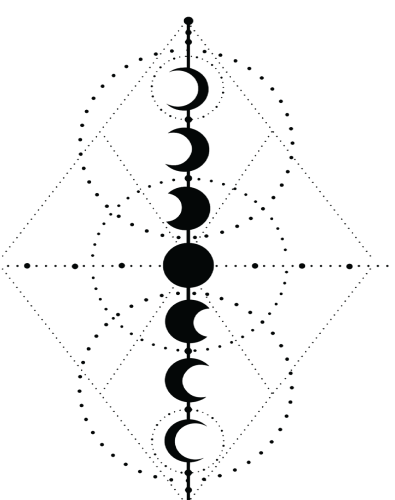
“I think we’ve covered that, actually. Is this... this secret, does it have something to do with what happened to me at the final battle?”

“I think so. I didn’t know it was going to happen, but I think... it makes the most sense that it happened because of the secret, yes.”

“Shit.” Hermione reached out and grabbed the whisky off of the table next to her. She brought it to her mouth and tilted her head back, taking a long, Sirius-style pull out of the bottle, then gagged, coughing and sputtering as she sat the bottle back down.

“Okay. That’s... no more... heavy. I’ll think about this when I’m sober tomorrow and then we’ll talk more. Somebody change the subject,” she said as she crossed the room

Chapter



Heroes

11th November 1993

7-

to me alone.

Unapologetically.

She's brilliant & I love myself. I don't want to tell about it.

But I swear it's not the only thing I want to be for her to be safe. I just need her to be safe.

There's a miracle. A perfect replica of Sirius with Lily's eyes. The second I saw him, I knew. The look at me with such kindness, such

reverses, that some part of me just wants to open my mouth and start giving all of my problems just as I did when those eyes were Lily's. Another

part of me wants to beg for a distraction, to release and laugh and laugh with him, just as I did when that face belonged to Sirius. He's so forward,

He's smart, but in that way, any sort of way that Sirius had. And he's so kind, I see it with his friends, the way he'd give the shirt off of

his back, just like Lily, but it seems to be even more intense. He's more than that though. He's not just the ghost of the past. He's this incredible,

terrifying kid and it's like nobody cares about the latter so long as he keeps being the former.

The things I've heard about the stone and the chamber, it's all fucking with my head. Questions, and he's already so self-sacrificing, ready to run

headfirst into anything to save the people he loves. Just, I wonder, why'd he so proud of him, I'm so proud of him.

Nothing new from Sirius since the portrait in Halliway. I should tell Remus about Sirius but I just don't want to. I'm always been so

coward. The only reason I'm still breathing is because I'm the middle of a coward to do the world a favor.

He won't matter. Pastors surely, anyway. I'll get through the year. Clear the lake up, then I can leave.

Don't be strong if humanity is long that my own would fall off.

RS

KEEPER OF THE MOON

Just totally a waste of a year. Harry's there, and that's better of a day except his cage. If on the last of the year, that last was supposed to have, and I see it's the same and I lay to be there and do my part to keep him safe, even if he doesn't have a clue who I am. It's going to be fine. I haven't seen you there as a student, and I'll have the influence now. He nice to know where my next word is coming from each day as it were.

Heck,

RJ.



1st September 1993

It happened. Ofc I's bad. It's so fucking bad. It's I stand on the astronomy tower for hours thoughts, contemplating just being a few steps off the edge's back.

I feel disgusting. I'm a goddamned monster. It's not even that it feels like... that. It hasn't felt all. There isn't a single feeling that

is coming. 'Hah? I never it

Just it. It's I to that's one day, and I don't know when and what if it's the same?

I'm a fucking 1989333100 now.

That is disgusting. I don't want this.

I don't want to do any of this anymore.

I should have taken those fucking steps.

Just I not Harry, and he is 'Hah. I see it's the same and I lay to still around until I know he's safe and I know a bad school has where he belongs.

Just help me, I don't want to do this.

Please let me live in my fucking days

RJ



*I been alone, all the years
So many ways to count the tears
I never change, I never will
I'm so afraid the way I feel*

STEVIE_SUNSHINE

and set the needle to restart the album they'd been listening to, bobbing her head as the upbeat sound of 'Secondhand News' filled the room once more.

"Well... how's your research coming?" Ron asked. "You mentioned reading Lupin's journals so you can learn more about werewolves? I always thought he was wicked cool."

"It's going well. I've learned a lot, but if I'm honest, I've been mostly focused on trying to solve a mystery," she said with a laugh.

"Ohh, I love a good mystery. Hey, I told you I accepted Kingsley's offer to join the Auror academy, yeah? And you know I'm the world's greatest Wizard's Chess strategist. Lay it on me." Ron sat up straighter and waved his hands at himself. Hermione laughed and cocked her head as she surveyed Ron for a moment, then looked at Sirius.

"He's not wrong, actually. He's always been really good at connecting dots... do you mind?"

"Not at all, Kitten. I insist." Sirius nodded so fast Hermione nearly called him a bogglehead, but she didn't have to capacity at the present to explain more muggle things to him, so she held her tongue. She put a finger up, urging them to hold on, then bounded up the stairs, returning a mere minute later with an arm full of journals.

"There's so much to show you, so bear with me. First, I found this entry here, from 1993," she told Ron as she sat down on the couch between him and Sirius and began spreading the journals out on the coffee table.

Opening the first journal, she read over the passage again and then handed it off to Ron.

"See? Something happened the day he came to Hogwarts to teach that seemed to be really bad. And there are other instances where he seems to be struggling with it throughout the year," she told Ron as they flipped through the notebook to the various pages she'd marked.

"Huh." Ron said as he sat the journal down, taking another drink of his Whisky. "Did you know about this, Sirius?" He leaned forward on the couch to look over at Sirius, who shrugged, then nodded, then shrugged again.

"Know about what?" Hermione asked.

"Well, it's obvious, isn't it? It happened, and it's bad, and it's not like that, but it will be like that. The big IT for werewolves, right?"

"Wait," Hermione asked, her voice cracking. "Are you saying you think he..."

"Yep. It's clear. Mione. I know I was never the swot out of the two of us but... the huge reaction, the wanting to protect this elusive 'her' Lupin met his mate on the day he came to teach at Hogwarts. And it was bad, so..."

KEEPER OF THE MOON

"Oh, my gods, Ron. It was a student!" Hermione said, a bit too loudly, then looked at Sirius.

"Sirius, did you know about this? Was Remus' mate a student when he..." She trailed off, her eyes going wide, then held up a hand to stop him from responding.

"Don't. Don't answer that. Don't say a word."

Turning to Ron, she gave him a hug, then pulled back and rose from the couch.

"Ronald. I love you. Leave. Now," she commanded, pointing a finger toward the fireplace before she gathered the journals in her arms and ran up the stairs to her room.



Hermione was kneeling on the floor next to her bed, clutching the journal that had '1998' etched in the lower right-hand corner, which she'd fished out of the nightstand, when Sirius came up to check on her a few minutes later.

"This is the last one." She said softly, not looking up at him as she spoke. "Unfinished. There are only a few entries. I suppose that'd be because he was so busy with the war."

"Are you okay, Kitten?"

"I don't know," she admitted quietly. "I don't think I want to ask you the question yet."

"That's okay. On your time, okay? Whenever you're ready," he told her as he sat down on the edge of the bed above where she was kneeling and reached a hand out to smooth the hair back from her face. Hermione looked up at him, her face filled with a sort of mix of anguish, confusion and understanding.

"I... I can't ask you, yet. But it makes sense. It happened that day, on the train. I thought... I always thought I had a schoolgirl crush. But I think I always felt it, too."

She shook her head, and turned her attention back to the journal.

"I'd saved this one. It felt more... final, knowing it was the last. Knowing it was unfinished. There was this book, when my grandma died. It's silly but... she had been reading a novel she was so excited about. When my family went to clean out her house and I found the book on her nightstand, I realized she never got to finish it, and it devastated me."

"That's not silly, Kitten. That's... a life, unfinished. It's tough to face. You don't have to push yourself if you're not ready."

"No, I need to," she said quietly as she brought her hand down to rub at the scar on her forearm. "We all lost so much in the war. You lost so much in both wars. But in this one, I lost... I lost my autonomy. My body was scarred. Greyback nearly..." she trailed off and shook her head as her throat grew too thick with emotion to speak, then took a deep breath and tried again.

STEVIE_SUNSHINE

Hermione returned home from the Burrow, finally, to see Sirius snoozing away on a couch in the sitting room. She nudged him to try to wake up, which he promptly responded to by flipping her the bird, and then rolled over with a loud huff. Noted, she thought, giggling to herself as she headed up to her room. She needed a shower but she was exhausted, so she opted to read a bit and just worry about hygiene in the morning. Unlike a shower, which she could take at any time of day and be fine, Hermione had to read before bed, or she'd toss and turn all night.

She considered picking a chapter book, but ultimately, she was ready to delve back into those journals, so she tossed her bag on the bed, made quick work of changing into her pyjama pants and a jumper —another of Remus' which had become the norm as of late. She wondered if she should feel some type of way about it. Perhaps there was something strange or wrong about wearing a dead man's clothes —someone somewhere was superstitious about it, she was sure—but he was dead, and they were cozy so she chose to believe he would understand.

After a quick dip to the bathroom to brush her teeth, she sat down on the floor in front of the bookshelf and pulled out different notebooks from various spots within the stack and began reading different passages at random. Finally, she pulled out one of the more recent ones—easy to tell, as they had been organized in chronological order, which she had to admit she had a grand amount of respect for.

Books deserved to be organized.

Hermione opened the journal to a point about midway through and noted the date, letting out a small laugh as she grinned at herself. Oh, this was going to be a good one.



20th August 1993

3-

Remus here came round today. Offered me the 30th of position at Hogsmeade. I know. He is a fucking professor. But he got me. He said that change is the person's professor now and would have the influence person for me each month. I said I wouldn't trust someone not to prove me, but Sirius said me with me of those all-knowing birds and asked how I was getting my influence now.

Well, you said I had him, I haven't been doing at all. So very kind of the university to suppress a person that could help people like me, and then at the price of the importance to help that most of us can't even afford it. I had it the one time, when I saw that money was a game of cards on '97, and fuck if I wouldn't do anything including try to be a teacher to have it again, so fuck your bags. 3-

We're going back to fucking Hogsmeade.

Oh, yeah. Almost forgot. He also threw out the 'Harry's there' card. I don't know how low to feel about that. He was supposed to be mine. Not like I couldn't guess a kid a life anyway, but I was to be the teacher in the 'winding' event that the rest didn't make it with. But Sirius said how to the fucking Burrows. How? When Burrows can now a child when he needs a so that he can't even land him at the floor to check on a teacher a beyond me.

“Okay? That doesn’t mean you have to feel obligated to babysit some old guy,” he responded with a shrug.

“Don’t. I can already see that if we continue this conversation, it will head in a direction I am unwilling to tolerate, so I am going to stop you right there. Sirius is not ‘some old guy.’ Sirius is someone who has lost everyone and everything he loved, twice over, and still stepped up to take me in because he made a promise to Harry to look out for us. You have your family, and I love them, I do, Ron. But what I need isn’t... this. Not right now.”

“Fine. I get it, I just... I don’t want you to just waste away drinking and roaming around that dark house. Cousin-kissing feelings aside, I love you, Hermione. You’ve been one of my two best friends for half my life. You’re bloody brilliant, and you should be out there kicking arse and getting the world back in order, too.”

“And I intend to. I actually... well I suppose there’s no harm in telling you. I accepted a position at the ministry from Kingsley to focus on the welfare of magical creatures. I start in August. In the meantime, it appears that Remus kept extensive journals about his life for nearly thirty years. I’m reviewing the journals to help learn more about his experiences as a werewolf, so that’s a big part of why it’s important for me to remain at Grimmauld.”

“To read journals? I know you’d read anything they put in front of you but that sounds boring, if not a bit invasive.”

“It does feel invasive. But Sirius asked me to read them. I want to make a difference for people like Remus, and for all magical creatures. So, between the journals and the Black family library, I’m taking the summer to research. I intend to step into the ministry on my first day, ready to commence with the arse-kicking.”

“I guess that makes me feel better. I suppose I should have known that healing for Hermione Granger means holing up in a library with dusty old books for three months.”

“I would pretend to be offended, but you’re not wrong,” she replied with a small laugh. “I love you, Ron. And your family matters so much to me, too. I’m not cutting people off, here. I’ll come round for dinners, and you can come to Grimmauld any time. I know it’s hard for you because you associate being in that house with Harry but, when you’re ready, you can come drink and bitch with me and Sirius sometime.”

“Drink and bitch?” Ron laughed, “Those are my favourite things. Count me in. I love you too, Mione.”

“Perfect. Soon as you’re ready, just hop through the Floo and we’ll give you an evening of proper D&B.”



“We all lost so much. But Remus, he... he lost everything, repeatedly, for his entire life. I started reading these journals with the thought that I would be able to save all the werewolves,” Hermione said with a snort. “But I wasn’t expecting... everything he’d been through. All those years alone, barely able to make ends meet, all because his arse of a father insulted a psychopathic werewolf and Greyback decided to turn Remus when he was barely more than a baby. He was four years old, Sirius. Four.”

“I know, Kitten. I know. It’s horrible.” Sirius rasped out.

“He lived this sort of... half of a life. A double life, but half all the same. And he was important to so many people, but he couldn’t see it. He was important to me, even if I couldn’t see why...” Hermione cleared her throat and shifted to sit down on the floor with her back to the wall.

“This is the final one. The last things he thought, felt, wrote down. I need to do this. To read through it and accept that he was... unfinished, like the journal is,” she said as she opened the cover and looked down at the first page, her eyes scanning the passage before she moved on to the next.

Around the fifth entry, Hermione gasped and looked up at Sirius, then back down at the pages in front of her.

“Sirius...” she began.



With April 1999

♂

Sirius called me to Shell Cottage tonight. He was attacked, and he was...

I had to do it. I tried to do it on the last morning, my parents, but it still made me sick. He was it for me. None of this a far

to her.

Just it ended. He's alone, and that's what matters. That's the ONLY feeling thing that matters.

I made him this the next afternoon.

She looks, and she's going to survive this alone now. It's the last thing I do, and she doesn't leave to be punished like this.

Just it's finished. Absolutely finished. He's never felt remorse, or tears, or anything of the sort before. He's of age now, but he's

still so young.

Just her blood was on my fucking mouth, and she tasted like the human embodiment of warlike.

I had to do it, and it saved her, and I can't regret that.

Just it was so fucking finished now.

Yeah.

-R.J.



“Sirius,” Hermione repeated as she looked up from the journal to meet his eyes.
 “What the FUCK happened at Shell Cottage?”



*Though nothing will keep us together
 We could spend time just for one day
 We can be heroes for ever and ever
 What do you say?*

“The kiss,” she surmised with a resigned sigh. “I... I don’t know what to say, Ron. It wasn’t bad. It happened. But I just—and I need to be clear here, there is a lot going on and everyone is grieving, but my feelings about this are not influenced by everything that’s happened since in any way, okay? I just... we kissed. It wasn’t a bad kiss. But it felt wrong to me. Like... gods, I’m sorry, it was like kissing my brother. Like I imagine it would have been to kiss Harry.”

Ron stared at her for a minute, his mouth open in shock, and then he dropped his shoulders and, much to Hermione’s surprise, began to laugh. A deep-bellied, boisterous, perfectly Ron Weasley sort of laugh.

“Oh, thank fucking Merlin.” Ron’s shoulders shook with the force of his relieved laugh. “I’ve... it’s been so awkward because I didn’t know how you felt but for me it was—gods, it was bad. Not—not that you’re a bad kisser, it’s just—”

“I get it,” Hermione nodded, a slow grin spreading across her face as she watched him struggle to compose himself.

“You are a perfectly good snogger, Ronald Weasley. But when you kissed me—underneath the aforementioned perfectly good snogging—there was just a giant sense of... ‘gross.’ I’m so sorry,” she told him, laughing as she spoke.

“No, yeah, I get it. I think everything we’ve been through in the last year just sort of... shifted things, you know? I always thought when we were younger, that you and I would just be a given, but we changed, I guess. We became closer in a very not-romantic way,” Ron said.

“Is it strange to say you’re family, given that your tongue has been down my throat?”
 “Eh.” He shrugged. “I AM a pureblood. Kissing cousins aren’t exactly breaking news.”

“Gross!” She laughed as she shoved playfully against his chest, then stepped forward and wrapped her arms around his waist. She pulled him in for a tight hug and then stepped back to look up at him.

“Now that that’s settled. Why are you worried about me? I’m really quite well, all things considered.”

“Yeah. I guess I just...” Ron trailed off and brought a hand up to rub the back of his neck. “I just don’t like it. I don’t have any problem with Sirius—please don’t get me wrong. I just mean... you in that house without your people around you, and half that house is evil anyway. I just think you should come stay here where we can make sure you’re healing.”

“I appreciate your concern, Ron. But Sirius is my people now, too. He was Harry’s godfather, you know what he meant to him,” she told him, her tone firm and clipped.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

“As if you left me any choice, Miss Granger,” Kingsley replied with a playful roll of his eyes. “You’ll be a wonderful asset to the ministry, Hermione. Have you given my offer any more thought?”

“Yes, Magical Creatures. The highest up you can get me, or I’ll take my own sub-department with a sole focus on creatures with dual classifications. I’ll start in August.”



Being at the Burrow felt surreal. Hermione had been there for the funerals just a few days prior, of course, but it hadn’t really felt like being there. In a sense it had seemed... suspended. As if the Burrow that was hosting a funeral existed on a separate plane from the Burrow she knew and loved. Which, subsequently, seemed to exist aside from the Burrow she was standing outside of now.

She wished Sirius were here.

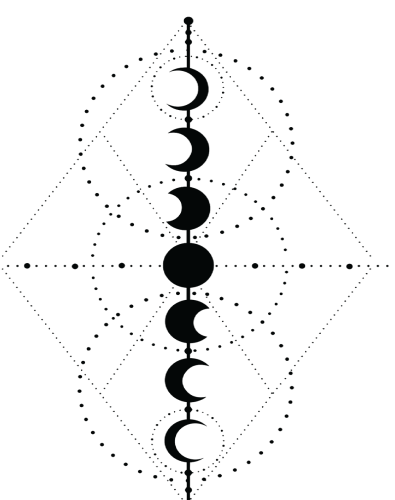
They could have passed around a flask and given one another knowing looks across the table and he would have helped her come up with an excuse to leave hours ago. He was busy, though, arranging things to have Remus laid to rest, and she hadn’t wanted to disappoint Molly so, here she was.

Dinner had been strange. Hermione was so used to the Burrow being crowded and full of life, but it had just been the seven of them. Charlie and Tonks, Bill and Fleur, Ron and Molly, and Hermione. There had been tears and nostalgia and one too many pointed questions and comments from Molly about grandchildren (to Bill and Fleur, who had been adamant for ages that they wanted to wait to have children until they’d been married for five years) a wedding date (to Charlie and Tonks, the latter of which just brashly told Molly that marriage was a patriarchal means to control women and she was fine to keep living in sin, thank you very much —Hermione liked her, she decided).

Not to mention the multiple thinly veiled attempts to pry into what Hermione and Ron ‘were.’ What they were, currently, was standing awkwardly outside of the Burrow as Hermione prepared to apparate home. Ron was visibly anxious. He kept shifting on his feet, showing his hands in his pockets, and opening his mouth as if he were going to speak, then shaking his head.

“What is it, Ronald?” Hermione finally asked, sounding a bit harsher than she intended, but it seemed to get the job done, at the least.

“I’m worried about you. I wish you’d come and stay here. And I... I know there has been a lot going on, but I feel like we should at least talk about it, you know?”



Sense of Doubt

30th May, 1998

“What the FUCK happened at Shell Cottage?”

Sirius cheered. He quite literally cheered, pumping his fist in the air and letting out a loud whooping sound, before he lunged off of the bed. Sinking to his knees in front of Hermione, he wrapped his arms around her, pulling her away from the wall and drawing her against his chest in a hug so tight it was nearly suffocating.

“I’m sorry, Kitten. I’m so sorry. I didn’t know it would have the effect it did, and I’ve wanted to tell you so badly. I swear I wanted to tell you. Please tell me you know that I haven’t been keeping anything from you on purpose,” he pleaded, pulling back to look down at her as tears began to pool in his eyes.

“I know. I know, I swear I know, Sirius,” Hermione responded in a shaky voice. “I feel so blind. You’ve been so tortured, and I thought it was just the grief but... I get it. I do.” Sirius leaned in again, burying his face in her hair as he sucked in a ragged breath, then nodded and pulled back, rising to his feet.

“Right. Okay. Shell Cottage,” he brought a hand up to his chest, rubbing over the space where his heart rested beneath his sternum and repeated the name of the cottage, then shook his head.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

"No. I'm sorry. It's so close but I think... I think you have to ask the question. Once you've... once you've asked that, confirmed that you figured it out, specifically, then I should be able to tell you everything."

"Okay," Hermione sniffled. She brought an arm up to her face to use the sleeve of her jumper to wipe away the tears that had fallen, and then nodded and climbed to her feet.

"Kitchen?" she asked, already making her way to the door. Sirius followed behind as they silently descended the stairs and made their way to the kitchen table.

Hermione sat silently as Sirius summoned their usual wares. He poured two glasses, sliding one over to her, then lit two cigarettes. She smiled softly as she accepted one, then took a few drags before she picked up the glass and downed the contents in one gulp.

"Okay. I'm ready now," she said, matter-of-factly. "I need to be precise, correct?"

"Yes. I don't know the exact constraints until I can feel them pushed against, but just... as clearly as you can. As many questions as you can think of, I want to tell you everything."

Hermione nodded and brought a hand up to cover her mouth for a moment before she sat back in her chair and looked him straight in the eye.

"Sirius," she began calmly, "on the first of September in 1993, did Remus Lupin meet his mate on the Hogwarts Express?"

"Yes, he did."

"Was his mate a student?"

"She was."

Hermione nodded and took another drag of her cigarette, then stamped it out in the ashtray and took a sip of the glass Sirius had just refilled.

"Okay," she repeated again. "Sirius, am I... was I Remus Lupin's mate?"

Sirius gasped, then laughed as he leaned forward, rubbing his chest with his left hand and nodding frantically while he took a drag of his cigarette with his right.

"You have no idea how much I've been dying to hear you ask that," he said as he grinned over at her. "Yes, Hermione. You were Moon's mate."

"Fuck."

"Yeah."

"Those journal entries... he was so bereft. He hated himself. But even I know enough about mating bonds to know that it wouldn't have been... sexual, or even romantic at that point. The bond is heavily influenced by the moral compass of the bonder. It was an eventuality, but he wouldn't have felt anything untoward in regard to me until I was

STEVE_SUNSHINE

Kingsley gave a resigned sigh, then nodded his head. "You had me to the wall with the life debt. Even more so now. But let me be clear about one thing." He began as he reached into his drawer and pulled out a small, black box.

"Remus was a dear friend of mine. The loss of him is one that weighs heavily not only on myself, but on our society as a whole. This," he said, sliding the box across the desk toward Sirius, "was to be presented at the war memorial next month. I think it should be buried with him."

Hermione watched as Sirius reached out and picked up the box with shaking hands. He looked down, opening it slowly, and then stared at the little medal nestled in the purple velvet lining, his eyes shining with tears. A darker look passed over his features, and he clenched his jaw, snapping the box shut and tossing it back on the desk.

"So what? Now that he's dead, we're gonna be a perfect, happy little society that gives a fuck about werewolves?" Sirius spat bitterly, then scrubbed a hand over his face and sighed, "I'm sorry, Kings. It's a lovely gesture. It's just... fucked. Everything is fucked."

"I understand, Sirius. I do. The anti-werewolf legislation, the stigma... Remus' life alone is proof enough that our world needs a serious wake-up call about magical creatures as a whole. As far as Remus' body is concerned, I empathize with how you're both feeling. I'll admit that I didn't think about the broader impact of things—but really, Hermione, threatening me with the prophet?" Kingsley huffed out a laugh and shook his head.

"She puts people in jars and leads them to centaurs and permanently disfigures them for being tattletales, but her bringing up the Daily Prophet is what gives you pause?"

Sirius retorted with an amused grin.

"To be fair, all of that was warranted," Hermione spoke up timidly. "But yes, Kingsley. I am that serious about this. All of it. Magical creatures being treated with dignity, war heroes being shown respect, Sirius having the right to lay his best friend to rest. I will go to the ends of the earth if that's what it takes."

"Very well then. Noon tomorrow. Sirius, if you'll stop at the front desk on the way out and let Morgana know where you plan to lay Remus to rest, I'll see to it that everything else is taken care of. Take this with you, though. You can decide if you wish to bury it with him or keep it."

"Got it, Kings. Thank you." Sirius leaned forward and rapped his knuckles on the desk, then rose from his chair and picked the box up. He tapped his wand to the center to shrink it, then slid it into his breast pocket.

"Thank you, Minister Shackbolt, for being so gracious about this." Hermione offered with a small smile.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

It was her scar, her story now, and it was exactly what she needed to drive her point home.

"I... Merlin, Hermione, I'd heard but I hadn't seen it." Kingsley reached a hand out as if he were going to touch her scar, but then quickly thought better of it and pulled back.

"We fought two wars over whether or not people such as myself even deserved to live. Everybody is dead. I was held down on the floor of my childhood bully's home and he was forced to watch while his aunt carved this word into my skin. The word that he himself was the first to ever call me. Draco Malfoy's penchant for being a whimpering arsehole notwithstanding, we were all children. I was there. I saw what it did to him to have to watch that. I saw what months in a tent did to Harry and Ron. I saw the Weasleys bury most of their family. I have fought, and bled, and we won the damn war. You say you want to rebuild a better world—"

"Yes, I do. And I understand the weight of the war, I'm—"

"I am not done speaking, Minister." Hermione raised an eyebrow at Kingsley and he held his hands up in defeat, then leaned back in his chair.

"You say you want to build a better world," she repeated. "I say I want to see a world where no more children are forced to become soldiers. That starts here. Today. By you choosing not to be the kind of Minister who will allow a war hero—TWICE over, at that—to be dissected like a lab rat. I may not have known Remus Lupin on a personal level, but I knew him, and how he felt about the lycanthropy curse, well enough to know that the absolute last thing he would have wanted was to be reduced to nothing more than something to gawk at."

She paused and cast a glance over to Sirius as she righted the sleeve of her jumper, then sat straighter in her chair and fixed her gaze back on Kingsley.

"Many of us are still reeling from the losses we faced in the quest to prove that we were not 'less than.' So, I am sure we can all agree that it would only stand to benefit the rebuilding efforts if one of your first moves as Minister for Magic is to uphold the honor of a war hero. I can only imagine how damaging it would be if the Prophet learned that their newly elected Minister was content to let a man who gave his life to the cause be treated this way in death, simply because he is considered 'less than' too."

"Goddic, Kitten, did you just threaten to go to the Prophet?" Sirius shook his head as an incredulous laugh escaped his lips. "Better listen to this one, Kings. I've got about 20 smeared, tattered family paintings at home that can attest to how unstoppable she is when she's determined."

STEVE_SUNSHINE

old enough that his morality would have allowed attraction, anyway. Why did he beat himself up so badly over it?"

"You were still just a girl, Kitten. You had already been through so much. And Moony, he... he had a penchant for self-flagellation. He hated the idea of a young, brilliant girl having her future tied to an 'old, decrepit, penniless beast'—his words—before you'd even had the chance to kiss boys or make mistakes or choose your own path in life."

"I've gathered that. The self-flagellation. He writes—wrote, so much about how deeply he hated himself for being a werewolf. How he wished he were 'whole' which is just... barmy."

"Yeah well," Sirius started with a chuckle, "If you think reading about it is tough, you should have lived with him in the late 70s. He was... self-destructive. Self-loathing."

"His life was so sad. So hard, from such a young age," Hermione said quietly. "He went through so much and then... that big, great thing wasn't even something he could be happy about. Those dreams we read about, all the little things, I think they were... real, sort of. Like..."

"Prophetic, maybe?"

"Yeah. Yes, I think, obviously, they were related to the bond somehow. The last dream I came across, where he could hear rain and felt like he was moving—it was storming that day, on the train. And there were other things too. I think he even dreamed about my hair once and I just... completely overlooked it," she said with an incredulous laugh as she shook her head.

"Makes sense. You haven't exactly been your old, cheery, focused self, Kitten. You can't beat yourself up over that."

"No but I... I think I had dreams, too. About Remus. Fuzzy details but, the smell of coffee, scarred hands," Hermione looked down at her shirt, picking at the fabric with her thumb and forefinger and then snorted.

"Soft jumpers."

"He was definitely a jumper guy."

She sighed and brought her foot up into the chair, wrapping her arms around her leg as she propped her chin on her knee.

"Sorry, I... I need to focus. I still have so many questions."

"On your time, Kitten. Moony's story, it's your story now, too. We can talk as much or as little about it as you'd like. I... in the magic of the vow, one of the components was that I couldn't tell you anything unless and until you became aware that you were his mate. So, if you'd like, I can tell you about Shell Cottage, but it's not pretty."

"Nothing is pretty anymore," Hermione said sadly. "Please, tell me. I need to know everything."

KEEPER OF THE MOON

"Right. Right, so, back around Easter, after you lot were captured and taken to Malfoy Manor, Dobby brought you to Shell Cottage. Harry spent the entire night digging a grave for the elf, Ron, Dean and Luna all went back and forth but they were out there with him for the most part. You know all of that."

"Yes, I remember."

"What you don't know is, uh... you don't know what happened inside the cottage that night."



10th April 1998

Shell Cottage

Sirius had been dozing on the couch of Shell Cottage when all hell broke loose. He had meant to pop on back to Grimmauld after he'd come round for a few drinks with Bill while they talked about a new mission Kingsley was sending them on the following day — staking out a residential neighborhood in muggle London, where a family had been threatened by Deathbeaters — but he had, apparently, fallen asleep at some point. He wasn't sure how long he'd been out, but it couldn't have been more than fifteen minutes or so before Dobby the house elf apparated to just outside of the wards with the unlikely trio of Dean Thomas, Garrick Ollivander, and Luna Lovegood — Regulus' best friend Pandora's little girl, who looked so much like her mother that Sirius did a double take when they all spilled into the small living room. Almost immediately, they heard another pop of apparition, followed by a guttural scream, and then the booming voice of Ron Weasley called out for his brother.

Sirius jumped up from the couch to follow Bill and Fleur outside, and his heart leapt into his throat at the sight that awaited them. Ron Weasley was barreling toward the house with an unconscious Hermione in his arms, already yelling out to Fleur to explain what had happened, but Sirius couldn't process any of it.

Further down the beach he saw a messy shock of black hair — Harry, kneeling down over Dobby, sobbing loudly. Sirius narrowed his eyes, then gasped when he saw the knife sticking out of Dobby's chest.

He rushed to Harry and took his godson into his arms, rocking him as he wailed. It was impossible. So much grief, in such a short life. Sirius bit back his own emotions and focused on being there for Harry.

For James and Lily's boy.

For his boy.

STEVE_SUNSHINE

for him and St Mungo's has clearance to conduct research with donated or unclaimed bodies."

"Research," Sirius scoffed. "You and I both know they're just using him because he was a werewolf."

"I don't deny that at all. In some ways, that's a good thing. It's important to study the physiology of different beings to help expand the understanding healers have of their classification. But I agree that you deserve to lay Remus to rest. If you can give me a few days I can —"

"Life debt."

Hermione stepped forward and leaned down to place her hands on the desk as she made direct eye contact with Kingsley. "I'm cashing it in, now. You are the goddamn Minister for Magic. And you are Kingsley fucking Shacklebolt. You can cut through any red tape with a simple command, and you owe me a life debt. I deflected a killing curse that was headed straight for your back while we rode the thestral last July."

"Shit, Kitten, that's serious stuff. Are you sure you want to —" Sirius began, but Kingsley cut him off with a wave of his hand.

"You are correct. I do owe you a life debt, from the night of Harry's birthday. But I need you to think, Hermione. Are you sure that staving off a bit of medical research is what you want to call upon the life debt for?"

"It's not just a bit of medical research, it's... it's the fact that they are only keeping him because of WHAT he is. Was. It's..." Hermione trailed off as her hand shot to her scar again, as if on impulse.

"It's about autonomy, Kingsley," she said softly as she retreated and took a seat in one of the chairs opposite his desk. "They are keeping him solely because he's a werewolf. And while I do understand the benefit of medical research, truly, this is... wrong."

"He wasn't even allowed to go to St. Mungo's," Sirius spoke up, taking the chair next to Hermione. "Back in the 70s. I think the law must have been repealed sometime while I was in Azkaban. But when James' Dad died, Remus couldn't even be there with us."

"I know what it's like to be treated like you're less-than in this world, Kingsley," Hermione said as she pulled the sleeve of her jumper up to expose her arm.

Sirius sucked in a breath, Muttering to himself as he dropped his head into his hands, but she ignored him. She knew it was hard to look at that word, etched on her skin, especially coming from the parents and upbringing he'd had.

Perhaps the fact that his own cousin had been the one to pin her down and carve into her arm made it even harder for him to stomach. She'd seen the way he went stiff and averted his gaze or made a quick excuse to leave the room every time he saw it.

But it was hers.

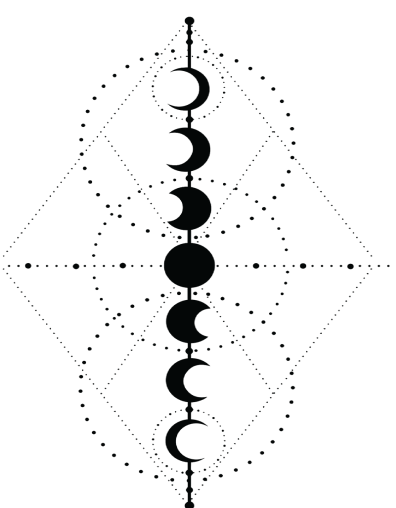
KEEPER OF THE MOON

through as grief, but you have been absolutely torturing yourself over all of this, and it stops now. We are alive, and we're going to live."

"We're going to live," he echoed back as he leaned down and pulled her into his arms.



*Someday they won't let you, so now you must agree
The times they are a-telling, and the changing isn't free
You've read it in the tea leaves, and the tracks are on TV
Beware the savage jaw*



Stars Strays and Ashttrays

14th June 1998

"I can't believe they don't have swing sets in the magical world. That doesn't even seem real," Hermione said with a shake of her head as she took another bite of her sandwich. She and Sirius had gone out to another movie—their fifth in the last few weeks. He was becoming bloody obsessed with the cinema, and she loved to see it. They'd both been famished after laughing their way through Can't Hardly Wait, so they'd grabbed some sandwiches and drinks from a deli and were sitting in a nearby park, enjoying the cool night air as they chatted and ate.

"We have magical toys," Sirius said with mock defensiveness. "We get flying brooms, the muggles get these sets of swings. Besides, magical communities are rather small. No sense in building out whole parks for the two children in a ten-kilometer radius."

"I get that, but still. Going to the park as a kid is sacred, and the swings are the best part! You know what, that's it," she said as she wrapped her sandwich up and placed it back in the takeaway bag, then stood from the bench and reached down to pull Sirius up by his arm.

"Am I being kidnapped?"

KEEPER OF THE MOON

"Clearly," she laughed, rolling her eyes. "Come on. I'm going to teach you how to swing."

"No, pump your legs! Look, like this," Hermione told Sirius, "Bend at the knee when you go back, then stick them out straight when you go forward. See! You've got it!"

"I did it!" Sirius laughed with youthful exuberance.

They swung a bit longer, and then came to a stop. Hermione was sat still on her swing, smoking a cigarette while Sirius spun his in circles, twisting up the chain and then letting himself spin backwards to untangle it.

"I can't believe you didn't have this. Being a kid, running at the park, seeing how high you can go on the swings? It was as close to magic as I got before I knew I was a witch," Hermione paused, chewing her lip for a moment, then continued speaking.

"I didn't get... normalcy, once I went to Hogwarts. Even aside from the strangeness of discovering I was a witch and moving into this fantastical world of magic, things were... especially abnormal, for me and Harry and Ron. We didn't get to be normal pre-teens or normal teenagers. We were just kids, but we were soldiers. So sometimes I just find myself feeling exceptionally grateful that I had all the normal, muggle things in my early years. Swing sets and cinemas."

"I get that. And I'm so fucking sorry you three were put in that position. But I get what you mean. It was the opposite for me," Sirius said, stilling his movements on the swing as he looked over at her.

"As a young child it was all pureblood customs and societal expectations and... fucking Walburga. Once I got to school, though, I got to just be for ten months out of the year. I had to hide my sexuality, which was hard. But I also got to live. Quidditch and parties and pranks and sneaking out of the secret passages to go to the Leaky. For those few years, things were perfect. And after school it was... it got real, fast. But it's important to get those few good years. Sometimes I still feel like my brain is stuck in those years."

"I think it is. I don't mean... Well obviously, I don't intend this as an insult," Hermione said, passing her cigarette off to Sirius. "I know you're nearly forty now, but you were... what, twenty-two, when you were put in Azkaban? Your brain wasn't even fully developed at that point. I'd imagine a huge part of you is always going to be stuck at twenty-two. If I'm honest, spending time with you is far more like spending time with people my age than it is being around other... real adults."

"Hey! Don't call me that!"

"A real adult?"

"No, 'nearly forty'! Why would you say something so very mean?" Sirius joked, leaning over to nudge her with his elbow. "I think you're right, though. I never really did grow up."

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"No," Remus said plainly, leaning against the wall next to where Sirius stood as the two watched Hermione lying peacefully in the small bed across the room, her chest rising and falling with deep, even breaths.

"No," Remus repeated. "I can still fucking taste her. I don't think I'm ever going to be okay again."



30th May, 1998

"Oh my gods," Hermione said, looking down at her arm as she pushed the sleeve of her jumper up to her elbow. She leaned closer and brought the fingers of her right hand up to trace the scarred lettering, then shook her head, looking up at Sirius.

"I've been so focused on the word that I didn't even notice these smaller scars. And it... it itches, feels strange, sometimes. When we were talking with Kingsley about his body, or when... when something is wrong, in regard to Remus. It's so strange."

"I'm so sorry, Kitten," Sirius said brokenly as he looked back at her with unshed tears in his eyes.

"No, no, don't," Hermione told him, shaking her head vehemently as she pushed her chair back and rushed around the end of the table, kneeling down next to him and taking his hands in hers.

"Don't you dare apologize."

"I pushed him, though. I used James and Lily, knowing it would guilt him in to doing it, and I didn't... if I had known that it would do this to you... We could have waited five fucking minutes and Bill would have had the knife."

"But you had no way to know that. And there might not have been time," Hermione said soothingly as she looked up at him. "I'm alive, Sirius. Everybody is dead, but we are still here. I am alive, because you fought for me. I wish I had known. I wish he had told me while he was alive or that I would have seen it for what it was or... I wish so many things, and if I could go back and change it all I would, in a heartbeat. But I am alive, and you have no idea how grateful I am to you for that. And... and to Remus, to Bill and Fleur, to all of you."

"Okay," Sirius sniffled, bringing the heel of his hands up to dry his eyes. "But I swear, Hermione, if I had known... he warned me that it could be bad, but..."

"Stop," she said firmly. "You couldn't have known what it would be like for me. Even if you had, you still would have stepped up and gave him the push he needed. That's just who you are. So you have to stop beating yourself up like this. I've watched you since I came to live here. I think I've excused a lot of what we've both been going

they love her, but she takes care of THEM. You have to promise me you'll be there for her. I have to know someone will be there for her. Please."

"I swear it. I swear on my wand, I will —"

"The vow," Remus rushed out as he interrupted Sirius. "Will you take the vow?"

"Remus, the Unbreakable Vow is serious, you cannot ask him to —" Fleur began.

"I'll do it," Sirius cut her off, turning to face Bill. "Will you bond it?"

Bill looked over at Fleur, who stared back at him for a few seconds before she nodded.

"Do what you must. Get it over with so you can break this curse." She told Bill, reaching out and tentatively taking the knife from his hand before she dumped it unceremoniously on to the bedside table.

Bill sighed, then pulled his wand out of his pocket and walked over to where Remus and Sirius stood. The two clasped hands as he uttered the incantation for the Unbreakable Vow, and then nodded his head toward Remus once he felt the magic take hold.

Remus looked over at Sirius, then began to speak.

"Will you, Sirius, vow to protect Hermione to the best of your ability, from this day forward?"

"I will."

"If I do not make it through this war, will you take it upon yourself to take care of her, for as long as she needs?"

"I will."

"And will you vow not to speak of anything to do with the bond unless and until I tell her she is my mate, or, in the event of my death, until she figures it out on her own and asks you directly?"

"I will."

"Will you, should I die, give her my journals?"

"I will."

Bill nodded again as he spoke the incantation to seal the vow, then stepped away and rushed back to the nightstand as he began casting spells over the dagger, while Sirius and Remus stood, hands still clasped, staring at one another.

"You're going to fucking live, Moony," Sirius commanded, pulling Remus toward him and wrapping his arms around him.

"I'll do my best," Remus responded, squeezing him tightly.

"But if I don't... you'll take care of her. Give her the journals, and anything I've got — not that it's much, but she'll like my books, at the least - It's all hers," he said with a laugh, pulling back.

"I will. I swear it," Sirius told him as he turned and leaned back against the windowsill.

"You okay, Moony?"

"Exactly." Hermione nodded, then added, in a teasing tone, "I should just start calling you Peter Pan, Mutt."

"So long as you'll be my Wendy, Kitten," he shot back, grinning down at her as he held his arm out for her to take. "Come. We must away. I can't get that damn Manilow song out of my head. I want to hit a record store before they close."

"Well, then. Second star to the right," Hermione laughed as she looped her arm in his.



19th June 1998

"Mione, we've been at this for hours," Ron whined from where he lay sprawled on his stomach at the foot of her bed. Sirius lounged back against the headboard with his feet propped up on Ron's back as each wizard held a journal in their hands.

Hermione shifted in her chair and looked up over the top of the leatherbound notebook in her hand to fix Ron with a withering glare.

"Less whining, more reading," she commanded sharply, then looked down at her lap and picked up the balpoint pen and yellow legal notepad she was using to jot things down as they stuck out at her.

"He's got a point, Kitten. It might serve us better to shift away from the journals, see what we can find in the library about bonds," Sirius spoke up.

"We could owl McGonagall. Well, you could, 'Mione, she likes you most. Maybe she'd let you go through the restricted section?"

"Those are both good ideas but I just... this is the most important thing right now. We're close to done, just keep going. I need you to make note of anything to do with the bond, even slightly. I need to fully understand it," Hermione said, still scribbling on her legal pad.

"What we need to do is talk about what happened at the battle, and how you're still feeling. You need to be testing the limits of your magic, so we know if and where it's been weakened," Sirius said casually, reaching over to the nightstand to grab the amber glass ashtray and balance it on his stomach as he lit a cigarette.

"It is," Hermione said softly. "I can feel it. I haven't really needed to cast lately, aside from a quick Accio or Tempus here and there. I cook the muggle way, we've been walking everywhere since the weather is nice, so it's been fine. But it is weaker. I know that, even without testing the theory. "

KEEPER OF THE MOON

"So, then, that's what we should be focusing on," Ron said, shifting on the bed and scooting up to rest his back against the headboard next to Sirius as he grabbed a pen off of the nightstand and began scribbling on another legal pad.

"Shut it, Ronald," Hermione snapped, then sighed, "Sorry, I know you both mean well, I just... I need to understand more about the bond to even begin to figure out if there's anything that can be done for having a weakened magical core. And its... well, it's personal, so I just want to understand his side of things before I figure out what can be done."

"Fine," Sirius said with a yawn. "I think I'm about caught up to the nineties over here."

"I just don't understand how you could have read through ninety-three and ninety-four and not realized this was you," Ron laughed as he picked his legal pad up and held it up.

Hermione clambered out of the chair and crawled up on the bed between them, settling her notes on her lap.

"Right," She said with a nod. "We'll go by decade, then. For the seventies I've got... nothing, for the first eight years, and then just a couple mentions of how the concept of mates was strange and exciting. In... December of Seventy-Eight he says 'The idea that there's someone meant for me just doesn't seem right. Though, it is rare for someone to actually find their mate, and Journal, you and I both know I don't get the good, so...'"

"Bloody hell," Ron said with a heavy sigh. "Really? I don't get the good?" Was he really just... so sad, all the time?"

"Yes and no. It was always there, I think. But he was fun, too. Happy. Loved music and singing, though he was horrid at it," Sirius laughed, shaking his head. "Books and Lily. Gods, he loved Lily so much. It was like you and Harry, Hermione. We were all the best of friends, but it was all... crisscrossed. I was closest to James and Remus, Remus and James were great friends, too, of course, but he was closest to Me and Lily, Peter, the fucking fuck, was closest to James and I, whereas he and Remus were always just... buddies. We all had other friends as well, but it was always the four of us and Lily. Prongs even asked Moony for Lils' hand in marriage, in lieu of dealing with her muggle parents."

"I read about that! I loved that they had that bond. I've wondered if... if somehow, the proximity of it all influences the bond."

"What do you mean?" Ron asked as he shifted on the bed to look over at her.

"Well, the closeness Remus had with... both of Harry's parents, but especially his mother, and then me being so close with Harry. I don't know. Maybe it's just the

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"I'm so fucking sorry, Hermione," he rasped out, just before he brought her arm to his mouth and sunk his teeth into the lettering marring her skin as a low growl emanated from deep within his throat.

Fleur let out a sigh of relief and Sirius tore his gaze away from Remus to look up to where she stood at the head of the bed, holding back the collar of Hermione's shirt. His eyes fell to her chest and he, too, sighed at the sight of the sickly, blackened veins receding rapidly. He looked back down at Remus and watched as he released Hermione's arm, then opened his mouth to speak, but was cut off by the sound of the door opening.

He looked over and watched as Bill stepped back in to the room and walked up to the bed with his hands behind his back.

"The veins," he stated as he looked down at Hermione's arm, then looked over to Remus. "You did it?"

Remus nodded, and Bill let out a laugh, then shook his head.

"You're about to be either incredibly relieved, or incredibly pissed off," Bill said as he pulled his hands out from behind his back and proffered a small silver dagger with a black handle. "Maybe a bit of both."

"Bloody hell," Remus said, sitting back on his heels. "Is that it?"

"It is, I guess, uh... Bellatrix threw it as they apparated away, and it landed square in Dobby's chest. They asked me to take it in case it's cursed, which we know it is. I asked to be sure, they said it's the one she used to cut Hermione. I should be able to find and break the curse in no time, now."

"Fuck," Sirius breathed out as he rose from the bed.

"So the fucking knife has been here the entire time?" Remus asked angrily.

"Remus," Fleur said softly. "Even with the knife, Bill may not have had the time to break the curse. You gave her that time."

Remus laughed, shaking his head as he rose from the floor and crossed the room to look out the window, bringing both hands up to fist in his hair. Sirius approached him cautiously, bringing a hand out to clasp his shoulder, but Remus shook it off, spinning around to face him.

"Moony, I'm sorry, but Fleur is right."

"I know, I just... I know. But I told you, this is dangerous. If I don't make it through this fucking war—"

"You will."

"But if I don't... I have no idea what it could do to her now that the bond is activated. If I don't make it, you have to take care of her," he pleaded, grabbing Sirius by the biceps as he stared down at him in desperation. "Please, promise me you'll take care of her. Somebody has to take care of her, she's... she's got Harry and Ron and I know

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"I know, I know, I just..." Remus trailed off.

Just then, a sharp knock rang out, causing all four heads to whip in the direction of the door.

"Bill?" Ron's voice called out from the hallway. "Why is this locked? Harry needs to talk to you, and I want to check on her."

"Fuck," Sirius cursed. "You can't let him see her like this."

"I know," Bill began, then looked over at Remus.

"Remus, you've been both a mentor and a much-needed friend to me since my attack. I have an infinite amount of respect for you, so I mean what I'm about to say in the absolute kindest way possible. She has minutes left, at best. I'm going to go out there and distract Ron, and if I get back and you have let my brother's best friend die because of your pride, I will tell the entire Order that you're a fucking coward. I will tell anyone who will listen that you could have saved her and chose not to. Do the right thing." Bill finished, reaching out and squeezing Remus' shoulder briefly before he sidestepped the bed and headed toward the door, closing it quickly behind him.

"I am a coward. I know that," Remus said softly, looking up at Sirius with watery eyes. "I just... I know what needs to be done. I just panicked. She's... she's everything, Pads, to everyone. The thought of taking away her right to consent, or of putting her in a position that could damage her magic... She's been through so much and now she's going to wake up and find out what I'm about to do, find out I acted on this, I — She doesn't deserve any of this."

"So, you will not tell her," Fleur said firmly, stepping over to Remus' side and sinking to her knees so she could face him eye-to-eye. "She would understand, if you did tell her. She is Hermione. The brightest witch of her age, no? But I understand the bond better than most. I understand all of the things you are afraid of. So, you will bite where the scarring will go unnoticed," she told him, gesturing to the eight letters carved into Hermione's arm.

"And you will resist, because you are a good man. When she is older, or you are ready, or both, you will explain. Tonight, you will simply do your duty and keep your mate alive. She is yours, Remus. You have to keep her safe."

"Safe." Remus nodded, bringing a hand up to wipe the tears from his eyes, and then said, his voice so quiet it was barely a whisper, "Thank you, Fleur."

He looked back up at Sirius, who nodded encouragingly, and then reached down and picked up Hermione's arm, studying the wounded flesh before he closed his eyes and took in a deep breath.

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romanticism of it all but I guess I find it... sweet. I don't know," Hermione said, then cleared her throat and sat up straighter.

"Anyway. Hit me with the eighties, Mut."

"The eighties are sad. Just a lot of bland updates about his health, struggles to keep a job and bouncing around from place to place, and... well he didn't, um, he didn't have anyone, or much of anything," Sirius said, his voice thick with emotion.

Hermione scooted closer to him and snuggled into his side, resting her head on his shoulder as she curled her feet in to Ron's lap, and Sirius responded in kind, taking a deep breath and turning his head to bury his face in her hair, then pulled back and patted her arm.

"Thanks, Kitten," he said softly. "Anyway, the eighties. He had the dreams, mainly. They were sporadic but it seemed like the more time went on the more hopeful he got about it all. The feeling of warmth always seemed to be present, but the details changed, and then as it went on, up to '89 is when he started being able to hear the rain and all the bits and pieces started getting stronger."

"When did the dreams start?" Ron asked, absently reaching a hand out to play with Hermione's hair as he looked over at Sirius. "Close to when she was born. I'd imagine?"

"Yeah, I've actually got the first mention of a dream on Halloween of seventy-nine."

"So, a little over a month after you were born, Hermione. I'd imagine he'd had a few by that point and it took him time to realize they weren't normal dreams," Ron said with a nod. "Did he ever say anything to you about them, Sirius?"

"Nah, I mean maybe he mentioned having a weird dream or something but by seventy-nine we were all over the place dealing with the war."

"I think the dreams are clear enough. They started when I was born but they were vague and nonsensical and then the closer it got to meeting me, the clearer they became. They stopped right around when we met, I think. What do we have going on in the '90s?" Hermione asked, tapping her pen on Ron's notes.

"Just a million and one examples as to why you needed me to figure this out," Ron teased.

"You two were just too close to the issue, I think. It's not that I don't care about what Lupin went through, but I didn't really know him, so I'm not as caught up in the emotional aspect of it all, and from where I'm standing it's the clearest thing in the world."

He reached over, placing the legal pad atop the one resting on Hermione's lap as she and Sirius leaned in closer to read his messy scrawl as he spoke.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

"September 1 st , it happened the first day of term, and then there are all these little snippets. Here, out of nowhere at the end of an entry in October he writes 'on the never-ending topic of fearing for her safety; sometimes I worry the hair is a health hazard. How can she even see through all of it?' and it goes on, but this one, this is where it should have clicked for you." Ron said, pointing out a specific note and then picking up the journal he'd been working on, spreading it out on Hermione's lap as the three looked down at the pages.



10 the Plumes, 1994

Journal,

This is a hell-name sort of situation, yes. I'll leave to go into details later when I have more time but the general random is this. I don't know. I mean it is uncertain. I mean, the goldmunds rats and the rest all along I should have seen it. Perhaps I would have if I'd been around to know they'd changed secret keepers. That was the one detail that always kept me from believing. Gods was uncertain even when nothing else added up. It's in rough shape and it won't be easy but it's advice, and let's not a fraction, and that's enough.

I don't know. I resigned myself. It was only ever going to be a poor warning, with the curse on the professors, so I'd imagine that and how that was with itself with, but it was better than it. I think the being an educator for better than I thought I would. Maybe in another life, there's a world where I just got to be a professor. Still, what with that ugly little wolf problem, parents won't want me teaching their children now. That won't will be not about me, so it's just the just the way.

I don't know. I never remember anything when I haven't had the nightmare, but I remember a few really scary details about last night I just wanted to get down, but they would let me, and I was so angry. God, then there was a call, it was compared as the last the called to me from elsewhere while I was looking directly at her, but it makes sense now that I have about the thing of it all.

I've never remembered a single thing in wolf form, but I remember the confusion that time around, only as they pointed to me person.

Young, that

More later,

Remus



"Oh," Hermione said with a laugh. "I read this, and I knew the part about the call was about me, but I don't think the thing about getting closer even registered."

"See? This is why you needed me for this, because to me, it's so obvious that it's comical. You look at everything to find the deeper meaning, but sometimes it's just about face value. He only remembered the emotions as they pertained to one person, but he explicitly states that he remembered the confusion over you. Which is an emotion, pertaining to one person. And there are more things here. He quoted the

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life. Fucking accept it already, and do what needs to be done. Stop being so ashamed of yourself and fucking live, so she can live."

Remus snorted and leapt to his feet, glowering down at Sirius.

"You're one to talk about being ashamed of who you are," he said in a menacing tone.

"Yeah, well, when me being gay equates to me being willing to watch an eighteen-year-old girl die when she's the one with the best bet of keeping James and Lily's boy alive, then we'll compare."

"Don't," Remus seethed, balling up his fists at his sides.

"Guys, let's just calm down, okay?" Fleur said calmly, holding her hands up.

They both ignored her, still staring each other down.

"You don't. What do you think they'd say if they saw you now, Remus? What would Lily think if she knew that you were willing to let Harry's best friend die because you're worried you'll... what, be horny?"

"It doesn't MATTER what they would think, because they're fucking DEAD." "And Hermione is s going to join them if you don't man the fuck up and save her!"

"Fuck, fuck, we don't have time for this, she's seizing! Fleur, hold her down!" Bill yelled, drawing Remus and Sirius' attention away from their stand-off.

Sirius whipped his head toward the bed, cursing at the sight of Fleur kneeling on the bed, her upper body flush with Hermione's as she tried to keep her pinned down.

"Somebody hold her legs!" Fleur screamed.

Sirius rushed forward, clambering onto the bed and pinning her legs down.

"I thought you weren't supposed to hold someone down if they're having a seizure?" he asked, watching as Bill took Fleur's place and Fleur leaned back to cast a series of healing charms.

"Generally, you should not," Fleur said. "But her body is under too much stress. See, here?" she asked, peeling back the collar of Hermione's shirt to reveal the blackened veins, now dangerously close to her heart. "It is too close. We have to do whatever we can to keep her still, so it does not push her past her breaking point."

Remus cautiously stepped up to the side of the bed, looking down at Hermione's wounded arm as his hands shook.

"Moony," Sirius said quietly, then paused as he felt Hermione grow still beneath him. His eyes darted up in panic, but he relaxed at the relieved look on both Bill and Fleur's faces as they withdrew from the bed.

"You have to do this," Sirius implored, looking back over at Remus, who was now kneeling beside the bed, looking up at Hermione's face with a pained expression. "I'm sorry that it has to be like this. I love you. But I promise you, if you don't save her, I will kill you."

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what it's like to actually live with this. I've fought it because of her, because I don't want her to be in the position where she's shoehorned into a life she never asked for, yes. But I've also fought it because... she's HER.

I don't fucking deserve someone so pure and bright and just and good. Even now, knowing that she's so young, my mind just... spins, every time I see her. She's of age now, and she's so beautiful, Pads. It's already starting to become... more, for me. If I bite her, those feelings are going to shift. Even aside from all of the things it's going to stir up..." He trailed off for a moment, his eyes falling on Hermione where she lay in the bed, then looked back up at Sirius.

"If I do this, if I bite her, then yes, it will help. There is a sort of healing magic invoked in the bite. It serves to heal the bite itself, specifically, but it's all the same. The issue, aside from the... other part I've explained is that the bond would only be activated. Partially sealed, may be the better way to frame it. The bond between a werewolf and their mate is rooted in ancient, primal magic. It's all about bloodlines and protection and it needs to be sealed. So the second I sink my teeth into her —" Remus paused, his eyes flashing gold, then took a deep breath before he continued on.

"I've done extensive research on the topic. The magic found within a binding such as the mating bond kind of... melds together, once the bond is sealed. If it's only partially sealed, then the magic will be, in a sense, suspended across the bond. If anything happens to her, or to me, while a portion of our magic is in this sort of stasis, where it's waiting to be solidified, it could be dangerous. If I don't make it through the war, her magic could be weakened."

"And?" Sirius asked with a huff, rolling his eyes. "Surely her dealing with weakened magic is preferable to her being fucking DEAD, Remus."

"Remus is right to be concerned," Fleur interjected.

"No. No, you're not fucking doing this, Moony," Sirius spat, standing from the bed and crossing the room to tower over his friend.

"Fucking look at me," he ordered. "We both know exactly why you're hesitating, and I am done listening to this 'poor me I'm a werewolf bullshit'."

"Sirius..." Bill warned.

"No! Sorry, Bill, just... don't. You two may understand the mating bond but I understand HIM," he said, jutting his finger toward Remus.

"I understand you," he reiterated. "I have known you most of our lives, time apart or not. I have watched you punish yourself and hold back from every single fucking thing that could have been good for you. You're a werewolf, that sucks. Greyback is a child-assaulting monster, and you didn't deserve to have to live like this but it IS your

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song Letters to Hermione often. I recognized it because you've played it so often. You're named after it, right?"

"Yeah, I am. Everyone always assumes it's from Shakespeare and not Bowie," she said with a laugh, then shook her head. "I guess... I recognized a few lines, but I never realized it was intentional," she said, shaking her head.

"To be fair," Sirius chimed in, leaning over to tap on the page, "I tear my soul to cease the pain? A lot of it just read like his normal angst."

Hermione sighed, climbing over Ron to stand from the bed as she gathered the journals and notes, depositing them all in a pile on the writing desk.

"So, this is all just a lesson in my blindness, then. Right. We're drinking now," she stated as she turned and left the room, not looking back to see if they followed.



Obviously, they had followed. The three made their way to the kitchen, where Hermione and Ron cooked dinner while Sirius—a dreadful chef, magically or mugglely, helped by pouring the drinks and managing the soundtrack. Afterward, they made their way back into the sitting room for a scene that was becoming all too familiar.

Ron was splayed out on the couch, with one hand holding his drink up in the air as he waved it back and forth like a conductor while Sirius and Hermione did a very poor rendition of a waltz to 'Vienna' by Billy Joel, when Sirius burst in to laughter out of nowhere, leaning over and bracing his hands on his knees as his deep, booming laugh filled the air.

Ron and Hermione looked at each other, then back at Sirius, then at each other again, before they, too, descended into fits of laughter.

"I don't know why we're laughing," Hermione said, still giggling as she collapsed to the floor near the coffee table as she wiped tears of mirth from her eyes.

"Because —" Sirius began, then laughed again. He stood still for a moment, drawing in deep breaths as he tried to calm himself, then plopped down on the end of the couch opposite Ron and resting his head on the arm rest. He reached a hand down to run his fingers through Hermione's gigantic mane, and planted his feet on Ron's back, which earned him a grunt of mock-indignation from the younger Wizard.

"Hey! Why am I a footrest to the both of you these days? And why are we laughing?"

"Because —" Sirius began again, then broke off into another fit of laughter. "Because I'm gay."

Hermione snorted, succumbing to her own laughter, and Ron's eyebrows shot up, nearly to his hairline.

"Well I don't want to laugh about that," he said with a grave tone, then, naturally, began to laugh again. After the three had calmed down, Hermione turned in her spot on the floor and looked up at Sirius, cocking her head to the side.

"Why are we laughing because you're gay? You okay, Mutt?"

"Never better, Kitten. That's the funny part. I'm nearly forty, I've been through all the worst shit, did twelve years in Azkaban, and everyone who's ever so much as waved at me dies. But while we were dancing the only thing I could think of is that I'm gay, and I've spent so much time hiding that because of bullshit pureblood politics or because it was the seventies and people didn't talk about things like that so openly in my part of the world. Everything goes to shit, always, and I still cared so much about what people thought, to the point that I've never even danced with another man. Not really."

"Merlin's saggy tits, that's heavy," Ron said with a shake of his head. "I'll dance with you. I'm shit at it, and I'll step all over your feet, but it'll help."

"I appreciate you, Ron," Sirius said with a soft smile, leaning up to ruffle Ron's hair before he twisted on the couch and planted his feet on the floor, reaching for his previously discarded glass to take a drink.

"But it's just... different. I've danced with Peter, with James, and even with Harry once. I've just never really danced with another man, not in that way, you know?"

"That's it," Hermione called out as she rose to her feet. She reached down and wrestled the glass from Sirius' hand, throwing it back and downing the whisky in one gulp, then looked back down at the guys on the couch.

"Ron, go home and change into..." She paused as she tapped a finger to lips, then held it up in the air as she reached a conclusion. "The blue silk button down you got from George, and those dark wash denims I got you last year. Annndd... your boots, not these ratty trainers," she told him, emphasizing her last point with a light kick to his shoe.

"Sirius, go look... hot and muggle. Maybe those tight black jeans with the button fly we got when we were shopping last week and a button-down with the top few popped so everyone can see your chest hair. A light color, to bring out your eyes. It is..." she craned her neck to the side, reading the clock above the mantle, then looked back down at them.

"8:17. I expect both of you ready and waiting by the Floo at 9:30," she ordered with an air of finality as she spun on her heels and headed toward the foyer to go upstairs and get ready.

"Where are we going?" Sirius called out.

"And why does it require chest hair?" Ron added.

"Hey!" Sirius called out, plopping down on the bed near Hermione's feet. "Non-creature here. Can all you... matey people please explain this in a way I can comprehend?"

"I have to... well, to seal the bond, I'd have to... I WON'T do that. But the bond sort of... exists on different levels." Remus sighed wearily, "There's the initial pull that I felt when I met her. The urge to protect her, keep her safe, and so on, as I've explained to you. Above that, some things can push the bond into a state of, uh... activation, I suppose would be the operative word."

"What things? And what happens when it's... activated, or whatever?" Sirius asked. "The magic within the bond becomes stronger. More... ingrained, and things become more intense. It would be, uh..."

"He will want her. Badly," Fleur said simply. "There are certain spots where, when the bond is being sealed, he will want to bite her in order to mark her as his mate. If he bites her elsewhere, and outside of the act of mating, it will help to give her the time she needs. But it will also... aggravate her. The instinct to seal the bond will become more powerful. Hard to resist."

(Make things worse.)

"So, if he bites her while he's shagging her, the bond is sealed. If he bites her without doing that, it will help heal her and he'll just... want to shag her?" Sirius asked, then shrugged. "So bite her, Moony, and then just... don't fuck her."

"No. Gods, Pads, just stop, it isn't... it isn't that black and white," Remus asserted, shaking his head vehemently as he pressed his back more firmly against the wall.

"I will want her, constantly. And she's still so fucking young. Where we've been the last few years, it's just been... I just want to keep her safe, but I've never felt that. I don't WANT to feel that, because I could lose control or coerce her or..."

"You wouldn't," Sirius said, simply. "You would never."

"You don't fucking know what it's like!" Remus growled, then screwed his eyes shut.

"It's not just that. It's... what they're asking of me, it's..." he trailed off, sighing heavily, and sank to the floor, bringing his knees up to his chest as he tilted his head back against the wall.

"She's my Mate. Every instinct inside of me WANTS to seal the bond. Even when the feelings have been innocent, the desire to make sure it's sealed, that she's bound to me, it's ever-present. I've fought it for years. Not because I'm a good man, but because I'm the worst —"

"You're not —" Sirius interrupted, but Remus cut him off with a sharp shake of his head.

"Don't. You don't know what it's like. You know in the general sense, better than most, because I've talked with you about so much over the years. But you don't know

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"He needs more time to save her Remus," Fleur said softly as she stepped back up to Remus' side and placed a hand on his shoulder. "She is yours. You will give her more time."

"No," Remus barked out, knocking the stool to the ground as he stood to his feet and backed away from the bed. "You don't know what you're asking."

"I do know. She is your mate. Bill and I both understand the bond better than most. But only you and I understand what you're feeling right now. You must help her. You know this. There is no other choice."

Sirius pushed off of the wall and moved to stand in front of Remus, his steps slow and cautious. He reached out to place a hand on his arm and, in a soothing tone, tried to reassure him the best that he could.

"Fleur says it will work. If you seal the bond... something about healing properties. She's sure it will buy the time Bill needs to save her. It's the only way."

"NO!" Remus roared. He jerked his arm out of Sirius' hold and backed away until his back hit the wall with a thud. "You don't know what you're asking. I need her to be safe, I need her to be okay, more than you could possibly fucking understand. But I will NOT take away her right to choose. To seal the bond, we'd have to... it... it has to happen when..." Remus trailed off, shaking his head.

"I will not fucking do that to her. I would rather kill myself and let her die than do that to her."

"Remus," Bill said calmly, still looking down at Hermione's arm. "We're not asking you to do that."

"Non," Fleur agreed, nodding her head. "We would never ask you to do that without her permission. We would not condone that, nor would we wish to see you taint the bond. We will wake her up and explain. Or, at the least you can..."

"Wait," Sirius said, looking between the three in confusion as they all carried on discussing the Gods knew what.

"I'm lost. What's so bad, here? It's just a bite, right?"

"Yes, but the bite must be administered during the act of intimacy. He must..."

"He has to bite her while he's fucking her, to seal the bond," Bill said matter-of-factly as he continued to focus on the matter at hand.

"Shit, Moony, you never told me..."

"I'm not fucking talking about this," Remus said pointedly, then looked back over at Fleur.

"At the least," He echoed. "Do you think it's enough?"

"I believe it will work, yes. It will not heal as well as a fully sealed bond would, but it should buy Bill the time he needs," Fleur responded calmly.

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Hermione grinned, turning back around as she placed a hand on the door frame and bounced lightly on her feet.

"We're going to the gay bar, boys."



Hermione leaned her head against the wall of the shower, letting the cold of the porcelain tile bite into her skin as she squeezed her eyes closed and tried to quiet her racing thoughts. Everything was fine. She was dancing and laughing and researching and everything was fine.

She'd gone to the Burrow a few times, been to the cinema, read and napped, and everything was fine. She was hanging out with Ron, and with Sirius, and Neville had even come by the night before last and they'd all had fun, and everything was fine.

She was alive, and everything was fine.

Except, of course, for the tiny, inconsequential little fact that nothing was fine. She had experienced what she was sure had to be the most painful sort of loss, and it had left her... less than. Her magic was weakened, and she felt the absence of the bond like a weight in her chest, and it was all just... bullshit.

She wasn't angry about what happened at Shell Cottage. She was eternally grateful and had plans to go with Sirius to see Bill and Fleur the next morning to tell them exactly that. What happened inside that room saved her life. Her life being saved helped to win the war, even with all the losses.

Even with the loss of herself.

But that was the problem. She had been so sure of her truths that she'd ignored so many obvious signs that pointed toward the actual truth. She had spent years thinking she was just a lovesick teenage girl with a little too much of a crush on her kind, gentlemanly professor. She had spent the time since the battle convincing herself that she would figure out what had happened to her, and everything would be fine.

She hadn't anticipated that finding out would make everything infinitely worse. She'd already been cracking before the truth was unveiled, but now the weight of it all seemed insurmountable. She understood everything.

She was Remus Lupin's mate.

That fact had saved her life when Fleur, Bill, and—primarily—Sirius, strong-armed Remus into biting her. Funnily enough, she even understood why he'd been hesitant to do so. Not many people saw her beyond her capabilities, which had never really bothered her—and why should it? Was it not far preferable to be known for your brains, for your skills, for the strengths you held, than it was to be known for something silly like being pretty or playing the trombone or what have you?

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Still, from what Sirius had told her, and from the little bits and pieces of journal passages they'd managed to figure out were about her, it seemed as if Remus saw her.

Hermione had been seen before. Harry saw her. Ron, though it took some time, saw her. Ginny saw her. Sirius Black, twenty years her senior, had managed to see her better than anyone else ever had in such a short time. But she understood exactly what Sirius had meant when he said he'd danced with men but had never danced with a man.

She'd never been seen by a man.

It felt impossible to rationalize the fact that she would never see the one man who had actually seen her again. The whole situation was hard. Unjust. Downright cruel. The burden Remus had carried over her, the guilt and shame that piled on top of the never-ending mountain of torment he'd endured throughout his life, it was all just so hard.

The hardest fact of all, though, was laid bare in those damn journals. Remus had never been seen, either. Not really. He had friends and loved them desperately. He had a mother who did her best to be good to him.

But he had never been seen. He had kept so much inside and buried it all under his incessant need to make sure people didn't think he was a monster, and he had been through so much. Then, he spent over a decade having dreams about her. He had hope, for what may have been the first and only time in his life, and then it had been shattered when he finally met his mate, only to have it be a bushy-haired, know-it-all, thirteen-year-old who was his student.

He had tortured himself over their connection, to the very end, and he never even realized how good of a man that made him. A lesser man, one who gave in to the wolf more freely, wouldn't have held back. It wouldn't have mattered how old she was, or what was right or wrong. But Remus had cared. He had seen her and refused to hinder her ability to build a good life, despite the fact that he himself never had it good.

She sighed, and turned around, leaning back against the wall as she brought her arm up near her face and trailed the fingers of her right hand over the scarred flesh, pausing over the little ridges over and around the letter 'u' and the first 'o.'

Remus had never had it good. He had been close, though. Happy, aside from the burden he carried as a werewolf. But that happiness had been fleeting.

He was attacked and turned at four years old. He spent the next seven years never getting to play with other children, never getting to be a normal kid, and being told by an asshole of a father that he wasn't a real boy. Then he'd gone off to school, where he made friends and learned to enjoy his life. After that, he'd entered the adult world and was learning how to stand on his own two feet when everything crashed down around him and he lost it all.

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"She... her scent, she smells like..." Remus trailed off, shaking his head as the unspoken word hung in the air between them.

Her scent.

While Sirius may have lacked the additional skill of super-hero level werewolf senses, he knew, both from the condition Hermione had been in when he'd left the room, as well as from the tortured, devastated look on his friend's face, exactly what Remus meant.

Death.

She smelled like she was dying.

Remus stared down at Sirius, a low, animalistic whine rolling out from his chest as he blinked away tears, and nodded slowly, as if in resignation.

"I'll be calm, I—I just have to see her. She needs me. Please, Pads."

Sirius nodded back and opened the door, immediately stepping through the threshold and to the side. He looked over to see Fleur perched on a stool near the head of the bed as she ran a wet washcloth over Hermione's forehead, whispering in a soothing tone while Bill knelt at her other side, still steadily casting detection spell after detection spell on her wounded arm.

Remus let out a strangled half sob, half choking sort of noise and, in two quick strides, stepped up to the side of the bed near Fleur, collapsing to his knees and burying his face in the mattress next to Hermione's hip.

Sirius watched, nervously twisting the hem of his vest, as Remus' shoulders began to shake. Fleur leaned in closer to Remus, appearing to whisper something as she tilted her forehead to rest against the side of his face, then stood from her stool and stepped aside, gesturing for Remus to take her place as she held the washcloth out to him.

He wasted no time scrambling back to his feet and moving toward the stool. Taking the cloth from Fleur, he began dabbing at her face with trembling hands as he leaned in close, his lips moving rapidly as he whispered something, over and over. From where Sirius stood, the only word he could make out was 'don't.'

Finally, after an extended period of silence that seemed to stretch on forever, Remus looked over at Bill and spoke, his voice cracking.

"Cursed blade?" he asked, then sighed heavily at Bill's nod.

"How long does she have?"

"An hour or so, I think," Bill answered quietly, his eyes still fixed on the task at hand as he cast some sort of spell that enveloped the entirety of Hermione's arm in a golden light—which immediately turned a sickly green, causing Bill to curse under his breath.

"Yeah. Hour, at the most. I'm trying everything I can, Remus but, without the blade here to cast a counter curse, even the best healer or curse breaker couldn't..."

KEEPER OF THE MOON

“Remus. You have to calm down. It’s bad, but Fleur says there is a way to fix it. But some of the other kids are here too, and if you go barreling in there all golden-Moony-eyed and growling and rageful, it’s going to cause a shit storm.”

“You don’t fucking —”

“Moony. Focus. She needs to be safe, right, you need her safe? If you don’t calm down, the other kids are going to figure out why you’re reacting this way. There’s a bloody war on, she will NOT be safe if word gets back to Greyback that she’s your mate. You told me that yourself!”

“Safe,” Remus repeated in a broken voice, then sighed heavily. “Yes. I need her to be... fine. I’m good, Pads, let me go.”

Sirius stepped back and moved to stand at Remus’ side, but kept one arm hovering behind his back, ready to snatch him by the collar if the need arose.

“I’m going to disillusion you, so the kids don’t ask too many questions, and I’ll explain along the way, okay?” he asked cautiously. Upon Remus’ stiff nod, Sirius brought his wand up and tapped him on the head, whispering the necessary charm, and then stepped back, nodding his head toward the house.

Sirius kept an eye trained on Remus, making note of his stiff posture and the way his fists were balled at his sides as they walked toward the house. He knew he had to tell him, but fuck if his normally calm, collected friend wasn’t irrational enough when it came to his mate, even prior to tonight’s events.

“Tell me,” Remus said, his voice coming out more of a growl than an actual vocalization.

“Snatchers found her and the boys. Took them to Malfoy Manor. We don’t know all the details, but Bellatrix decided she wanted some kind of information from Hermione, so she...” Sirius trailed off, glancing around to make sure no eyes were on them as he opened the door and led Remus inside of the little cottage.

“She what?” Remus commanded gruffly as they began to ascend the stairs.

“She tortured her. The Cruciatus curse. She was... well, Fleur was getting her cleaned up and changing her clothing when I stepped out. But that’s not the worst of it.” He paused as they reached the landing at the top of the stairs, one hand resting on the knob of the door to the little bedroom on the left, and turned to face Remus fully. “I need you to stay calm, okay?”

Remus closed his eyes and tilted his head up, rolling his shoulders and flexing his hands as if he were physically willing himself to relax. He drew in a long, audible breath through his nose, and paled immediately, his body going rigid again as his eyes snapped open. Sirius startled at the flash of gold he saw reflected back at him, then reached out, placing a hand firmly against his chest.

“Breathe, Moony,” he warned softly.

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His life had been four years of normalcy, followed by seven years of isolation. Ten years of good, followed by twelve spent destitute and alone, and then the rest of his life had been spent hating himself because the vicious attack he’d suffered through when he was practically still a baby had led to the lycanthropic urges forcing a bond that wasn’t appropriate in terms of age and timing.

He had deserved to be more than just a walking, breathing tragedy. As had Sirius. Sweet Sirius, forever stuck at the age of twenty-two. Her rock.

She wished so very much that she could just find a way to undo everything that had been done. She wished that she could just wave her wand and set the world back to how it should have been. Sirius, allowed to embrace his truth. Harry’s parents, alive and well. The Weasleys and Harry himself, as well as everyone else she’d lost, still breathing.

Remus, above ground, alive, in a world where maybe, some day, there would have been hope for the two of him.

But at the very least, if she had to settle, then she was going to settle for making the life she got as good as she could, and she was going to drag Sirius and Ron and anyone else she felt necessary along for the ride. Starting tonight, with Sirius. He needed this, so she would plaster a smile on her face and give him this night.



Hermione laughed and leaned back against the bar as she watched Sirius spinning around the dance floor with a tall, handsome, muggle banker. He looked up and caught her gaze, wiggling his eyebrows in response.

“He looks so damn happy,” she mused thoughtfully.

“Yeah, well, I’m happy for him, I just can’t believe I let you talk me into going to a gay club,” Ron responded.

“Aww, Ronald, what’s wrong? Are you worried it might awaken something in you?” Hermione teased.

Ron looked away for a minute, his eyes catching on something across the room, and Hermione followed his line of sight to see him staring down a man seated at a table on the other side of the dance floor.

“No,” he finally said. “I don’t need... awakened. I like to think I’ve got myself figured out pretty well.”

“Ron are you...” she began, then trailed off for a minute as she gathered her thoughts and chose her words carefully. “Is there anything you’d like to tell me?”

“There’s not anything to tell, really. I love women. I’ll probably marry a woman someday, and I can’t wait. I just also don’t see the harm in experimentation, or doing

things that make you feel good, you know? I don't really see guys in a romantic sense, or at least I haven't met one who makes me feel that way, yet. But, uh, sexually speaking, I like a bit of everything. What feels good, feels good," Ron said with a shrug.

Hermione squealed in delight, then pointed, not-so-inconspicuously, to the man across the way.

"Go feel good then, Ron," she told him softly. "You deserve some good."

Ron laughed and gave her a little mock salute as he slammed his drink down on the bar. Throwing in a wink, he spun on his heels and walked across the dance floor and stepping up to the guy he'd been eye-fucking for the last hour.

Good for him, Hermione thought with a wry grin before she turned back to watch Sirius some more.

He was still dancing with the same guy, though a softer song had come on, and they were now holding each other closely, swaying to the music as they talked and laughed. He looked so happy. So carefree. So young. He deserved this. He had deserved this for so long, and she was so happy to give it to him.

The little dance club was a good choice. It was cozy and intimate, but still lively, and they just happened to make this little excursion to The Hourglass on seventies night, where a DJ was currently cycling through all the greats, which Hermione knew had to be especially healing for Sirius.

Speaking of the devilish wizard, he popped up next to her at the bar, and leaned in to signal to the bartender before he stepped back and looked down at her with a huge grin plastered on his face.

"Are you having fun, Mut?" Hermione asked, smiling back up at him.

"The absolute best time, Kitten," he said brightly as he reached behind her to accept the beer he'd ordered and gave the bartender a grateful nod and a quick, "Thanks, Brad."

"I'm so glad you could have this," she said softly. "You always deserved this."

"It's a bit surreal. The music, the vibes, the old flooring. I feel like a kid again. Like I spun a Time Turner too far and wound up back in the old days. I suppose The Hourglass was a fitting choice," he said with a laugh, then paused and looked down at her again, his expression suddenly growing serious.

"I think I'm gonna go home with that guy, John. I've never done that before. I mean, obviously, I'm no blushing virgin. I used to cruise the parks, hooked up in a couple bathrooms, fell into the occasional wrong bed after a party back in school but I've never.. gone home with a guy. Do you think it's, um.." he paused, trailing off as he ran his fingers through his hair, but she reached up and put a hand on his arm, squeezing lightly as she smiled at him.

(Seal the bond)

"S'celler le lien?" Sirius repeated. "No, you can't be serious. He won't do it."

"Someone want to clue me in?" Bill asked.

"I am saying to Sirius, that Remus must come here to Hermione and seal the mating bond. There is deep magic involved. You will remember the way it felt when I marked you, no? If we are to bring him here, he can heal her. Not all the way, of course, but enough that she will survive through the night, so you have time to break the curse."

"He's going to be fucking pissed. About all of this. Her being hurt, me not calling him until now, your idea about the bond. But if it works, then... it'll be worth it. She's important. To him. To Harry. To the cause," Sirius said, pulling his wand out and spinning it in his hand.

"She's the way we win the war. Harry and Ron too, of course. But we need her. She keeps Harry grounded, keeps Ron in check, and her mind is... unmatched. We have to do whatever we can." Bill told him.

Sirius nodded and waved his wand to cast the patronus charm. After the big silvery, wispy dog emerged from his wand tip and bounded around the room, it came to rest at his feet, wagging its tail while it looked up at him expectantly.

"Find Remus Lupin. Tell him, 'Come to Shell Cottage. Alone. She's hurt,'" Sirius ordered the patronus, then watched as it took off, disappearing through the wall. He sighed, then slapped his hands on his knees and rose from his chair.

"I'm gonna go check on the kids and then wait for him beyond the wards. Fair warning, he's not gonna, uh..." Sirius trailed off, bringing a hand up to run through his hair.

"He will not handle this well," Fleur said with a knowing nod. "She is his mate, and to see her hurt will be very hard. Intolerable. But he will help her. There is no question."



Remus did not, in fact, handle it well.

The very instant he arrived at the apparition point on the beach, Sirius practically had to tackle him to keep him from storming straight into the cottage in a blind rage.

"Moony, breathe," he said, his voice a low warning as he beatrugged Remus, pulling the taller man back against his chest and banding his arms around him while he struggled against him in a desperate attempt to break free.

"Where the fuck is she? What happened? Who the fuck —" Remus seethed as he continued to fight against Sirius' loosening hold.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

Crucio'd a few times, but Fleur was able to administer some potions that help with the aftereffects. This wound, though... it's bad, Sirius."

"Shit," Sirius cursed, scrubbing his hands over his face as he walked around to the other side of the bed and crouched down to get a closer look. "Cursed blade, yeah? Can you break it?"

"I don't, uh... I don't think there's time. See?" Bill said quietly as he inched the arm of Hermione's sweatshirt up to her bicep. Sirius felt bile rise in his throat as he surveyed her arm, and he let out a long string of curse words as his eyes traced the various veins crisscrossing beneath her skin, now blackened from her wrist to as far up her arm as they could see.

"Well fucking... what CAN you do?"

"I don't know. I'm trying to decipher the specifics of the curse so I can break it, but it could take hours and..."

"She does not have hours," Fleur's melodic voice rang out as she stepped into the room, closing the door behind her.

"Fuck. We have to figure something out, she's... Harry can't lose her now. I don't know shit about this mission that they're on for Dumbledore but it's big. Whatever it is, it's the key to ending the war. And she is the key to Harry making it through this. We all saw how badly he broke down over a house elf that he met a handful of times. This would... losing her would break him, and — oh my gods, Remus..." he turned and sank into a small chair next to the bed, running a hand through his hair.

"Remus?" Fleur asked. "Remus Lupin?"

"She's..." Sirius paused, considering his words for a moment.

"Fuck it. You're part Veela, and you're basically half a werewolf," he said as he gestured between Fleur and Bill. "Hermione is Remus' mate. If she's... if she's not going to make it, he needs to be here, at least."

"She's his what?" Bill asked incredulously, his face twisting up in confusion. "But she's... he's old enough to be her..."

"Bill," Fleur said in a soothing tone as she stepped forward and placed her hand on his arm. "It is natural. You are my mate, even though I am seven years younger. We were lucky to meet once we were both adults, but the magic does not care about the age. We could have met at twenty and thirteen. Sixteen and nine. It would not have mattered. When the mate is... much older, or much younger, the feelings wait. Right now, he just feels... protective, no?" she glanced over to Sirius, who nodded.

"Now. This changes things," Fleur continued as she stepped back over to the bed and cast a cooling charm on Hermione, then re-situated the blankets around her. "We must send for Remus. He will come and sceller le lien."

STEVIE_SUNSHINE

"I think it's brilliant, Sirius. I think Ron is on the same wavelength," she added with a laugh, nodding her head to where Ron now sat with his arm around the back of the other man's chair as he leaned in closely and whispered in his ear."

"Fucking hell, that's brilliant," Sirius laughed. "Ah, to have been able to do this when I was young and beautiful. Lucky bloke."

"Hey! You're still beautiful," Hermione argued.

"Right you are, Kitten," he said with a wink. "But I should have been braver back then. Summoned up some of that Gryffindor courage and gone to a place like this. I think, sometimes, that if I'd had the guts to open up to my friends sooner, I could have lived a little more."

He turned to lean back against the bar and sling an arm around her, then gestured back to Ron as he spoke again.

"If only I'd had you to kick my ass into gear when I was his age."

Hermione went still, then bolted up from her chair, grabbing her bag off of the bar as she looked back over toward Ron and then up at Sirius.

"You good, Kitten?" he asked, furrowing his brow as he studied her face.

"I'm absolutely fine. I just realized that..." she trailed off, chewing her lip, then decided to change course. "Well, I thought I'd get out of everybody's hair. Do me a favour? Tell Ron I said goodnight, and that I said he better let that mountain of a man take him home. And then you go do the same. I'll see you in the morning, and I expect a full report," she said brightly as she leaned in and gave him a hug before turning around and slipping out of the club.

Hermione stood in the street, simply staring up at the sign above the door as her mind spun.

The Hourglass.

Seventies Night.

If only I'd had you to kick my ass in to gear when I was his age.

It all made so much sense, in the most nonsensical way. With her mind made up, she walked around the side of the building and into the dark alleyway, apparating away as a plan began to take root.



20th June, 1998

"Kitten!" Sirius called out in a sing-song voice as he bounded up the stairs.

"Library?" Hermione responded without looking up from the book in her lap as she furiously scribbled notes.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

Sirius stepped into the room, surveying the messy stack of books, journals and notepads spread out on the table in front of her, and then cleared his throat.

“Have you descended into madness in the twelve hours I was away?” he teased.

“No. I don’t think I’ve ever been more sane,” Hermione said, pushing the book away to look up at him.

“Did you have fun?”

“The best night of my life. Truly. It was better than I could ever have dreamed to finally get to just... be, in a place like that. To get to go home with someone and not worry about how I was going to cover my tracks or make excuses when the dawn broke. I probably won’t see him again, honestly, and he seemed to be on the same page, but it was... perfect. It was everything,” Sirius told her as he sat down in the chair across from her and brought a hand up to wipe the tears from his eyes.

“It was well worth the wait.”

“Sirius,” Hermione began, looking up to meet his eyes. “What if you hadn’t had to wait?”

“Well then that would have been pretty fucking cool,” he said with a laugh. “But time passes and things happen the way they do. It is what it is.”

“Sometimes. But what if we could undo it?” she asked as she rose from her chair and began organizing the mess atop the table.

“Kitten, what’s going on?” he asked, raising an eyebrow at her as he picked up the book she’d just closed. “Why are you reading *The Art and Ethics of Time Travel Or... Paradoxes and Possibilities: Theoretical Frameworks for Time Travel in Magic?*?”

“I...” she began, but Sirius rose from his chair and glared at her, effectively shutting her up.

“No. No, you will NOT,” he told her, shaking his head vehemently.

“But I could! I could do it. I’ve moved through time before,” she argued as she continued to stack her books methodically.

“Time travel is dangerous, Hermione!”

“You’re ALIVE because of time magic! You would have gotten the dementor’s kiss if I hadn’t had the Time Turner. Not to throw it in your face, of course, but you can hardly stand here and argue about the matter at hand when you’ve personally benefited from it.”

“And I am so eternally grateful for what you did that night. But going back a few hours is vastly different than... What are we even talking about here? Months? Years?”

“It’s vastly different, yes, but in theory, there is no real reason why it would be impossible. And I could fix it all. I could save them, Sirius. I’ve thought about it since the final battle. How I wished I’d still had the time turner from third year, and I could

STEVE_SUNSHINE

A while later, after Harry had decided he needed to dig a grave for Dobby on his own, Sirius reluctantly left him to it and headed back into the cottage. He stepped into the kitchen and was immediately taken aback by the sight of Fleur leaning against the counter, her shoulders shaking as she cried against Bill’s chest.

“Alright, Frenchie?” Sirius asked, raising an eyebrow.

“It’s cursed and she’s not... I don’t think I can...” Fleur began in her heavy French accent before she broke off into another strangled sob.

“Oh fuck,” Sirius said, his eyes going wide. He’d been so focused on Harry that he hadn’t even really registered with him that Ron had been carrying Hermione’s unconscious form when they’d arrived.

“What’s going on? Where is she?” he questioned, his eyes darting back and forth between Fleur and Bill.

Fuck, Moony was going to lose it.

Bill leaned in and hugged Fleur tighter, whispering against the side of the head. She nodded, then pulled back and tilted her head so that Bill could kiss her on the forehead before he stepped away.

“Upstairs. I need to check on her and I don’t want to talk about it where everyone can... not until we’re sure there’s nothing we can do,” he said to Sirius, gesturing for him to follow as he ascended the stairs.

When they reached the small landing, Bill paused with his hand on the knob of the first of the three doors. He took a deep breath, shaking his head slightly, before he opened it and led Sirius inside.

Sirius stepped up to the side of the bed and reached out, brushing a mess of curls out of the way to get a better look at her face as Bill rounded the other side of the bed and knelt down to inspect her arm. She looked... horrid. Ghastly. Her skin was a sickly, greyish-green color and she smelled like a mixture of blood and piss.

This wouldn’t do at all.

Harry needs her.

Moony’s gonna lose his shit.

“What happened?” he asked as he looked over to see the wound on her arm that Bill was currently casting a series of healing charms on. He leaned across Hermione’s torso to get a better look, and his eyes went wide when he saw the word etched into her skin.

“What the fuck happened?” he repeated.

“I just got bits and pieces from Ron. He was out of it, had to slip him a calming draught. Snatchers grabbed them, he said. Took them to Malfoy Manor. Something happened... I guess it was related to that damn mission that they can’t tell us about, and then Bellatrix...” Bill trailed off, gesturing to Hermione’s arm. “She’s also been

Hermione sat down, leaning her back against the other window, and brought a hand up to watch the coloured beams of light dance across her skin.

"This is gorgeous," she said.

"Yeah, it is," Draco responded quietly, then cleared his throat. "I should apologize about so many things. I am sorry for what it's worth. I um... I have nightmares about that night in my drawing room... I wake up with your screams still echoing in my mind. I'm seeing a Mind Healer, and she's been a big help with a lot of things. She says it's the guilt. I think I have a lot of guilt where you're concerned."

"I have nightmares about it, too," Hermione admitted. "I have them about a lot of things. The Quidditch cup, the last trial of the tournament, the battle... she trailed off, shaking her head, then added, "The war fucked all of us up, Malfoy. We were children, no matter what side we were on. None of us were even old enough to know what we truly wanted to fight for when it first started back up again."

"Yeah," Draco agreed softly. He extended his arm as he, too, watched the light flicker across his skin, then sighed.

"I fancied you, Granger. When we were younger. I still think you're brilliant, and quite possibly the smartest person I've ever met. But before the war, I was such an arse to you and Potter because I was... a stupid kid. I thought you were cute, and I was so bloody angry with you for that because I wasn't supposed to think you were cute. I wanted to be Potter's friend because he was a big deal and I'd been raised to believe I was the biggest deal, but he had no interest in me. Honestly, I just hate Weasley," he continued on with a shrug.

"But with you and Potter, at the beginning at least, it was confusion. Jealousy. I'm..." Draco shifted slightly in his seat and gave her an apologetic look. "I'm so sorry he didn't make it."

"Yeah. It's been hard without him," Hermione said, turning her head to look out at the bookshelves for a moment before she looked back over at him.

"Some day you'll have a son, Malfoy. Teach him better than you were taught. And tell him that when he sees a cute girl, he should choose kindness instead of being a pompous ass. Because I thought you were the dreamiest boy I'd ever seen for about fifteen seconds after I first saw you. Until you opened your mouth," she told him with a wry smile.

"I will," he nodded, then smiled back. "Perhaps in another life, I would have been less of an idiot and we would have spent a lot more time in this library together."

"Maybe," she said, chewing her lip for a moment. "I don't need apologies or excuses, Malfoy. I never hated you. I just thought you were an arse. Move forward and do better."

Draco nodded again, then cocked his head and narrowed his eyes at her.

"Speaking of moving forward," He started, shifting to face her. "What the bloody hell are you doing? Really? A blood adoption? You're Hermione Fucking Granger. You don't do anything without a carefully constructed reason. You probably schedule every time you'll come down with a headache three months in advance."

"I did just schedule and plan for a mental breakdown earlier this week," she acquiesced with a laugh.

"Exactly!" Draco threw his hands up in exasperation, then sighed and righted himself. "Look, I may be an arrogant arsehole, Granger, but I'm capable of a lot more than people give me credit for. I'm brilliant, too. I'm analytical and focused. I beat your marks in potions and was second to you in just about every other class. You may be the Brightest Witch of our Age but I am undoubtedly the smartest Wizard. That's not conceit—though, make no mistake, I am conceited, but that's beside the point. I just... I know you have some sort of plan up your sleeve."

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you."

"Try me."

Hermione worried her bottom lip between her teeth as her eyes moved rapidly over Draco's face. She really shouldn't be talking about this. She knew that. Still, she figured, what the hell? He didn't seem as if he would care, nor could stop her even if he did take issue with it. She was a grown witch and a bloody war heroine, who could make Kingsley Shacklebolt himself cower, and she answered to no Wizard.

Especially not Draco Malfoy.

"Time travel."

"Really?" he asked, leaning back against the window. "Huh. That's ambitious. So... I assume that, since you're going to be Black's sister, you plan to go farther back than a time turner would allow?"

"A traditional turner, at the least. But I'm working on gathering alternate methods and figuring out which is the best option," she informed him.

"I'm capable of a lot, Granger," he reiterated as he rose from the bench and crouched down in front of it, tapping his wand to a wooden panel along the base.

"The ministry didn't find all the hiding spots when they stormed the manor for dark artifacts. This isn't necessarily dark, just... taboo," he explained as he reached inside the panel, his hand disappearing through the wood as if he'd stuck his arm straight through it. Finally, he pulled out an ornate silver box, bordered by a continuous line of tiny runes and set it on the bench in front of her as he sat back on his heels.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

"I may have failed as a killer, but they had me working on that cabinet for a reason. I've always been adept at dealing with magical objects. I think I'd like to be a curse breaker someday." He grinned as he studied the box in front of them.

"So, what is this?" Hermione's fingers twitched with the urge to reach out and run her hand over the intricate designs lining the edges of the box, but she knew better than to touch an object hidden in a secret compartment of a manor that had housed dark wizards and witches for centuries.

She was hardly a firstie.

"I found it in the room of hidden objects. It's a time box. Simple name, but it's a pretty big deal." Draco's voice rose as he rushed the words out, palpable excitement filling the space between them as he spoke. "There were only ever five known boxes in existence, and they were outlawed at the turn of the sixteenth century."

"A time box? I've never even read about this." Hermione let out a small, surprised laugh as she shook her head.

"The only reason I recognized it is I, um... well I didn't really have a lot of socialization as a child. I used to spend a lot of time talking to ancestors in the portrait hall. A very distant Uncle, who disappeared in 1584, possessed one of the five boxes. It's featured in his painting, so I recognized this as soon as I saw it."

"So you found this great, hidden, illegal object and... stuck it in a bench?" Hermione prompted with a teasing lilt to her voice.

"Nobody else knows about this hiding spot. It's warded only to me. Admittedly, I created it just to stash booze and other items of teenage debauchery after third year, but it's secure. I may have taken the mark, Granger, but that doesn't mean I loved it. The second I saw this, I knew that I couldn't let Voldemort get his hands on it, so I stashed it here," Draco explained as he rose from the floor and sat back down on the bench across from her.

"So, what does it do?"

"It's like... a time turner to the maximum degree. Instead of hours, it works in decade long increments. This knob here, see?" he asked, pointing to the silver knob in the center. "You cast the spell and then each turn is ten years. I don't know the incantation, but I can visit the portrait hall and find out."

"So, what's the catch?"

"Always so clever," he said with a laugh. "It's a one-way ticket. The box quite literally just blips out of existence once you arrive. Neither of the creators were ever able to figure out how to get back."

STEVE_SUNSHINE

As your daughter, she will become the Heir of House Black, so there are the vaults to contend with, certain familial —"

"Oh, she's going to be my sister," Sirius corrected. "But yes, I've explained it all."

"On?" Narcissa looked taken aback and went quiet for a moment. Her head moved on a swivel, studying first Sirius, then Hermione with an appraising look on her face.

"Hmmm," she hummed. "Draco? Would you be so kind as to take Miss Granger out to see the rose garden while I speak with my cousin in private?"

"No," Draco scoffed as he rose from his seat. "She doesn't care about your flowers, Mother."

He turned, looking down at Hermione, and extended a hand in a silent offer to help her to her feet. "Come on, Granger. I'll show you the library while they talk about you behind your back."

Hermione laughed and ignored his hand as she rose from her seat and followed him from the room.



"Wow."

"Yep."

"I mean, just... wow."

"Your sense of awe has been established," Draco drawled in a bored tone.

"Sorry, it's just really... wow." Hermione laughed as she trailed her hand over the spines of a row of books on the shelf to her left, staring at the titles in wide-eyed wonder. She turned again, taking in the large, two-story library, complete with four spiral staircases, a number of sliding ladders, and an array of floor pillows, low chairs and tables strewn about.

"Come on," Draco said, waving his hand to gesture for her to follow him as he turned and began ascending the nearest staircase. "I'll show you the best part."

Hermione followed him up the winding steps to the second floor of the library, where he led her to a back corner, and she gasped in awe at the site before her. Tucked into the corner was an expansive window seat below two large, stained glass windows that met in the middle and cast a rainbow of colours over the cream fabric of the cushioned seats, as well as the numerous adorning pillows and throw blankets.

"This is unbelievable," she breathed, running her hand over a particularly fluffy throw pillow.

"This has always been my favorite place to hide away in the manor. I think I may have fallen asleep here as a child just as often as I did in my own bed," Draco told her as he took a seat on one side and gestured for her to join him.

not do to protect my child, and the fact that he has made it through the war alive and breathing makes it hard to say I would change a single step that I took. However, I do sincerely apologize for the fact that you were collateral damage to that goal.”

Hermione blinked, taken aback by Narcissa’s matter-of-factness, and simply stared unblinkingly for a moment. She had known—or at the least, she had suspected—that some sort of exchange of pleasantries or apology would occur. She had not, however, anticipated that it would be so... Honest. It was refreshing, really, to have someone just tell her the truth—or, more accurately, to have someone own their truth. Somehow, despite the fact that it is one of the last things she would have ever predicted, she realized that she kind of respected it.

So, she told her as much.

“I respect your honesty.” Easy. Simple. Honest, in return. Hermione didn’t feel the need to accept the apology, nor did she feel as if Narcissa expected her to, so she simply left it at that.

“Good,” Narcissa gave Hermione a stiff nod and smoothed her hands over her skirts as she spoke, “Now, it is my understanding that we are here today to talk about blood adoption. May I ask what brought this on?”

“Yes, we are,” Sirius said. “And no, you may not.”

“Very well,” Narcissa lifted one shoulder in a sort of half-shrug as she took another careful sip of her tea. “And the both of you are resolute in your decision?”

“We are,” Sirius and Hermione spoke in unison, then glanced at each other, exchanging a conspiratorial smile as they tried to hold back their laughter.

“Good. The adoption ritual to incorporate an of-age individual into a bloodline requires full participation from all parties involved. This participation must be given willingly, and it must come from four parties, which include the adopter, the adoptee, the caster, and another member of the bloodline. Draco is willing to stand on behalf of the Black bloodline.”

“Thank you,” Hermione said, looking over at Draco in surprise.

“Consider it reparations for the teeth thing fourth year,” he said with a shrug.

“I already considered the teeth thing as reparations for the slap third year,” she retorted.

“Was the slap not reparations for the slur I used for the first time second year?” he raised an eyebrow, and Hermione couldn’t help but laugh.

“Suffice it to say,” Narcissa interjected, cutting off their little back and forth exchange, “The two of you can call it even. Moving on,” she continued, looking over at Sirius. “I assume you have explained the full implications of the adoption to Miss Granger, yes?”

“That’s...that’s fine, I’ll have people, where—or, when I’m going, so I...” Hermione shrugged, teeth digging into her lip again as she shook her head, “I don’t plan on coming back. But is this... are you actually offering me this?”

“I am. Like I said, I have a lot to apologize for. But I think actions speak louder than words, and there is no better way I can think of to set things right than giving you this. Go do your annoying Gryffindor thing. Save the whole bloody world so none of us have to fight a war before we’ve even decided on a post-Hogwarts career path.” He picked the box back up and tucked it back into the secret cubby, tapping his wand to reset the wards, and then looked up at her.

“As painful as it may be for my inner eleven-year-old self to admit, if there’s anyone who’s smart enough to go back and undo all of this, it’s you. I’ll take a trip to the portrait hall and start working on breaking down that ancestor I mentioned. I’ll owl you once I have the incantation.”

“This is...” Hermione began, shaking her head. “Thank you, Draco.”

“To a better end, Hermione.”



As Hermione and Draco made their way back into the solarium, she stopped short and smiled at the sight of Sirius and Narcissa. They were clinging tightly to one another, hands grasped between their laps as they sat sideways on the settee she’d abandoned, facing each other with broad grins on their tear-stained faces, and she felt her heart swell.

Whatever conversation had taken place while she was with Draco in the library had clearly been something that they had both needed, and she had to admit she was a sucker for any situation that put a smile like that on Sirius’s face.

The two broke apart as they saw Draco and Hermione approaching them, and Narcissa rose to hug Draco while Sirius mirrored her movements and wrapped his arms around Hermione.

“Welcome to the family, Kitten,” He told her, planting a sloppy kiss on her cheek and then stepping back away from her.

“She’ll do it, then?” Hermione asked excitedly.

“I will,” Narcissa answered, turning to look at her. “The ritual needs to be done under the light of a full moon. We’ll do it here, in the gardens, in seven days’ time. I’ll owl instructions for the ceremony. Welcome to the family, Hermione.”



KEEPER OF THE MOON

*Well, I've been afraid of changing
'Cause I've built my life around you
But time makes you bolder, even children get older
And I'm getting older too*

STEVIE_SUNSHINE

“Awkward, because we’ve never been in the same space for more than five seconds without attacking one another?” Draco surmised, his face morphing into his trademark smirk.

“Precisely,” she said with a solemn nod. “I find myself torn between the urge to hex you preemptively and the urge to throw up a shield charm in case you hex me.”

“Well, old habits,” he said with a bit of a laugh. “But I’m trying this new thing called ‘not being a raging asshole over my Daddy issues and feelings of insecurity.’ Mind Healer’s orders. Anyway, my mother has prepared tea and asked me to fetch you, so...”

Hermione nodded and followed Draco back toward the center of the expansive room, where she took a seat next to Sirius on a pale blue settee.

“Miss Granger,” Narcissa said softly, tipping her head at her by way of greeting. “Before we begin, I would be remiss if I did not ask that you allow me a moment to speak frankly?”

Hermione glanced up at Sirius, who nodded at her as if to say ‘it’s okay.’

“Sure, yes, that’s fine,” she replied nervously, her hands fidgeting with the hem of her jumper as she looked back over at the Malfoy matriarch.

“Miss Granger,” Narcissa began again. “I offer no excuses. I was raised with a certain ideology that—despite knowing a good portion of what I was taught was rubbish—I chose to continue to perpetuate. I married a cold man and played the role I needed to play to get through, which led to my son being raised with the same ideology. At times, in life, we must go along to get along. In this case, my going along led to me standing idly by while many horrible things occurred. I am not proud of that. At the point when you were brought to the manor, my family and I had been living—quite literally—under the Dark Lord’s hand for nearly a year. I was cowardly, terrified, and desperate to appease him.”

She went quiet for a moment as she took a sip of her tea and then delicately set the cup and saucer back on the table before she looked back up at Hermione and continued speaking.

“My cowardice led to a teenage girl being tortured in my family home while I stood and did nothing. It led to my son being forced to watch a classmate he’d grown up with, rival or not, be harmed by his own Aunt, in a room that had once held happy memories for him—”

“Mother..” Draco began, but Narcissa cut him off with a shake of her head.

“I am not proud of my choices, Miss Granger. But I am a mother who found herself in an impossible position, and every choice I have made since the events that occurred in the Department of Ministries has been in an effort to keep my son safe. Unfortunately, that includes the choices I made when you were brought here. There is nothing I would

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on a small fainting couch with a full tea service spread out on the low marble table in front of her. She rose and immediately stepped toward them, opening and closing her mouth a few times, and brought her arms up, then quickly dropped them. She cleared her throat and cast her eyes down to the floor, then said, softly, “Hello, Sirius.”

Sirius laughed and rolled his eyes at her hesitation, then reached out and pulled her into a bear hug. “War’s over, Gissy. Our parents are dead and that cunt of a husband of yours is locked up. Don’t be weird, just hug your favorite cousin.”

“Reggie was my favourite, but I suppose you’ll do.” Narcissa laughed and hugged him back. Hermione side-stepped the weepy, giggly pair of Black cousins to give them a bit of space. She turned to survey the room, and her eyes caught on a large, white piano in the far corner of the room.

She walked over to the baby grand and brought a hand up, lightly tracing a finger over the keys as she stared down at it. It was high-quality. Expensive—of course—and the entire body was lined with a golden trim that she was sure was actual gold. Figures, she thought.

“Do you play?” a deep voice asked from behind her.

“Malfoy?” Hermione turned slowly and took a calming breath before she looked up at her former bully. He looked... better, she thought. The last time she’d seen him had been in the height of the battle, when she and Ron had passed him dueling someone she hadn’t recognized and he’d pretty well been a petulant, blubbering mess.

Prior to that, she’d gotten a good eye full of him the night the snatchers brought Harry, Ron and herself to the Manor, and he’d looked worse than she’d ever seen him—which was saying a lot, given how horrid and sickly he’d looked throughout their sixth year.

He did look better, though. He was wearing simple black trousers and a charcoal grey button up with the sleeves rolled up, and his hair had grown a bit longer, falling into eyes that no longer bore the deep circles she had grown accustomed to seeing.

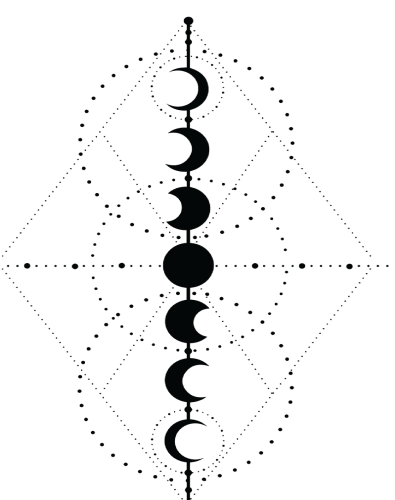
“Sorry, I didn’t mean to sneak up on you,” Draco reached a hand up to rub the back of his neck, then gestured toward the piano. “Do you? Play, I mean.”

“Oh, it’s fine. I... a bit, as a kid, yeah.”

Draco nodded and cast his eyes down to study the floor as he replied, “That’s good. I do. Play the, um, piano, I mean.”

Hermione tilted her head, staring at him with incredulity for a lingering beat, then let out a loud laugh, causing Draco to jump and look at her in alarm.

“Oh, I’m so sorry.” She shook her head and covered her mouth with her hand as she tried to stifle her laughter. “It’s just... this is...”



Coming Home

7th July 1998

Hermione sat on the floor with her back against the footboard of the bed, staring down the neat little stacks set out in front of her.

Twenty-Seven identical, leather-bound journals.

She wasn’t sure about this part. Given the fact that Remus was dead, she hadn’t really had to worry about how he would react to her knowing all of his deepest and most personal thoughts. The fact that he had told Sirius to give them to her made it a little less complicated, so while she could never quite shake the feeling that she was invading his privacy every time she cracked open one of the notebooks, she’d never felt guilty about it.

Going back, though, to a time when he was alive, and twenty years younger than when she’d known him, she couldn’t rightly predict how he may feel about... well, any of this. Still, she had to take back anything she could. The time would come when she would need to prove her identity to everyone, and she needed proof, believability, if any of this was going to work.

So in addition to an over-abundance of potions and a hefty amount of gold from the Black family vaults, she had pictures and newspaper articles for James and Lily, the

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journals for Remus, a letter Sirius had written to his younger self that he assured her would be all the proof he needed, Harry's cloak—because Sirius thought it would be a good way to drive the point home, since James' was one-of-a-kind—and a small satchel containing vials of memories from both of them, just in case.

"Okay. Talk to me, Kitten," Sirius said as he strode into the room and flopped down onto the chair in the corner, throwing a leg over the arm.

"I might miss that chair most of all," Hermione quipped as she lifted her wand and began methodically shrinking the journals, one by one, so that she could fit them all into the little magic lock box she'd purchased when she and Sirius had gone out to the shops earlier in the week.

"It's been here since the sixties, and my Mum will be dead just a few years after you're done playing hero so you can add the chair to your list of prizes to claim. You'll have your wolf and the chair and the two of you can live happily ever after with your jumpers and your nerdy and read yourselves to death while I'm on holiday with my big, beefy husband," Sirius told her, lighting a cigarette and balancing the ashtray on his knee as he watched her work.

"Well, I don't... I mean, I know the mating bond is a thing. But first of all, we don't even know if that will stand the test of time travel. Technically speaking, I'm going back to fifteen years before the bond snapped into place. There's no real way of knowing if it will... well, it's tied to our souls, and I get that, but I'm a vastly different person than the girl whose magic deemed her a compatible match for him, and he is going to be vastly different as well. And aside from that, I'm certainly not going back for the sole purpose of chasing any romantic dreams or to —"

"To get a werewolf into your knickers?" Sirius deadpanned, then burst into laughter as he asked his cigarette.

"Don't be gross," Hermione groaned, reaching behind her and tossing a throw pillow she'd been leaning against at him. "But yes, I... in this timeline, the circumstances were so impossible. I always fancied him, but I was also a child. If things happen, they do, but I'm far more focused on the bigger issues at hand."

"Oh, they'll happen. Bonded or not, you're gorgeous and polarizing and he's going to be drooling all over himself. I did know him, remember? Even if the bond never existed, there's no way the world could drop you with all your similarities into Moony's orbit and him not be a goner for you. But fine, I'll drop it," Sirius told her, holding a hand up in surrender. "Give me the rundown again."

"I am Carina Hermione Black—but I go by my middle name, and I'll pretend I hate Carina because it would be impossible to get used to going by a different name. I

STEVE_SUNSHINE

"And you're sure she knows how to do this? And that she would actually do it for me given our roles in the war and my blood status?"

"Swear it. The blood thing... not everyone is an extremist. She absolutely thinks she's superior to people who aren't purebloods. A lot of people do, which is bullshit, but it doesn't mean they all want you to die. Narcissa is the best man for the job, as it were. Most older families have a person in each generation who knows of these things—blood magic, ritualistic customs and so on—and they pass that on to the next, so Narcissa trained under our Great Aunt Cassiopeia. She owes me two life debts so as I said, I'll call one in if I have to, but it's not going to come to that."

"How did you manage to rack up two life debts?" Hermione asked with a laugh.

"I saved her when she fell off a broom when we were kids, and then she got right back on and did it again," Sirius responded, shaking his head. "She was always so stubborn. And a giant snob. But we were cousins, and before the real world happened we had a lot of love between us."

"Ah. I thought the snobbery was just a Malfoy trait but I suppose her kid got it from both sides." Hermione said, pushing up off of the table and approaching Sirius to pluck his cigarette pack from the pocket of his shirt. "Fine. I'll trust you. But I'm coming with you. Don't—don't give me that look, Sirius. The house didn't torture me."



2nd July 1998

Hermione stepped out of the Floo into the grand foyer of Malfoy Manor, then quickly moved out of the way to give Sirius room to pass through behind her as she brushed some soot from the grey, oversized jumper she'd pulled on. She had briefly considered dressing up a bit but had decided—fuck that. There wasn't an outfit or set of robes in the world that would make her look or feel any less out of place here. She couldn't really be arsed to care about fitting in with the Malfoys, anyway.

"You ready, Kitten?" Sirius asked, picking up her arm and looping it through his. "You'll let me know if it's too much and we'll leave, deal?"

"Deal." She nodded as she let him lead her to a large set of double doors at the end of the foyer.

They stepped into a large space that seemed to pull triple duty as a sitting room, solarium and greenhouse, with so many plants lining two of the walls that Hermione was quite certain Neville Longbottom would have simply lost all semblance of composure and wept at the sight.

Narcissa Malfoy—clad in a set of sage green robes made of some sort of airy, silky material that Hermione was sure cost more than her childhood home—was perched

30th June 1998

"It's HER? Narcissa Malfoy, of all people?" Hermione screeched as she reached behind her to find the table and then gripped the edge, lifting herself up to sit on the rough wood surface.

"I know it's a lot. But I need you to understand that... well, I guess that there are things you don't understand," Sirius said as he leaned back against the stove.

"Explain anyway."

"You trust me, Kitten," he responded —Not a question, but a statement of a fact.

"I do."

"Then trust me on this, *Cissy* isn't... great, in a lot of ways. But women in her position are raised to keep their heads down and obey their husbands. Men in those circles are raised not to spare the rod where wives and children are concerned. Not every choice she made was black and white."

"I know things aren't all... good or bad with no in-between. I know Kingsley reviewed her memories from the final battle. What she did for Harry, even though he didn't make it out the other end, it helped him survive long enough for the Order to win and I'll always be grateful to her for that. She's just..."

"A bitch?"

"Oh gods, she's such a bitch. I've only ever interacted with her like a couple times but... she's a bitch."

"Yeah, well. Half of that is the raising. Half of that is because she's just naturally a bitch. But she was raised to be the perfect paragon of pureblood society. Andromeda got blasted off the tapestry for marrying Ted, Bella was always batshit. I don't think Narcissa ever even really formed her own opinions. They betrothed her to Lucius when she was eleven and then her entire teen years were just about getting through school and training to be a proper wife so they could marry her off the day she turned eighteen. Some of us break out of what we were taught, and some don't. But believe it or not, there's always been good in her."

"I'm sure there is." Hermione sighed, "Like I said, I don't think anyone is just strictly good or strictly bad. That night at the manor she seemed more afraid than anything. It's just still a lot to process."

"You and I both know what it's like to have a little darkness in us. She's got a little light in her. I told Harry once that the world isn't just made up of good people and Death eaters. I was thinking of her when I said it," he admitted, bringing a hand up to run through his hair.

still think the muggle mother is excuse enough to not need to change my first name," Hermione began as she started loading the miniaturized journals into the metal box.

"Eh. A constellation name is the one thing my —our father would have made sure any child had, bastard or not. It sells the story better, and makes Orion look complicit in hiding you away. Continue."

"Right. Carina Hermione Black, the secret daughter of Orion Black and Linda Crist, a muggle woman who met Orion while she was waiting tables to put herself through university. I was raised by my mother and stepfather, Jack, who are both dentists. I attended Beauxbatons instead of Hogwarts. I'm coming to you because Death eaters attacked and killed my family. I narrowly escaped with this —" she continued, holding out her arm as she gestured to her scar. "So, thankfully, this word is proof they didn't know my true identity as a supposed half-blood. I'm afraid of what may happen if they find out, so I'm coming to my secret long lost half-brother for help."

"Perfect," he said with a nod. "We can write off any slips in language or slang as a product of being in France for so long and none of the others would be the wiser, but you'll have to watch your references. It's a good thing you already love old music and film, though, that will help you appear more natural."

"Yeah," Hermione said. Standing, she set her bag on the bed and then stretched, twisting her back to ease the ache that had developed from sitting on the floor. Finally, she looked back at Sirius and offered as tentative, hopeful smile.

"I think we've got everything covered. I have enough money from our trip to the family vault to last for far longer than I'll need. I know the plan, I have the proof, I have the clothes now that we lucked out at the vintage shop, I know the music and the slang and all the things. I'm still just... processing, I think. I can't believe it's real. I can't believe you are being so cool about all of this."

"Like I said, I know you, Hermione. You're going to do this either way. It's still my job to protect you, vow fulfilled or not, and I can at least make sure you're prepared for success. Besides, life's short. Everybody dies. Might as well go out trying to save the world," he said with a shrug as he rose from the chair and ran a hand down his shirt to smooth out the wrinkles. "I have one demand, though."

"Anything," she said as she walked over to the dresser and dug around, pulling out the few jumpers she figured looked ancient enough to be able to take along with her.

"Tell me. Give me the letter when you get there. You can wait to tell the others until you've been there a few months, given them time to get to know you."

"Sirius... are you sure? What if younger-you doesn't want to deal with it all? With me? Oh gods, what if everybody hates me? I'm such a swot and I'm bossy and I —"

"Kitten," he said, stepping up to grip her by the biceps as he looked down at her.

"I love you now. I will love you then. And they are all going to adore you. James was so much like Harry, you two will get on famously. You and Lily will bond over muggle things and academics. You and Remus are... that whole thing. And even Peter —"

Hermione stiffened, clenching her teeth, but Sirius just shook his head and smiled.

"A fucking rat, I know. But he was our friend, then. He was funny. A bit daft, but bloody hilarious. He'll remind you a lot of Ron, in that regard at least."

"I'm going to hate him," she declared with a scowl.

"Maybe. I think it'll be a lot harder to hate him than you're hoping. But if you do your job, you're going to save him either way. And maybe...if you get the chance, you can —"

"Regulus." Hermione nodded. "I promise, I'll find a way." She turned and reluctantly bent down to pick up the lock box and pressed her wand to the latch, trying — and failing — to cast a locking ward.

"Stupid fucking dead werewolf mate magical weakness bullshit, good for nothing wand, can't cast shit aside from a damn Accio," she rambled as she tried again, then slammed the box down on the bed next to her bag.

"It's okay, Kitten. I've got you," Sirius said softly as he came up next to her and drew his wand. He grinned over at her as he cast the ward and slid the box in her bag, then threw an arm over her shoulders and squeezed her to his side. "Two more days. You're going to be so bloody brilliant."

"I'm always brilliant," Hermione sniffed.



8th July 1998

Hermione twisted her body and shook her head to the beat as her long, wild hair slung across her face. She raised one arm above her head and rolled her hips as she used the other to press the bottle of firewhisky she was clutching to her lips, taking a long swig and humming around the mouth of the bottle to the sound of 'Black Dog' by Led Zeppelin.

She pulled the bottle away and passed it to Sirius, who let out a laugh and threw it back, then took a few steps to set it back down on the table in front of Ron, Neville and Hannah before he pivoted and came up behind Hermione, wrapping an arm around her shoulders and planting a sloppy kiss on her cheek. He trailed his arm down to her hand and wrapped his fingers around her wrist, then showed off of her, spinning her out and back in as they twirled to the music.

Hermione laughed, then braced her hands on Sirius' shoulders as the two moved into a caricature of a stiff, prom-like slow dance. Finally, when the song ended, she crossed

"You think?"

"Yeah. Any earlier and I'd have to find a way to re-enroll in Hogwarts. Any later and I may not have enough time. Seventy-Eight gives me three years."

"We had that extra room at the flat, too. So that's perfect. I like it." Sirius declared as he sat up a little straighter and looked down at her. He brought a hand down to brush the curls off her forehead and then sighed dramatically.

"I still maintain that I would have made an excellent father," he teased with mock sadness.

"You're already like a dad and a brother and a best friend and a thorn in my side, all rolled into one." Hermione laughed and sat up against the headboard next to Sirius, then pulled his hand into her lap, lacing their fingers together as she smiled over at him. "I think it would be impossible to properly label what you are to me. However, given the fact that you're going to be a month younger than me once everything is said and done, it might be a little difficult to explain to everyone if I were your child."

"Fine. I'll allow it." Sirius huffed, then laughed. "Besides, the idea of everyone learning that the great Orion Black had a habit of consorting with muggle women — which isn't even a lie — and then feeding them the story that he had a half-blood kid before I was even born? I'm only sad I won't be there to watch their heads spin."

"I still wish you could go with me," she muttered softly as she leaned her head on his shoulder. "I hate the idea of leaving you alone here."

"I know. But the books are clear. I can't go back there because my soul already existed back then. It's different for you because you hadn't been born yet. And when the Granger's have a baby in seventy-nine it will just be a different person, a different soul, if everything works out the way your research shows. You'll be safe there, but I'd cause a temporal rift. Or make the world explode entirely by trying to bang my younger self. Do you think that would still classify as masturbation? Or would it be incest? Suppose I'd be a true Black, then." Sirius mused thoughtfully.

"Ew, don't be gross, Mut!" Hermione commanded, nudging him with her shoulder.

"Oh, hush, Kitten. I'm merely a man. Besides, if you do what you intend to, then the second you leave, I won't be alone anymore. This reality won't exist, and I'll have no memory of it all. Do it right, though, because I'd much rather be sipping a margarita on a beach somewhere next to my gorgeous Italian husband than locked up in a Death-eater's dungeon," he teased.

"I'm going to do it right. I have to. I'll have three years, and I'll have you. We're going to save the world and I'm gonna get you to that beach."



First, she sent off a few owls to make sure she didn't have any obligations left hanging. Next, she made a huge cauldron of stew that would last her and Sirius a few days, did the laundry, deep cleaned her room and changed the sheets. She perused both the library and Remus' bookshelves and loaded a number of books into a tote bag that she deposited on the floor next to the bed where it would be easily accessible.

After that, she hauled an arm full of junk food into the bedroom and stacked it up on the nightstand before she retreated to the bathroom where she took a full shower—one of those intense, shave and scrub and exfoliate and deep condition everything sort of showers—followed by a long bubble bath with oils and salts. Continuing on, she carefully combed out her curls and braided her hair, winding the strands around her head in a sort of crown fashion, cursing all the while at what a hassle it was to tame her wild locks—honestly, she loved the braids but they were rarely worth the hassle—before she trimmed her nails and lotioned her skin.

Afterward, she stole one of Sirius' vintage Rolling Stones t-shirts, slipped into a pair of flannel pyjama pants she'd pulled from Remus' drawer, and climbed into bed at exactly Two o'clock in the afternoon on the Twenty-Third of June to spend three days smoking cigarettes, reading books, crying, staring at the wall, and napping.

There was a bit of muggle psychology involved in her decision to wallow. It was all tied up in the fight or flight response. When someone stays in that sort of suspended state of survival mode for so long, it's inevitable that it will all come crashing down at some point after things finally calmed down.

Hermione simply did not have the time to wait for the elusive 'some point' to rear its head. There was a magical blood adoption to handle, plans to solidify, and the pesky issue of figuring out exactly how she was going to get back in time. She had no choice, really, but to bring the wallowing on herself rather than sit around and wait for it to strike.

"She stinks," Ron said in a teasing tone. "Hermione, you stink."

"It's day three," Sirius reiterated. "She's got an hour left. Let her stink."

"Only Hermione Granger would schedule her own mental breakdown, down to the minute," Ron laughed.

"Some of us value efficiency," she mumbled out, nudging him with her foot.

"Well, I wanted to be here when you were finished but I need to get back and check on Mom. I'll swing back by later," Ron told her, leaning over to place a kiss on her forehead before he rose from the bed and made his way out of the room. Hermione lay in silence for a while, as she relished the sensation of Sirius' fingers deftly massaging her scalp.

"1978," she finally said, rolling to her back to look up at him.

the dance floor and collapsed onto a stool at the bar-height pub table next to Ron. She accepted the bottle of water Hannah offered her with a grateful smile, then chugged it down as she wiped her sweaty hair from her face.

They were back at The Hourglass—for Seventies night again, of course. A good refresher, she'd decided, before she left late tomorrow night, and a mandatory last hurrah in this timeline, which Sirius insisted on. Inviting Ron was a given, but she'd been elated when Neville accepted the invitation. She was going to save him, too. She had to. She'd make sure that prophecy was never heard, so that his parents didn't have to live with the same fear Harry's had, and she'd take Bellatrix out with her bare hands before she let her turn her wand to Alice and Frank Longbottom.

She might take her out with her bare hands either way. The satisfaction of destroying Walburga Black's portrait in a muggle way would likely have nothing on what it would feel like to get her hands on that baty bitch.

"Hermione, I never knew you could move like that," Hannah said brightly as she took a sip of her own water. She liked Hannah. They hadn't been close in school, but she was a sweet girl. Lively and bright, and so very kind—and, so very, clearly, undeniably, head-over-heels for Neville, though Hermione got the distinct feeling that Hannah would never push him, given the recent loss of Luna.

"Ah, I just... move to the music," she said with a shrug. "I've got nothing on that guy." She added, tilting her head to where Sirius was currently dancing between two different men, a wicked grin on his face as he rolled his hips.

"Well, I'm about to have something on the bloke on the left," Ron said with a smirk as he tipped his head back to down the rest of his beer and set the bottle back down on the table with a clank before he rose from his chair and made his way back to the dance floor.

"That's still a surprise to me," Neville shook his head, a smile playing at his lips as he glanced over his shoulder to watch Ron approach the aforementioned left bloke.

"I think it's wonderful. Ron's lost so much, and he deserves to let loose. Plus, it's refreshing to see people who aren't afraid to go after what they want. Not everything has to be labeled and defined. He's just going with the flow and I can appreciate that. I've always been the same way," Hannah said with a shrug.

"Hannah Abbott?" Hermione gasped in mock indignation. "Don't tell me you've played for both teams?"

Neville sat up straighter in his chair, bringing his glass of whisky to his lips as he pretended not to be extremely interested in the sudden turn of conversation, but Hermione didn't fail to notice the slight tinge of pink spreading across his cheeks.

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“Oh, I just don’t even think about what team they’re on.” Hannah leaned forward and, in a conspiratorial whisper, added, “Or what house they’re in.

“Spill!” Hermione commanded as she leaned in and reached for her drink..

“Pansy Parkinson and Theo Nott... at the same time. Dean Thomas. Cho Chang.” Hannah paused, chewing her lip, then continued in a quieter tone, “Luna. For, um... most of sixth year, but then the war...”

Neville choked on his drink and sputtered, then brought a hand up to wipe his mouth. “Luna? You and Luna?” he croaked. “That’s so fucking hot. I mean, gods , no, I’m sorry, I just meant, that’s so... unexpected. Luna. Really?”

Hannah laughed, then nodded. “Yes. It was just... physical. She told me about you, though. She talked about you all the time, Neville. We both did.”

“She did? You did? I never... I told her, at the final battle... You and Luna.” Neville repeated, shaking his head. “All through sixth year. D’you know, I fancied you then? But you never talked to me, so I... just, didn’t think...” He trailed off as he leaned a little closer to Hannah and scanned her up and down, his eyes lingering on her mouth around the bottle of water.

Hermione hid her grin behind her drink and silently excused herself from the table. Get it, Ney, s he thought to herself as she made her way back to the dance floor, where Sirius and Ron were now both dancing with a guy who looked like a lumberjack.

Okay, everyone get it, I guess.

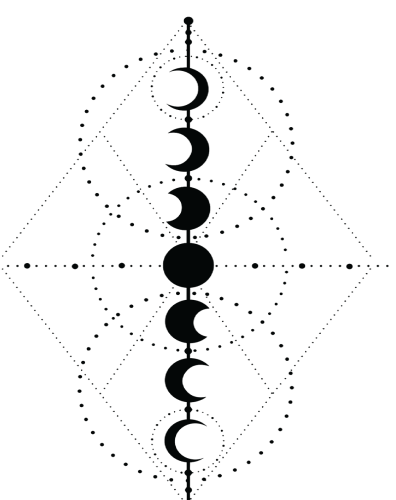
“Hey, ‘Mione! Hear that?” Ron asked as he pointed toward the DJ table where the song ‘Brown Eyed Girl’ by Van Morrison had begun to play, then held a hand out to her. “They’re playing your song. Dance with me?”

Hermione felt tears spring to her eyes, and simply nodded as she reached out to take Ron’s hand, letting him pull her into his arms. She rested her head on his chest and moved with him as he swayed to the music, running a hand up and down her back soothingly.

Brown Eyed Girl.

Ron knew her so well, and he’d known without her even having to communicate it that this song would always be bittersweet for her. Hermione’s father, David, was a major fan of Van, and had an excellent singing voice. The majority of her memories involving her life at home were filled with the background track of her dad humming or singing, but this song was the one he reserved especially for her.

She’d had a happy home. A happy childhood. Her parents had been wonderful and had worked so hard to have a child. You could feel all of the love they shared, and the love they had for their daughter, reverberate through every inch of their home. They were attentive and caring and would have died for her.



Landslide

26th June 1998

“How long has she been like this?” Ron asked.

“This is day three, finally.” Sirius responded as he climbed on the bed next to Hermione and leaned back against the headboard. He reached over and shifted her so her head was nestled in his lap, then began running a hand through her hair as Ron climbed up on her other side to rub soothing circles on her back. Hermione smiled gratefully and opened her mouth to speak but no words came out. She was floundering. She wasn’t depressed, she wasn’t ill, she was just... stuck.

In the nearly two months that had passed since the Battle of Hogwarts, she had gone through a roller-coaster of emotions. Now, here she was. Her mind was made up, she had a semblance of a plan in place and was resolute in her decision. However, she had been in survival mode for so long, through years of literally fighting evil to varying degrees, and then she had descended into grief and discovery and more grief.

And then she crashed.

But in typical fashion, she crashed on purpose, having planned her seventy-two-hour excursion to the land of the lazy down to the minute.

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But she couldn't allow that. Wouldn't.

So, she'd layered the memory charms better than anyone would have thought that even she, Brightest Witch of her Age and all, were capable of. It was irreversible.

They were the Wilkins' now, running a bustling dental practice in Australia, and they believed they'd never been lucky enough to have a child of their own, so they had become foster parents, taking in disabled children, sibling groups, older teens. Sharing the love that had sustained her for so long with the kids that other people overlooked.

It was beautiful. Purposeful. She'd always carry them with her, even now as she gave up the life she'd known entirely. And she would never forget them at their best. The three of them, showing the couches out of the way and dancing to music just like this. The Doors. Van Morrison. Queen. Bowie. Fleetwood Mac and James Taylor and The Rolling Stones. Joni Mitchell and Eric Clapton, Elton John and Led Zeppelin.

Between the love for the oldies they'd passed on to her, and their classic film nights every Saturday, David and Jeanette had unwittingly prepared their daughter for a task for the ages. There wouldn't be a single person in the 1970s who would doubt that she belonged in their decade. Hell, she was willing to wager she'd know more about being a muggle in the sixties and seventies than anyone else she'd be interacting with, save for Lily.

Lily.

It was so surreal. If all went according to plan, she'd be back in 1978, well on her way to getting to know Harry's parents, in less than a day. She was anxious, terrified even. She wasn't exactly sure how to explain it, but she was positive she would never be able to handle it if Harry's mum and dad didn't like her. Some part of her felt as if she would be letting him down, and that was the last thing she wanted to do.

Gods, she missed him. She was so glad to have Ron, and Sirius. But she missed Harry so badly that it was a constant ache. It had been hard to rationalize the choice she made about when to go back for a while. She could so easily just rewind the clock a few months and save Harry.

She could have him back.

But it would have been short-sighted. Selfish, really. She knew that, in doing this, she would be giving up the chance to be close with him in the way that she had been. She'd be an adult when he was born. A friend of his parents, were she lucky.

His godfather's sister, regardless.

But if she did this right, if she succeeded, she could give him something much better than her friendship. She could save him from the abuse he'd faced as a child, enable him and Neville both to grow up with their parents. She could keep the Weasleys alive,

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and give Ron —whom she loved so dearly—a normal adolescence. She could give all the kids she'd gone to school with a life without having to become child soldiers in a blood war.

She could even, admittedly, make a better world for people like Draco sodding Malfoy. She was sure he'd always be a pompous arse, in any timeline, but he still hadn't deserved the war any more than the rest of them had.

The loss of Harry would always hurt. But she would meet him again, innocent and wide-eyed, in just over two years, and she would make the world better so that he never had to know the pain he'd lived with. He wouldn't be the chosen one. He'd just be a damn kid. She would make sure of it.

Hermione shook her head to clear her thoughts, then sighed heavily as she squeezed her arms tighter around Ron's middle.

"Sickle for your thoughts?" he asked, pulling back to look down at her.

"Harry," she said simply as she looked back up at him.

"Yeah." Ron nodded, his voice thick with emotion as he wrapped his arms around her once more and crushed her to his chest. "All of them."

She nodded, listening as the song changed to something more upbeat—"Lola" by The Kinks—but the two remained entwined, swaying softly.

"I'm not going to ask what's going on," Ron said softly. "But I'm analytical, yeah? Something has been up with you and Sirius both."

"Oh, it's nothing, just..."

"I'm not going to ask," he reiterated as he leaned back and brought a hand to her chin. He tilted her head back and looked down into her eyes, and she almost broke. She wanted to tell him everything, wanted to beg him to come back with her. She'd considered it, over and over, but ultimately, she knew that, too, would be selfish. She couldn't take him back to a time where his father was still alive and force him to watch the family he'd lost grow up without him.

"Okay," she said quietly.

"I just need two things, okay? I need you to promise me that whatever is going on, you've applied your entire Hermione Granger superbrain to it, that you know what you're doing and you're sure of it."

"I have. I'm sure."

"Good. Now here comes the hard part."

"Oh, gods," she laughed out. "Haven't we had enough hard?"

"Nope. I told you. Two things. Part two is for me."

"Fine. Whatever you need. Anything," she responded earnestly.

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*There are songs you can never remember
And songs that you cannot forget
Just like stars, strays and ashtrays
They follow you around*

roll? And last week it was because you wanted to see The Truman Show and I wanted to watch *A Perfect Murder*.”

“It’s my life debt and I’ll use it however I see fit,” Hermione sniffed in mock indignation, then, softening her expression, she added.

“I really do mean it this time. I need your help with this. I don’t want to force your hand, but I will call it in if I have to. If my plan works out then you’ll be a whole different person in the new 1998 so you won’t be able to stay mad at me long, anyway. Just say yes, Sirius. Help me find a way to fix my magic, and help me save the people we love, and help me go be there for you.”

Sirius sighed, running a hand through his hair and then shrugged.

“Fine. There is a way to fix your magic, and I suppose it could only benefit you when you go back, anyway.”

“You’ll help? You’ll really help? What is it? Tell me everything,” Hermione asked excitedly.

“Magical adoption. It requires a blood magic ritual, but I know someone who... well, that bridge was burned a long time ago, but things are different for her now, since the war is over, I think she’d be willing to help. If not, I can pull a Hermione and call in the life debt she owes me, I suppose.”

“And this... magical adoption, will it help to strengthen my magic?”

“Absolutely. That’s the crux of it all. When people die, the essence of their magical energy just sort of... goes back into the world. Through the ritual, you essentially take on a portion of the magic that a deceased family member or ancestor left behind. It binds you by magic and by blood to the house you were adopted into, and it strengthens the magic of the adoptee.”

“That’s bloody brilliant, Sirius. You think we can actually do this? And then you’ll help me figure out how to get back?”

“One step at a time, Kitten. Let’s get you back to where you need to be magically, and then we can go from there. But I hope you know I’m only agreeing to entertain this time travel business because I love you, and because I know that if I say no, you’ll find a way anyway. I would rather help than risk you hurting or killing yourself over this. If you promise to wait until we find a safe method to send you back, then I will reach out to my contact about the ritual.”

“I promise. I swear it, Sirius. I want to do this the right way.”

“Well then,” he said, leaning back against the table and smiling down at her. “I guess that’s settled then. Just one more question, though.”

“What’s that?” Hermione asked skeptically.

“Tell me, Hermione Black—you wanna be my kid, or my sister?”

“I need you to not react, to not judge me, and to turn a blind eye to the fact that I’m about to go over there and convince your new best friend to take me to his bed tonight. And maybe cast a silencing charm around your room in case I forget one.”

“Ronald Bilus Weasley?” she laughed, pulling back and slapping him in the chest.

“He is Twenty years your senior and you’re both my best friends. That’s just... strange.”

“Stranger things have happened, Mione,” Ron said with a shrug as he grinned down at her. “I’m... intrigued. I’m of age, and besides, the age gap thing is kind of hot. I said no judging.”

“Fine. Gross, but fine. Go get your man, Ron,” Hermione said, grinning back as she shook her head. “I’m going to head home now though, so I can be safely locked in my room and don’t have to watch you two stumble through the Floo being all... Handsy.”

“So, you’re saying you think he’ll be into it?” he asked, wiggling his eyebrows. “What if he freaks about the... you, factor?”

“Absolutely,” she paused, then added, “Tell him I said, ‘one last hurrah,’ if he worries about what I’ll think. He’ll understand.”

“You’re brilliant, Hermione.”

“Ron? I love you. So much. I’m so glad I’ve been lucky enough to know you.”

“Why does that sound like a goodbye?” he asked skeptically. Upon her silence, he just nodded and sighed in resignation, then pulled her back into him and pressed a lingering kiss to her forehead.

“Right. Not asking. I love you too, Mione. You’ve always been... You were all the best parts.”



9th July 1998

Hermione stood, bathed in moonlight, in a small clearing in the center of Narcissa Malfoy’s rose garden, digging the toes of her bare feet into the earth as she focused on taking steady, controlled breaths. She squeezed Sirius’ hand as they watched Draco light the candelabras that had been placed at the head of each of the four directions while Narcissa slowly circled them, using her wand to levitate a large decanter of salt as it poured on to the ground, enclosing them in a circle.

“This is... Beautiful,” she whispered, her eyes still glued to Draco as he stepped up to the stone altar in the center of the circle and withdrew a book from his white, ceremonial robes. Tapping it with his wand to restore it to its normal size, he placed it on the altar next to the goblin-wrought, emerald-and-diamond encrusted silver chalice Narcissa had placed there before she began to form the circle.

“Ritual magic is enthralling. Archaic, but it’s incredible to watch,” Sirius agreed.

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"They don't teach this shit at Hogwarts," Draco added with a smirk.

"Yes," Narcissa agreed, offering Hermione a soft smile as she approached the center. Draco stepped out of the way and stood to Narcissa's left while she stepped up to the altar. She placed a hand on the book, whispering an incantation too low for the rest to hear, and Hermione watched with rapt attention as the goblet began to glow, a soft golden light slowly rising from the base, up the stem, and then surrounded the cup. It glowed brightly for a few seconds, then the light began to recede, traveling upward until only a faint glow remained on the rim.

"There we are," Narcissa said with a resolute nod. "Sirius, Miss Granger, if the two of you could please keep your hands joined and approach the altar. Draco, the dagger."

Sirius and Hermione slowly stepped forward until they were standing directly opposite Narcissa, while Draco withdrew a dagger—an exact match for the chalice, with its cool silver and shimmering jewels—and placed it next to the book on the opposite side. Narcissa picked up the dagger and placed the blade to the skin of her left palm, swiping it downward quickly and then laid the dagger back down as she reached over and let her blood drip into the cup. The ring of light around the rim pulsed three times, then glowed just a bit brighter.

"Has every soul present within this circle arrived here of their own free will?" Narcissa asked, her voice firm and commanding.

"I have," the other three responded in unison.

"And does any soul within this circle object to the ritual that is to be performed tonight?"

"I have no objection," they answered, one after the other.

"Then by the light of the full moon, I hereby commence the proceedings for the adoption of Hermione Jean Granger, born on the Nineteenth of September, Nineteen Seventy-Nine, to induct her as a formal, blood-bound member of The Most Ancient and Noble House of Black. Who will speak for House Black?"

"I, Draco Lucius Malloy, Son of Narcissa Anastasia Black—Malloy, hereby stand for House Black, and offer my blessing for Hermione Jean Granger to share in our lineage," Draco stated firmly as he raised the dagger and placed the tip to the palm of his hand, dragging it downward as it opened the flesh. He held his hand over the chalice and allowed the blood to drip down into the cup as he added, "Per sanguinem, per carnem, per animam."

"I, Narcissa Anastasia Black—Malloy, as caster, hereby accept your blessing. Who will offer their blood to bind Hermione Jean Granger to House Black?"

"I, Sirius Orion Black III, hereby offer to share my lineage with Hermione Jean Granger, so that she may henceforth be known as a full and willing member of

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just give it a few spins and save Harry and everyone else, but I hadn't given it any serious consideration until..." she trailed off, scratching her arm absently.

"I could go farther. I could go all the way back, Sirius," she said, looking up at him in a silent plea.

"Absolutely fucking not," Sirius spat out, reaching over to place his hand over hers as he stilled her movements.

"That is the last thing he would want, Hermione. You can't risk killing yourself in some sort of hare-brained scheme to save him."

"It's not just for Remus," she told Sirius, placing her hand over his. "I could save all of them, Sirius. I could go back to that point in time, with the knowledge of how to end Voldemort. Harry could grow up with his parents, Sirius. And yes, yes, I will admit that the idea of... meeting Remus in a different time where he won't descend into years of self-flagellation when he discovers I'm his mate, the thought of helping him to have a better life, that's very enticing. Not even solely from any sort of romantic point of view, just... knowing I could help him, that I could change his life, that would be amazing."

Hermione paused and stepped closer to Sirius, placing her hand on his chest as she looked up to meet his eyes.

"You said it yourself, Sirius. Last night. I have needed you so much recently. You've saved me in more ways than one. And what we've built here has been... sacred. Vital. Our friendship is... you've become like a brother to me, age difference and fast-pace and all. This is our family, now. But I could do this. For the people who have been our family in the past. For everyone else and for all the great and noble reasons, but for you, too.

I could take what we've built back to that scared kid putting himself in danger cruising the parks at night and drinking the pain away. I needed you now, and you came through. But the you that you were then needed me, and I am going to go back and save him from himself, and then he and I are going to save the damn world."

Sirius sighed and pulled her against his chest, wrapping his arms around her.

After a moment of silence, Hermione piped up, her voice slightly muffled as she pressed her face into his chest.

"You're free of the vow now that I know, so you can't stop me. But I don't want you to want to stop me. I want you to help me figure out how to re-strengthen my magic so I can be strong enough to do this."

She stepped back and looked up at him again with a conspiratorial grin.

"I'm gonna say it. I'll do it this time," she teased as she tried to lighten the mood.

"Oh, bloody hell, Kitten. You can't keep threatening me with that," Sirius groaned, then laughed. "Didn't you say you were going to call it in yesterday over the last egg

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She made her way back to the sitting room to find Sirius still sitting on the ugly sofa, staring down at the letter in his hands with tears in his eyes and —to her relief—a small smile playing on his lips. Suppressing her own smile, she took a seat back down on the couch, toying with her hands in her lap as she waited for him to finish reading. “Did you read this?” he asked, his voice thick with emotion as he held the letter up and gave it a bit of a shake.

“No. I promised you... well, the older you, that I wouldn’t touch it. He said that, although there was nothing he wouldn’t tell me, some of it would be personal to who you are currently, and that he wanted it to be up to you whether or not you share it with me. Though, honestly, the contents aren’t important to me. He said that it would be enough to convince you of who I am, so...”

“Well, I’ve got to give it to him. Er... to myself, I suppose. Though, I did just give it to myself this morning...” he joked, wiggling his eyebrows.

“Gross!” Hermione laughed and rolled her eyes. “You’ll be happy to know you’re just as shameless in twenty years.”

“Twenty bloody years,” he echoed incredulously. “Shit, that’s insane. You really are from the future, aren’t you? I’ve gotta say, it’s all a little insane. This is really us?” he asked as he picked up a picture that had been included in the letter and held it out to her. Hermione accepted the picture and smiled down at it, tracing her fingers over the face to the left of Sirius, opposite of where she sat on his right.

“It is us, with Harry. Remus took this picture, Christmas before last,” she said softly as she brought a hand up to wipe a tear from her eye.

“Harry. He looks an awful lot like...” Sirius began, then trailed off, running his hand through his hair.

“Yeah.” She nodded. “Just like James, but with Lily’s eyes. At least that’s what you and Remus and... well everyone said.”

“You know Remus?” he asked excitedly. “So Moony and I are still friends even when we’re boring old men, aye? That’s brilliant.”

“I do know Remus. He’s... um, he was very important to me, in that time,” Hermione replied quietly, then cleared her throat before she continued, “He’s part of why I came back. As are Harry, Lily and James. You. There are a lot of reasons, but it’s a long story and it’s not pretty.”

“Well, how’s this? We’ve got a spare room here and it’s yours for as long as you need. Or... wait, did you know that we had a room already?” Sirius furrowed his brow in confusion, then waved a hand. “Forget I asked, we’ll get to all the things you know tomorrow. For tonight, let’s get you settled. I’d say you look exhausted, but for all I know, you always look this feral.”

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“I do have a tendency to look a bit feral,” Hermione agreed with a laugh. “But yes, I am definitely exhausted. A blood adoption ritual and twenty years’ worth of time travel will do that to you. Are you, um... are sure it’s okay that I stay? I know Remus was very adamant about not having a roommate, and I don’t want to step on any toes.”

“Ah, well Remus is... do you know? Why he didn’t want a roommate, I mean?”

“I know all about Moony’s furry little problem, Padfoot,” she intoned as he stood from the couch and extended a hand down to help her up.

“Right. Of course you knew, if we were all that close. I think I’m equal parts excited and terrified to learn exactly what all you know,” he quipped as he flashed her a smile over his shoulder, then began to lead her down the hallway.

“So, first on the left is me, then the loo, then Remus. You’ll be the door on the right, here, just across from him,” Sirius told her as he wrapped a hand around the knob and pushed open the door to the guest room.

Hermione smiled at the sight of the room. It certainly wasn’t her cozy room back at Grimmauld Place, but it was nice and clean, with a simple, brass double bed flanked by two mismatched bedside tables—a round, lighter oak table sat on the left with an old, green and gold library style lamp on top, and on the right side there was a square white table with a drawer, with a bit of scalloped trim over the shelf below.

Across from the foot of the bed to the left of the door sat a mahogany-coloured chest of drawers. The singular window over the bed was covered by a thick, sage green curtain. It was mismatched, clearly thrown together from hand-me-downs or thrift store finds, but it all came together in a rather quaint way. The room was exactly what she would have imagined if someone told her to describe a guest room in a flat shared by two freshly adult men..

Hermione stepped closer to the bed and tossed her beaded bag down, then turned to look over at Sirius as he leaned against the dresser. Something made her pause, though, something she nearly overlooked, and she gasped and did a double take. With an incredulous laugh, she spun back around and looked down at the bed. Reaching a hand out, she ran her fingers along the stitching of a fairly new looking burgundy and grey patchwork quilt and stifled a sob as tears sprang to her eyes.

“Is something wrong?” Sirius asked, crossing the room in a few long strides and coming up to stand beside her as he looked over at her in concern. “I suppose neither Remus nor myself have an eye for decorating, but we can fix it up for you.”

Hermione shook her head and sat down on the edge of the bed, running her hands over the quilt on either side of her thighs as her tears began to fall. She sniffled, reaching up to swipe them away, then shook her head again. “No, it’s perfect. The room is perfect.

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I'm sorry, it's just...it's silly. This is...this is my quilt. Well, it's the one I used in the nineties, rather."

"Really? This thing lasts that long?" Sirius asked as he sat down next to her. "I'm surprised Remus parted with it. Lily learned to quilt from her grandmother and then, of course, learned how to speed the process up a bit with magic, so we all got quilts from her for Christmas last year, but this was an extra one from one of her early attempts, so she gave it to Remus when we moved in here. She's quite good at the whole thing now, makes a bit of money on the side, even, but this old thing was a bit rough so he stuck it in here specifically because it wouldn't be used often. You must be special if he let you sleep with it," he teased, bumping her with his shoulder.

Point four, she thought, wiping a tear from her eye as she smiled over at him. He had her there. She was special to Remus. Or, she had been. But she couldn't bring herself to tell him just yet that she only had use of the quilt because Remus was dead, so instead, she laughed softly and deflected.

"Well, it's fairly old by then, so I doubt it's as sacred. And it became mine by happenstance. The room I was staying in at Grimmauld is one Remus used to stay in, so he'd, um...left some things behind."

Sirius furrowed his brow at her, his eyes scanning her face as if he were looking for some sort of hidden truth. Reading her like a Godsdamned book, as he always had. Chalk that up to points five through infinity, she mused.

Thankfully, he chose not to push.

"I will definitely be asking how the hell you wound up staying at Grimmauld tomorrow."

"You lived there too." She told him as she shifted to look over at him.

"Okay. That's it. I've decided this is all a farce because you couldn't pay me enough to go back there," Sirius snarked with a shake of his head. "I'd imagine I'll have a million questions, but they can wait until morning," he paused, tilting his head, then asked, "Wait. One question tonight. Are you like...someone's kid? Like mine or...Moony's maybe, since you had his quilt and I'm roughly ninety percent certain he was wearing that very jumper last week."

"Oh, Gods, no, I am absolutely not Remus' daughter," Hermione grimaced. "Or anyone's that you know. I'm just...well, there really is a lot to talk about tomorrow. And I'm so sorry for popping up here and laying all this on your lap."

"Nonsense, Doll." Sirius said with a wave of his hand. "I find this all rather exciting, and you seem wicked cool, so I'm glad you're here already."

"Eww." She scrunched up her nose and giggled. "Don't... Don't call me Doll. That's weird. That's not what you call me."

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"Strict instructions, hmm? By whom?" Sirius asked. He took the letter and raised an eyebrow at her, then stared at the offering skeptically as he began to turn it over in his hands.

"By someone much wiser than either of us, with a great head of hair—and yes, saying that was a part of my instructions as well," Hermione laughed. She watched as Sirius began to open the letter and then launched herself up from the couch.

"I'm sorry, can I use your loo?"

"Yeah, second on the left." He glanced up quickly and waved his hand toward the hallway before he turned his attention back to the letter.

Hermione slipped into the bathroom and softly closed the door behind her, then leaned against the wood. She would not spiral. She refused. There was nothing to worry about. He would read the letter and know the truth, and that would be that.

Oh, Gods, but what if he didn't believe it? Or worse, what if he did believe it, but wanted no part in any of this? Or even worse than that, what if he was mad she'd led with a lie? This Sirius certainly had no way to know that his future self had deemed it important that she give her backstory a little test run, unless it was mentioned in the letter and Merlin, what was even in that letter anyway? What if—

Okay, so, maybe she was spiraling, just a bit.

With a shake of her head, a silly attempt to clear her thoughts, Hermione walked over to the bathroom vanity and began carefully washing her hands to ground herself. She needed to be talked down. Badly. But the Sirius who knew how to do so didn't exist yet, and Ron wasn't here, or Ginny or Harry and oh, Gods, Ginny and Harry.

"Get it the fuck together, Hermione," she whispered to her reflection in the little mirror affixed to the medicine cupboard.

She could do this. She had to do this, because she was here, now, and there was no going back. Furthermore, there was an abundance of things to do. Regardless of how Sirius may or may not react, the plan had already been set in motion, so she knew she needed to relax, and to very much not lose her shit.

Spiralling would be a waste of time, and the clock had started ticking the second she raised her fist to the door.

Hermione took a deep breath and reached for the hand towel where it lay crumpled and shoved over the bar to her left, rolling her eyes at the placement as she dried her hands. Once she was done, she carefully hung the towel over the rack, smoothing it out and adjusting it so both bottom edges lined up correctly. Satisfied with having fixed anything at all, she took one last glance at the mirror and nodded to herself before she exited the bathroom.

ugly couch, and Sirius was eighteen and not thirty-eight, and her favourite tattoo—the one that spanned the left side of his collarbone—might never exist.

It seemed like such a trivial thing to get stuck on, but the only thing she seemed capable of focusing on was the fact that the series of runes she'd traced while he held her through their shared grief may never exist again.

Her Sirius no longer existed at all. Bugger that, really, because the one thing she needed more than anything in the world was for him to grab her by the face and remind her that she could do this.

Alas, she was all alone now. Connections would come. She'd get to know this Sirius, if he'd have her. She'd adjust. Logically, she knew herself capable of managing all of this just fine. Still, she had simply failed to anticipate how painful it would be not to have him here, where she could draw strength from his encouragement.

Hermione would have to be strong enough for the both of them, then.

"Do you believe me?" she asked softly. "Would you like to cast a lineage spell or consult records or...?"

"No need." Sirius reached out and patted her knee reassuringly as he spoke, "Like I said, I knew of your mother. I found some old letters between her and our father, when I was around eleven or twelve years old, so when I heard about the Deathbeater attacks in Redbridge a few weeks back, the name jogged my memory. There was no mention of a daughter, so you're quite the surprise, but when I recognized her name some part of me knew my—our—father was behind it. The old bastard probably saw fit to tie up loose ends so the fucker who calls himself the Dark Lord wouldn't know one of his followers had been rolling in the mud—no offense, sorry, that's just what his mentality would have been."

Hermione breathed a sigh of relief. Sirius had been thorough when he helped her come up with her backstory, so she should have known better than to doubt him—if only because of course he would know what his own younger self would believe—but it had still been nerve-wracking. He bought it, though, and she felt herself grow a bit more hopeful. If Sirius believed it, then perhaps it wouldn't be as hard as she'd thought to sell it to everyone else.

"Okay. So... there's more." She reached down and pulled her beaded bag into her lap, then reached inside to begin searching for the letter. "Sorry it's... there might be a slightly illegal undetectable extension charm on this bag so it's a little full. I think... there." She produced the folded, wax-sealed parchment with a flourish and grinned down at it in relief before she held it out to him.

"I have been given very strict instructions to tell you 'Use your fucking brain' when you read this," she said with a laugh.

"What do I call you? Love? Dearest? Pumpkin?" he teased as he stood from the bed. "Kitten," Hermione proclaimed proudly.

"Kitten," Sirius repeated, drawing the word out as if he were testing the way it felt before he declared, "I like it."

"Well, Kitten," he continued, "the way I see it, there's nothing to apologize for. I'm part of the reason you're here, and I happen to think I'm brilliant, so if the future me sent you, then that's good enough for me. Besides, whether by backstory or blood ritual, you're my older sister now, yeah?"

"By less than two months! I'm not that old!" she laughed.

"See? Dreadfully older," he said, shaking his head gravely. "Nevertheless, I'm happy to have a sister now. And I expect a full report about why I have a time travelling older sister in the morning. For tonight, just answer one question for me. No wait. Two."

"Anything."

"Am I hot? And do I keep the hair? I know I had hair in that picture, but it could have been a wig. PLEASE tell me I don't wear wigs," he begged, running his hand through his hair protectively.

"You keep all your hair." She reassured him laughingly. "And you are absolutely handsome. Everyone and their mother has a crush on you. The fathers, too, of course."

"I'm gonna love having you around, Kitten," he proclaimed, grinning broadly down at her. "I'm gonna love you. You seem so fun."

"I'll love you twice, Mut," she told him softly.



11th July 1978

"In the future, we have a very sacred ritual," Hermione said as she sat down on the end of the ugly sofa and placed the bottle of Firewhisky she'd sent Sirius out to procure on the coffee table. Raising her wand, she summoned two mismatched glasses from the kitchen and began pouring the amber liquid.

"Any ritual that involves Firewhisky is a tradition worth keeping, in my book. Tell me more," he grinned as she held a glareout for him to take.

"This is called a D&B. Drinking and Bitching. It's something you said to me, on the night we became roommates. Well, the night we became roommates for the first time, rather. I was, um...struggling with a lot, but you were there for me. You said, 'you're here, with me, and we're going to drink and bitch our way through it.' And it just sort of stuck."

“Well. I happen to be highly skilled at both drinking and bitching, so that makes perfect sense. Good on ya, future me,” Sirius said, raising his glass in a symbolic toast. “But if you’re not ready to talk about it all, there isn’t any rush.”

Hermione sighed as she looked down at her glass, twirling it in her hand. She’d gone to bed the night before last fully intending to tell him everything yesterday, but when she’d woken up and the reality of the fact that she was actually here sank in, she simply couldn’t bring herself to focus on the bad.

Instead, they’d spent the day walking around, popping into a little deli for lunch and exploring the neighborhood while she asked him a million questions about his life as it was now, and he told her all about his friends. They’d laughed and talked, and it had just been... good. She was surprised to find that the ease with which she’d always communicated with him hadn’t been lost to the reversal of time.

She wasn’t sure why it was like this. Perhaps she was so used to interacting with him in the future that it was just natural now, no matter what age he was. Or maybe the reason she’d grown so comfortable interacting with him in the future was simply because of who he was as a person, and that rang true even now. Regardless, she was grateful.

There were parts of him that weren’t the same as she’d known. Parts that would hopefully never be the same, because they were born of the suffering he’d endured. But in the past present, she still saw so much of the man—the brother—she’d come to love so dearly, that she was almost positive she’d be able to move past that little twinge of pain in the back of her mind that popped up every time she looked at him and didn’t see greying temples and laugh lines.

Pulling herself from her thoughts, she nodded as she answered, “I’m ready. It won’t be easy to talk about, or for you to hear, and there are things I can’t tell you yet, so you’re just going to have to trust me. But it is important that you know.”

“Well, lay it on me, then,” Sirius said, spreading his arms wide as he leaned back against the arm of the couch opposite of where she sat facing him. “I can take it, Kitten.”

“Yeah,” she said with a soft smile. “You’ve always been made of tough stuff, Mut.” Hermione brought her glass to her lips and tilted her head back, downing the contents in a few quick gulps, and then grimaced before she reached for the bottle to pour another.

“Mut?” Sirius asked thoughtfully, pausing a moment to mull over the word before he proclaimed, “I like it. Also, I have to say, I’m a bit shocked to see how well you can throw back a glass of whisky. That’s impressive.”

“Yeah, well. I lived with a man who was a gay wizard in the 1970s,” she teased.



“A sister,” Sirius said thoughtfully as he leaned back against the couch, taking a long drag of his cigarette. “I suppose I can see it, in our colouring. And the hair. My—our cousin, Bellatrix, the loony bitch, you two have the same hair minus the colour. How’d you skip the black hair and grey eyes, though?”

“Ah,” Hermione responded, shifting on the couch to lean against the arm to face him. “I suppose... I got my lighter hair and the brown eyes from my mother. Since she’s a muggle, it must have canceled out some of that archaic pureblood shit.”

“Well, that or you’re just not as diluted. You may be the first Black in centuries who isn’t their own cousin on both sides,” Sirius laughed, then shook his head. “This is surreal.”

It was surreal. All of it. She was twenty years in the past, sitting on a hideous avocado green, nineteen-sixty-something sofa, in a flat in Fulham, next to a very much not-nearly-forty Sirius Black. Her brother, now. Even before the ritual.

It was all very... dissonant. It felt as if the past—well, the future—was at war with the present. She kept expecting to wake up on the pavement across the street in 1998 and discover this had all just been a hopeful dream. Even worse, she kept having to fight the urge to treat this Sirius like he was the Sirius she was used to.

She sat and studied him for a moment, her eyes lingering on the smooth, unblemished skin on his face before finally settling on his eyes. Those damn eyes were where she found the biggest difference. They were still that pale, otherworldly grey, still so piercing, but they held a brightness that she wasn’t used to.

He had already been through quite a bit at this point in his life, at the hands of his family. But it hadn’t altered him, hadn’t broken him to the point she knew him at yet. This Sirius still held the smallest shred of innocence. He was as jovial and ridiculous as ever, but he was also still a bit pure, still. Damaged, sure, but not broken.

Her Sirius had been broken. But her Sirius no longer existed. Even just by showing up here tonight, she would have changed his life to some degree, could have set off some sort of ripple effect the second he opened the door. She could only hope it would be for the better.

For nowhere near the first time since she’d made her choice, doubt began to creep in. Why did she think she could do this? Why did she think she was strong enough to change the world? She was just an ordinary witch who had always been a little too conceited in terms of her capabilities. What if she fucked it all up?

This was real. Permanent. Anything she did in this timeline would change the world. She’d known that, of course, in theory. But now she was here, in this muggle flat on this

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launch herself into his arms, she knew she had to hold back. Even aside from the fact that this Sirius would think she was barmy, she simply had to stick to the plan.

Her Sirius had encouraged her to try her backstory out on this version of him before she presented the letter and told the truth, because if anyone could find holes in the story she needed everyone else to believe, it would be him, given that a future version of his brain had been the one to help come up with it.

Taking a deep breath, she looked back up at him and offered a small smile, then grasped the cuff of her jumper. "I come in peace," she said as she pushed the sleeve up to her elbow and held out her left arm.

"Shit." Sirius sucked in a breath and ran a hand through his hair, then leaned forward to look up and down the hallway, then back down at her.

"Yeah. So. Not a Deatheater. Just someone who needs your help," she said with a laugh.

"Why my help? How do you know who I am? You didn't go to Hogwarts, did you? We look about the same age, but I'd remember that hair," he remarked as he leaned his hip against the door frame and brought a dark brown beer bottle to his lips.

Guinness Extra Stout, she noted with a smile. The only muggle beer her Sirius thought was worth its salt. And he still ran his hand through his hair when he was nervous or confused.

Points two and three, then.

"I just graduated from Beauxbatons last month," she lied with a practised ease. "As for how I know who you are, I don't think that's really, um... hallway conversation. May I come in?"

"I don't know..." Sirius said, worrying his bottom lip between his teeth. "I've got a roommate and he, uh, doesn't like people he isn't familiar with poking around."

"Is your roommate home?" she challenged, though she already knew the answer.

"Well, no," Sirius admitted with a laugh. "But... look, Doll, I'm sure if you've got that carved into your arm then you know exactly why I can't let just anyone in." Hermione scrunched up her nose at the monk. Only Kitten would do, she decided, but it was okay. She'd get him there.

"I do understand, all too well. And I'm sorry for showing up like this, but I think you may be one of the only people who can help me," she paused, shifting on her feet as she pulled her sleeve back down.

"Does the name Linda Crist mean anything to you?"

"Bloody hell." Sirius tightened his hand on the edge of the door for a moment, then, with a heavy sigh, pushed it open and stepped to the side as he gestured for her to enter. "Best we take this inside, then. Sitting room is just through there. I'll grab you a beer."

STEVE_SUNSHINE

"Hey! That's me," he laughed. "So, get to it. Tell me everything. I promise I'll do my best not to lose my mind, and I'll try even harder not to get frustrated when we run into something you can't tell me yet. I've a feeling something..."

Sirius scrunched his face up for a moment and then sat up straighter. "When you were looking at that picture of us with James and Lily's boy, you looked... He was important to you, wasn't he? And from the way you reacted I think maybe something happened to him. That, in combination with the fact that you know me and Remus, but don't seem to have actually known Harry's parents, given that you said other people talked of how he looked like them, and then something about the way you were with Remus' quill..."

He sighed, running a hand through his hair, then added, "Look, Kitten. It's clear you're here for a reason, and it's clear that reason involves some of the people who are the most important to me in the world. If I can help prevent bad things happening to them, then I want to be involved. I want to know anything you're willing to tell me, no matter how hard it may be to hear."

"Okay. You're right. I'm here for a number of reasons. As I said, it isn't a happy tale..." Hermione began, but trailed off, looking down at the drink in her hand as she swallowed through the lump that was already building in her throat.

"James and Lily are dead, aren't they? In your future?" Sirius prompted quietly.

"They are." Hermione's voice cracked under the weight of the admission, but she took another breath and soldiered on. "That's sort of where the story starts. After Harry was born, there was a prophecy that either he or the son of Frank and Alice Longbottom would be the one to defeat the Dark Lord. The Order put both families into hiding, but on Halloween when he was a little over a year old, Voldie- I don't know if there's a taboo yet?" Sirius shook his head, and she sighed in relief. "No? Okay, so, Voldemort found Lily and James because their Secret Keeper betrayed them."

"Who the fuck was the Secret Keeper?" Sirius asked, his eyes darkening as he tightened his hand around his glass.

"I can't tell you that. What I can tell you is... you had been the Keeper, initially, and then circumstances arose where there was a need to transfer the responsibility to someone else. When the new Keeper sold them out, Voldemort came to Godric's Hollow. He killed them both, and tried to kill Harry. James had been downstairs to try to hold him off, but he got him first and then made his way up to the nursery. Lily, she stood between Voldemort and the baby, gave her life trying to protect him. In doing so, she saved Harry. Sacrificial Protection, it's called. It's technically a blood curse, though it's far more pleasant than most. And so, because of Lily's sacrifice, Harry was the only known person to ever survive the killing curse."

KEEPER OF THE MOON

“Fucking hell,” Sirius said, running a hand through his hair yet again. “So, what happened next? Did they catch the Secret Keeper, at least? What happened to Harry?”

“Sirius...” Hermione said, her voice thick with emotion. “Nobody aside from you, James, Lily and the Secret Keeper knew the responsibility had changed hands. You found their bodies and went after the Keeper, but they caused an explosion to get away from you, which killed twelve muggles, and enabled them to fake their own death. And then, um...” She trailed off again, squeezing her eyes shut as she took a few deep breaths to help steel her resolve.

“Out with it,” Sirius urged. “It can’t be worse than knowing that James and Lily are going to...fuck, I can’t even say the words.”

“They blamed you. You spent twelve years in Azkaban.”

“Godric,” he breathed. “Fucking Azkaban? Really? So, what of Harry, then? And Remus and Peter and everybody else?”

“It’s all very complicated. Remus and Peter...” Hermione paused, swallowing back the bile that rose in her throat at the mention of his name. She couldn’t tell this Sirius that part, though. Not yet. She had so many connections to make first, and so much that she needed to be careful about.

But fuck, he deserved to know. How was she supposed to just not tell him? Naturally, she knew she couldn’t just dump this particular bomb on him until she’d done some work here in the seventies. There was too much at stake and... oh. So, this must have been what he felt like, when he couldn’t tell her about the mating bond. Fucking karma, Hermione thought to herself. Sirius had been strong for her though, and it was her turn to protect him now.

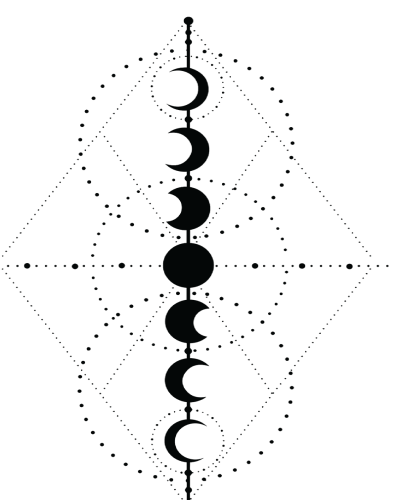
If that meant a few omissions or half-truths, then so be it.

“Sorry, I lost my train of thought for a minute there,” she told him as she took another sip. “Anyway, Remus was okay, though he was quite isolated for a long time. I first met him when he became my DADA professor at Hogwarts my third year. Peter... he, um, moved in with a nice family in Devon and helped look after their boys.” It was a half-truth, but it worked.

“Wait. Moony was a professor and Peter was basically a governess? Gods, and you’re SURE I can’t tell them? I’d love to see their faces.”

“Not yet,” she laughed. “I promise when the time comes, I’ll make sure you’re there when I tell your friends.”

“Deal. So, what then? I’m rotting in Azkaban for twelve years and then I become friends with someone twenty years younger than me and make her my sister? How did we become what we were? Or... are, rather?”



Emerald Eyes

10th July 1978

Sirius stared down at her for a moment, then dipped his head behind the door. Hermione heard him mumble —undoubtedly summoning his wand —before he popped his head back out. He stood carefully, holding the door so that it was only open as wide as it needed to be for him to stand in the crack.

“Hello,” he said cautiously. “Who are you, why are you at my door at one o’clock in the morning, and how the hell do you know my name?”

Hermione bit her lip and glanced away to stifle a laugh. Point one in the category of ‘some things never change’, she thought wryly; Sirius was as gruff and direct as he had ever been. She wanted to just shove past him, barge into the apartment and plop down on the couch, but she knew she had to play this smart —at least until he trusted her enough to read the letter. She could not allow herself to forget, in her excitement, that she’d landed right in the middle of the First Wizarding War.

The Sirius in this timeline —the defected heir to the Black legacy, who had fled when his family tried to make him take the Dark Mark a mere two years ago —had every right to be cautious. He should be suspicious of a random girl showing up on his doorstep knowing his name in the middle of the night. As much as she wanted to

STEVIE_SUNSHINE

“Well, that’s where things get really messy. So, after James and Lily died, Dumbledore took Harry to Little Whinging…”



“Fuck.”

“Yeah.”

“I mean... fuck, that’s a lot,” Sirius said with a slow shake of his head. “So, even with all of the work the Order is doing now, the bastard is taken out by a baby only to pop back up and start a whole new war? What happened after that final battle?”

“Ah, well. I was... struggling. I’d had a bit of a mental breakdown,” Hermione said, the omission tasting bitter in her mouth. She wanted so badly to tell him about the mating bond, but some part of her just couldn’t go there yet. Maybe she just needed more time, maybe she was scared of how he’d react or how it would all play out. At the least, she couldn’t divulge that bit of information until she could work out why she felt so hesitant, so protective over the matter.

It was hers. Hers, and Remus’, and if she were honest with herself, she was a bit curious to see what came of all of that, now that she’d gone back in time and was on an even playing field with Remus. The same age, without the weight of the world they’d carried before them...she was hopeful, admittedly. But regardless, it wouldn’t hurt to keep one more tidbit of the story to herself, just for now.

“I wasn’t in a good headspace. And you and I, we’d lost everyone. So, you brought me to stay with you at Grimmauld and we just became so close, so fast. You were my anchor, and you helped me so much.”

“And now you’re back to save the world?” Sirius asked.

“Pretty much,” Hermione said with a laugh. “I want to set things straight. To end the war for good and give Harry a better life. I want to save my friends that I lost. And Remus. He, um... he didn’t make it through that final battle, and then you were so broken, too. After you and I became what we were to one another, you became a primary factor in my decision, too.”

“I can’t believe all of this.” Sirius took another drink of his whisky, then tilted his head as he appeared to lose himself in thought for a moment before he corrected, “Well, I can. I do. It’s just all so much. How are you even standing, Hermione? How do you suffer through so much loss and still be strong enough to go back in time on a mission to save the world?”

“I had you,” she told him, smiling softly. “You became my best friend. My brother. We held each other together and healed and... you made me strong.” Her voice cracked, and she cleared her throat, then cast her eyes back down to her glass, staring at the

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amber liquid as if the look of it alone could chase away the emotion clawing its way up her throat.

“Do you miss him? The older me?” Sirius asked softly.

“I do,” Hermione admitted as she raised her glass to her lips and took a drink. “It... it hurts. But I’m also so glad to be here with you the way you are now.”

“Well good. Because I’ve grown rather fond of having a sister, now, Kitten. I’m afraid you can never leave.”

“Oh? Checked into the Hotel California, have I?” she teased.

“Such a lovely place, innit?” He grinned as he gestured to the room at large.

It really was lovely. It was definitely a bachelor pad, with the ugly sofa, a few mismatched chairs—a plush wingback chair in a garish yellow floral sat on one end of the coffee table, and a wooden framed chair with cushions bearing a striped pattern in various shades of reds, oranges and yellows sat at the other end. There was a bookshelf in the far corner, though it held clutter and knick-knacks in lieu of actual books, with another blue armchair near the window next to it.

The main attraction, though, was the vintage console record player—not vintage, she corrected herself, as it couldn’t have been more than a decade old in this timeline. It sat on the wall opposite the couch, next to another bookshelf that was overflowing with records she couldn’t wait to dig through.

The kitchen—visible through a serving hatch in the wall beyond the small dining space on the other side of the room—was small but pristine, the bathroom had all the essentials and the bed she’d slept in the last two nights had been surprisingly comfortable. Due in no small part, she knew, to the fact that she had been able to wrap herself up in the same quilt she had grown used to sleeping with.

Such a lovely place, indeed. She already felt almost as at home as she had in her little formerly-inhabited-by-a-werewolf bedroom back in the nineties.

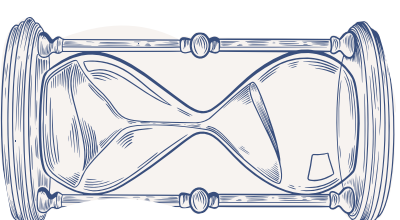
Hermione watched as Sirius took a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket and pulled two out, lighting one and handing it over to her before he lit his own. She’d lost track of the points by this... point, but even in just such a short time being back here, the similarities she saw between his younger self and who he had been when she’d left had quickly become such a comfort to her. She supposed they’d always move fast, then, in terms of how smoothly they fell into a comfortable rhythm together. Maybe he was always meant to be her brother.

She accepted the cigarette and took a drag, then smiled over at him. “I made a promise to you, involving a beach in Italy. I intend to keep it.”

Sirius threw his head back and laughed as he reached over to pick an ashtray up off of the coffee table and sat it on the ugly sofa between them. “A beach in Italy, huh?

ACT II

The Traveller



"I did it," Hermione laughed. "I mean, I'll do it. Thanks so much," she rushed out, then spun on her heel and pausing briefly to check for traffic, darted across the street. With her heart pounding in her throat, she stood on the stoop and looked up at the door—green now, not red, just as Sirius had said—then dug in her bag, making sure the letter was easily accessible. With a slowness that belied the frenetic energy roiling inside of her, she opened the door and stepped into the small foyer, then began to ascend the stairs slowly, running her hand up the smooth wood banister.

She reached the top and gazed down the hallway, screwing her eyes shut and taking a deep breath, then stepped forward, counting the doors she passed until she found it. Flat 212. Three doors down, last on the left.

She took another deep breath to steady herself, then brought a fist up to knock, once, then twice.

Then, she waited. She could hear faint music drifting out from under the door, and couldn't help but laugh when she realized she recognized the tune—"Somebody to love, because of course, of course, it would be Queen. She brought her hand up to knock again, but before she could bring her fist to the wood, the door was flung open and she gasped as she came face to face with him.

His hair was a bit shorter, falling just below the collar of the open button down he wore over his bare chest, and the years of age and Azkaban had been erased, leaving behind a strong jawline, high cheekbones, and smooth, youthful skin. But those cool, grey eyes looked just as wise as ever.

Hermione grinned from ear to ear, and found herself having to fight the urge to launch herself into his arms. She laughed once, clear and light, at the idea of how badly that may scare her much younger friend—no, her brother—then shook her head in disbelief. She did it. She was here. It was him.

"Sirius."



*Where are all the faces that I knew?
All the heroes in the bright burning truth
Makes you feel real, real good in your bones
When the hunger stops, and the truth is known*

Well then, we best get started on your plan to save the world. So, what's the grand plan, Kitten?"

"Have you ever heard of a Horcrux?"
Sirius' eyes went wide, but before he could respond, they heard the creaking sound of the door to the flat opening and Hermione went rigid, freezing with her cigarette halfway to her mouth as she looked over at him in alarm.

"Sirius?" A voice rang out, and Hermione stiffened. It was a familiar sound—deep, raspy, like someone had dipped the speaker's vocal chords in pure sin.

Remus fucking Lupin.

Remus fucking Lupin, a full fifteen years younger than the first time she'd heard that voice, and twenty since the last.

Remus, alive, and here. Hermione had known he would be back today, from the journal entries she'd studied and memorized, but oh, Gods, she wasn't ready. She let out a shaky breath and took a drag of her cigarette in a desperately futile attempt to calm her nerves. Ready or not, this was happening.

"Sitting room, Moony?" Sirius called out, shooting a grin over to Hermione, who, in that moment, was rather preoccupied with mentally kicking her own arse over the fact that she absolutely should have told him about the whole... mate-y aspect of her story. She had no idea how this was going to go, and at the least, she should have had the decency to prepare Sirius. But it was too late.

He was home.

Hermione heard the shuffling sound of feet moving down the small foyer, and then watched as Remus entered the room. He veered to the left immediately, stepping into the kitchen before she could get a proper look at him, so she stared at his back through the serving window as she reminded herself that she couldn't freak out—despite how desperately she wanted to freak out.

"Lily sent some of that beef stew you like so much," Remus called out as he moved around the kitchen, messing with something Hermione couldn't see from her vantage point on the couch.

"Ah, my dream girl. James is lucky he already got a promise ring on her finger. Though if she keeps feeding me, I might try to steal her away, anyway." Sirius said, casting a nervous glance over to Hermione, who furrowed her brow in confusion before she realized—tight.

Nobody knew, yet, that his dreams absolutely did not involve women. Or, at the least, currently, it was still sort of... unspoken. She hated that for him, but no matter. It was already on the list of things she intended to fix.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

“James may not have a mind left to fight you if fixing up that Godsdamned cottage keeps giving him so much trouble,” Remus replied as he disappeared from view of the little window.

“What’s that smell? Did you pop over to the sweet shop or —” he began as he rounded the corner and took a step out of the kitchen, then stopped dead in his tracks.

Hermione’s breath caught in her throat as she took in the sight of him.

Jesus fucking Christ, she thought to herself—so far beyond coherent thought that she’d reverted back to using muggle curse words, apparently.

The Remus of her time had been attractive, to say the least. Hermione could admit, now, that even despite the way he always looked so disheveled and exhausted, she’d thought he was the most handsome man she’d ever laid eyes on.

She was absolutely wrong. The Remus she’d known had nothing on this Remus. He was as tall as ever, but seemed to stand straighter than he had in his older days. Despite the scars dissecting the surface, his face was more youthful, lacking the requisite stubble his older self always seemed to have. His light brown hair was a bit longer and far shaggier than she was used to.

He wore a pair of dark, tattered denims and a black t-shirt displaying The Ramones’ logo, and a pair of black Converse, not a stitch of tweed in sight. He was hot. Hot as fuck, honestly; there was really no other way to word it. But as Hermione’s gaze trailed up his body and finally met his eyes, everything else melted away.

Those eyes. A deep emerald green, so bright that she could see the colour clearly even from across the room. Remus blinked a few times, then tilted his head down and met her stare, and the world tilted on its axis.

Oh.

Oh.

She had wondered a great many times since finding out that she was his mate if the pull she’d felt toward him—which she’d once written off as a simple schoolgirl infatuation over a handsome, mysterious professor—had been part of the mating bond. Especially knowing that the bond would react differently based on attraction and age but now...

She knew.

As she sat on that damned ugly sofa, her eyes locked with his from across the room, she knew. It never should have happened the way that it did. This, right here, was how it should have been all along. They were the same age, in the same place, and on an even playing field, and Merlin help her, she’d never felt anything like this.

Hermione watched in anticipation—half fear, half hope, half contemplating the risk of casting a Bombarda at the floor to create a hole to crawl into and hide—as Remus

STEVE_SUNSHINE

around her, blocking out the lights of the city street for a moment.

“Oi! Go home, curls. You’re pissed,” someone called out. She sat back on her heels and looked up, then gasped out a laugh as she took in the sight of a woman in vertical striped bell bottoms and an orange halter top, wearing big hoop earrings that were almost lost in her big, feathered hair. Next to the women were two men, dressed similarly in tight denims and silk button downs, undone a bit to show their chest hair.

Seventies clothes.

She glanced around and took in the sight of the neighborhood, now looking far more vibrant than it had mere seconds ago, as well as the vintage style the cars all passing by showcased.

“Pass off, Brad,” the woman said, rolling her eyes as she crouched down in front of Hermione and held out a hand to help her stand. “You okay, girl?”

Hermione nodded and climbed to her feet, swaying lightly. “Ye- yeah, just pissed.” She lied with a laugh.

“Can I help you get somewhere safe?” the girl—a saint, really, to show concern for another woman she didn’t even know, Hermione thought—asked as she raised an eyebrow.

“Oh, no, thank you, my... my brother lives just over there,” Hermione answered, pointing at the building across the street.

“You could come spend some time with us,” The man in the lighter coloured shirt drawled.

“Leave her alone, Henry,” The girl barked, then turned back to Hermione. “You’re sure you’ll be alright?”

“I am. Can... Can you tell me the date?”

“It’s the Ninth of July. Well, Tenth now, it’d be, given the hour.”

“And the year?”

The woman furrowed her brow in confusion. “Listen, maybe we should get you to hospital...”

“No, I’m fine, truly. I just... was working on some work for University today and, sloshed or not, I need to finish tonight but I keep writing the wrong year and now that I took a break from writing for a few drinks it’s all fuzzy,” Hermione explained. The lie rolled off of her lips stuttered and breathless, but if she was lucky, they’d just blame her fake-intoxication.

“Ah,” the woman laughed. “I don’t miss those days. I think I slept for five minutes per term when I was at Cambridge. It’s 1978. Go get some rest, kid. You need it.”

Nineteen Seventy-Fucking-Eight.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

"Twenty years ago is only a few years behind me in a lot of ways. I love you. He is going to adore you. And he needs you. Everybody does. Hermione Jean Granger—no."

He grinned, leaning forward, and took her face in both his hands.

"Carina Hermione Mother-Fucking Black does NOT cower. She does not hide. She does not doubt her ability to kick arse. She leads the charge into battle. She fixes her fucked up, gay little brother, and she saves James and Lily and Remus, and even the little shits like Regulus, and Peter, and she saves the godsdamned world."

"Okay," she said, nodding as she brought a hand up to swipe at the tears she hadn't realized were spilling down her cheeks. "Okay. I can do this."

"Hell yeah, you can, Kitten. Because I said so, and I'm the boss," Sirius told her, sniffling haughtily.

He rose to his feet and extended a hand down to help her stand, then pulled her in for a tight, crushing hug and kissed her on the forehead. Hermione stepped back, smiling up at him, and ran a hand through his hair.

"I love you, Murt."

"I'll love you twice, Kitten. Are you ready?"

She closed her eyes and nodded as she took a step back and placed the box on the ground. Kneeling down before it, she brought the tip of her wand to the little knob in the center and opened her mouth to speak the incantation, but faltered. She looked back up at Sirius and watched as he took several large steps backward.

"I'm going to do this. I'm going to fix it. I'm going to help everyone, and I'm going to give you a beautiful life."

"I've never believed in anything as much as I believe you will get me to that beach, Kitten."

She nodded again, smiling at him as they held one another's gaze for a moment, and then she took a deep breath, looking back down.

"Chrononavius Decadus." She called out firmly as she kept her wand held to the box and brought her left hand up, turning the little knob clockwise twice.

Hermione felt her entire body lurch, then began to shake as everything around her blurred and spun. She blew out a breath slowly, trying to force herself to remain steady as the world shifted on its axis and everything went black.



10th July, 1978

Hermione gasped, falling forward and bracing herself on her elbows as she dry heaved for several seconds. She felt nauseous, disoriented, as her curls spilled down

STEVIE_SUNSHINE

stood stock still, staring her down. He closed his eyes and drew in a deep, long breath through his nose, then snapped them open again.

His irises flashed gold, so briefly that she would have missed it had she herself not been rendered incapable of blinking, and he stumbled back slightly. He reached out and grabbed onto the doorframe, gripping the wood so tightly that his knuckles were turning white, and continued to stare at her.

And then.

Then.

Remus wrinkled his nose as his face contorted, his brow furrowing and his mouth scrunching up into a grimace as if he'd smelled something foul. A disgusted look settled across his features as his eyes darted from Hermione, to Sirius, then back to Hermione. He cocked his head and furrowed his brow, staring at her for a little longer, and then tore his eyes away from her to look back at Sirius as he released his grip on the doorframe and took a step into the room.

"Pads," Remus began, his voice riddled with what sounded to Hermione, painfully so, like contempt. He took a few steps closer, then grimaced, looking rather like he'd been force-fed an entire bowl of lemons.

"Who the FUCK is that?"



*When she comes to me, then I feel fine
And I'm not afraid, but so gratified
Emerald eyes is a mystery
She's a heart that beats close to me*

STEVIE_SUNSHINE

with Draco's right, and the four circled the altar, closing their eyes and whispering in unison.

"Ue Fiat Fiat."

Hermione kept her eyes screwed shut, even as both Narcissa and Sirius dropped her hands. It was only when she heard Narcissa's pleased hum and Sirius' half-laughed sigh of relief that she dared open them. She looked down at the tome, then reached out to run a finger over where her name now rested, to the left of Sirius'.

Carina Hermione Black

19 th September 1959

"We fucking did it, Kitten." Sirius said, letting out a loud, joyful whoop as he wrapped his arms around her.

"That's sister to you now, Mut!" she laughed back.



10th July, 1998

"It's good timing. The journals said this is when he went to Godric's Hollow to help James with some repairs and wound up staying through the full moon, so it will just be you and I until... Two days from now, your time. And it's only half-past midnight so I'll be up for hours. If I'm not there just wait on the stoop until I'm back from the stupid park," Sirius said as he took a drag of his cigarette and passed it to Hermione, who sat next to him on the curb of New Kings Road in Fulham, across the street from the building where Sirius and Remus had once shared a flat.

"Yeah. It will be easier to explain everything to you, first, I think." Hermione nodded, taking a drag and passing it back to him. She looked down and chewed her lip as she toyed with the box in her hands.

"Talk to me, Kitten," Sirius coaxed, nudging her with his shoulder.

"I'm sure about this. I am. But it's scary. I'm going to miss you so much. This you. What if the other you hates me? What if everyone does? What if I can't fix everything, or nobody believes me, even with all the proof? What if I make things worse?"

"What if you save the world, give Harry a loving home with his parents, and get to live the rest of your life free from pain and war and unnecessary death?" Sirius challenged as he turned to look at her.

"What if it doesn't work, and we did all of this for nothing?" she asked.

"Then I got a new sister out of the deal, and I've found my spark, and we'll go come up with a new plan." Sirius grinned and reached out to tuck a curl behind her ear.

"You are my sister, now. You're my best friend, always. You said it yourself, Hermione. I never quite grew up, anyway. That guy in there," he said, pointing across the street,

KEEPER OF THE MOON

“By the power bestowed upon me through the teachings of Cassiopeia Astra Black, I hereby invite Hermione, Jean Granger and Sirius Orion Black III to complete the final bloodletting.”

Hermione stepped forward again and picked up the dagger, then turned and placed it on Sirius’ waiting hand, wrapping her fingers around his to clasp the hilt as she held out her left palm.

“I, Sirius Orion Black III, hereby claim you, Hermione Jean Granger, as my sister,” he said, grinning at her as they moved in tandem and brought the blade down to cut her skin.

Hermione turned, holding her hand palm-up as she waited for the blood to pool in her palm, and then turned it over as she recited her lines.

“I, Hermione Jean Granger, born on the Nineteenth of September, Nineteen Seventy-Nine to David and Jeanette Granger, hereby denounce my name and station of birth, and offer myself to be fully bound to the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black. I shall, henceforth, be known as Carina Hermione Black, born on the Nineteenth of September, Nineteen Fifty-Nine, to Orion Arcurus Black and a mother of plain blood. May the gods see fit to accept my offering.”

She stepped back from the altar, pressing her shoulder to Sirius’ as she placed her hand back in his and watched Narcissa work.

Narcissa waved her wand over the book, then tapped it to the Chalice and called out in a loud, booming voice, “Signatus Sanguine, Nomine Ligatus.” Finally, she rested her wand along the inner spine of the book and picked the chalice up with both hands, bringing it to her lips and taking a small sip. She turned to Draco, bowing her head slightly, and extended the Chalice to him. Draco took a drink, then passed it along to Sirius in the same fashion.

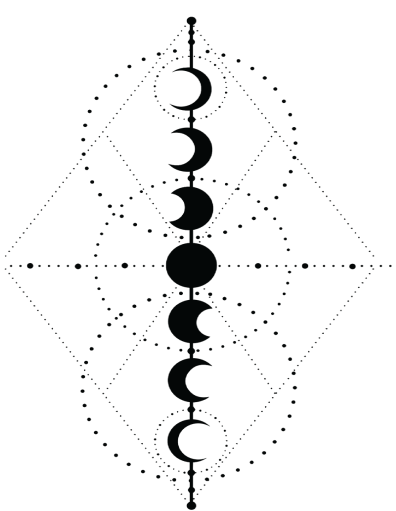
Sirius released Hermione’s hand and accepted the chalice, then uttered, “Nam Soror Mea,” before he drank of the cup and passed it to Hermione.

She took it into her hands, looking down into the dark liquid that almost seemed to shimmer from the glowing rim, and looked up to meet Sirius’ eyes.

“De Fratre Meo,” she said, her voice high and clear. She brought the chalice to her lips and drank down every last drop, savouring the taste of copper in her mouth as the liquid poured past her lips, coated her tongue, and slid down her throat.

Fighting back the urge to grimace, she pulled the chalice away and realized — thankfully — that the glow had disappeared. She turned and placed it back on the altar as Sirius stepped closer along with her.

Narcissa took Draco’s hand in her right hand, and Hermione’s in her left. Sirius, already clasping Hermione’s left hand in his right, reached out and joined his left hand



Just Crazy

11th July 1978

Hermione squeezed her eyes shut and drew in a deep breath, only to realize she could smell him. The scent of him was so thick it was as if he were standing right next to her. Chocolate. Coffee. Old books.

The sensation nearly overwhelmed her. She supposed, now that she thought about it, that she could, of course, smell him before, but in her ignorance to the bond she’d never paid much attention beyond just liking the fact that he smelled nice. It had been fainter, in...well, her past-future. Now, though, she couldn’t help but wonder if her knowledge of the bond somehow opened up the pathways of susceptibility to its effects.

Where Remus’ scent had just been a pleasant thing in the past — a comforting thing — she’d never reacted to it like this. It was so strong. All-encompassing, and she could feel her heart drumming against the wall of her chest, and he was here and so... beautiful. Perhaps, she thought, that wasn’t a word one should use to describe a man, but sod it all, he was beautiful.

Remus was alive, and he was fucking beautiful, and he smelled so good that it made her ache, low in her stomach, and he was looking at her as if she disgusted him.

She wondered for a moment if, perhaps, she smelled bad, but her hair still wasn't even dry from her shower. And sure, she'd used some shampoo Sirius had, which smelled far too much like melons and they didn't even have conditioner which seemed unfair, given how much product her hair required in comparison to the fact that Sirius had that Goddamned amazing head of silky hair, all without the use of conditioner, apparently. She also didn't have any antiperspirant but really, she'd hardly broken a sweat, and she supposed she did need to pop out to the shops and grab a few things if she was going to be staying here but maybe she wouldn't be staying here if he was so bothered by her presence and —

She was spiraling. She knew it. And while she did tell herself she would allow an hour of spiraling on Wednesday, she could hardly do it sitting here on the ugly sofa with the two of them present so, that was that.

"She's safe, Moony," Sirius said with a smile — so sweetly oblivious. "You can trust her. It's actually a long story, you're not gonna believe."

"Why is she here?" Remus snapped.

Hermione looked up at him, then quickly looked away, her heart lurching a bit when she saw that he had turned his head away from her and was staring very pointedly at the wall to his left. Something painful coiled in her gut at his avoidance, and she rose from the couch a bit too quickly, causing Sirius' head to snap to her.

"You okay, Kitten?"

"Kitten?" Remus asked incredulously, spitting the word out as if it had soured in his mouth.

Hermione ignored him, and instead turned to Sirius, forcing a smile on her face as she reassured him, "All good, Murt. I just thought I'd give you two a minute to talk."

Sirius nodded, then looked back and forth between she and Remus before he asked in a low voice, "Is there... more, that we need to talk about?"

"Yeah," Hermione rasped, her smile wavering as she nodded. "We'll talk later," she reassured him as she looked back over at Remus, who was now staring at the floor. Lovely.

"You two talk. Just come bug me when you're done, yeah?" Hermione stepped away from the couch and walked around the coffee table, stifling a groan when she realized she'd have to walk right past Remus to get to the hallway and go hide in her room. Keeping her eyes trained on the floor, she went to move around him, but came to a halt when he shot his arm out and wrapped a hand around her bicep.

"Wait," he barked out.

She looked up at him curiously and their eyes met again, holding each other there. Remus squinted at her and tilted his head down — his nose nearly touching her hair

The Noble and Most Ancient House of Black," Sirius spoke as he mirrored Draco's movements and added his own blood to the goblet. "Sanguis Frater."

"Hermione Jean Granger," Narcissa said, looking up from the book to meet her eyes. "You will now offer your blood to the ancestral tome, thus solidifying your claim on the unbound magic of Black blood passed."

Hermione took a deep breath, releasing Sirius' hand, and stepped forward, holding out her left hand, palm up. Draco reached down and, picking up the dagger from the altar, pressed the tip into the pad of her ring finger. She looked down at the book, and couldn't help but smile as she pressed her finger over the name inked onto the page.

"I, Hermione Jean Granger, hereby call forth and claim the magical remnants of Harry James Potter, of Black descent via his Paternal Grandmother."

"I accept your claim on the magical essence of the deceased Harry James Potter, should it befit the Gods." Narcissa said softly as Hermione took a step back.

They all watched with bated breath as the page where Hermione had pressed her bloodied finger glowed with a faint silvery light. The blood stain lifted from the page to hover suspended a few inches above the tome as it twisted and turned about, and then — finally — everyone loosed a soft sigh of relief as the blood darted back into the book, spreading out to cover Harry's name and then snaking up the branches of the family tree until the entire thing was covered, before it finally disappeared, taking the light with it.

"Let it be known that the magic of Harry James Potter has found Hermione Jean Granger to be a fitting host," Narcissa said, pressing the tip of her wand to Harry's name, and then to Hermione's forehead. "Ut Fiat Fiat."

Hermione gasped as she felt a cold trickle begin in her forehead. It spread down her face, trailed down the column of her neck, and then took root, spreading through her veins until she could feel it in every inch of her body. The feeling seemed to swell, then contract, and then grew warm, just shy of an uncomfortable burn, before it retreated and coiled back into the center of her chest, wrapping itself around her magical core. As quick as the feeling had come, it ebbed, and she gasped, lurching with the urge to bend at the waist as Sirius gripped her hand tighter.

Panting to catch her breath, she stood up straighter, chest heaving, and closed her eyes as she drew in a deep breath. She could feel him. Not Harry himself, exactly, but the feeling of new, strengthened magic and she knew it was him, knew that some small part of him would always exist within her now. The thought alone brought tears to her eyes, and she let them flow freely as she looked back at Narcissa, and gave her one quick nod.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

frantically. She responded in kind, fisting both of her hands in his hair to pull him closer, and their tongues collided in a furious, searing, tangled mess.

The kiss was fervent and sloppy, rife with inexperience but Gods, it was pure magic. Their teeth clashed and they clung tightly to one another so tightly that it felt like they were trying to crawl into each other's skin, and Hermione was soaring.

She'd never felt anything like this, and she simply could not —would not stop to think or remind herself why this shouldn't be happening yet, because she was in nineteen seventy-fucking-eight and they were the same age and Gods, of course she smelled like him because she was his, and how on earth could she be expected to be rational when Remus Lupin's tongue was in her mouth and his right hand was sliding back to grip her arse and then down to her thigh as he hitched her leg up over his hip? How on earth could she possibly be expected to maintain control when his left hand moved to knead her breast through her jumper while he rolled his hips and ground himself against her?

"Remus," Hermione moaned against his lips, breathless and needy. She moved her hands down to brace herself on his shoulders and pushed up off of the foot that remained on the floor, wrapping her other leg around him, and began to rock her hips in time with his movements. Remus growled and nipped at her bottom lip, then pulled back just far enough to look down into her eyes.

"Mine," he rasped, then dove back in, devouring her mouth before he broke the kiss again. He trailed his lips down the side of her jaw and to her neck, licking and sucking at the skin like he was a man who had been lost in the desert, dying of thirst, and she, an ice-cold glass of the purest water he'd ever tasted.

She moaned his name again, grinding against him as heat began to pool in her lower stomach. She felt like her skin was on fire, like she just needed to get closer, to keep them both under this spell, because she was rather certain she'd stop breathing if he stopped touching her. Then again, she wasn't sure if she was breathing at all.

Remus' mouth found purchase at the juncture where the side of her neck met her shoulder and she gasped at the feeling of his chest vibrating against hers as he emitted another low, rumbling growl. He broke his suction on her shoulder and opened his mouth wider, grazing his teeth across her skin, then, without warning, broke their contact entirely.

He jerked his head back and released his hold on her breast and thigh, slowly lowering her to the floor as he stared down at her in wide eyed horror.

"Remus," she whined, pinching her brows together in confusion as she looked up to meet his eyes.

"Hermione, I—I don't—" he started, shaking his head vehemently, but was cut off by the sound of a throat clearing.

STEVE_SUNSHINE

"I hate to crash the party, but I've just buzzed James and Lily in, and they'll be coming up the stairs any minute, so..."

Hermione craned her neck to look over Remus' shoulder to see Sirius standing in the open doorway. Realizing only then, as heat began to rise in her face, that they hadn't even shut the door. Hermione shot Sirius a withering glare and he held his hands up, grinning at her as he backed away.

"Just thought you ought to know," he called as he disappeared from view.

"Godsdamnit," Remus cursed as he slumped forward and rested his chin on her head. Hermione reached down and dug her wand out of her pocket, then waved it at the door to slam it closed, and Remus took a step back, looking down at her.

"I don't know what you're doing to me, Hermione," he murmured. "And you're... Gods, you're Sirius' sister."

Hermione nodded as she smooched out her rumpled jumper, then brought her hands up to twist her hair into a bun atop her head and secured it with her wand. "I know. I am. And this is... intense."

Remus barked out a laugh as he brought a hand up to try to smooth his tousled hair, then nodded back at her. "Yeah. It's a lot. I don't... I don't do this, Hermione, and it's certainly never felt like this and I... your brother is my best friend, and my roommate, and I CAN'T do this, but I feel as if I can't not do this and I... there are things you don't know, things that—I think I'm spiraling," he admitted as he crossed the room and leaned back against the desk.

Hermione fidgeted with the hem of her jumper and cast her eyes down to the floor for a moment before she looked back up at him. She felt like she was going to suffocate under the weight of all of her guilt. She wanted so badly to tell him that she did know what he thought she didn't. She wanted to reassure him that his lycanthropy wasn't something that gave her even a moment of pause. She wanted to say fuck the plan, to start word-vomiting every bit of the truth, but she simply couldn't allow herself to say any of it.

She knew it wasn't fair to keep the truth from him while he struggled, but she also knew it was a catch-22, because if she did tell him the truth now, it would be selfish. Her arrival in the past was going to affect the future of everyone in their world, and she knew she had changed his life entirely—though whether it was for the better or for the worse was yet to be determined—just by being here.

While she was content to change an ever-growing number of things, what Remus was about to go through was a part of his life she simply could not take from him. Anything she said or did now could rob him of the experience that he didn't even realize he needed. So as painful as it was to think about spending even one more second of her

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life without his hands on her body, or his breath against her skin, she had to be smarter about this.

This mission was a turning point in his life. She'd seen the change, right there on the pages of his journals, that he went through after learning firsthand that werewolves weren't completely feral beasts. Sure, he still struggled with what he was after the mission, but it had settled something within him. He needed that, and she needed him to have it. For one, he was far more likely to be receptive of the bond if he learned about it once he'd seen it in action.

But if he knew, now, what she truly was to him, he would never leave, so there really wasn't a choice to be made at all. Remus had given her five years. She could give him three and a half months. Hermione took a moment and quickly did the math in her head. They only had ten more days of cohabitation until he left. Ten more days of resisting this ever-present pull to him. Ten more days of not launching herself at him every time he chewed on the knuckle of his thumb while he read or fixed her with a heated stare while she danced or told her Bore da in that raspy morning force of his.

Ten more days.

She could do this.

"I spiral, too," she admitted. "All the time, about everything. Though I sort of... schedule it."

"Huh," h laughed out. "Well, that sounds efficient."

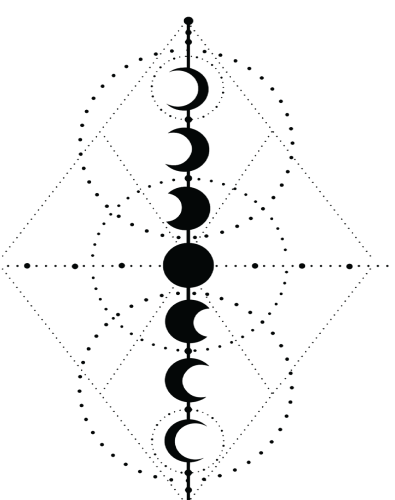
"It's silly, but it's just... important to me. I know this... I know it's a lot, all at once. I feel it too. There are things I may not know, but there are things you don't know either. And I don't think we're capable of sorting it all out after... that, anyway. Could you... she trailed off and toyed with the hem of her jumper, looking back down at the floor as she tried to choose her words carefully.

"Give you time?" Remus prompted softly. "I'll give you anything you need, Hermione. For what it's worth, I think I could use a bit of time to sort out my head, too."

"Time. Yes. Shall we say... two weeks, and then we'll talk it out?" she asked hopefully. She felt horrible as she said the words, knowing he wouldn't even be here in two weeks, but she stuffed it down and reminded herself yet again. Five years. She could do a few months, for him. She was quite certain there wasn't a thing in the world she wouldn't do for him.

"Two weeks. Okay. I can do that, if that's what you need." Remus nodded as he pushed off of the dresser. His eyes moved rapidly over her face, then locked onto the side of her throat, flashing gold yet again before he spoke.

"You've, erm... you've got a bit of a..." he trailed off and blushed as he gestured to his neck. "I can glamour it for you."



Over My Head

29th July 1978

Hermione's breath hitched as Remus closed the distance between them and pressed his lips to hers—a soft, featherlight kiss that sent shockwaves across her skin, as if she'd shuffled across a plush carpet and then touched her hand to a metal doorknob.

They both gasped and broke apart as quickly as it had happened. Remus dropped his hands and immediately took a step back. They stared at one another, chests heaving, until Hermione just... snapped. She was being reckless. She knew it. But he had kissed her, and she wasn't sure she had a rational thought left in her brain.

"Fuck it," she echoed as she took a step forward.

She grabbed him by the face and pulled his head down, then crashed her mouth to his, kissing him so hard that her lips hurt. She darted her tongue out and licked his bottom lip, and he broke, groaning into her mouth as he dug both hands into her hips and shoved her back against the bookshelf.

Remus deepened the kiss, his tongue delving into her mouth, and she moaned softly, every cell in her body set ablaze. His right hand gripped her hip with a punishing strength while his left snaked up her side, splaying across her ribcage as he kissed her

KEEPER OF THE MOON

couldn't exactly tell him that when she needed to sick to her plan and James and Lily would be here any minute.

But she couldn't not tell him. Maybe, she thought, just maybe, he'll figure it out enough. Maybe he'll tell me what he is, and I'll help make the connection. Maybe I'm losing my mind but he's losing his too and Gods, what if we just lost them together, even just once?

Even as she thought the words, she knew it wasn't time. He needed to go learn more about his kind, to see others like him interact with their mates, to understand he'd never hurt her, or he'd never truly be ready for her.

So, she simply stared up at him, and he stared back.

"Why do you smell like me?" Remus finally broke the silence as he softened his hold on her face and ran his thumb over her lips, then added in a voice so low it was barely a whisper, "Why do you smell like you're mine?"

"Remus..." she whimpered.

"Fuck it," he rasped.



*Well you've just got something
Makes a girl start feeling crazy
And I'll do anything
If you'll let me be your baby*

STEVE_SUNSHINE

Hermione brought her hand up to the side of her neck and trailed her fingers over the slightly swollen, warm to the touch, love bite above her shoulder. "Does it bother you, if they see it?"

"Hermione, I cannot express enough how much it absolutely, unequivocally, does not bother me if people see me on you," Remus told her, his eyes darkening a bit as he continued to stare at the love bite. "But your brother, I don't want him to..."

"I can handle my brother just fine. I guarantee he won't say a word about this."

"You don't know him very well yet, then, because Sirius Black may stop breathing if he's rendered incapable of making a lewd comment."

"Don't worry about him. I promise, I've got it. Do you want to glamour it?"

"I should want to," Remus said with a sigh. "But... I like it."

"It's settled then. This stays, and we go back to normal for two weeks. Let's go, I'm so ready to meet more people who have managed to tolerate my brother for seven years," she laughed out as she headed toward the door.

"Two weeks," Remus echoed as he stepped up to open the door for her. "But I'm still fixing your tea."

"I'll keep restocking your chocolates, then." Tea and chocolates. It wasn't enough, but it was theirs, and damn if that didn't make her feel a little more hopeful every day. They may not have had everything she would have liked for them to have, not yet. But they had their something.



"Sirius, when you said you had a sister, I expected some sort of brooding, pureblooded, Narcissa-esque snob, but I like her. She's fun. Can we keep her?" Lily asked playfully, looking over at Sirius with an over-dramatic pout.

"I've already decided that I probably won't drown her," Sirius teased, winking over at Hermione as he took a swig of his drink.

"I think she's pretty cool," James piped up, slinging his arm over the back of the sofa behind Lily.

"She's right there," Remus said in an exasperated tone.

Hermione laughed and reached up from where she sat cross-legged on the floor to flick her cigarette in the ashtray on the coffee table. She looked up at the ugly sofa, where Lily sat between Sirius and James, and darted her eyes over to Remus in the yellow armchair to her right, then blushed, quickly casting her eyes back to the others.

Lily narrowed her eyes, looking back and forth between Remus and Hermione as a conspiratorial smile played on her lips. Hermione couldn't help but think, again, about how much she reminded her of Ginny. It was surreal.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

She'd always heard Harry looked like his father, but seeing James in person, at the same age as Harry had been, was shocking. His eyes were brown, where Harry's were Lily's green. James' hair was longer than Harry's had been, and a bit curly; and his skin was tanner than Harry's as well, but other than that, they were nearly identical. Not only in looks, no. He had his laugh, and he sat the same, with one ankle propped up on his knee. Their similarities were to be expected, but Lily is what had thrown her for a loop.

She had the same exact hair as Ginny, and their smiles were nearly identical, but, most noticeably, it was as if they were cut from the same cloth. Lily had Ginny's sense of humor, her confident demeanor, and her snark—Gods, she had missed that snark. She also, apparently, had Ginny's ability to read her like a book. Well, to be fair, it was likely that she could read Remus, but it was all the same when they were both guilty of committing the same little dalliance.

"Well of course she's right here, Remus. How could we fail to notice her? She's really quite beautiful, isn't she?" Lily asked, her eyes still trained on Hermione.

"Ye-yeah," Remus stammered out. "Quite."

A self-satisfied smirk spread across Lily's features and Hermione swore she could physically see her resisting the urge to kick her feet and giggle. Gods, she was going to love her so much. Some part of her already did, if she were honest, though how could she not? Even aside from the fact that this woman literally gave—or would give—birth to Harry, Lily Evans was magnetic. She had the sort of presence that just drew you in. Luna would say her aura was... whatever colour one would associate with someone being a beacon of light, she was sure. Yellow, like sunshine, if Hermione had to guess, though the Gods knew she'd never paid enough attention in divination to know.

"I just think you're lucky you didn't come out looking like that guy," James joked, jutting his thumb out toward Sirius.

"Hey! I'm stunning, thank you very much," Sirius retorted.

Lily, unphased by their ribbing, continued studying Hermione. "So, Hermione. How do you like living with your brother?"

"It's been really good," she responded. "A bit surreal, but we get on really well."

"She's my new favourite. You've all been usurped." Sirius chimed in.

"You flatter me, Mutt."

"I was born to flatter, Kitten."

"Aww, you two are so precious," Lily squealed, clutching her hands together over her heart. "And how about with Remus? Are you two getting along?"

"Oh," Hermione said, her mind buzzing for a moment because how could she even begin to answer that? "Oh, it's um... it's been fine."

STEVE_SUNSHINE

A low growl emanated from his chest. Hermione sucked in a breath and then, so fast that it almost threw her off balance, Remus brought his free hand to her hip and spun her around. He crowded her against the shelf as he gripped the wood above her head with his left hand, the fingers of his right digging into her hip almost painfully—well, actually painfully, though not in a physical sense, but more because she thought she might actually die if he stopped touching her. She tilted her head up, meeting his eyes as he stared down at her, and he cursed under his breath.

"What are you?" he whispered, his voice rough and commanding.

"Yours, I'm yours, please don't stop touching me."

"A Virgo," she said.

"Your mate, Gods, can't you feel this? Can't you see that you're supposed to have your hands on me?"

"Don't," he barked out, then sighed, gripping her hip even harder.

Please, don't move your hand, please don't stop touching me.

"Just... don't," Remus repeated in a softer tone. "What are you, Hermione?"

Yours. Only yours.

Hermione squeezed her eyes shut to try to catch her breath around the intensity of his gaze. Her head was spinning, she was drowning in the scent of him, and her hip nearly burned from the heat of his touch. She could hardly think beyond this and him and more. A deep, unfamiliar ache had settled low inside of her stomach, but she didn't need familiarity to know her body was screaming for him, craving him, because only he could quell this emptiness.

But he couldn't. She couldn't, they couldn't, so she forced her eyes open, searching his before she spoke, a bit too roughly. "What are you, Remus?"

Remus' eyes went wide, and he brought his left hand down to grip her by the chin, tilting her head back farther.

"What do you mean?" he asked as he leaned in closer, his nose brushing against hers.

"What the fuck do you mean by that?"

"What do you mean, Remus?" She challenged. Gods, she hated this. Please just figure it out. Please, just tell me I'm yours.

"I... I mean... it's like you're under my skin, and I can't wrap my head around it. And you smell like peppermint and sugar and chocolate, but that part, it's... different, and I don't... I don't understand it, but you smell like me, Hermione, why do you smell like me?" he asked, sounding equal parts feral and tortured.

Hermione, unable to formulate a response, simply stared back up at him. His hands were on her and his breath was ghosting across her face and of course she smelled like him, because she was his, and also maybe because he'd already bitten her, but she

“Yes. I can tell you really seem to like to read, and I thought you may get rather bored here when we’re both gone. I have a whole wall of bookshelves in my room, and I wondered if you might like to come see if there’s anything you’d like to borrow, since I can’t imagine you managed to bring many books with you.”

Hermione fought back the urge to squeal, unsure if it was because this was more than he’d said to her the entire time she’d been here, or because of the potential for new reading material, and instead, just nodded her head.

“Yes, Remus. I would love to browse your bookshelves,” she told him.

“Brilliant.” He grinned, then held out a hand to gesture toward his room.



“Wow. It’s like you sleep in your own little library,” Hermione mused, her voice awestricken as she took in the space around her.

“Yeah. The flat is technically only two bedrooms. This was meant to be a study, but I like a smaller space, and I’d have just filled half the room with bookshelves anyway,” Remus responded.

The room was small, but cozy. When you walked in, the wall to the right was filled with bookshelves. Next to the door sat an old wooden desk with a hutch, and the only decorations hung above it—a Gryffindor pennant above two framed pictures—one of the four Marauders, and one of himself, Sirius and Lily. There was a large, shaggy orange rug on the floor—a bit garish, but it paired well with the brown and cream-coloured quilt on the bed that was shoved into the corner opposite the door. The small chest of drawers next to the bed held various pieces of clutter, but it was otherwise tidy. While visually different, the way he lived in this room reminded her so much of the room at Grimmauld that she felt comfortable, as if she could stay in this room forever and never feel the desire to leave. It was just so bloody Remus.

“It’s lovely,” she told him, smiling over his shoulder and then blushing at the sight of him leaning against the desk with his hands in his pockets. Her stomach flipped over how reminiscent his stance was of his older self. She shook off the thought and turned back around, rising to her tiptoes to try to reach a copy of ‘Dune’ by Frank Herbert from a shelf above her head.

“Here, let me help you,” he said as he stepped up behind her. He reached over her head to pull the book out, and she stood straight, the movement causing her back to rest flush against his chest. Her body went rigid as he leaned in and buried his face in her hair, and she was nearly certain she’d stopped breathing. Remus moved again, just the smallest bit closer, and inhaled deeply, drawing in her scent.

“Hmmm. Remus? How do you like having a new roommate?” Lily asked, turning to face him. Hermione looked over at him as he glanced at her and their eyes locked for a beat before he cleared his throat and looked back at Lily, then shrugged.

“It’s, erm... she’s good. I mean, it’s good. Having a fresh face around,” he said, then tilted his head back and looked up to the ceiling as he brought his cigarette to his mouth.

Hermione watched with rapt attention as he wrapped his lips around the end and inhaled deeply, his neck flexing with the movement. He held it in for a few seconds, then exhaled, the smoke slowly curling up out of his mouth. He darted his tongue out to lick his bottom lip—something she’d noticed he always did after he took a drag—and she had to bite the inside of her cheek to stifle a groan.

Prior to the war, she’d found the habit of smoking rather disgusting, but she’d picked it up herself, in her grief. She knew she should quit, but it was the seventies, and it seemed like everyone smoked, so she’d decided that in lieu of worrying about it now, she would quit and make everyone else do the same once she’d saved the world. It really was a hideous habit.

But Remus Lupin cradling a cigarette between his long fingers—fingers she knew were skilled judging by the way his hands had moved over her body less than half an hour ago—bringing it up to that full mouth, daring his tongue out to lick his lip as he exhaled? Cigarettes were a turn off but that, specifically, turned her on more than she could wrap her mind around.

“Well, I’m glad to hear she’s good,” James said, earning him a smack to the stomach from Lily. Hermione laughed as she watched them bicker, until Sirius stood abruptly.

“Dance with me, sister,” he ordered, reaching down to help her off the floor.

“Ooohhh, are we dancing now?” James said excitedly. “Up, Lils.”

“Actually,” Lily started, as another Ginny-esque smile morphed her features. “You three dance. Remus, could you show me that book you were talking about, in your room?”

“Book?” Remus asked. Lily narrowed her eyes at him, and he jumped up from his chair immediately. “Right. The book. Let’s go.”

Hermione fought back a laugh, shaking her head. James and Lily may be reminiscent of Harry and Ginny, but in just a few short hours she’d come to realize that Remus was also the Harry to Lily’s Hermione. She was glad he had that. That they had that. Gods, she missed Harry, most of all.

Yet she couldn’t quite feel the ache as deeply as she had before. The longer she spent here, the more sure she was of her decision. Harry would only know love and happiness

KEEPER OF THE MOON

in the new life she'd create, and she'd get to watch him grow up with all the good that she was going to fight like hell to achieve for him.

For all of them.

"Come on, Kitten. Let's show this loser our moves," Sirius encouraged, bumping James with his shoulder.

"Hey! I'll out dance the both of you," James declared as Sirius flicked his wand toward the record player and 'Kashmir' by Led Zeppelin started to play. Hermione threw her head back laughing and the three began to dance, Sirius and James twirling her back and forth between them as one song bled into the next. Lily and Remus rejoined them, the latter immediately taking a seat back in the yellow chair as Lily joined them on their imaginary dance floor.

Remus didn't seem fond of dancing, always content to sit back and watch the show when she and Sirius played around in front of the record player. That was okay, though. She'd already added that to her list of things to fix. She let herself get lost in the music as she twirled and shimmed, resting her back against Sirius' own as they moved together, then stepped out and took the lead, spinning Sirius in her arms and dipping him down low.

She also let herself pretend not to notice the way Remus kept his eyes trained on her the entire time.

After two more songs, they were all spent. Sirius and James collapsed back on to the couch and Lily sank to the floor, grabbing Hermione's arm to drag her down alongside her. She enveloped her in a big hug and sputtered a bit as Hermione's hair threatened to overtake her face, then pulled back and slung an arm around her shoulder. Lily looked up to where the guys were all leaning over the coffee table, laughing as they tried to bounce a sickle into a shot glass, then rested her head on Hermione's shoulder and spoke to her in a low whisper.

"Sirius needed a sister," Lily said.

"Yeah. I needed him to," Hermione admitted. Gods, she had needed him, in both timelines, more than she could even put into words.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Lily prompted.

"About Sirius?"

"About why you keep looking at everyone like you know something we don't. You're all... half relief, half torture," Lily straightened up and turned to face her. She reached out and placed both her hands in Hermione's, then pulled them into her lap and gave her a reassuring smile. "Hey. It's okay. Sirius said you've been through a lot. I just... can I be honest, for a second?"

"Sure, yeah. Please." Hermione laughed.

STEVE_SUNSHINE

Even if doing so was growing increasingly hard, given the pesky fact that she wanted to climb him like a fucking tree.

She knew, of course, that some level of her attraction to him was influenced by the bond, but it was also extremely important to note that 1978 Remus Lupin was so unbearably climbable. He really was rather beautiful, and so damn tall, and the way he always dug his teeth into his bottom lip when he read a book or the way his hands flexed when he was stirring her tea or —

"Shit," Hermione yelped, jumping out of the stream of water as her shower turned cold. There she went again, losing herself in thought over that damn wolf. Sure, yeah, she was doing the right thing and future him had done the right thing but future him also hadn't even had to be around her once this side of the bond kicked in and she had to live with it every damn day.

She wondered if he was feeling as tortured as she was. He had to be, given the way he looked at her. She wasn't sure if it was wrong or not, but she was rather fond of the idea that she wasn't in these feelings alone, at least, even if she was the only one who had a name for it yet.

Hermione hurriedly rinsed the conditioner out of her hair and stepped out of the shower, then toweled off and pulled her clothes on, only to exit the bathroom and run directly into the aforementioned damn wolf.

"Alright, there?" he asked as he reached an arm down to steady her.

"Remus," she said, internally wincing at the husky way his name came out of her mouth. "Ye-yes, I'm fine, sorry."

"I was just looking for you, actually."

"Oh?"

"Yes, well, I... have books."

"Books?"

"Yes," he replied, nodding feverishly. "Come to my bedroom. Would you, I mean? Not... not for — I mean, for the books."

Hermione looked on in amusement as Remus sighed and brought a hand up to rub his temples. Gods, did he have to be so damn adorable when he was flustered?

"What I meant to say," he started again, "Is that I've noticed you were reading through that copy of 'Rebecca' again, which you'd already read before you read 'Middlemarch' and you seemed to move through 'The Picture of Dorian Gray' rather quickly, and now I sound as if I'm stalking you..." he trailed off as he squeezed his eyes shut.

"Remus, it's okay," Hermione said softly. "You have books in your room?" she prompted.

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they'd had, or did horrible things like use a floral-scented cleaner or buy an incense burner for the living room. She knew he loved it, though. Just as he had promised in the future, he loved her twice.

Remus, on the other hand, was... complicated. They never got too close and rarely spoke at all. But they'd developed a delicate sort of rhythm. The third day after he'd returned from Godric's Hollow, he began making tea for her in the morning — peppermint, two sugars — and would set it in front of her with a simple 'Good morning, Hermione,' before they went about their days separately. The fifth night, he walked into the living room and settled into the chair in the corner, and proceeded to do so each night, reading while she either did the same on the couch or goofed off with Sirius.

He would sit and smoke and read, occasionally engaging in conversation with Sirius, and then once Hermione decided she was ready to go to bed, he would close his book, get up from his chair, and walk silently behind her to the end of the hall, pausing to tell her goodnight as they opened their respective doors and escaped into their own bedrooms. It was, she supposed, the closest thing to doing something with her that they could have right now, and some part of her was glad he'd found something that hopefully soothed all the things she knew he must be thinking and feeling.

She couldn't deny that she rather liked having a routine of sorts with him. He was the first person she'd interact with in the morning and the last every night, and she knew that was intentional, even if he may not have realized it himself, yet. They read together quietly, he saw to it that her tea was brought to her exactly as she liked it, and she repaid him in kind by keeping a steady stock of the little chocolates in the red foils he liked from the sweet shop around the corner.

She had found a little candy dish at a shop nearby and she was still flying a bit high from how adorable he looked when she walked in and placed the little treasure trove down on the coffee table in front of him. That was it. Morning tea, evenings spent in silent proximity and a dish of chocolates, but it was nice. Enough, even. For now.

They'd had a few small conversations here and there, and an innumerable amount of awkward run-ins where they both kept veering in the same direction whilst moving about the kitchen or one would catch the other staring and they'd both blush — though to be fair, he was sort of always staring at her, so it wasn't exactly hard to catch him staring, and she only noticed because she was staring too, but, semantics.

In candy dishes and peppermint tea and heated stares, she was so damn comfortable with him. And, above all else, she was resolute in her decision. She refused to push him or make this hard on him. She'd meant it when she said she wanted to show Remus the same grace his future self had shown her, and she intended to stick to that resolve.

STEVE_SUNSHINE

"I don't really have an easy time being friends with other women. I tend to be... well, I supposed I'm a bit bossy, sort of a mother hen. The guys seem to thrive when I get all bossy and swotty, but other girls always seem put off by me. I ask personal questions and try to herd everyone around and — I'm just a hard pill to swallow. But I really like you and I would really like to be friends."

She blinked back at Lily, unable to form a coherent sentence, then shook her head in an attempt to ground herself. "I'm sorry, I just — it sounds like you just told my life story." She laughed. "Back at, um, at school, at Beauxbatons, my two best friends were boys. I had these two dorm mates who were all about the trendiest beauty charms and whether or not that cue boy in potions class was watching them stir their cauldron and I tried so hard to just... meld with them."

"But, after about ten minutes of talk about the way their arse looked in the muggle jeans they were going to wear to the next weekend excursion to the local village, I'd wind up descending into a rant about the importance of focusing on academics or whatever and I've just... yeah. I've always had a hard time connecting with other girls, too. And I'd really like to be your friend, too."

"Well, it's settled then." Lily grinned back at her, "Now, tell me about these two best friends."

Hermione worried her lip between her teeth but slowly nodded, a wiseful smile spreading across her face. "They were amazing. One, um... Barny, he was a bit daft, but in the most brilliant way. One of those people who always joked around and seemed like he couldn't quite get with the program but then he'd point out some obvious detail the rest of us missed or was poetic about something huge and you'd just sit back wondering how on earth he even knew that."

"He sounds like Sirius," Lily mused with a grin.

"Yeah, in a lot of ways." Hermione chuckled. "And my other friend... Dudley, James reminds me so much of him. That sort of easy laugh he has. Dudley had been through a lot. He had a really poor childhood, and he had... just, so much weight on his shoulders, but he was the bravest, kindest person I'd ever met. He was my first brother. Blood or not. He's someone I'll carry with me for the rest of my life, in more ways than I can even tell you." She finished, bringing a hand up to wipe a tear from her cheek.

"Was," Lily repeated softly, surging forward and wrapping her arms around Hermione once more. She held her tightly for a moment, then pulled back and took Hermione's hands in hers once more. "It's okay. You don't have to talk about how you lost them. Sirius said your parents aren't here anymore, either?"

Hermione shook her head, more tears springing free from her eyes and then laughed at herself. "Sorry. I'm such a crier."

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"That's okay, I'm a crier too," Lily sniffled, then gestured to her own tear-soaked face. "We'll just cry together all the time, it's fine. These men of ours never cry with me anyway," she added, raising her voice a bit so they'd hear her.

"Hey!" James cried out indignantly. "I cried that time we saw Star Wars at the cinema last year."

"You got drunk and cried at the *Leaky* afterward because you realized you'd never own a lightsaber," Remus teased.

"I deserve a lightsaber, thank you very much." James huffed indignantly before leaned over and shoved Remus. Sirius joined in, and Lily rolled her eyes as the three descended into a tangle of limbs, then turned her attention back to Hermione.

"What we can talk about, is that," Lily said, her eyes sparkling with mischief as she lifted her hand and poked Hermione on the side of her neck where her jumper had fallen down her shoulder to reveal her love bite. Hermione blushed and adjusted the neck of her top, then shook her head. She could feel Remus' heated stare on the back of her head but willed herself not to look over at him.

"I thought you and Remus already had a lovely chat about books?" she deflected, arching an eyebrow at Lily.

"Stop. I love this so much. It's like we're the same person," Lily laughed, then leaned in and lowered her voice. "James and Sirius are clueless, so they likely thought I actually wanted to talk about a damn book. Which, to be fair, would not exactly be atypical, but... I'm getting off track here. Tell me everything."

"I... there's nothing to tell, really. We, um...we had a little...we had a moment," Hermione stuttered out.

Lily groaned and rolled her eyes dramatically. "That's exactly what Remus said, which is how I know there's more going on between the two of you. He usually tells me everything."

"If it's any consolation," Hermione began, offering an apologetic smile, "we agreed not to talk about it for a little while, so there isn't much I can tell you."

"Fine," Lily huffed out. "Then I'll tell you something. I can tell you've been through a lot. Remus, he um, struggles with some things too. But I've never seen him look at a girl like he's been looking at you all night. I've never really seen him look at a girl very much at all. And he's my best friend, truthfully, so please know I don't mean to come on so strong. I just want him to be happy. And you, now, too, as I've decided we're also best friends."

"I understand." Hermione nodded, glancing back over toward Remus again. He'd settled back into his chair and was very pointedly not looking at her. She knew he could hear every word, given his lycanthropic senses, no matter how quietly she and

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"Okay, Kitten. It's going to be okay," Sirius reassured her as he pulled her into his arms. "Let's focus on the three of us being roommates, and getting you introduced to everyone. One step at a time, yeah?"

"Okay," she nodded against his chest. "I'm sorry, I'm — Gods, I'm a mess."

"Hush up," he chided playfully, then squeezed her tighter. "You're my sister, yeah? Then your mess is mine."



29th July 1978

"What if they hate me?" Hermione whispered into her pillow.

"What if you hate them?" Sirius challenged.

"Oh Gods, I could never," she scoffed indignantly. "They're Harry's parents. There's no way I won't love them."

"Exactly." Sirius poked her in the side. "And you're my sister. They're going to love you."

Hermione groaned and rolled over to her back, then looked up at him. "Fine. I suppose I can't keep putting it off."

"Good. Relax," he commanded, ruffling her hair before he turned away and climbed off of the bed to leave.

Hermione stretched as she rose from the bed and gathered her things for a shower, then crossed the hall and turned the water on, brushing her teeth as she waited for it to heat up before she stepped inside. She washed her body and got to work on her hair — smiling to herself as she sniffled her conditioner, which Sirius declared changed his entire life, a point he emphasized by running his hands through his hair more often than ever.

The past few weeks had been a major adjustment. Living with one nearly-forty-year-old wizard in a large home had been a nice change of pace, but being with two eighteen-year-old wizards fresh out of Hogwarts in a small-ish flat felt rather like being back in the tent with Harry and Ron.

Gods, she missed them. Desperately. But being with Sirius and Remus was nice. She and Sirius, naturally, got on like wildfire and were already dancing and drinking and she had big plans to take him to the cinema and get him to the damn bar — though, the latter was quite a feat. For all their talk of Remus' self-flagellation, she had been woefully unprepared for how far in the closet Sirius was.

She would get him there, though, and in the meantime, it was incredible to be here with him, even with all of his complaints about her 'gritting up the place' because she had the audacity to purchase new hand towels to replace the singular threadbare one

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fact that there's 1000s of inmates in there, and it's like, "I don't think I like the idea of the facility being very much and now I've gotten far off course."

The women and children left behind in the camp during the moon were protected by walls, but it wasn't that when they carry the scent of a wolf, through language or more interesting means, it's sort of a glowing, keep away sign. There's so much about it all that I don't know any more.

Oh, the bond is more, something like a quarter of all wolves actually find their mates, and we both know that I've never been the lucky one.

James is keeping me the door, reminding me for decades, so I must tell you when.

- RJ



"Hey, that's me! Can I read through these sometime?" Sirius asked excitedly.

"I don't... well I don't know," Hermione laughed. "You read them in the future, but he was dead, and now what's in them will likely change so... I brought them back for him, and I just think that should be up to him."

"Fine, but I'm going to brood about this," Sirius sighed dramatically. "Do you think... I know you said you would tell him the truth once he'd had a few days to adjust to you being around, but maybe you should just take these to him and tell him now."

Hermione chewed her lip in contemplation, then shook her head.

"It's hard to decide when and how I should go about things. I've already shaken things up, and I don't want to take away from the important things that haven't happened yet. I think it was important for him to get to experience it this way. I also..." she trailed off and sighed, then took the journal back and tucked it away again.

"In my past, Remus was so tortured over this bond. I want it to be a good thing for him, this time. He worked so hard to make sure my right to choose wasn't taken away, and I think I'd like—I need to pay that forward for him. I think he needs to go on this mission and learn about the bond the way he was meant to. I want it to happen naturally and for him to have the time that he's away to decide if it's what he wants."

Sirius nodded and brought a hand up to tuck a curl behind her ear. "And is it what you want?"

"I think I do," she admitted. "When we met, the bond was different because of the societal and emotional baggage that came with it. I just thought I fancied my professor."

"And now?"

"Now," she repeated as she looked up at him with watery eyes. "Sirius, I—I saw him and it was everything. I didn't know it would feel like that. It was so intense. And I just can't push this. He was so strong for me, for five years. I can give him a few months."

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Lily were whispering, but she thought it rather sweet that he had the decency to at least pretend he wasn't eavesdropping.

"How about this, new best friend?" she asked as she looked back over at Lily. "I swear to you that the second I have anything that I can tell you, we'll talk for ages."

"Deal." Lily nodded enthusiastically.

"Oi!" Sirius called out. "Are you hens done chucking? We need to talk about The Order before we're all too pissed to think straight."

"Be nice, or I'll hex you, so that you cluck every time you try to speak for the next week." Hermione responded in a sing-song voice.

"I'll pay you to do it," James encouraged.

"Oh, James, be serious for a moment," Remus chastised.

"I can't be serious, he's Sirius," James deadpanned.

"Hey, that's me!" Sirius proclaimed proudly.

Hermione laughed and scooted closer to the coffee table, propping an elbow on the surface. "Okay. The illustrious Order of the Phoenix. Sirius has told me quite a bit, but I'm serious about this. I want to help."

"No," Remus said, causing all four heads to turn to him.

"It's her choice, Moony. If she wants to help with the war efforts, then she should get to help," James told him.

"It's going to be fine. She's tough," Sirius added, waving his hand dismissively.

"She's been through enough," Remus continued, his voice nearly lethal in his seriousness. "She just lost her family. She needs time to heal."

"She is right here," Hermione spat out, narrowing her eyes at him.

"I'm sorry, Hermione, I just..." Remus started, but trailed off as he leaned back in his chair and rubbed at the back of his neck, a confused expression on his face.

Hermione opened her mouth to argue but came up short. Yet again, she felt that Goddamned guilt crawling just beneath the surface of her skin as she watched him try to rationalize his feelings. He was, undoubtedly, struggling to contend with the inexplicable urge to protect her. In what little research she'd had the time to do about the mating bond, she had learned enough to know that he would likely protest a number of things she would need to do to set things right.

The bond was born of an archaic sort of natural magic, and thus, predated trivial matters such as the decorum involved in modern society. The primary nature of the bond was about securing the bloodline. Meet the person who was the most compatible, both biologically and in general, breed, protect the pack, rinse and repeat.

Werewolves were known to be rather ruthless when it came to protecting their mates, and though he may not have a name for the way he felt yet, a large portion of what her

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presence was causing him to feel likely stood in direct opposition of the gentle nature he worked so hard to maintain.

"I get it," she told him. "But I need you to... well, I need all of you to understand that I need this. That bastard and his little leeches took everything from me. I'm going to fight, and I'm going to help end this. For good."

"Fuck yeah you are, Kitten," Sirius all but cheered as he picked up another shot off of the table.

She glanced back over to Remus, who fixed her with a hard stare, then nodded. "Next meeting is on the eighth. I'll owl Moody tomorrow."

"Yes!" Lily said brightly as she held her glass in the air. "Here's to ending this shit."



You can take me to paradise

And then again you can be cold as ice

I'm over my head (over my head)

Oh, but it sure feels nice

STEVIE_SUNSHINE

"Self-loathing," she answered him. "And seeing me triggered a reaction he didn't understand, two days after the full moon at that. So given that he doesn't know about the mating bond, he probably felt the pull... it's a bit primal, um..." she trailed off, blushing.

"Oh. OH," Sirius said, shooting her a wicked grin. "Moony felt the bond and he thinks his wolfy side wants to eat you, because he can't rationalize how bad he wants to eat you."

"Gross," she said, rolling her eyes. "But something like that, probably. Shit, look at these dates." She added as she passed the journal to him."



August 9th, 1979

8-

It'll be away for a while. Order business. Dumbledore wants me to infiltrate a pack to sniff around and see if Moody is trying to recruit werewolves.

Guess I'm off to run with the wolves for a while.

Do you think this single jumper says 'I'm a fend head?' or should I go with the collar head? I lay down that one brings out my eyes.

Let's pretend I'm not pondering

-RJ



November 16th, 1979

8-

Did you miss me? It was, as expected, terrible. Off with I felt like out of place, but once I was able to relax, I was trying it out that look. It'd be ironic if I didn't mention that I feel a lot more alone, and maybe less like I'm wandering now.

Being there, in a pack, running in the woods like that was pretty, I'm a creature of comfort, and I missed real life every day. Unlike the moon, it'll never end. It felt like anything I've ever done, the run free with other werewolves.

Ultimately, I can't say I loved the experience much. There is something primal about running free with my own kind, but that sensation does not outweigh the fear. We could have had someone. Still four times I woke up in a panic, so sure I would be covered in blood or anyone, it's simply not the way I want to live.

There are some aspects I find intriguing, though. I got close with a couple of the other single pups. Just was a pup, and Otto, an older man who was my sort of guide. really helped me a lot in learning to navigate it all. The pack Alpha and his Luna are possibly the kindest people I've ever met, which I have to admit was rather pretty.

It was nothing like I expected. There were about twenty other wolves, including three mated pairs, and a couple of kids. pups, rather. They have their own rituals and customs and way of life that seemed so strange when I arrived but the longer I was there, the more I could understand or, perhaps, even enjoy the familiarity and security of some of it.

The females, especially, I was concerned about how all of that would play out during the full moons, but apparently, when a woman or bitch, they call them, and you know that it's the technical term for a female wolf, which they seem to extend to human males (the

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“So it’s like with Veclas or Centaurs? The whole, ‘one true mate’ thing?”

“Yes,” Hermione answered firmly as she leaned back against the headboard, toying with her bag in her hands.

“Shit. I didn’t know that was even a thing for werewolves,” Sirius said softly as he took a seat next to her, mirroring her position on the bed.

“Yeah, well. The United Kingdom isn’t exactly known for being open and honest about werewolves,” she said, rolling her eyes.

“No. No, Kitten, you don’t understand,” Sirius told her, shaking his head vehemently as he shifted to face her. “I didn’t know werewolves had mates.”

“Well, they do, apparently.” She laughed.

“No, I didn’t know,” Sirius repeated. “My best friend is a werewolf, who tells me everything, and he’s never mentioned the fact that there’s someone destined by the Gods to be his perfect match. Does that seem right to you?”

Hermione gasped and dropped her bag into her lap. “Oh fuck.”

“Precisely.”

“He doesn’t know.”

“Nope,” Sirius responded. “At least, I don’t think he knows yet.”

“So, his reaction..”

“Is the reaction of a man who became a werewolf at the age of four thanks to his werewolf-hating father, was raised by said werewolf-hating father, and then went off to school where he only had access to the few —likely biased —books in the Hogwarts library to teach him about his nature,” Sirius paused, pulling out two cigarettes, and made quick work of lighting them and passing one to her. Hermione accepted it gratefully and leaned back again, smoking in silence as she tried to gather her thoughts.

“It hasn’t happened yet,” she said softly. “I knew he talked about it this year, but I didn’t realize that’s when he learned of it.” She leaned over to the bedside table and placed her cigarette in the ashtray, then reached into her bag and pulled out the little metal lockbox.

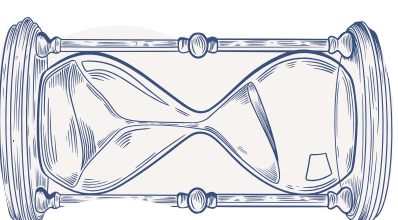
“What hasn’t happened yet?”

Hermione held up a finger as she dug in the box, then, pulling out the journal from 1978, she brought her wand down to resize it and began to flip through it as she spoke.

“He’ll be sent on a mission for The Order, sometime this year. I don’t remember when. It was the first time he’d ever spent any real time with other werewolves, and he mentioned mates for the first time when he returned.”

“Well, shit,” Sirius said. “Hermione, you have to understand —well, I’m sure you do, given that you knew him and have these journals, but Remus is...”

INTERLUDE I Incense & Peppermint



STEVE_SUNSHINE

Hermione heard a shuffling sound, and then the unmistakable sound of footfalls in the hallway. She jumped back and pulled on the Ear, silently hoping it hadn't been seen, and shoved it into her back pocket just as her door burst open.

She watched as Remus appeared in the doorway, his chest heaving as he stared her down.

"Are you hurt?" he asked in a quiet voice that belied the frantic way he'd barged in.

"No, I'm okay," she reassured him.

"She's fine, Moony," Sirius called out.

Remus turned his head and held a hand up to silence Sirius, then looked back at her.

"You have a scar."

"Yes. It's fine though," Hermione told him. She stepped closer and pulled up the sleeve of her jumper, then held up an arm for her to see.

"What the fuck," Remus said in a low whisper. He reached a hand out toward her arm, then quickly brought it back down and shoved both hands in his pockets.

They stood in an awkward silence as Hermione finally glanced over his shoulder to see Sirius standing behind him with a look of confusion etched across his features.

"Sirius said he told you that can stay here?" he asked. She nodded, glancing at Sirius again and giving him what she hoped was a reassuring smile.

"Good." Remus nodded jerkily, then paused and nodded again. "You should. Stay here where you're safe. I'm... well, as I said I'm not feeling well. Not usually this much of an arse."

"Yes, he is," Sirius said with a laugh.

"Shut up, Pads," Remus called over his shoulder, all tension seeming to have drained from him, for the time being.

"I'm gonna go lay down. I, um... can't believe Sirius has a sister," he said with a shake of his head.

"It really is nice to meet you, Carina."

"Hermione," she corrected softly. "My middle name."

"Hermione," Remus repeated, his voice so low it was barely a whisper. "You'll be safe here, Hermione."

"Thank you, Remus."

He nodded again, then quickly strode from the room. Hermione waited until she heard Remus close his bedroom door behind him, then looked back over to Sirius.

"Well, Kitten," he said with a laugh. "You wanna tell me what else I don't know?"

"Lock the door. Silencing charm," she rushed out quickly as she turned back to the dresser and grabbed her bag.

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if she was the reason he thought he smelled the sweet shop? She could certainly smell him, so earthly and rich and —

Okay, she was getting off base.

Focus, Granger, she chastised herself. She was here. That was an irrevocable fact. And she would have to put aside any selfish thoughts, anyway, because the mission she was on was far greater than whether or not her werewolf — a werewolf, she corrected herself — thought she smelled good.

But surely he thought she smelled good, right? Surely she didn't sink, or her scent wasn't offensive to him or — no. No, she couldn't let herself spiral that far. Not yet.

With a sigh, Hermione glanced at the door as she stopped her pacing. They were talking about her, out there, and the urge to eavesdrop was too great to resist. It was an invasion of privacy, sure. But really, wouldn't it be best if she knew all the information? She did have a mission to see to, after all.

Before she could talk herself out of it she turned to the chest of drawers and dug in her bag, pulling out one of the many little tools she'd brought along just in case. She looked down at the Extendable Ear, a sad smile playing on her lips as she thought of the twins, but she shook off the grief and rushed to the door, setting the Ear down on the floor.



“She’s really your sister?” Remus asked, his voice riddled with disbelief.

“I know, it sounds unbelievable, but it’s true. And I’m sorry, Moony, because I know how you are with new people, but I can’t just leave her to fend for herself.”

“No, no, I get it. It’s just... the strangest thing.”

“That I have a sister?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah. That. Are you sure she needs to stay here, though?”

“I’m sure. You’ve got to trust me on this. She’s been through a lot, and she needs me right now. She needs people, in general. She doesn’t have anyone else anymore. And I swear it, she’s bloody brilliant. She’s good people.”

“What do you mean ‘anyone?’” Remus asked, his voice rising an octave.

“Ah. Well. That Deathrater shit in Redbridge, awhile back,” Sirius sighed, and Hermione smiled softly to herself. She could almost envision him running his hand through his hair.

“What happened?” Remus demanded.

“They got her parents. Her Mum and Stepdad. She got away, thank the Gods. She’s got this scar, though, it’s brutal.”

“They hurt her?” Remus spat angrily.

A KEEPER OF THE MOON COMPANION PIECE

Incense & Peppermint

BY STEVIE_SUNSHINE



SHE WAS LIKE A
SIREN, AND HE, A
SAILOR LOST AT SEA,
DESPERATELY
SEARCHING FOR
THE REPRIEVE OF A
DRY LAND HE
COULDN'T FIND
THROUGH THE
HAZE OF HER.

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due to their proximity—then drew in another deep inhale as he made a strange, low sort of keening sound in the back of his throat.

“I’m sorry, I’m not... I’m not the greatest with new people. And I was, erm... I was sick a couple nights ago so I’m a bit out of sorts, of course,” he said quietly.

Of course, she thought to herself. She had only come here two nights ago, the very night of the full moon. She knew, both from reading his journal and from the million questions she—ever the swot—had asked his future self, that the lingering effects of the full moon left him a bit off kilter for a few days. Maybe that was the reason he’d seemed so... grossed out?

But no, that didn’t explain it, not really. There had to be something she was missing. Nevertheless, she couldn’t exactly think when he was so close, and his hand was on her arm, and he was looking down at her with those Godsdamned eyes.

“It’s okay,” she said softly, “I gave Sirius a bit of a shock when I popped up, too. You two talk.”

Remus nodded and opened his mouth as if he were going to say more, then shook his head and gave her a forced smile that more closely resembled a grimace before he dropped his hand and stepped away from her.

She had an overwhelming urge to yell at him to put it back, to beg him to touch her again, but given the fact that she was losing her mind, she figured she was in no position to make demands. Instead, with a great deal of reluctance, she turned away and headed down the short hall to her room in lieu of making herself look even more strange than this whole afternoon had already been.



Hermione paced back and forth at the foot of her bed, wringing her hands. She needed to catalogue things. A list. Lists never failed her, and with that in mind, she began to think, slowly unraveling what she knew.

In the future, Hermione was his Remus’ mate. The bond had been activated but was left unsealed. She had been concerned that somehow, bringing that bond back to the past with her could taint it. She had also wondered if the bond would even exist here in the seventies, as technically, she hadn’t actually been born yet. But she felt it herself, so the second option wasn’t viable.

So, then. In the category of explanation, a tainted bond could be the reason for his reaction. He had felt something, too. She knew it, in the way that he had been so thrown off guard by her presence. She didn’t know what he’d felt, as all he’d really said was that he smelled something sweet. She wondered, her cheeks heating at the thought,

KEEPER OF THE MOON

“What do you mean ‘anymore?’” His chest tightened with worry as the word reverberated through his head.

“Ah. Well. That Death Eater shit in Redbridge, awhile back,” Sirius sighed and ran a hand through his hair.

“What happened?” Remus demanded.

“They got her parents. Her Mum and Steplad. She got away, thank the Gods. She’s got this scar, though, it’s brutal.”

“They hurt her?” he spat, inadvertently balling his fists at his sides.

She was hurt.

She wasn’t supposed to be hurt, he needed to...

Before he could stop himself, Remus turned and stomped down the hallway, barely twisting the knob of her door before he shoved it open. He felt manic, breathless, until he looked down and saw her standing near the foot of the bed.

Safe.

“Are you hurt?” he asked, the words coming out almost a sigh of relief.

“No, I’m okay,” she told him, and Gods, her voice was so damn soothing, it was almost as if he could feel the weight of it wrapping around him like an old quilt.

“She’s fine. Moony.” Sirius said from behind him. He looked over his shoulder and held a hand up, mentally begging him to just, kindly, if you please, shut the entire fuck up, then turned his attention back to her.

“You have a scar.”

“Yes. It’s fine though,” she said, wrapping the figurative blanket tighter around him. She took a step closer and pulled up her sleeve, then brought her forearm up near her face.

Mudblood. Etched into the otherwise perfect skin of her arm, angry and pink. A cursed blade, he assumed. As if the lettering itself wasn’t bad enough, whoever had done this to her had done a complete hack job, judging by the smattering of smaller, slightly curved scars next to part of the word.

“What the fuck,” he whispered, his fingers twitching with the need to reach out to her.

He shoved both hands in his pockets and continued to stare at her arm. The scar was cruel. Grotesque. But some small part of him, buried deep in the back of his head seemed almost... content, at the sight of it.

It made no sense, but then again, what did? The only thing he could bring himself to care about was that she was here, and she was safe, and she was supposed to be both of those things.

Everything was strange and fucked but this was right, and she smelled right.

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“Sirius said he told you that you can stay here?”

She nodded, casting a small smile over his shoulder toward Sirius, and Remus nodded back in return.

“Good. You should stay here. Where you’re safe. I’m... well, as I said, I’m not feeling well. Not usually this much of an arse.”

“Yes, he is,” Sirius called over his shoulder.

Fair.

“Shut up, Pads,” he responded, more of the tension leaving his body as she heard her emit a soft giggle.

Safe.

“I’m gonna go lay down. I, um... can’t believe Sirius has a sister,” he told her, shaking his head. He couldn’t believe any of this and he needed to go chain smoke and scribble in his journal and maybe cast a silencing charm and scream for seven hours but this would be okay. She was safe.

“It really is nice to meet you, Carina.”

“Hermione. My middle name,” she responded.

“Hermione.” The word felt sweet on his tongue, melodic and sweet, and he had to fist his hands at his side to keep from pulling her into his arms. Gods, she was so sweet, and she smelled like that, and she was named for a fucking Bowie song. How could he not be a creep?

I care for no one else but you

“You’ll be safe here, Hermione.”

I tear my soul to cease the pain

“Thank you, Remus.” She smiled at him. The air left his lungs entirely.

I think maybe you feel the same

Remus nodded again, then turned and left the room, his mind buzzing. He wanted to stay. He needed to go.

What can we do

He entered his room and cast a silencing charm over his shoulder before he tossed his wand on to his desk and then moved to the record player, pulling out his copy of Space Oddity and placing it on the turntable he had sitting on a stack of books in the corner next to his spare bookshelf.

I’m not quite sure what I’m supposed to do

He moved the needle to the third track, then grabbed his latest journal off the top of the stack and settled on the floor next to the record player, leaning back against the wall and balancing his journal on his knees as he dug in his pocket for one of the pens he’d swiped from Lily.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

So I've been writing just for you



11th July 1979

Journal

It's absolutely, unequivocally a full name type of day.

I don't know how to put it into words. There's a girl, Sirius's sister, if you can believe that I know, the fact alone that I'm mentioning

a girl is a shock in itself. But I tell me to your own journals, because it gets weaker.

Her name is Hermione.

Hermione.

Hermione.

Yes, Journal. Oh in 't letters to Hermione' Hermione, though I suppose she's more likely named for Shakespeare since she's about ten years too young to have been named after my favorite. Btw sorry, but it's still perfect. She's perfect.

There's a girl, and she's Sirius's sister, and she bears the name of a Btw sorry, and her eyes look like melted chocolate, and she would

like. Haven't seen me. Nobody and I wanted to discover her.

I wish I meant that in a metaphorical sense, Journal, but I don't be mistaken.

I wanted to and my teeth in her fucking field.

There was this girl, at the base of her neck, right in the side, and I went to the girl's journals, it felt like the only honest something I don't because all I could think is that it was 30th July 1979 to the left down, right there, that it would fix everything, but I don't

even know what I'm supposed to be fixing.

I've never felt this way, I did today. It was like that feeling directly before a transformation, but differently, and even more intense.

Just then my hand was on her arm, and she smelled like me, and she's here and she's safe and it's right. There is a lot that would take me a dozen of your journals, if all the things that are wrong, but it's better now. I think I can just... breathe through it.

Oh, maybe, hold my breath around her because she makes my fucking teeth hurt.

She's beautiful. She's.

Remus John L. you (has your completely fucking mouth).

PS - four journals, you caught me. I'm on the floor listening to 't letters to Hermione no repeat because apparently this is my life now. Although, just between me and you, I? Oh now could get used to days filled with nothing but her and Btw.

Random in golden angle is count. 32th yr in that sense. I?

(I could smell her can't. What the fuck is wrong with me?)



13th July, 1978

Remus sipped his coffee and leaned back against the counter, his eyes committing every move she made to memory as she made her tea. He wanted to be the one doing

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Remus stood staring after her as she walked down the hallway and shut the door to the guest room, then turned around and stared blankly at Sirius for a moment before he sighed and walked closer.

"Who is she?" he asked.

"Ah," Sirius began, a broad grin stretching across his face. "She is Carina Hermione Black."

Hermione.

Like a fucking Bowie song.

Because of course she was.

"A cousin?"

"My sister."

"Rydych chi'n celyydd. You don't have a sister."

(You lie.)

"Well, I do now. Dear old Dad had a thing for muggle waitresses back in the fifties and sixties, and now... she's here. And you're going to have to get over your weird little refusal to get to know anyone new, because she's staying."

"She's staying here?"

"Yep. Already settled in. I know you didn't want a roommate, and you know I meant to respect that, but she doesn't have anywhere else to go."

"No," Remus said, a bit too quickly, then added, "She should stay. She can stay. It's fine, if she stays."

Gods, the thought of her going elsewhere was even more unbearable than the thought of her staying. She wasn't safe here, but he couldn't shake the feeling that she wasn't safe elsewhere, either. She was... everything, and he was bloody terrified of her, and he craved her, and she was Sirius' sister. Fuck.

"She's really your sister?" Remus asked.

"I know, it sounds unbelievable, but it's true. And I'm sorry, Moony, because I know how you are with new people, but I can't just leave her to fend for herself."

"No, no, I get it. It's just... the strangest thing." Remus couldn't wrap his head around any of this, and it seemed to get more confusing by the second. How could she be so... this, whatever this was, and also just so happen to be his best friend's sister?

"That I have a sister?"

"Huh? Oh, yeah. That. Are you sure she needs to stay here, though?"

"I'm sure. You've got to trust me on this. She's been through a lot, and she needs me right now. She needs people, in general. She doesn't have anyone else anymore. And I swear it, she's bloody brilliant. She's good people."

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It was neither high nor deep, but steady, with a melodic lilt, almost as if she were singing the words. It was perfect. She was perfect.

She and Sirius exchanged a few more words but he didn't pay attention, using the time to covertly study her side profile. Gods, she was perfect, and he'd been harsh and dickish and now she was staring down at the ground as if she couldn't bear to look at him and she was walking away and – no.

No. Not yet.

Without a thought, he shot his hand out, wrapping it around her arm to still her movements.

“Wait,” he commanded. She turned her head to look up at him, and he was lost all over again. He tilted his head down, running on pure instinct, and drew in another long breath, her scent invading his body all over again. He let out an odd sort of whine that he'd never heard himself emit as he felt his body relax instantaneously.

She smelled like him. It was faint, but it was present, and he had no way to explain how on earth she could have picked up his scent, nor could he put reason to why he so desperately needed her to smell like him, but relief coursed through his veins.

She smelled like him. It wasn't enough, though. It should be stronger, he should... gods, her neck was right there. But she smelled like him, and his chest felt a little less like it was being ripped in half, his mind a little clearer. It helped.

He pulled his head back, fighting the desire to bury his face in her hair, and looked into her eyes once more. She looked confused, a sadness in her eyes he couldn't place, but he had to fix it, somehow.

“I'm sorry, I'm not... I'm not the greatest with new people. And I was, erm... I was sick a couple nights ago so I'm a bit out of sorts, of course,” he told her softly.

“It's okay,” she responded. “I gave Sirius a bit of a shock when I popped up, too. You two talk.”

Fuck, that voice. Maybe she really was a siren.

Shit, maybe she was part Veela? He'd never been around one, sure, and he didn't recall their pull being described as this intense when he learned about them in school, but that would certainly explain things, wouldn't it?

He opened his mouth, the question on the tip of his tongue, then shook his head. No. The coloring was all wrong, and she was too... human.

He could sense it, somehow. He gave her what he hoped would come across as a reassuring smile, though he could feel in the pull of the muscles around his mouth that it came out strangled just like everything else had been, and forced himself to release her arm and step away.

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that for her, had almost asked if he could, but stopped himself when he realized how pathetic he would have sounded.

Pathetic, maybe.

Definitely.

But gods, he couldn't shake this constant urge to just... care for her, in some way, however small.

Two sugars.

Noted.

14th July 1978

Remus smiled down at the two mugs in his hand – his coffee, her tea – and had to physically shake his head to brush off the thoughts about how very much he could get used to doing this. He walked into the dining area, where Hermione had sat down and lit a cigarette – a smoke before her tea seemed to be a common thing – and, with a bit of a shake to his hand, set the mug down in front of her.

“Bore da, Hermione. Good morning”

“Oh!” she said happily, her eyes going wide as she looked from him to the mug and back again.

She picked it up and brought it to her nose, taking a long sniff and then let out a satisfied sigh – she seemed to love the smell of peppermint too, though he would wager his last knut that her liking for the scent couldn't rival his in the slightest.

“Thank you, Remus. Good morning”

He smiled softly and gave her a quick nod, then turned away and walked back to his room, shutting the door behind him.

14th July 1978

St,

I made her tea.

She smiled at me, and told me good morning.

Very nice! And so happy you know feel much better.

(I bet her mouth tastes like peppermint)

Good fucking morning.

-RJ

15th July 1978

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8,

She brought a little crystal candy dish and filled it to the brim with Remus's chocolate fennel.

She did that for me.

For me.

My fucking tooth hurt.

—Remus Padon-Leggs, "The Little Bandaid at Large."



17th July 1979

8,

Remus keeps asking about her 'poking up the place,' though I know he's just trying to get a rise out of her. I don't mind if he does. It's nice to have a woman's touch – and even nicer to have Lily may not yell at us for the mess next time she comes round.

I hate this bloody cleaner she uses. I hate how the scent clings on her skin. I fucking HATE my clamps, but she burns if we're doing the job, and on her dress. It leaves me mad, the way it gets all over her and mixes with her scent.

We'll wait till about the incense burner and my clamps are my tale. I just poked up at the shop today.

—R8



20th July 1979

8,

I've gone out with the others from the last few nights. I used to read with them in the evenings, but I'd blown the lid off my room a lot of times. It's easier now, though. Lily's still here and she still makes me feel... everything. There's some piece of the puzzle I can't quite get to click in the place and, somehow, unacceptable as it may be, I feel like she knows something.

She may be kind to me sometimes, just to make me... happy. I don't know. (I HATE) She knows, but I know she knows it.

It's easier now. I stand with her and she thinks I could spend the rest of my life just being in her presence. That would be enough. I know it sounds pathetic, journal, but I never let her with me, then.

She feels this too.

Gradually, just cause fuck it?

(Maybe I just want to fuck her?)

Remus, this is just... what it feels like to want that? I've never allowed myself to want that's able from in the distance. There's never been an actual person that I just... needed like this. Maybe I can just wrap it up in that next little hour and blame Remus.

Remus's playground.

(I'm a liar.)

—R8

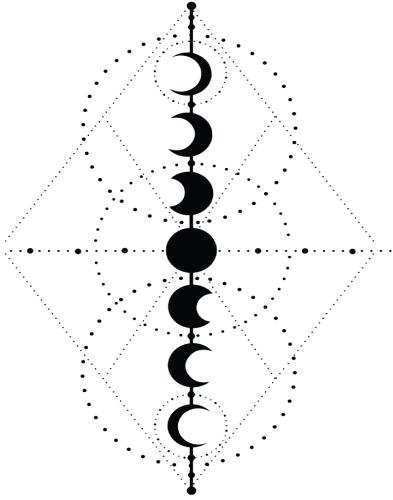


26th July 1979

8,

I was a pretty happy little thing about it, of course, but I accidentally wrote a journal that was certain, very hard individual described over the back of a bloody chair and the next morning, with their room and table, it under their pillow just to be able to read her while he slept.

Interlude 1.2



Letters to Hermione

11th July, 1978

Remus looked back to her and winced when he saw her sitting with her eyes squeezed shut and a pained look across her face. Fuck. He looked away quickly, staring at the far wall as he contemplated running to his bedroom and locking himself inside where she'd be safe from him. He hadn't meant to hurt her.

He wasn't supposed to hurt her.

"She's safe, Moony. It's actually a long story, you're not gonna believe—" Sirius began, but Remus cut him off quickly.

"Why is she here?"

She's safe. Sure. Perfectly safe, not at all in danger, Pads, save for the tiny little fact that I want to eat her fucking neck, nothing to see here.

"You okay, Kitten?" Sirius asked the girl, effectively ignoring his question.

Kitten? No. That wasn't... why was he using a term of endearment for her? She wasn't his.

"All good, Mutt. I just thought I'd give you two a minute to talk." She spoke, reassuring Sirius with a comfortable familiarity that made his stomach twist in some sort of mix of relief and anger, and her voice, gods, her voice.

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that would be dreadfully creepy, wouldn't it?

If bad persons were to also happen to spend quite a bit of time in the last real happy in bed with said jumper folded in his hands, and if he were to bring his nose in said jumper while he held his hands with his pants and thought about the way her lips just melt lightly when she smiles, that would be criminally insane, yeah?

Isn't a good thing that is just beyond the reach, I wonder.

What kind of monster would be such a thing?

-Remus John Lyons, Strangely Mysterious Beast



29th July 1978

"I have books," Remus rushed out. Shit.

He had very much intended to not sound like an idiot. He had a whole plan in place. He was going to casually mention that she was welcome to peruse his bookshelves any time, and he was absolutely not going to be awkward about it. He'd even practiced in his room for nearly an hour.

But then he'd heard her scream in the shower, and then his feet were carrying him down the hall before he could stop himself and then she walked out, all Christmas morning and vanilla shampoo and her hair was wet and she said his name, and her voice was so... thick and his brain short circuited.

"Books?" she asked with an amused smile. Gods, please, let me be the reason for every smile.

"Yes. Come to my bedroom," he commanded, then bit back a groan. Why was he so bad at this? "Would you, I mean? Not... not for—I mean, for the books."

Smooth, Moony.

Sure, he would absolutely love to get her into his room, into his bed, to keep her there for days or weeks or—but he really did just want to make sure she had some books to read.

He sighed, bringing a hand up to rub his temples, and tried again.

"What I meant to say, is that I've noticed you were reading through that copy of 'Rebecca' again, which you'd already read before you read 'Middemarch' and you seemed to move through 'The Picture of Dorian Gray' rather quickly, and now I sound as if I'm stalking you..." he sighed again, squeezing his eyes shut.

Brilliant.

"Remus, it's okay. You have books in your room?" she asked, the warmth of her voice falling over him like a blanket. He had no idea how it always seemed to calm him in an instant, but he couldn't bring himself to care enough to complain. He just wanted her to keep talking to him, forever, just like that.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

“Yes. I can tell you really seem to like to read, and I thought you may get rather bored here when we’re both gone. I have a whole wall of bookshelves in my room, and I wondered if you might like to come see if there’s anything you’d like to borrow, since I can’t imagine you managed to bring many books with you.”

“Yes, Remus. I would love to browse your bookshelves.” She grinned broadly, and he felt his heart leap to his throat, could almost actually feel himself choking on the damn thing.

Yes.

Good.

Keep fucking smiling at me.

“Brilliant.”



Remus pulled his bottom lip between his teeth as he watched Hermione strain to try to reach a book—Dune, because of course she’d go right for one of his favorites. She was adorable. She was a bit on the small side, though he’d wager she was rather average in stature for a girl their age—there was, most assuredly, not a single other thing average about her. She stood somewhere around 162 cm if he had to guess, but he still towered over her at his 188.

He liked that. He wanted to tower, where she was concerned.

She was in his room, and everything smelled like her, and he hoped, beyond hope, that her scent would linger. His eyes darted toward the bed, where her jumper was still hidden under his pillow, and he decided he should absolutely not be focusing on that right now, so he pushed away from the desk and moved behind her.

As cute as it was to watch her try to reach the higher shelf of his floor-to-ceiling bookcase, he could hardly sit and watch her struggle when he was right there to help.

He was supposed to help her, in that strange surety that he had when it came to so many things about her.

He stepped up behind her and offered to help, but as he reached for the book she rocked back on her heels and her back pressed against his chest and that damn brain of his went all fuzzy again.

He had to get closer.

Gods help him, he was supposed to get closer.

Tilting his head down, he leaned in, closer, closer, until he was drowning in that godsdamned infuriating hair of hers, drawing in her scent like he was dying for oxygen, and he was, nearly constantly, dying to drown in her. It hit him again, then.

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Another step.

She smelled like she was his.

Another step.

Closer now, a fresh wave of her scent washing over him as if he’d been bathed in golden sunlight.

She smelled like home.

She smelled like... him.

No, that was wrong. Gods, but it was so right, so bloody brilliant, but how did she smell like him, and why did some part of him settle the moment the realization hit?

She was supposed to smell like him.

What was she doing to him?

“Who the FUCK is that?”



If a face could launch a thousand ships

Then where am I to go?

There's no one home but you

You're all that's left me too

KEEPER OF THE MOON

He furrowed his brow and darted his eyes back up to her face as he tried to push it all down, but the ache refused to be ignored. Something was clawing its way to the surface, something wild and feral and animalistic, and he couldn't seem to get a grip on it at all.

Almost instinctively, his gaze shifted back to her neck, and his breath caught in his throat.

He wanted to bite her.

To cradle her head with one hand and wrap the other around her waist and sink his teeth down, right fucking there, to taste her blood on his tongue and sink inside of her and –

Gods, no. He couldn't do that, he wasn't...that.

He had never felt this kind of desire—this deep, feral longing—and it disgusted him. He hated it. He hated himself for even thinking it. He wanted to vomit, if only to seek a break from the way her fucking neck seemed to beckon him forward. She was like a siren, and he, a sailor lost at sea, desperately searching for the reprieve of a dry land he couldn't find through the haze of her.

He tried to force the thoughts away, but it didn't help. The ache in his teeth only grew, the hunger more insistent. He was a fucking monster, and that monster was pushing through, demanding a reaction, begging something of him that he refused to do, and he could feel his resolve slipping with every breath he took, every time he breathed her in, his control was hanging by a thread and the very thought of it sent bile to his throat.

He was a monster, and he shouldn't feel like this, could not want her like this. He was disgusting, diseased, a fucking animal, and the animal wanted to devour her. The need to get closer to her was suffocating, every fiber of his being pulling him in her direction. He couldn't. He shouldn't. But he needed to touch her. He needed – he was supposed to fucking touch her.

He was losing his bloody mind. He forced himself to look away from her and let his eyes land on Sirius in an attempt to ground himself, to latch on to something familiar, to escape from this. But there was no escape from the way his body needed her.

“Pads,” he rasped, his voice thick, the words feeling like a desperate plea for clarity, for something. His body screamed for release, but all he could do was stare at her, his chest rising and falling with each ragged breath.

He took a step forward.

He was ravenous.

Peppermint. Sugar. Chocolate. Naddling.

Christmas fucking morning.

His teeth hurt.

STEVIE_SUNSHINE

Peppermint. Sugar. Chocolate.

Chocolate.

But, chocolate in a way that was... his .

She was supposed to smell like him.

He moved in an instant, unable to pause for even the briefest of seconds and think about his actions because she was here and she was in his room and her fucking back was still resting against his chest and she smelled like him.

She smelled like she was his.

A frenzied sort of desperation engulfed him as he gripped onto the shelf above him so hard he was sure he'd split the wood and brought his right hand down to grab her by the hip and spin her around. He took a half step closer, caging her in against the bookshelf, and she cast her eyes up to meet his, and she was his.

Mwyrnglawdd.

Mfine.

This wasn't normal, what she was doing to him. Whatever it was that she was doing to him.

Remus was fluent in Welsh and English. He even knew a bit—albeit a small amount—of French, Gaelic, and Spanish, and at least five ways to cuss someone out in Russian. Nevertheless, he lacked the language to put this into words, but it was something.

She was something, and his throat was dry, and his fucking teeth hurt.

“What are you?” he rasped out.

“A Virgo,” she said, a small smile playing across her lips and gods she was cute, and how dare she be so perfect?

“Don't,” he commanded, his fingers digging into her hip in a frenzied attempt to just keep her. He needed to keep her, right here, or he was sure he would break. Her lips parted slightly in shock and her eyes tightened a bit.

He wasn't supposed to hurt her, he was going about this all wrong.

He sighed, softening his voice, and tried again. “Just... don't . What are you, Hermione?”

“What are YOU, Remus?” And there it was again. That look she gave him, every so often, as if she held the answer to some riddle he hadn't even known he was meant to be solving.

What are you, Remus? She couldn't mean... no. No, she couldn't mean that. She couldn't know that. He couldn't watch her run in fear, he couldn't let her be afraid of him, no matter how much he knew she should be.

Gods, she couldn't know.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

He released his grip on the shelf and grabbed her by the chin, likely far too roughly but it was as if he was a man standing outside of his own body, watching himself act beyond his control. Leaning in, he sucked a breath in through his teeth as his nose brushed hers, and her breath ghosted across his lips. Fuck, what was she doing to him?

“What do you mean? What the fuck do you mean by that?” he whispered, the words coming out a desperate, feverish sort of plea.

“What do you mean, Remus?” she challenged softly, sounding nearly breathless in a way that almost folded him.

“I... I mean... it's like you're under my skin, and I can't wrap my head around it. And you smell like peppermint and sugar and chocolate, but that part, it's... different, and I don't... I don't understand it, but you smell like me, Hermione, why do you smell like me?” he begged.

She stared back up at him, their eyes locking again, and gods, to close this tiny shred of distance between them would barely take any movement at all, and he could taste her breath, and she just kept looking at him.

“Why do you smell like me?” he asked again as he absently stroked his thumb over her mouth, caressing her bottom lip so softly he could barely feel it beneath his touch but, oh, he felt it. He felt her, everywhere. “Why do you smell like you're mine?”

And then, Hermione Black fucking killed him.

Not in the physical sense, but some part of the restraint he'd spent years carefully constructing, wrapping around himself like barbed wire, died in the breath that passed between them as she sighed out his name, all breathy and tortured and desperate and perfect and his.

“Fuck it.”



*I care for no one else but you
I tear my soul to cease the pain
I think maybe you feel the same
What can we do?*

STEVE_SUNSHINE

It was unbearable.

There was something about her that made him feel... hungry, but not in the way he was used to. It wasn't born of a need for food, or even sex, though that would have been easier to understand and explain away. This was different. It was gnawing away at his insides, fierce and wild, and he wanted to scream.

He couldn't look away from her, couldn't shake the feeling that he wasn't supposed to look away from her, and she was staring back at him, their eyes locked in a standoff, a slight glint in hers that made him think – know – that she felt it too.

In a desperate attempt to shake himself of this stupor he'd slipped into, he closed his eyes and drew in a deep breath, drinking in the scent of her as if he were dying of thirst and Gods, he was still so bloody aware of her even with his eyes closed. His hands twitched at his sides as he tensed every muscle in his body in an attempt to stay rooted in place despite the overwhelming urge to just fucking... go to her. It was like trying to fight the tide with his bare hands, his resolve dying before it ever even took hold.

It was her. Her fault. Whatever this was, whoever she was, she was the source of everything. The smell, the unbearable feeling in his chest as if some essential part of him was trying to claw its way out to reach her.

He opened his eyes, immediately finding hers again, and he was hit with an all-encompassing, intrinsic need to just fucking get to her. He stumbled back and reached out to steady himself against the doorframe, gripping the wood so tightly that his knuckles ached, but he simply could not trust himself to let go.

His eyes burned, and he tore them away from hers, his gaze catching on the spot where the neckline of her jumper had shifted slightly to the right, the delicate juncture between her neck and shoulder in full view. And then, as if both his mind and body were conspiring against him, a sharp, painful throb shot through his teeth.

He froze.

For a split second, the whole world went still.

His teeth... hurt.

It wasn't a pang of hunger or even just a physical ache – though they did, physically, ache, and he, physically ached, he was almost positive his cock had never been this hard in his life and could only thank the gods that he'd thrown on a jumper two sizes too big this morning so that it hung low enough over his trousers to conceal what was going on down there.

But no. It wasn't just physical hunger. It wasn't just lust.

It was more visceral than that. His mouth watered, and his chest clenched, the urge to move closer to her reaching a fever pitch. He needed to touch her, to bury his face in the crook of her neck, to inhale her scent deeper.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

Remus sighed and rolled his eyes. Sirius' flirty banter was one of the few things that could rival that sweet tooth, and he tried to take it stride but the longer time went on, spent listening to his best friend make comments about women, the more frequently he found himself wanting to grab him by the shoulders and scream that he should stop lying to himself.

He looked back down and picked up the cauldron, drawing in a deep breath – a poor fucking choice, really, because that damned smell was still driving him crazy, so thick that he could taste it on his tongue – and turned toward the refrigerator.

"James may not have a mind left to fight you if fixing up that godsdamned cottage keeps giving him so much trouble." He responded as he placed the cauldron in the fridge and quickly scanned the shelves, finding only a couple bottles of Guinness and the few odds and ends that had been there before he left. He closed the door with a sigh, then turned to exit the kitchen. He needed a fucking cigarette, if only to stop these blasted shakes.

"What's that smell?" He called out as he stepped through the threshold into the room that doubled as their dining and sitting areas.

"Did you pop over to the sweet shop or -" He began, but the words died on his tongue when he caught sight of the woman sitting on the sofa next to Sirius.

He let his eyes trail from her wild, chocolate brown hair, past her thin brows and almond eyes, across the light smattering of freckles that spread from the bridge of the button nose that turned up just a bit at the end, all the way to her full lips, which were parted just slightly, as if in surprise.

She was new. Why was there somebody new?

He flicked his eyes back up to hers and then –

Then

It happened.

What it was, he hadn't the slightest clue, but a million sensations hit him at once. The world seemed to shift beneath his feet, and he felt an eerie sense of realization sinking in, as if every cell in his body had been out of place and he'd never noticed until it all snapped back together the second his eyes met her deep, chocolate orbs.

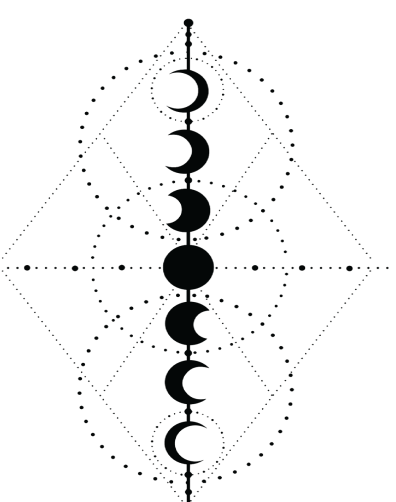
Chocolate.

Sugar.

Peppermint.

It was her. He could taste the way she smelled on his tongue, her scent so thick it was practically suffocating. A sudden, overwhelming urge to close the distance and latch on to her hit him like a freight train, and he was frozen, lost in her eyes as a strange heat began to surge up his spine, leaving his heart hammering in his chest.

Interlude 1.3



Whole Lotta Love

29th July 1978

Remus leaned in, closing the mere two or three centimetres between them and slanted his mouth over Hermione's, just slightly. Something inside of him ripped and tore and lurched toward her, and he felt a shockwave spread out from the brief, barely-there contact. He gasped, as did she, and he jumped back, dropping his hands and balling his fists at his sides while he stared down at her and tried, albeit a futile attempt, to catch the breath she'd stolen.

This couldn't be normal. This wasn't normal, and his fucking teeth hurt, and he needed to get away from her because he couldn't put words to this fucking hunger and he was so afraid, terrified, shaking over the thought of harming her.

But then, she moved.

"Fuck it," she whispered, echoing his words as she brought both hands up and grabbed him roughly by the face. Remus groaned, and she pulled him in, pressing her mouth back to his so hard that he feared they'd both be bruised. He needed to pull back, to stop this, to keep her safe but then her tongue played across his lip and his cock twitched and she killed him all over again.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

Remus let out some sort of strangled half-growl, half-groan as he grabbed her by the hips roughly and crashed her back against the shelf, too far gone to bother with gentleness. He dove back into her mouth, shoving his tongue between her lips, and she let out a perfect, breathy little moan. Fucking hell, the only thing he wanted to do with the rest of his life was draw those little sighs out of her. He tightened his grip on her hip and trailed his left hand up her side, splaying his fingers wide in his desperation to touch as much of her as he could as his thumb brushing the underside of her breast through her jumper.

Their tongues tangled, their noses knocked against one another, and their teeth clashed almost painfully. But fuck it, his teeth already ached. She could knock them all out for all he cared. He dug his fingers in tighter, trying so desperately to be closer to her in any way he could, and she buried her hands in his hair, holding his face to hers as if she needed this, needed him as badly as he needed her.

His body was on fire, his cock had never been harder, her mouth tasted like peppermint tea and one of the little, red-foiled chocolates she bought for him, and she was fucking made for him, because she was his, for whatever that meant. He knew, then, with that surety that was steadily becoming a constant presence in his life, that he never wanted to take another breath that wasn't mingled with hers.

He ran his hand down her thigh and hitched her leg up over his hip, rolling his hips to grind his painfully hard cock against her, rutting against her and palming her breast like a beast, because he was a fucking beast, feral and unyielding over this infuriatingly perfect little mystery of a witch. Hermione moaned his name again, sighing into his mouth like she was tracing a sacred prayer along his tongue as she braced her hands on his shoulders and pushed herself up, wrapping her other leg around him.

He could feel her everywhere, could feel her in everything, and she was everything. She moaned his name and rocked her hips against him. He could feel the heat of her cunt through her jeans as she grinded against his cock, and he broke again, growing and nibbling on her lip.

She was so fucking sweet.

So perfect.

So very his.

"Mine," he growled—a deep, animalistic sort of tone he'd never even heard himself emit, but he was too far gone to notice. He broke away from her mouth and began trailing his lips down her neck, moving as if by instinct, and she moaned his name again, tightening her legs around his hips just as he reached the base of her neck, brushing over that perfect fucking spot just above her shoulder.

STEVIE_SUNSHINE

He turned to Lily and leaned in, giving her a quick side hug and then immediately stepping back again.

"Thanks for the stew, Lils. And for letting me scream in your cellar again."

"Tell Sirius to visit soon or the next cauldron will have a balding potion." She responded with a grin.



Remus stood outside the front door to the flat he shared with Sirius, balancing the cauldron of soup in one hand as he dug his keys out of his trouser pocket. He found keys to be rather pedestrian, but, given the fact that they had to be cautious with their use of magic in a muggle block of flats, it was a necessary evil. He lifted his hand and slid the key into the lock but stopped short of turning it when a smell invaded his senses.

Nadolg.

Christmas.

Like the cocoa his Mam would bring him in his favorite mug, complete with a candy cane to stir – only when Dad was away, of course. Chocolate. Sugar. Peppermint. The scent was so heady he felt as if he were drowning in it.

He leaned forward and rested his head against the door for a brief moment, then shook his head, blinking rapidly as he turned the key. He always felt as if he were starving in the few days before and after the full moon, and clearly, whatever Sirius' notorious sweet tooth had inspired him to pick up from the shops was just hitting him hard.

He felt ravenous.

Turning the key, he called out for Sirius as he pushed the door open and stepped into the little foyer of their apartment.

"Sitting room, Moony!" Sirius responded. Remus, distracted as he tried to shove his keys back into his pocket with an inexplicably shaky hand, looked down at the cauldron he held in his right to focus on not spilling it as he reached the end of the foyer and immediately veered left in to the kitchen.

Shit. Lily was right, as always. He really should have had a bite to eat before he apparated back to Fulham.

"Lily sent some of that beef stew you like so much." He called out as he waved his wand over the cauldron and canceled the stasis charm, rolling his eyes as the light over the sink flickered slightly. Really, someone ought to have figured out how one could cast a simple spell without making the electricity go all wonky by now.

"Ah, my dream girl. James is lucky he already got a promise ring on her finger. Though if she keeps feeding me, I might try to steal her away, anyway." Sirius laughed out.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

Remus groaned but complied and brought a hand up to pat James on the back awkwardly.

“Woah.” Lily’s voice rang out. He looked up – James still glued to him – and caught Lily’s eye as she stood in the doorway holding a small cauldron by the handle.

“James, let him go, you’re going to scare him.” She laughed as she watched them with a bemused smile.

“Never.” James argued, squeezing him tighter.

“Okay, thirty seconds is my limit.” Remus grumbled, peeling his arm off of him as he moved to stand.

“What happened in the five minutes I was in the kitchen that led to Moony being hugged?” Lily asked. “James, you know you have to proceed with caution, you’ll scare him away.”

“Hey! I’m not that bad. I’m just not as touchy as the rest of you lot.”

“That’s okay. We’ll convert you someday.” James said as he settled back on the sofa.

“Hey, speaking of converting you...”

“James, I already told you no. Here, Remus. Be sure to remove the stasis charm when you get home before you put it in the cooling cabinet.” She said as she passed the cauldron to him.

“Thanks, Lils. Told him no about what?”

“Divinia Greeting is in my round of auror training.”

“And?” Remus asked, though he already knew where this was going. Divinia was a nice girl, a Hufflepuff that had been at school with them, and she’d been far too obvious in her attempts to flirt with him when he’d tutored her in ancient runes his sixth year.

“Amnddd.” James continued, “She was asking about you.”

“And.” Lily added, “I reminded James that you don’t date, but he’s being relentless.”

Remus sighed and brought his free hand up to rub the back of his neck. James, ever the romantic, just wanted everyone to be as happy as he was, and honestly, Remus couldn’t fault him for that, though he loathed to be on the receiving end of James’ attempts to play matchmaker.

“I’ll pass, James.” He told him, trying to keep his tone light.

“Fine. I’ll let it go. This time.” James sighed. “We just want you happy, Moony. You can’t let your furry little problem make you a spinster. You’d never pull off one of those Victorian looking nightdresses old shut-in women wear, anyway. Your legs are too long.”

“I’m good, Prongs.” Remus laughed, then looked down at his legs. “And I could pull off anything, thank you very much.”

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He clamped his mouth down on her flesh, sucking the skin into his mouth, growling and rocking against her as she gasped and whimpered and grinded against him. He could smell how wet she was, for him, because she was his.

She was his, and this was his. Every roll of her hips, every breathless sigh, her pulse rabbiting beneath her skin, the flush of her cheeks as she chased her release against the rigidity of his cock through their clothing. It all belonged to him, it was supposed to be his, and this, right here, was where they were supposed to be.

His teeth fucking hurt as they grazed against her skin and he could smell how badly she needed him and he needed to fucking bite her.

No. No, no, fuck no.

He crashed back into awareness as if someone had slapped him, rearing his head back and dropping his hands as he tilted his body away from her to guide her back to her feet.

“Remus..” she breathed out, her face morphing into a mask of confusion.

“Hermione, I-I don’t–” I don’t want to hurt you. I don’t know why I want to hurt you, he meant to say, but the words were lost when he heard the deep, guttural sound of a throat clearing from behind them.

Sirius.

Her brother.

Fuck.

“I hate to crash the party, but I’ve just buzzed James and Lily in, and they’ll be coming up the stairs any minute, so...” Hermione glared toward the doorway over Remus’ shoulder, and he heard his friend let out a low laugh. “Just thought you ought to know.”

“Godsdammit,” Remus cursed as he dropped his shoulders and rested his chin atop her head. He was absolutely going to hear about this later. What was he thinking? He’d been so caught up in snogging his best friend’s brand-new sister that he hadn’t even had the decency to close the door.

Hermione dug out her wand and the door slammed shut, the sound breaking the spell he was under enough that he was finally able to make his feet move. He took a step back and looked down at her, his chest clenching at the sight of her flushed cheeks and wet, swollen lips.

“I don’t know what you’re doing to me, Hermione,” he muttered, half under his breath. “And you’re...gods, you’re Sirius’ SISTER.”

Hermione nodded as she righted her clothing. She twisted her hair up, showing her wand through the massive mess of curls piled atop her head to secure it into place, and

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Remus had to physically force himself to look anywhere but at the side of her damn neck.

"I know. I am. And this is...intense," she said softly.

He laughed—because it was laughable. Intense was an understell, to say the least. He tore his eyes away from where they had, in fact, trailed back to her neck despite his best efforts, and ran a hand through his hair, nodding distractedly.

"Yeah. It's a lot. I don't... I don't do this, Hermione," he began as he walked back over to his desk and leaned back against it, desperate to distance himself from her, despite the deep-seated ache in his chest urging him to just get her. "And it's certainly never felt like this and I—your brother is my best friend, and my roommate, and I can't do this, but I feel as if I can't not do this and I... there are things you don't know, things that..." he trailed off, shaking his head as he shoved his hands into his pockets. "I think I'm spiraling," he admitted softly.

He didn't do this.

Save for a few party dalliances in Gryffindor tower—He and Rosaline Rowbourn had shared a chaste peck during a game of truth or dare their fourth year, and he had wound up kissing both James and Sirius during a few rounds of spin the bottle in fifth, but pressing his lips to James' had left the lingering taste of peanut butter, which Remus hated, and Sirius had quickly darted in and put his lips on his for half a second before he pulled back and licked his nose because, well, he was Sirius—but he'd certainly never snogged someone.

The rumors flew, and he let them spin, let people fill in the gaps of his mysterious behavior and twist it all into a tale of him being some sort of secret playboy, but in truth? Remus was terrified of women. Not in the sense of being scared that they existed, but more to the point that he was terrified of letting himself get close to anyone.

He was a monster, barely holding himself together, stretched so thin trying to keep the secret of his lycanthropy and balance school and his social life, and he simply never allowed himself to consider that he could have the normalcies that the other lads in school did. There were no alcove sneakaways with that Ravenclaw girl a year above him who seemed to exist as a rite of passage for so many of his peers. There were no trips to Hogsmeade with a girl on his arm.

The danger he posed to someone if he lost control was insurmountable, and the fear of getting attached to someone only to have them run screaming when they learned the terrible truth of his nature was too much to bear.

So he did not do this.

But now she was here, and she was her, and he was an eighteen-year-old virgin who had nearly came in his favorite trousers just from kissing her, and she was his, and he

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"Well, that would be preferable, though with the way you're acting I'm a little concerned you're about to tell me something horrible." Remus responded.

"No, no it's...it's good. I think. It has to be good, right?" James muttered, before he finally sighed and dropped his shoulders, then took a seat at the other end of the sofa. James reached into his pocket and pulled out a small, burgundy velvet box, then opened it and placed it on the cushion between the two of them wordlessly as he stared across the room at the empty fireplace.

"You can't tell anyone else. Not even Sirius or Pete. She'll kill me if anyone knows before her, and they'd never keep their mouths shut anyway."

"Well, shit." Remus laughed as he picked up the box and examined the ring inside. It was perfect. A round ruby sat in the center, encircled by a ring of smaller diamonds, perched atop a simple gold band.

"She's going to love it."

"You think?" James asked excitedly, turning to look at him. "I know we're young. It's just... when you know, you know... you know?"

Remus absolutely did not know, but he nodded anyway. It wasn't that he was averse to the idea of romanticism in theory. It was just that, given certain aspects of his nature, he'd chosen to spend his school years focusing on academics instead of girls. No sense in wasting time on something that would prove to be pointless in the end, as it were.

"You are young." He said with a nod. "But you're James and Lily. You two are already an old married couple. Might as well make it official."

James laughed and slung his arm over the back of the sofa as he reached the other hand down to put the ring back in the pocket.

"Traditionally speaking, I'd ask her father for her hand, but she doesn't talk to her family any longer. While we all know that is for the best, I still want to do right by her. So, in lieu of blood family, I'm asking you." He said with a grin as he shifted in his seat to face Remus fully.

"Remus." He continued in a serious tone. "Can I have your blessing to make Lily my wife?"

He blinked at James and, shocking himself, realized he was a bit misty eyed.

"Moony, are you crying?" James laughed.

"No. I got... dust in my eye. Shut up. Of course you have my blessing."

"I'm going to marry Lily."

"You're going to marry Lily."

"Well shit. Now I've got dust in my eye." James laughed, launching himself across the sofa and pulling him in for a hug. "We're hugging now, do not resist."

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him go for being sick too often. He had another job in a vinyl shop lined up to start the following week, which he wouldn't last long at either, but it would bring in a bit more money to throw in the jar.

It wasn't much, but it was enough. For a man who was half beast, half awkwardness, stitched together with a pack of cigarettes and a stack of journals, it was more than he had ever hoped to achieve, so it was enough.

Lily likened him to a phoenix, for how the creatures tended to burst into flames, only to be reborn from the ashes. And sure, there was something to be said about how accurate her analysis was, given the way his entire body was torn to shreds and reformed into a monstrous beast every few weeks only to wake up human once more, as was typical with the curse of lycanthropy.

But that wasn't what she meant. The reality was that Remus had always been the one who held the matches, setting himself on fire repeatedly only to rise again and again. He self-sabotaged as if he were trying to win a race, but since that damned day when Sirius and James barreled into his train compartment at eleven years old, they had always pulled him back.

Lily loved a good metaphor, but in truth, she was the Phoenix, the human embodiment of fire and healing, all book smarts and sass and take-charge attitude. She was the kind of person who made you want to be better, just to be worthy of taking up space in their life. From the moment in their first year, when she'd plopped herself down in the seat across from him in the library right after the Easter holiday and started peppering him with questions about being a werewolf – having, of course, figured out his secret thanks to her uncanny ability to read people like a book – she became important to him in a way he couldn't explain.

He loved his other friends, of course, but Lily Evans felt like blood, in a way he had never experienced with anyone else. She was like having a second mother and an annoying little sister all rolled into one, far more family than friend. A fact that had become yet another universally accepted truth within their little ragtag group.

Which was exactly why he was currently here, in the sitting room of the cottage James and Lily had been fixing up through the summer as he watched James cast a silencing charm and pace nervously while Lily, ever the mother hen, bustled herself in the kitchen preparing a pot of stew for him to take home.

"I'm not helping to replace this flooring again when you wear a hole in it, Prongs," Remus said with an amused smile on his face.

"Right. Right." James nodded, stuffing his hands in his pockets and stilling his movements for a brief interval before he began pacing again.

"Right. I should just... out with it then, yeah?"

STEVE_SUNSHINE

couldn't not do this. He couldn't make sense of it. He had spent eighteen days trying to rationalize it, and the only semi-answer he could come up with was that he was a monster, and this was what happened when he got close enough to someone to allow the monster to want them, which had been exactly what he had feared for so long.

Even that fell flat, though, because despite his best efforts, he couldn't seem to find a way to rationalize why it was her. Everything about her felt like it was specifically crafted to be his, and it was nearly unbearable. He'd thought and thought and journaled and smoked and drank and thought and journaled some more, but he still couldn't seem to make sense of it.

Nor could he seem to shake the feeling that she knew something he didn't.

"I spiral, too. All the time, about everything. Though I sort of... schedule it," Hermione admitted sheepishly.

"Huh," he laughed. Scheduled spiraling? He could get on board with that. "Well, that sounds efficient."

"It's silly, but it's just... important to me. I know this... I know it's a lot, all at once. I feel it too. There are things I may not know, but there are things you don't know either. And I don't think we're capable of sorting it all out after... that, anyway. Could you..." she trailed off and looked down, her fingers twisting in the hem of her jumper nervously.

He felt it again, that strange feeling that she was hiding something. If she did, though, she wasn't exactly being forthcoming with the information, which should have been an infuriating concept, but the only thing he could focus on was that she looked so lost, and she wasn't supposed to be sad.

And she felt it too.

"Give you time? I'll give you anything you need, Hermione," he responded.

Anything. Everything. There wasn't a single thing in this world he would be unwilling to give to her, and that concept was terrifying in and of itself. He really needed to get his shit together.

"For what it's worth, I think I could use a bit of time to sort out my head, too," he added.

"Time. Yes. Shall we say... two weeks, and then we'll talk it out?"

"Two weeks. Okay. I can do that, if that's what you need." Remus nodded. He let his eyes trail down to her neck again and—

Holy fucking shit.

He had left a mark, right there in that spot that made his teeth ache, and, Merlin, he liked it. But it was wrong. There was something about it that wasn't right, which he wrote off as the fear of her brother seeing it, but it was still there, and it almost felt as

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if it wasn't enough, that it needed to be more, and it made something twist in his chest that he couldn't quite name.

"You've, erm... you've got a bit of a..." he told her, gesturing to his neck. "I can glamour it for you." That was wrong. It should stay; it needed to stay because everybody needed to know. What they needed to know, he wasn't sure of, but sod it all, he loved the way it looked on her skin, this blooming, purple mark that screamed he'd been there. Hermione touched her fingers to the love bite, her fingertips stroking over the mark with a calm reverence, and then she fucking smiled. Gods, she was going to drive him insane.

"Does it bother you, if they see it?" she asked.

"Hermione, I cannot express enough how much it absolutely, unequivocally, does not bother me if people see me on you," he responded, still transfixed by the mark on her neck. He couldn't explain it, couldn't even begin to identify a reason, but this, too, settled something inside of him, just slightly, and his teeth hurt a little less, a welcome reprieve from the constant ache he'd grown accustomed to.

It wasn't enough, but it was something. But she was Sirius' sister, and Lily and James were here, and he couldn't bear the idea of anyone saying anything negative to her about it because this was good.

"But your brother. I don't want him to..."

"I can handle my brother just fine," she interrupted, matter-of-factly. I guarantee he won't say a word about this."

"You don't know him very well yet, then, because Sirius Black may stop breathing if he's rendered incapable of making a lewd comment," Remus laughed.

"Don't worry about him. I promise, I've got it. Do you want to glamour it?" Hermione asked.

"I should want to," Remus told her honestly. "But... I like it." Need it.

"It's settled then. This stays, and we go back to normal for two weeks. Let's go. I'm so ready to meet more people who have managed to tolerate my brother for seven years," she said with a laugh as she turned to leave the room.

"Two weeks." Remus reiterated as he reached around her and opened the door.

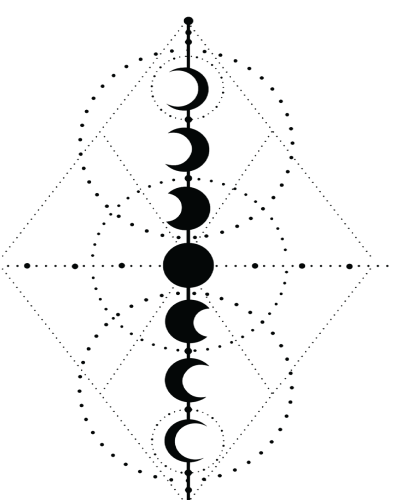
"But I'm still fixing your tea."

"I'll keep restocking your chocolates, then."



"She's right there," Remus said, his hand digging in a little tighter on the arm of the chair he was lounging in. He was being irrational. Again. He was always irrational, when it came to her, it seemed. He knew they weren't making her feel ignored, and he

Interlude 1.1



If

11th July 1978

Remus Lupin had always lived below. Below average. Below the poverty line. Below the bar he could never quite reach to be worthy of his father's respect. Below the floor, caged in the cellars of a string of shitty homes in shitty villages because juvenile werewolves tend to wreak havoc on the neighborhood property values if they aren't locked up tight.

Below the canopies of beech leaves when he would climb up high to settle on his favorite branches with a book in his hand as he pretended he wasn't watching the other children of the village play in the field beyond the trees.

When you grow up below, it tends to rewrite one's brain and put a dampener on their perspective. Remus held no expectations for his future, aside from merely surviving from one day to the next – a goal that, if he were honest with himself, he only maintained because he had something now that he'd never had before.

He had a space that was only his. He had James and Sirius and Lily and Peter. He had his books and his records, and a few good jumpers – and Remus happened to love a good jumper. He had a little jar on his desk filled with a bit of muggle money he'd saved working as a security guard in a nearby disco club for a few weeks until they'd let

Coffee. Old books. Chocolate.

He tasted like chocolate, too.

She stifled a groan, though whether born of relief or frustration, she couldn't be sure. Slowly, she peeked out from underneath the quilt and lifted her head to see him lingering in the doorway—because of course he was—with a mug in his hand.

"Hi," she said quietly as she moved to sit up.

"Bore da, Hermione. Er...good afternoon, I suppose. Had a bit of a lie-in myself. But I thought..." he trailed off and held up the mug by way of explanation.

"You brought me tea?" she asked, then immediately burst into tears.

"Shit," Remus muttered as he shoved off from the doorframe and rushed to the side of her bed. He stumbled a bit as he tripped over one of Sirius' shoes—that damn brother of hers had even begun to overtake her room with his clutter. Remus righted himself quickly, but not before the steaming hot tea sloshed over the rim of the mug and on to his hand.

"Shit," he repeated as he sat the mug on her bedside table and shook his hand, as if to quell the burn.

"Shit," Remus—clearly a man of many words repeated. "Don't cry, Cariad. I—I mean... Hermione. It's okay, I didn't mean to upset you."

Hermione felt her heart lurch at the accidental term of endearment—such a damn Welshman, that one, though she was rather grateful seven years at Hogwarts had put a damper on the accent or she feared she wouldn't be able to make out a single thing he said. Given his quick correction, though, she chose to ignore it.

"It's okay, Remus. You didn't upset me. It's just... a hard day. But the tea will help. Thank you." Before she could overthink the action, Hermione reached out to take Remus' hand into hers. She ran her fingers over the splotch of red left in the wake of the scalding tea, and then looked up to find him staring down at where she touched him.

"Does it hurt? I have some dittany."

"No, it's okay," he reassured her. "I have a high tolerance for pain, it just surprised me."

Hermione nodded and looked back down at their hands, and the two simply stared for a beat, then Remus cleared his throat and pulled back, shoving both hands into his pockets and rocking back on his heels. "Right, well, I just thought, since you wouldn't be out of bed today, I'd bring your tea to you. Are you... you're alright, then?"

"I am. I'm sad today but it's nothing that can be fixed. The music helps. Thank you." She smiled softly, shifting to sit up straighter as she reached for her tea.

Remus nodded and remained standing next to the side of the bed, watching as she sipped her tea. It should be awkward, she thought idly to herself, to be stared at so

much. She had always dreaded feeling like the center of attention, yet she was finding that she very much did not mind being the center of his attention.

The album finished playing.

Remus stared.

Hermione sipped.

After what could have only been a few seconds, but felt as if it were an eternity all the same, he stepped away and rounded the end of the bed to change out the record. Hermione smiled when I Feel the Earth Move by Carole King began to play. Tapestry was, in her not-so-humble opinion, one of the greatest albums of this era.

"Remus?" she began as she sat her mug down on the table. "You could... Would you like to sit with me, for a while?"

Remus nodded and then rushed to the opposite side of the bed nearly tripping again, and Hermione couldn't help but laugh. She shifted on the bed and pulled a pillow out from behind her back, placing it next to her as Remus sat down on the other side of the makeshift barrier that she knew, while not actually doing much to keep them separated, would serve as the reminder they both needed.

Time.

They were giving each other time. Everything had become about time for her, and she was trying her best to go about things carefully, for fear of making the wrong move, but Gods, she just wanted to engulf herself in his presence every minute of the day. She could only imagine how he must be feeling. If the pull of the bond was this strong for her, it must be insufferable for him.

"Would you like to talk about why you needed a day of efficiency?" he asked quietly.

"It isn't something I can talk much about," Hermione responded. "Today is the birthday of a very close friend whom I lost. Another friend's birthday was yesterday, and both are gone, so it's very hard. I just needed a day to let myself feel it."

"Is there anything I can do to help?" he asked.

Kiss me. Touch me. Let me blow up your entire world and ruin everything, by just telling you the truth. Call me your mate and pin me to this fucking mattress and—

"Good records and peppermint tea are the two safest bets when I'm in a mood, so you've already helped immensely," Hermione rushed out, a blush warming her cheeks at the thoughts she should absolutely not be having right next to him.

Remus nodded again, tapping his fingers on his thigh to the beat of the music as the first track ended and 'So Far Away' began, and then looked over at her, pinching his eyebrows together as he studied her face.

"I've been trying to work out why you make me feel so..." he paused and shook his head, then glanced away again. "You said you feel it too. Which doesn't make a bit of

KEEPER OF THE MOON

sense to me because you're so... calm. I know we said we wouldn't talk about it yet and for some reason I'm okay with that but I just... you're so calm."

"Calm?" Hermione snorted as she leaned down and picked up her mug of tea again, the urge to busy her hands to keep herself from lunging at him nearly unbearable.

"I'm good under pressure," she said quietly. "I am... collected. That does not mean I'm calm."

Remus looked at her for a moment, his jaw clenched tight, and then looked away again. "I'd like to kiss you again. I won't. But I would very much like to."

"I would like that too," Hermione cleared her throat, then forced a lighter tone as she added, "But we're waiting."

"We are," Remus agreed, sounding exactly as tortured as she felt. "I should—I need to go. I actually forgot what I came here to tell you. Don't be mad, okay?"

"...Okay?" Hermione responded skeptically.

"Sirius and I wanted to help you, and we thought... Well, just hold on," he commanded as he made his way to the door and disappeared down the hallway.

Hermione stared after him in confusion and then grinned when he reappeared, waving his hand behind him as he urged another person to follow him.

"Lily." She let out a relieved sigh, tears brimming in her eyes again. Gods, she couldn't even begin to wrap her mind around why, but the instant she saw those bright green eyes and that wicked grin, she knew this was exactly what she needed.

"Hi, new best friend," Lily said excitedly. She wasted no time crossing the room and kicked her shoes off to join Sirius' where they lay haphazardly on the floor, then climbed onto the bed next to her and settled under the covers, dropping a blue bag onto the pillow between them.

"I heard you're having a sad day. I brought magazines, sweets, Joni Mitchell's Blue album so we can sob to 'A Case of You' amndd...." Lily paused, then scrunched up her face. "James, honestly, you're killing my reveal here, hurry up," she said with a sigh, looking over to Hermione and rolling her eyes.

Hermione giggled, then looked back at the door to see Sirius enter her room with a grumbling James in tow. James held up a little turquoise and white portable television set. Remus immediately reached over to take it from his arms and set it down on one side of the stereo console.

"And," Lily continued, "A telly, so we can watch Corrie tonight. We're having a proper slumber party, and the men are going away."

"Corrie?" Hermione asked. "Oh, Coronation Street. Would you believe me if I said I've never seen it?"

STEVE'S SUNSHINE

Harry's birthday. Sirius and Remus would never know him the same way they had in her past. Though, hopefully, that was for the better. If she did everything right, Harry would grow up with his Uncle Pads and Uncle Moony like he always should have. He would have James and Lily—Gods, she could already tell how brilliant of a Mother Lily would be. Not that it was ever up for debate, given how the woman had literally sacrificed her life for her son, but it helped to see it all the same.

Still, he wouldn't be her Harry. She didn't even know what role she would play in his life, though she could say with absolute certainty that she would be there. She was Sirius' sister and Remus' mate. She was also Lily's new best friend—a title she took just as seriously as she knew Lily had been when she'd it, because in some sort of intrinsic way she couldn't explain, she knew with her entire heart that Lily was going to be so important to her.

There were all these strings connecting them and she would get to watch him grow up in the world she created for him. But she'd never be his best friend again.

But there was an even bigger issue picking at her mind as she thought of Harry. He was the first boy she'd ever considered a brother. Now, she had Sirius, but he wasn't the only one.

Regulus was, for all intents and purposes, her brother now, too. He would have likely already taken the mark, at this point, and would then turn around and sacrifice his life at some point in 1979 to lay the first stepping stone to bring Voldemort down, so she needed to act fast.

Sirius, Harry and Ron had all been content to believe that Regulus only changed his mind because Kreacher had been harmed. She could never quite get on board with the idea that someone who was all in on blood purity and the eradication of muggles changed his entire belief system because of a House Elf. Especially when one considered the way Wizardkind generally regarded House Elves.

Hermione needed to meet Regulus. Sirius would abhor the idea, but it was a fight she was willing to undertake. His older self had hoped she'd be able to save their brother, too, and she was determined to try. She needed to know why he took the mark, what his true motivations were, and how he really felt, because he was an important part of her plans.

If his entire belief system could be shaken over a house elf, how would her presence and the backstory she and Sirius had concocted affect him? She wasn't sure, but she intended to find out. He was her brother now too, and if she had even the smallest chance of saving him, then it was her duty to see it through.

Lost in her thoughts, Hermione sighed and moved to roll over, but stopped short when she smelled him.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

"Yeah. Yeah, it does. It's..." Hermione laughed, then shook her head. "Well, you're my brother, so I'll spare you the details."

"Please do. Not because I feel any weird protective brother vibes in this situation—perhaps I should, given my sister is feeling all activated over my best friend, but I understand what you've told me about the bond—but, moreover, because I don't want to think about straight people snogging. A man and a woman? Unnatural," he teased, as he laid back down across the foot of the bed.

"Ah, yes. I'd hate to gross you out," Hermione joked back.

"It's hard, though?" Sirius asked, softening his voice.

"It is. I can control myself, because I know it's worth it. But I feel so much guilt. Not just about Remus but James and Lily and I know I have a plan to stick to but it's hard feeling like I'm keeping this secret from everyone. And today is Harry's birthday anmmmmmmmm now I'm going to cry again," she sighed, flopping back down on her pillow and pulling the blanket over her face.

"Hey, Kitten, it's okay. Come here," Sirius urged as he moved up the bed to sit next to her and peeked the blanket back from her face.

"You're brilliant, and the future me—apart from being devilishly handsome, naturally—was clearly very bright, too, because he sent you to me. You said there are things you need to do before you tell everyone. They're going to understand why you had to wait," Sirius said, running his fingers through her hair as he looked down at her.

"I'm going to tell James and Lily after Remus gets back, I think. He should know first, and I think it would be best to tell him one-on-one, but he needs to..."

"Go be wolfy first?" Sirius asked, then laughed and shook his head. He leaned down and kissed her on the forehead, then added, "You're going to be okay. All of this is going to be okay."

"Okay," She nodded.

"So, Harry's birthday?" Sirius prompted as he reached out and ran his hand lazily through her hair.

"Yeah," Hermione sighed, "And Neville's was yesterday. Honestly, there isn't anything to say. They're not here and it sucks. But we're all here and alive and they'll be born into a better world, if we're lucky. I just needed to let the grief in for a bit."

"I'm sorry, Kitten. I can't imagine how hard this all is for you. But I'm proud of you, for what it's worth. And I'm hungry. I'll be back with soup," he declared as he climbed from the bed.

Hermione nodded and burrowed back under the covers, letting the melodic tune of 'Into the Mystic' soothe her as the latest in what seemed to be a never-ending stream of things that made her entire situation bittersweet nagged at the back of her mind.

STEVIE_SUNSHINE

"What? Well, it's a good thing I'm here to save your life," Lily said with a dramatic sigh.

Hermione looked back up at the guys, shaking her head. "You guys brought me a Lily?"

"Yeah, well, I took the morning shift, but Remus thought you might do well with some... lady time," Sirius said, running a hand through his hair.

"Thank you." She told him, then looked up at Remus and smiled through teary eyes.

"Really, Thank you, Remus."

"Well, I couldn't..." he trailed off, glancing around as if he had suddenly become hyper aware of the presence of others. Hermione understood, though. He couldn't be around her for long. Not yet at least, though she was becoming increasingly desperate for the day when he could be.

He couldn't be around her for long, but he didn't want her to be alone. Gods, if this man did not stop being so thoughtful and in tune with her needs, she might have to hit him with a boil hex on the face so there was at least some part of him that wasn't perfect. Though with that jawline and those eyes, she was sure he would somehow manage to make the look work for him all the same.

"Lils is better at tears and comfort than we are," Remus finally added, earning him a broad smile from Lily.

"That's right. I am the queen of comfort. So, we are going to have a lie-in and eat sweets and look at magazines and the men are all going to go back to my cottage and fix the roof." Lily paused for a moment, then added, "Again."

"This is perfect, really. Thank you all so much."

"Hey, you're family now, yeah?" James said.

"Yeah," Hermione nodded, looking from James, to Sirius, to Remus, and then to Lily, who was already digging into a bag of sweets with a magazine open on her lap.

"Family."



7th August 1978

"No," Hermione waved her wand and lit the lamp beside her, illuminating the room as Sirius stood at the threshold between the sitting room and the foyer.

She leaned back on the couch and brought her cigarette to her lips, inhaling slowly while she stared daggers at Sirius' back. She wanted to throttle him. Logically, she understood that some of what she was feeling was unfair, but emotion and logic rarely behaved copacetically, and she felt it all the same.

Sirius fisted his hands at his sides and then released them. He dropped his shoulders in defeat and turned around, walking back into the living room and flopping down into the striped chair next to where Hermione sat on the couch.

"I was just going to go for a little while. Just... to walk around," he told her defensively as he reached over and plucked the cigarette from between her fingers.

"Rock Hudson." Hermione began ticking off the names on her fingers as she continued. "Tom Fogerty from Creedence Clearwater Revival. Freddie fucking Mercury."

"Are you just naming my favourite people?" he asked, grinning over at her mischievously. "No. Those are all names you're familiar with, though, right?" she prompted. "Those are also names of just three of the hundreds of thousands of people who lost their lives to HIV or AIDS."

"I don't follow, Kitten. Wait, are you telling me Freddie Mercury dies? Now that's just cruel," Sirius gasped dramatically, clutching his hands to his chest as if she'd shot an arrow through his heart. "Why are you just waiting in the dark ready to break my heart like some harbinger of heartbreak? Evil little kitten."

"I need you to take me seriously right now, Mutt."

"Well, I'm trying but I don't even know what this H—I—What have you thing is," Sirius waved a hand dismissively, and Hermione forced herself to take a breath and set her wand back on the table beside her, lest she feel the urge to hex him. He didn't know, and it wasn't his fault he didn't know, she reminded herself. Nobody knew, yet.

"That's my point, exactly. In the next few years, a virus will start to spread across the globe, and it will become a full-on epidemic. By the time medical science advances enough to begin to manage it, hundreds of thousands of people will die. Initially, they'll call it GRID. Gay Related Immune Deficiency. At the time, doctors will think it only happens in gay men, and that it can only be sexually transmitted, but it's carried in the bloodstream, so they'll learn that's not the case. Blood transfusions and intravenous drug use will also lead to the spread of the virus. By the time I came back here, things were better, but it is still a deadly disease."

"Shit." Sirius breathed out, running a hand through his hair. "Do... do I...?"

"No. Not in my original timeline. But in that timeline, you go to prison for twelve years two months before the first documented case in the UK," she explained softly.

"Right. And in this timeline, I have a hero of a sister who is going to save my arse from Azkaban," Sirius said gruffly. He leaned back and propped his boot-clad feet on the coffee table, and then crossed his arms over his chest. "Which I'm grateful for, of course. But you said that's over three years away. So why does it matter now?"

"The first documented case was in December of 1981, Sirius. Documented." "Hermione scowled at him. "There's no way of knowing when it actually started or



31st July 1978

"I can feel you staring," Hermione murmured as she rolled over to her side and opened her eyes.

"I was standing guard," Sirius defended.

"And what is it that you're guarding me from on this, the day of my crying?"

"Well, somebody has to make sure no happiness sneaks through the door."

Hermione yawned and stretched her arms over her head, then sat up and leaned back against the headboard.

"I don't want to talk about it yet," she said softly.

"Do you have a time scheduled for that, too?" he teased.

"Don't be an arse," she chided, leaning over to rest her head against his shoulder.

"You were so focused on waking up to my beautiful face that you didn't even notice," he said, nudging her forward with his shoulder.

"Notice?" she asked, scanning the room with her eyes until they landed on the big console record player from the living room, now standing just beyond the foot of her bed with a stack of records on top.

"Sirius! You didn't!" Hermione exclaimed with a grin. "What of not letting any happiness sneak in?"

"Hey, don't look at me," Sirius said, holding his hands up in defense. "I was going to bring the little radio from the kitchen."

"Remus," she whispered. Of course it had been Remus.

"Yup. Moony thought you'd prefer records to the radio so..." Sirius paused and moved to the foot of the bed, picking up the stack of records and depositing them into her lap. Hermione picked up the records and started sorting through them. Moondance. Rumors. Madman Across the Water. L.A Woman. Cover by cover, at least a dozen of her favourite albums.

"He's observant, that one," she said, smiling so hard her cheeks hurt as she looked down at the albums.

"Always has been," Sirius began, "though, it's to an even higher degree with you than anything else, but I suppose that's to be expected. How are you doing with all of that?"

"Put on the Van Morrison," Hermione ordered as she handed the stack of records back to Sirius. "And I don't know. Now that we've snogged, it's like I'm even more aware of him. I think... Before I came here, he'd told your older self that the bond can come on in stages, and that some things, like how he bit my arm, could serve as a sort of, um... activating event."

"So, the kiss has you feeling all...activated?" Sirius asked, wiggling his eyebrows.

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Hermione rose to her feet and leaned against the counter opposite of where the two men were now fighting over the candy dish as she watched them in amusement. Remus finally wrenched it out of Sirius' grasp with a triumphant smile and Hermione absolutely did not feel said smile reverberating in her chest like a kick drum.

He set the dish down on the counter and picked out a piece of chocolate, unwrapping it and popping it in his mouth. Hermione glanced down at the floor, very much not thinking about how that mouth had felt on hers.

She was doing a lot of not thinking. Tomorrow, however, was a day she simply couldn't not-think away.

"Anyway," Sirius said as he hopped off of the counter and walked over to the stove, lifting the lid off of the pot of soup she had going and then grinning over at her. "Smells good, Kitten. Now, before I was so rudely interrupted, how long have you been scheduling when to be sad, you little control freak?"

"I'm not sure," she admitted. "I think it's something I've always done. I'm very self-aware, I suppose. I realize something is going to be hard or that I'll need time to process it so I just... get my ducks in a row and then give myself that time. It's not insane, I'm just being..."

"You're being efficient." Remus finished, giving her a small, knowing smile.

"Well, efficient or not, I don't like the idea of you being sad. I'll clear my schedule," Sirius said with an air of finality as he dove forward and grabbed a whole fistful of chocolates from the dish and then bounded out of the room, brandishing his middle finger over his shoulder as Remus glared after him.

Hermione shook her head and held a finger up to her lips, then stood on her tiptoes and dug around in the cabinet above the stove, pulling out a brown paper bag and then turned around and handed it to him.

"Here. That's the rest of the ones I bought last time I went to the sweet shop. Hide them in your room so he can't steal them all," she told Remus.

He reached out and took the bag, his fingers brushing hers as she passed it to him, and she had to suppress a shiver as she felt fireworks bursting beneath her skin where they'd touch. She gasped, and they both jumped back and stared at each other for a minute, then laughed.

"Sorry, its..." Remus began, frowning his brow.

It's just our magic reacting to the fact that I'm your mate. It's just everything inside of me screaming for your touch. It's fine.

"It's fine. We're being efficient too, right? We'll talk in... thirteen days." Hermione smiled shakily and reached out with a trembling hand to snatch the bottle of cleaning off of the counter. "I'm going to go clean the bathroom."

STEVE_SUNSHINE

how many deaths were born of misdiagnosis. Granted, I've no way to know if a wizard can contract it, as we're generally immune to muggle viruses, but given that this one is specifically a bloodborne virus, it's not a risk I'm willing to let my brother take."

"That's not fair, pulling the brother card," Sirius huffed. "So, what, I'm just never supposed to have sex again?"

"No, I would never ask that of you." Hermione shook her head and squeezed his arm. "But before I came here, you were very adamant about how dangerous what you're doing right now is. I think... I think cruising in the parks like you have been, you haven't always run into the kindest people. I didn't pry and I won't now. I don't think anything truly horrible happened, but I also don't think I would be incorrect if I said that you've done things that you weren't comfortable with, or that didn't feel safe. In specific, I do know that there was something that happened later this year that made you swear off the parks altogether. You—he wasn't sure of the date, but I think it's safe to say you need to avoid going back there."

"Future me is a damn narc," he spat, then laughed. "Fine. No more parks. So, what now, then?"

"Well, right now, we focus on getting through the meeting tomorrow. We handle Remus leaving. And then I make good on some promises I once made a nearly-forty wizard."

"Hey!" Sirius protested. "A dashing nearly-forty wizard."

"Yes, yes. You dash, you dazzle, you delight," she said with a wave of her hand.

"Hermione?"

"Sirius."

"Could you tell me a little more about those promises? Or... give me something to hold on to, I suppose would be the better question to ask." Sirius shifted in his seat, tugging at the cuff of his leather jacket as he stared down at his hands. "If you say I need to stop, then I'll stop. You're the all-seeing time traveller, as it were. I just think it might be nice to have a little... reassurance, if you will."

"That friend I told you about, Ron?" Hermione began, "He was with us the first time I took you dancing at a gay club. We were watching him flirt with a man, and you said you wished you'd have had me when you were his age, to 'kick your arse into gear.' That was the moment when everything clicked together for me. I had been scheming, to an extent, and the desire to go back in time was already present. But you saying those words just made something snap into place for me."

"We went that night because you'd never danced with a man. Aside from goofing off with friends. You hadn't really danced with a man. I wanted to give you that experience. You met a lovely banker, and you danced for hours and then let him take you home. In

KEEPER OF THE MOON

the morning, I was in the library pouring over books about time travel, researching the idea and trying to decide for sure if I wanted to take the risk.”

“Well, hats off to future me,” Sirius laughed. “Go on.”

“Right. So, you burst into the library and Sirius, you—I’d never seen you so happy. I’m not sure if you had ever been so happy. You said it was the best night of your life, because you finally got to be your authentic self, to go home with someone and not have to worry about anything bad happening, or to not have to feel bad in the morning. You said it was worth the wait.”

“So you, my stunning, brilliant, overbearing sister, decided you’d travel through time so I don’t have to wait twenty years again?” Sirius looked back up at her, a small smile playing on his lips.

“Well, that and the whole ‘save the world’ thing. But yes,” Hermione laughed. “So, in the interest of giving you hope? I’ve seen how much it means to you when you finally get to accept yourself and find a man to treat you good for a night. When what I’m asking of you gets to be too hard, remind yourself that this time around, you won’t have to wait. You’re going to find someone and have a million good nights with him.”

“I like that,” Sirius nearly whispered the words, then reached into his pocket and pulled out his cigarettes, lighting one as he added, “I hope he’s hot, whoever this guy will be. And that he doesn’t have better hair than me.”

“Impossible,” Hermione laughed.

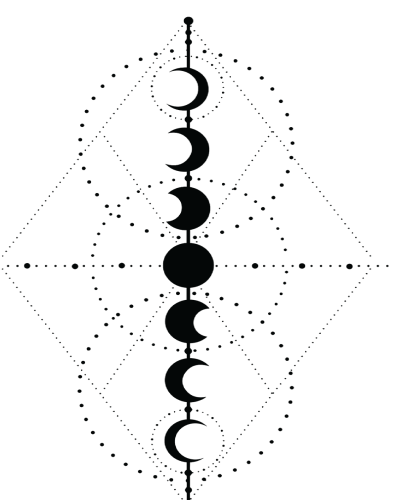


Finally baby

The truth has come down now

Take a listen to your spirit

It's crying out loud



I Don't Want to Know

30th July 1978

“How long have you been doing this?” Sirius asked from his perch on the counter.

“Cleaning?” Hermione asked over her shoulder as she sat on the floor, a bottle of cleaner in one hand and a rag in the other.

“Don’t eat all of those,” she added, nodding at the candy dish on his lap.

“I meant how long have you been doing this insane little scheduling thing?”

“Why is she insane?” Remus asked.

Hermione felt her pulse begin to race, so she kept her eyes trained on the cupboard door and pretended the sound of his voice didn’t make her feel as if her entire nervous system was short-circuiting. Finally, she chanced a glance over her shoulder to find him leaning against the doorframe, then quickly turned back around.

It was like he was trying to drive her mad. Though, to be fair, she had decided that, given how often he lingered in doorways, he clearly had no idea of the effect a good door frame lean could have on a woman.

“She’s crying tomorrow,” Sirius said around a mouthful of chocolate.

“Give me those,” Remus demanded.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

She looked back over at him, her eyes pleading with him to understand, and gods, he would give her anything. She seemed so strong in her convictions, as if she knew she would be the one to end the war, and his resistance died in the air between them.

He nodded at her, just once, and her face broke out into a wide, radiant grin, as if she'd been desperate for him to—not approve, no, because he had no doubt that she would do this with or without his support. She seemed so relieved, though, to have his support all the same. As if she wanted him with her.

As if she needed him, too.

Remus had already joined the Order, already planned to fight this war, because of all the good and just and right reasons, of course. The choice had barely even been a decision that needed to be made. This was right, and he would do what was right. Now, though, it was her. Every single thing in his life had narrowed down to one point. Hermione.

If she was determined to charge headfirst into the battle between good and evil, then he would be at her back every step of the way. He was supposed to stand beside her.

“Next meeting is on the eighth. I’ll owl Moody tomorrow.”

“Yes!” Lily sang as she raised her glass for a toast.

“Here’s to ending this shit.”

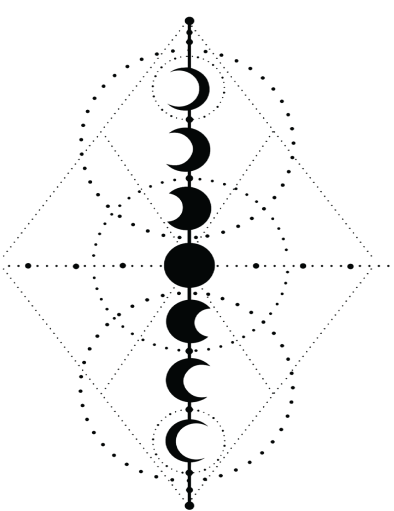
They all clinked their glasses together, Remus’ finger brushing against Hermione’s just slightly and they both jerked their hands away and brought their drinks to their mouths. She looked at him out of the corner of her eye and blushed, and he couldn’t help but grin.

Gods, he had no idea what she was doing to him, and he was so terrified and so unsure of so many things, but the one thing he did know for certain was that he hoped she never stopped looking at him like that.



*You've been coolin', baby I've been droolin'
All the good times, baby I've been musin'
Wey, wey down inside
I'm gonna give you my love*

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Don't Stop Me

8th August 1978

“If there is no further preliminary business, I would like to officially open this meeting of The Order of the Phoenix,” Albus Dumbledore said firmly as he took a seat at the center of the long table in the front of the room.

Hermione wasn’t sure where they were. A portkey had arrived just that morning and delivered them all directly into the room where the meeting was being held. The portkey had dropped them into the room at precisely six in the evening and would take them back home at eight. According to James, the location changed every time, which she thought was rather efficient. It was clear this room had been haphazardly thrown together, as there were various chairs, couches and ottomans strewn about for people to sit on. Additionally, all of the windows were covered with thick drapes, so there was no discerning the location from the scenery outside, which she found comforting. It all seemed very...orderly, pun only slightly intended.

“Now, it has come to my attention that we have a new witch with us who would like to join the Order. Carina, if you could please step forward?” Dumbledore continued.

Hermione took a deep breath and looked to her left, where Sirius was holding her hand with Remus next to him, and then to her right, where Lily had both hands clasped

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around hers while James sat next to her. Lily squeezed her hand, and she nodded in response as she rose from the couch they'd all crowded together on and moved to stand directly opposite Dumbledore.

"Before we go any further, I'd like to request that I be called by my middle name, Hermione. Carina never suited me." Her casual tone was absolutely an act, because she could feel a frenetic sort of energy roiling in her gut that nearly made her dizzy, but she focused on taking measured breaths and making eye contact with her former headmaster—who hadn't de-aged a bit.

"Very well then, Hermione Black, everyone," Dumbledore said, motioning for her to turn around as if he were presenting her for inspection.

"Now, Alastor has informed me of some personal aspects of Hermione's story that she prefers to keep close to the chest. However, I'd love it if you could share what you're willing to divulge with everyone, Miss Black, so that we're all on an even playing field."

Hermione looked out across the room—Sirius had said everyone hung around and socialized after the meeting until it was time for the return portkeys to go off, so she had not been formally introduced to anyone yet, but she recognized many faces all the same.

Neville's parents. The Prewett twins, who both seemed to be made up of a strange amalgamation of Percy's face, Bill's hair, and Charlie's stature. Peter Pettigrew, who had taken up the chair next to the couch and chatted animatedly with everyone else while she smiled politely and pretended like she didn't want to cast her very first killing curse at the sight of him. Acting as if she didn't loathe the rat would be the hardest part of all of this, she feared.

"Right, um, thank you, sir," Hermione began.

"It's fairly simple. I was born of an affair Orion Black had with a muggle woman. Death eaters came for my parents—my mum and step-father—and I escaped with a bit of a souvenir." She reached a nervous hand down to the sleeve of her jumper and pulled it back, then held her arm up for all to see. "It says—forgive me for the use of the word, but for those who can't see, it says *Mudblood*."

A chorus of gasps and cries of indignation rang out, but Hermione barrelled on. "A cursed blade, so I'm stuck with the scar for good. I stayed with a family friend briefly, and then made my way to Fulham to seek out my brother, Sirius—"

"That's me!" he called out, earning him a few laughs.

"Yep. That's him. So, I'm living with Sirius and Remus now, and I've come here tonight seeking permission to join the Order."

"Very well, Miss Black, thank you," Dumbledore said.

Whatever the fuck she was, she was for him, so he couldn't blame James for not realizing how much she mattered, how vital it was that she be kept safe, but he felt anger licking its way up his spine all the same.

"It's going to be fine. She's tough." Sirius waved his hand, as if he, too, had no idea that this was very much not fine. Nobody else seemed to notice how priceless she was, and, irrational or not, it drove him mad.

"She's been through enough. She just lost her family. She needs time to heal," Remus argued. It wasn't enough. It was the truth, but he had no idea how to convey how or why the idea of her fighting in this damn war was absolutely not fine.

"She is right here," Hermione narrowed her eyes at him as if she were challenging him and gods, he loved that fire, that intensity. She, too, had that same power that Lily had, the one that made them want to leap out of their chairs and follow her commands with the slightest look. Though, to be fair, he was quite sure Hermione could have commanded anything of him, and he would have obeyed in an instant just to keep her close.

"I'm sorry, Hermione, I just..." he began, but really, what could he say?

"I just have this insane feeling of possessiveness when it comes to you, and that is only rivaled by the urge I feel to protect you, and also I'm a werewolf, surprise, and for some fucking reason this beast that lives inside of me has decided he wants to eat you alive, and my teeth hurt if I'm too close to you for too long, pesky little fact, that, and somehow in the combination of all of that, my brain has decided that it is my personal obligation to keep you safe, please do not resist?"

No. It was crazy.

He was crazy.

She made him crazy, but crazy or not, he hated this. He just wanted to throw her over his shoulder and lock her up in his bedroom and guard the door so nothing and no one could harm her. It was irrational, but he didn't think he had a rational thought left in his brain where she was concerned, and he was so very tired of trying to rationalize it all.

"I get it," Hermione said softly, that damn voice wrapping around his heart and soothing him in an instant. She did get it, didn't she? She knew. She'd said she felt it, too.

"But I need you to... well, I need all of you to understand that I need this. That bastard and his little leeches took everything from me. I'm going to fight, and I'm going to help end this. For good."

"Fuck yeah you are, Kitten," Sirius called out.

He continued to watch her dance, her and Lily now back-to-back belting out ‘Say You Love Me’ by Fleetwood Mac—another in her long list of favorites—while James and Sirius took turns twirling and dipping each other off to the side.

Remus had never been a dancer. He had never quite gotten with it as far as moving comfortably in his body was concerned. He stumbled and tripped and swayed on his feet, dropped things, ran into walls. A fun little side effect of your skin and bones being torn to shreds every thirty or so days, likely.

But Gods, she made him want to dance.

Have mercy baby, on a poor fool like me

He was going to try, for her, he decided, just as soon as he could be within a foot of her without his damn teeth hurting.

She loved to dance, and he loved to watch. So, she danced, and he watched.

He kept his eyes trained on her the entire time, and hers darted to him every thirty seconds or so like clockwork, as if she just had to be sure he was still there. She seemed to be as constantly aware of him as he was of her, which did all sorts of great and terrible things to his insides.

Two weeks, he reminded himself as he watched her twirl.

Two weeks, as he collapsed to the floor and began to giggle and whisper with Lily.

Two weeks, when he realized they were talking about him.

Lily had always tended to forget about the whole ‘heightened werewolf senses thing’. Even the guys thought to cast a silencing charm sometimes—though Remus had to admit, he more than a little bit hated that Sirius never forgot to throw up a muffliato when he’d be off in Hermione’s room or she’d go to his.

It wasn’t that Remus was nosy, per se. It was just that he wanted to know one hundred percent of the information as far as she was concerned. And maybe, possibly, also a tiny bit because he was curious if she’d mentioned him to her brother.

He rather liked the idea of her mentioning him.

The night went on. Sirius and James devolved into a debate about some quidditch game or another, and Remus drank and smoked and watched until everyone else seemed to collectively decide it was time to get serious.

“No,” he said, fighting back a wince at the way he nearly growled the word as every head in the room turned to face him.

“It’s her choice, Moony. If she wants to help with the war efforts, then she should get to help,” James said, his tone light, as if he had no idea how not okay this was, how important she was. Remus had to remind himself, then, that of course it would be fine to James. He wasn’t... She wasn’t his... something.

“Miss Black,” Alastor Moody called out. Hermione turned to face him, doing her best to keep her face a careful mask of indifference despite the fact that his appearance was even more jarring than Dumble-dore’s had been, given that he did look younger. He was just as rugged as ever, though looked markedly different, appearing to be around his early thirties, and had two normal, functioning eyes. Hermione had known he’d lost an eye in the war, so it stood to reason that it just hadn’t happened yet, but it had thrown her off all the same.

“Mister... Moody, was it?” she asked.

“Yes. You’ll understand we cannot just take someone at their word, in times such as these?” Moody responded firmly.

“Of course, sir. I’m open to any line of questioning you see fit. Sirius warned me there may be a use of Veritaserum.”

“Indeed.” Moody nodded as he rose from his chair and walked—without a cane, at that—around the table and gestured to a chair nearby. “Standard protocol.”

Hermione sat down, looking back at the couch where the others were seated and breathed a sigh of relief at the various thumbs up and grins of encouragement she received. Remus just offered her soft nod, and she let her eyes linger on his for a moment, steeling her resolve before she looked back up at Moody.

Moody pulled a small vial containing just a few drops of Veritaserum out of his breast pocket and uncorked it, then extended his hand out to her.

“Best get on with it then, I suppose,” she said as she accepted the vial and tipped it back. She grimaced, out of sheer habit, despite the fact that the potion was flavourless, then held the now-empty vial back out to Moody. He repocketed the vial and then looked down to his wristwatch, holding up a finger for a moment before he nodded.

“Right. Best get on with it,” he echoed. “Please state your name and date of birth.”

“My name is Hermione. Though my full name is Carina Hermione Black. My birthdate is September 19th, 1959.”

“Who are your parents, Miss Black?”

“Orion Black, and a deceased muggle woman named Linda Crisp.”

“Very well. What is the nature of your relationship with Sirius Black?”

“Sirius Black is my brother. And my favourite person on the planet, naturally,” she added, earning another ‘that’s me’ from said brother.

“What happened to your parents, Miss Black?” Moody asked, his voice a little softer than it had been during the previous questions.

“They’re no longer here.”

“Here, in the UK?”

KEEPER OF THE MOON

Hermione paused for a moment, considering her words carefully, then continued on. “They are no longer here, at all. Everyone I have loved, with the exception of my brother, is either dead or gone. The majority of which lost their lives to Death eaters.”

“Sorry to uh, hear that,” Moody said, clearing his throat. “Why are you here?”

“Here, in the UK?” she asked, repeating his words back to him, then laughed. “I came to Fullham to seek the help and protection of my brother, and to be with him and his network of friends, so that I was not alone. I came to this meeting tonight because I wish to help end this war.”

“Okay. And who carved that scar into your arm?” Moody asked.

“A Death eater,” she responded bluntly.

“And why is it that you wish for us to allow you to join the order of the phoenix, Miss Black?” Dumbledore’s voice rang out from the table.

“Because I have never known anything in my life more than I know, with absolute certainty, that I possess both the knowledge and the skill to help end this war. Because I believe that I will be an invaluable asset to the Order. Because there is not a single thing on this Earth that would mean more to me than being able to assist in bringing that half-blooded, pure-blood supremacist and all of his lieches down for good.”

Hermione paused, looking back over to the couch, and smiled at the sight of the four of them watching her with rapt attention. Her brother. Her new best friend. Her mate. And James was... Well, she hadn’t labeled him yet, but that was fine. They had time.

“And because they,” she added as she pointed to the four of them. “Are my family now. Where they lead, I follow. There is not a line I would not cross, nor a risk I would not take to ensure they make it through this war alive.”

“Well,” Moody said with a bit of a laugh, then turned to look back at Dumbledore. The two seemed to be engaged in some sort of silent conversation for a brief interval, and then Dumbledore nodded resolutely.

“Very well. A show of hands, then?” he called out to the room at large.

Hermione watched, her heart swelling inside of her chest, as every hand in the room shot up nearly instantaneously.

“Hermione Black,” Moody said gruffly, sticking his hand out to shake hers. “Welcome to The Order of the Phoenix.”



Hermione had a problem. A very rodenty sort of problem. While Dumbledore pulled Remus into another room — undoubtedly to discuss the news she absolutely did not want to think about at the present time — and James had stepped away to speak to

STEVE_SUNSHINE

“Good,” Lily said, leaping off of the bed and brushing her hands together as if to say she was all done. “That’s all I needed to know. Let’s go dance.”

“I don’t dance,” Remus reminded her with an eyeroll.

“She does.”

“Yeah, she fucking does,” he laughed.



Remus could watch Hermione dance for hours. And he had, over the last few weeks. Her being around had been such a welcome change of pace. Sirius, for one, was absolutely loving having his new sister to join in on his previously-solo little dance parties, and was all too keen to shove the coffee table out of the way and throw on whatever record she preferred.

She loved to dance more than anyone he’d ever seen. He could practically taste the relief and pure joy rolling off of her when the right song came on and she started to twist and writhe and throw her hair around. She was a bit shit at it, if he were honest, but it didn’t matter. The way her body seemed to spring to life when the music hit her was breathtaking.

Music was a big deal for her. She seemed to love everything, even some of the more obscure shit that Sirius had tucked away. He’d made note of her favorites, jotting them down on the ever-growing mental list of things she liked, things that made her happy, and even things to absolutely not do, such as:

Ash your cigarette in the kitchen sink (Sirius)

Forget to put the toilet seat down (him, repeatedly)

Leave your shoes in the middle of the room (Sirius, again – Remus carefully did not bring attention to the fact that she also kicked hers off wherever fancied her. That was okay, though. He’d taken to quietly picking them up for her and moving them to the rack by the door.)

Leave the screen open after you sit in the big picture window in the sitting room to watch traffic as you smoked, thus allowing a bird to get into the flat (the jury was still out on who did that one, and they still needed to replace the broom Hermione had broken trying to shoo the bird back outside while Sirius stood on the coffee table and screamed.)

The list went on and on. To Hermione’s credit, though, she seemed to adapt well to living with two lads, as if she’d been doing it her whole life, but Gods, did she have a temper on her. It was rare, but it was powerful. He never wanted to see her angry again, almost as much as he couldn’t wait for it to happen.

even though he knew that was barny because he knew everyone else in the room better than he even knew her. But it had been wrong, all the same, to watch her walk out of his room and to have to spend the evening watching her be around other people. His eyes had kept drifting back to her neck, his fingers digging harder into the armchair beneath him as he fought the urge to just...do something.

He wasn't sure what that something was, of course. He only knew that it felt unfinished, in a way that made the skin on the back of his neck prickle, and his damn teeth were back to killing him all over again.

Naturally, he couldn't tell Lily that. Normally, he did tell her everything, but the way Hermione made him feel was... personal. Inexplicable. And, truthfully, something he should be ashamed of, because something about her made him feel so fucking animalistic in the exact way he'd always feared.

The shame just never seemed to come, though. He knew he was supposed to feel this way, knew it as well as he knew the way his own veins felt within his body, but he couldn't exactly explain how or why.

So, he deflected.

"I dunno, Lils. She's a fox," he said with a shrug as he tried his best to sound unaffected. "See? That, right there?" Lily said, sitting up to poke him in the chest. "You sound like Sirius or James! You would never talk about a girl like that, and you don't look at girls like that, and you don't have moments!"

"Lils, I can't... I don't know, okay?" He sighed and rubbed the back of his neck, then shrugged. "I don't know. She just... there's something about her that makes me feel all these things I've never felt and it's almost like it physically hurts sometimes," he continued as he brought his hand up to rub his chest as if he had any hope of soothing the ache that had taken root within him.

"Oh, Remus," Lily said, grinning broadly as she looked up at him with watery eyes. "You like her?"

"I think... yeah. I like her," he said. Roedd yn ffyn caru hi, he thought, then physically recoiled.

(I'm in fucking love with her)

He fucking loved her. Shit. He was a lost cause. Two weeks with this infuriatingly everything girl and he was worse than James 5 th year. It wasn't possible, was it? To feel that, this fast?

'When you know, you know' James had said. Remus hadn't really taken the words to heart at the time—a mere few weeks ago, though it felt, now, in the aftermath of knowing her, as if an entire lifetime had passed—but he got it now.

He knew.

Moody about something going on in the Auror department, Sirius and Lily led her around the room and made introductions.

Dorcas Meadows was hilarious. Mary McDonald seemed to be bursting with anxiety, but she had been extremely polite. Hermione swore she saw a few very heated looks exchanged between the two, but, polite as she was, she didn't make mention of it.

Gideon and Fabian, who Sirius didn't know well but Lily had met a few times due to the fact that the two led the auror training that James was currently undergoing, had—in addition to the features she'd noticed earlier—Ron's laugh, the both of them. It was as if they were just an amalgamation of all of Molly's children.

Frank Longbottom had been reserved and a bit awkward, reminding her so much of Neville in how he shuffled his feet and cast his eyes down to the ground when he spoke, and Alice had, shockingly, a sort of 'cool girl' air about her that Hermione would not have anticipated from Neville's mother. It was almost dangerous. Alice had the sort of presence that made you want to spill all your secrets. She seemed the type to take anything in stride, to the point that Hermione was positive that if she just told her the whole tale of her travels through time, Alice would simply nod and ask if she wanted some tea.

She met a few others whose names she hadn't quite committed to memory, and everyone had been polite and kind and received her presence with open arms. Still, she had a problem.

Peter fucking Pettigrew. She hated him, on instinct, despite knowing that she was blaming him for something he hadn't done yet—and would never, were she to have anything to say about it. Yet, as she stood and watched him smile and laugh, as he joked around with Sirius, James and Frank, she found that some tiny part of her was incapable of hating him.

He was barely more than a kid. They all were. Nobody asked for this war. The people in her time had not asked to be child soldiers, and the people here, in what she'd begun to refer to in her head as the Marauders Era, had not asked to be fighting a war fresh out of Hogwarts, either. He was a rat. A traitor. The very reason Lily and James died, Harry grew up without his parents, Sirius spent twelve years in Azkaban, and Remus, her Remus, had spent twelve years of his life in desolate solitude.

But he was barely more than a kid, his betrayal was three years away, his left arm was still bare beneath the sleeve of his t-shirt—a bloody Van Morrison shirt, at that—and the people she already loved, loved him. Sod it all, she was going to have to save him too, wasn't she?

Her internal musings were interrupted by the sound of a door slamming open and she whipped her head around to see Remus stalking into the room with an angry look on

his face. He stopped short when he saw her and stared her down for a moment, then looked away and walked over to Sirius, pulling him to the side. Hermione pretended not to watch as the two engaged in some sort of heated debate, and then her attention was pulled back to Lily as everyone started readying themselves for the portkeys to take them home.

“Peter is going to come back to the flat for a bit,” Sirius announced to her as they all huddled together around the wooden spoon Lily had placed on a side table.

“Brilliant, Petel Lily and I are going back as well,” James said.

Hermione held back a groan, still irate over the fact that she was going to have to like the Godsdamned rat if she had any hopes of saving him, and stared down at the portkey, waiting for it to activate and take them home.



Another loud slamming sound rang out from down the hall, causing Hermione to jolt. She chewed on her thumbnail, bouncing a leg as she took another drag of her cigarette and tried to ignore the way her heart felt like it was splintering at every sound of Remus’ frustration.

“What’s got him in such a mood?” James asked.

Sirius glanced at Hermione, then turned his attention back to James. “He’s got a mission. He has to leave for a while and he’s not sure how long.”

“They can’t... tomorrow is the...” Peter began, then glanced over at Hermione and cleared his throat.

“They um, can’t rightly send him away. He has things going on,” he concluded. Hermione almost smiled at the realization that he’d been trying to protect the truth about Remus’ furry little problem from her. A good friend, she surmised, though she’d always assumed he would have had to have been, at some point, for Lily and James to quite literally put their child’s life in his hands by way of Secret Keeper duty.

“Oh, poor Remus,” Lily breathed, shaking her head. “Should we go check on him? He seems very angry.”

“Yeah, he’s ‘absolutely tampon’ in there,” James said, mimicking Remus’ accent.

Sirius howled in laughter, and Peter chuckled, shaking his head.

“He says tampon! not tampon, James,” Lily huffed and crossed her arms over her chest.

“That’s what I said,” James replied, holding his hands up defensively. “Maybe we do need to check on him though. He is being rather stompy.”

“I’ll go,” Hermione said, rising to her feet in a hurry. She looked down at Sirius, then sighed and clambered over the coffee table to launch herself into his arms, landing half

“A moment Remus, really?!” Lily screeched as she grabbed one of the pillows to her right and smacked him across the face with it repeatedly as they both lay sideways across his bed, side by side, with their feet resting on the floor.

“Stop beating me, Lils, for fucks sake,” Remus laughed as he yanked the pillow away and then dropped it unceremoniously on her face.

Lily laughed and picked the pillow up, then tossed it back on the bed next to her. Her eyes caught on the jumper that had been stuffed underneath it prior to her vicious attack and she scoffed.

“Honestly, Remus, why do you have dirty laundry in your bed? Don’t think I didn’t notice how clean the bathroom is. You and Sirius could stand to learn a thing or two from your new roommate,” she teased as she reached out to grab the jumper. Remus sat upright and grabbed her wrist to stop her short of reaching it.

“Don’t... don’t touch that,” he told her as he climbed off of the bed and picked it up. He turned around and shoved it into the top drawer of his chest, fighting down the urge to bring the soft, heathered grey fabric to his nose.

“Ewww Remus, don’t tell me it’s like... wanked on.”

“Gods, Lily, no I didn’t—I don’t wank on jumpers. Shut up.”

“Oookay, jumper wanker,” she teased as she moved to sit cross-legged on the bed.

“Ni allaf sefyll chi,” Remus shook his head as he sat back down.

“Calm down, you’re going all Welsh-y. What does that even mean?” she laughed.

“Forget the jumper wanking. Let’s circle back to the real issue here.”

“It means I can’t stand you.” Remus rolled his eyes, “And there is not an issue.”

“Remus, I’m your favorite person in the world,” Lily sighed, as if she were thoroughly put out by his reticence—which, to be fair, was commonplace for the two of them.

“You can’t prove that,” he argued with a grin.

“Stop deflecting,” Lily groaned as she collapsed back on the bed dramatically and began to speak, waving her hands in the air to punctuate her words as she laid into him—Lily always talked with her hands, a habit she and Hermione both shared.

“Remus John Lupin, I have known you since we were eleven years old. You do not have moments. You do not let yourself have moments. Yet you have spent all night staring at that girl out there like you’re physically fighting the urge to throw her over your shoulder and look her away here in your book cave so nobody else can even breathe the same air as her.”

Well shit. There were myriad inarguable facts about one Lily Jane Evans, but perhaps the most inarguable was that she could read all four of ‘her’ boys like a godsdamned picture book. She wasn’t wrong, because that is exactly how he’d felt all night. It was like Hermione had been too... exposed, in a room full of people. Like she was unsafe,

"Well of course she's right here, Remus. How could we fail to notice her? She's really quite beautiful, isn't she?" Lily asked in a conspiratorial tone.

"Ye-yeah. Quite," he responded, tripping over the words as he fought back the urge to argue. She wasn't beautiful. Well, she was. Of course she was. But it was too typical a word to describe her. She was radiant. Effervescent. Breathtaking.

His.

James and Sirius began to banter as Remus lit a cigarette and relaxed back into his chair. His eyes fell on Hermione again and the rest of the world melted away, until he heard Lily speak his name again.

"Remus? How do you like having a new roommate?"

"It's... erm.... She's good." Fuck, she was so good. He could still feel her in his hands, could taste her breath in his mouth, could nearly hear her perfect, tortured little sighs. Fuck.

"I mean, it's good. Having a fresh face around," he corrected himself, then leaned back to look up at the ceiling as he took another drag; the smoke invading his senses and mingling with the taste of her mouth on his tongue and the smell of her that had seemingly taken up permanent residence in his nostrils.

Peppermint. Sugar. Chocolate. Smoke.

Fel tân yn llosgi yn yr aelwyd fore Nadolig.

(Like a fire burning in the hearth on Christmas morning)

"Well, I'm glad to hear she's good." James quipped. Remus bit back a grin, because gods was she good, yet he also felt the distinct urge to throttle his friend for talking about her that way.

That was new.

They talked of dancing, but his eyes had trailed back down to that fucking mark on her neck and there he was, distracted again.

"Remus, could you show me that book you were talking about, in your room?"

"Book?" he asked, snapping his eyes back to Lily. Had he mentioned a book?

She gave him that look—the one Sirius and Peter lovingly referred to as the 'Mori' look and he sprang up out of his chair because... well, sod it all, she'd trained them well, and he knew her well enough to know that he had about thirty seconds to decide to handle whatever she wanted to say to him in private or she'd just start talking.

"Right. The book. Let's go," he rushed out, holding out his arm for Lily to lead the way to his room.



on his lap and half on Lily's. Lily patted her leg while Sirius squeezed his arms around her shoulders and rocked her back and forth, before he pulled back to smile at her.

"It'll be alright, Kitten," he said softly. She nodded, then, casting her eyes to the floor to avoid the questioning looks she knew were pasted across the faces of the others, she scurried out of the room and knocked on Remus' door.

"Fuck off," he called out. Hermione laughed in response, and she heard him let out a string of curses before he whipped open the door. He stared down at her for a moment, looking left and right to see if anyone else was behind her, and then reached down to grab her arm, jerking her inside and slamming the door behind her.

"I have to leave," he said, his soft tone belying the anger she and the others heard from the living room.

"I heard."

Remus nodded, then sighed as he scratched at the back of his neck. After a moment of silence, he moved to lean back against the desk and stared down at the floor as he spoke. "I don't know how long I'll be gone. The fucking timing is—I know there are things I haven't told you yet, but it's just... really bad timing. I'd say I'm not usually this much of an arse but for as much as I've had to say that to you, I'm beginning to think it's a lie," he said, shaking his head as he pulled out a pack of cigarettes and lit one.

Hermione mentally cursed herself when she realized she was watching him smoke again—but really, it was as if he were utterly clueless to how beautiful he was in literally everything he did, and it was hardly her fault he was so... climbable.

"Remus," she began tentatively. "You said there are things I don't know."

"I can't tell you like this," he rasped. "I... shit, I know we agreed to talk in a few days but, I can't have this conversation and—and then just leave."

"No, that's okay. We can talk when you get back. I just..." Hermione sighed and moved to take a seat on the bed, quickly thinking better of her actions because she absolutely could not process the implications of being in his bed right now. She opted to play it safe, instead, and leaned back against the chest of drawers.

Remus stood with his hands gripping the wood beneath him as he studied her for a moment. Hermione glanced down, her stomach going all fluttery at the way the simple movement made the veins in his forearms flex, then tore her gaze away to look back up at him.

Remus gave her a knowing look, his eyes darting down to his forearm and then back up to her, and he cocked his head briefly, then let out a soft laugh, clearly realizing the effect he was having on her.

"Hush," she chided. "We're being serious right now."

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"Okay. I can try to be serious," he sighed, "Though I lack the requisite hair, and I don't own a single leather jacket."

"Remus?" Hermione laughed.

"Sorry, I'm... Lily says I deflect." Remus shook his head, then crossed his arms over his chest.

"I'm panicking, and I can't quite wrap my mind around why leaving feels so wrong when I knew I'd have to undertake this mission at some point. My head is just all..." he lifted the hand holding his cigarette and made a sort of waving gesture next to his temple, then sighed.

Hermione nodded, another twinge of guilt hitting her. She had so much to tell him. She couldn't tell him she was his mate, because he needed to go through this mission and find out on his own. She couldn't tell him she was a time traveller, because that was too closely interconnected to the whole... mate, thing. She understood the need to wait, and despite the guilt and the second-guessing, she really was resolute in her decision to go about things the way she was.

But she wanted to talk to him, to have a real conversation with him about something that was real. There was one thing, she realized, that she could tell him, and though she knew this was hardly the time or place, she was desperate to just... talk to him.

"Remus?" she asked tentatively as she cast her eyes down to her jumper—his jumper, though it was likely one he didn't even own yet—and began picking at a loose thread. "I'd like to tell you something, but I need—I really need you to promise you'll hear me out, and that you won't panic. Because you're going to want to panic."

He eyed her skeptically for a minute, then slowly nodded.

"Why do I have the feeling I'm really going to regret agreeing to this?" he murmured, then sighed heavily. "Okay. No panic. Got it."

"Okay," she echoed. Pausing for a moment, she considered her words carefully, then began to speak. "I know that you're a werewolf."

"Fuck." He reared his head back and gripped the edge of the desk tighter, squeezing his eyes shut so hard that it looked painful. "Did Sirius tell you? I swear to the Gods I'm going to wring his neck, that mangy mother—"

"Remus. Nobody told me. I'm just... well read. I did an essay about werewolves in my third year, and I suppose it stuck with me. Aside from that, I've always had an interest in the welfare of magical creatures, and I suppose I just put the pieces together. Your friends call you Moony. The scars on your face resemble claw marks. When you came back from James and Lily's, you'd mentioned being sick two nights prior. That was the night I arrived here, and I recall it being the full moon," she explained calmly. More truths that weren't quite the truth, but they would have to work for now.

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knew that would never be their intent in the first place, but it was like they couldn't even tell that she was the most important person in this damn room, for fuck's sake.

He was staring again. He supposed some part of him should feel like a creep, for how often he watched her.

Should, but absolutely did not, because watched him too.

He liked knowing that she was staring back almost as much as he liked just... looking at her. Watching her, as she kept looking between James and Lily as if she was trying to soak up every single detail about them that she could. She had that look again—that strange, anxious sort of knowing.

He supposed she was just excited to meet them, as Sirius must have talked about them with her, but this, like so many other things with her, just seemed to be hinting at something deeper beneath the surface.

A girl who studied in France for seven years but had a London accent, with the slightest Scottish lilt to her words here and there, just like Lily and so many others did after spending so long at Hogwarts.

The look he'd catch her giving Sirius sometimes, almost as if she missed him, even though he was right in front of her.

The way she looked at him, so knowingly.

There were other things, too. She spoke strangely sometimes and would use words he'd never heard of. She had three jumpers that were exact replicas of ones he had as well, such as the brown cable knit one she was wearing today that looked just like one he'd bought back in May.

Which, okay, that was less strange, as his wardrobe was far more bargain-bin than customized. Besides, the ones she had were far more worn, so they probably weren't exact matches, and it wasn't that weird.

It was more just... something he really liked. But that faint hint of himself that seemed to be embedded in her skin was present on some of her jumpers as well and he couldn't make sense of it.

There were a great many things about her that he couldn't make sense of.

But for some reason he could not even begin to explain, he had no desire to push her. He supposed it was due in part to the fact that the idea of upsetting her made him feel disgusted. Perhaps it was due in part to the fact that he just... trusted her.

Remus didn't trust easily, but when it came to her, he felt as if there wasn't a move she could make that he wouldn't believe was the right one.

Something was strange about her. Not only in what her presence did to him, but in everything that she was. He was dying to know the answers, to know every single tiny, insignificant detail about her. But she needed time, and he would give her anything.

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“You’re so much more settled now, sleeping in here where you feel closer to him, and I have never seen Remus look at anyone like he does you. I’ve never seen anybody look at anyone the way you two look at each other. The letter will be good.”

She nodded and looked back over at Lily. Gods, she adored her. She had loved Ginny dearly, and was even quite fond of Luna, but she had always kept them at arm’s length because her focus fell on Harry, Ron and the war above all else. She’d never realized how much she was missing out on by not having a genuine connection with another woman who just got her.

It took her no time at all to realize how lucky she was to be one of the people Lily Evans loved. Lily loved hard. She was fearless and unwavering. The kind of person who met you where you were, didn’t judge, didn’t push. Lily’s love was pure and just in its totality, and it was impossible not to sink into the comfort of it.

Lily’s love had ended two wars—first, through her sacrifice that allowed Harry to live, and then, because Harry did live long enough to end the dark lord for good. And in the in-between, Lily’s love had bled out of Harry and into the world, wrapping around all of the people he considered his own. Lily’s love, through Harry, had given Hermione a purpose, had taught her how to fight for what she believed in, had met her where she was at and driven her to survive, over and over.

Harry was Lily’s love, and James’ strength. A portion of the magic that had flowed out of them and combined in Harry existed within her, now, and that very love that had saved the world was extended to her twice over, now that she had it directly from the source.

Sirius was her brother, and she’d never been closer to anyone than she had been with him, in both of her lives. He knew the truth of where she came from, knew all of her secrets. He was her strongest pillar of support, her greatest source of comfort, and she could talk to him about anything.

But Lily was different. Lily was her best friend now, too. And right now, sod it all, she needed to talk this out with Lily. Lily always knew what to say, and she always understood the mushier, more anxious emotions that the guys just never seemed to get.

“Lily,” Hermione began as she reached down to grasp her hand. “I have to tell you something. About Remus and me.”

Lily squinted her eyes and scanned Hermione’s face, then slowly nodded.

“I was going to joke and ask if you actually did shag him, but this looks more serious. Tell me. I’m here. Always.”

“Right. There’s, um... something different, about us. I suppose...” Hermione trailed off, searching for the right words. “Well, you said you’d never seen people look at each other like we do, right? There’s a reason for that.”

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“Honestly, I’ve had this feeling, as if there was something... bigger, at play. Remus doesn’t... you realize he’s never dated anyone, right? He’s never even really shown much interest in girls. And then you come in—don’t get me wrong, you’re a total catch—but the fact that your presence knocked him so off-kilter... it just seems deeper than some passing fancy.”

“So astute, Lily! Jane Evans-Soon-Potter,” Hermione laughed out. She could feel some of the tension draining from her body already. Lily just got it, all the time, no matter what it even was.

“Yep. That’s me. On both accounts.” Lily grinned. “So, there’s something going on, yeah? Some reason things are the way that they are? I haven’t been able to put my finger on it, but I think we all see it.”

“There is. You’re right. Remus and I, it’s... what do you know about the bonds certain magical creatures have, such as Veelas or Centaurs?”

“I know a bit. I know Veelas have life bonds, debt bonds, mating bo—oh,” Lily gasped, spinning on her knees to face Hermione head on. She cocked her head and squinted, then sighed.

“I thought you were going to tell me you’re a creature, too. But I would have noticed if you had hooves, so you’re not a Centaur. And your colouring is all wrong for a Veela. So...” Lily tailed off, still scanning Hermione’s face with rapidly moving eyes.

“Carina Hermione Black. You’re bonded, somehow, aren’t you? With Moony, I mean? Are you human? Or... well, no, surely Remus would have told me if werewolves... though there is something to be said for how his Dad poisoned him against all things wolfy, and I suppose he’s allowed to keep secrets, but—” Lily gasped and stopped her rambling.

Lunging forward, she grabbed Hermione’s face in both of her hands and stared in to her eyes with such intensity that Hermione thought she might melt under the pressure.

“It’s a mating bond.”

“Yes.”

“That’s like, for life.”

“Yes.”

“Oh, my Gods.”

“I know.”

“Oh, my Gods,” Lily repeated, flinging her arms around Hermione’s neck. “I didn’t even know that sort of bond existed for werewolves. I can’t believe he didn’t tell me.”

“He doesn’t know,” Hermione admitted, pulling back to look into her eyes. “I, um... learned a lot about werewolves my third year. I had access to some resources that were more... real, than whatever Remus has had to go off of. I talked with Sirius about it

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because the whole thing is so messy and complicated, and he agreed that he must not know. But now..." she trailed off as she sat up straighter and picked the letter back up.

"Now he's been running with the wolves," Lily finished for her.

"Okay. We're not going to freak out. We're going to be logical. What is the worst thing that letter could contain?"

Hermione laughed and shrugged her shoulders as she turned the letter over in her hand.

"I suppose it could say he knows about the bond, but he has no interest in some wolly connection with me that only exists because of his curse. Or maybe it just says, 'fuck off, cunt.' And he'll never come home again," she said, then laughed. She knew it was a ridiculous fear, but it was a fear, all the same.

"And best?" Lily prompted.

"The best-case scenario would be just... reassurance, I suppose?"

"Well, then open the damn thing and we'll see where it falls," Lily told her with an air of finality.

"Right. Just... open his letter," Hermione nodded, still staring down at the envelope.

"Oh, Merlin, you're so difficult." Lily reached over and snatched the envelope from her hands, then ripped it open and turned it over, causing a thick letter and a small little makeshift parchment package to fall out. "There. It's open. Read it or I will."

"Could... could you just, um... check?" Hermione asked nervously as she picked up the little pouch and cradled it in her hands, making a conscious effort to not rip into it yet. The curiosity was eating her alive, but she decided to tackle one issue at a time and see what the letter had to say.

"If you're sure," Lily nodded slowly. "Though if this contains the filthy, randy musings of a horny teenage werewolf, I will hex you both for making me see it with my own eyes."

Hermione snickered, then grew serious, watching as she scanned the letter rapidly. She glanced back up and Hermione felt her heart leap into her throat at the sight of the tears brimming Lily's eyes, and Hermione's heart leapt into her throat.

"Oh my gods, it's bad," she groaned.

"No, don't—don't panic," Lily rushed out. "It's... happy tears. I love Remus and I love you, and you two are... mates? Mate? Whatever, and I just skimmed this but it's... so good, and I just love you guys."

"Technically speaking, we have a mating bond," Hermione informed her. "But it hasn't been sealed so we aren't Mated yet. And before you ask, no, I won't tell you how one seals the bond."

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short when she saw an envelope resting on the pillow next to her, along with a scrap of parchment. Yawning, she batted at the papers and grabbed the note on top first and sat up as she read.

Kitten,

Happy Birthday! The letter came in the post yesterday, but I thought it'd be better delivered on your day. I'm off to the cottage with James and Peter. It's late now so the sleep shift will be back soon in case you need to scream or sob. We're taking you out tonight, James says to tell you we wish, and you bet we're ready to help with it.

*Love,
Your favourite.*

☺

She laughed and rolled her eyes at Sirius' sign off—though, to be fair, he wasn't wrong—and then picked up the letter as she pondered what sort of muggle mail could make her need an emergency dose of Lily. Then, she turned it over in her hands and gasped when she saw her name scrawled across the front in Remus' familiar script, with a simple 'RIL' in the corner where the return address should have been.

He wrote her a letter.

He wrote her a letter.

Her hands shook as she stared down at the envelope. Remus had been living amongst an active werewolf community for forty days. Through two full moons.

He knew, now.

He knew that mates existed, and he knew that she was his mate, because he had to have made the connection, and he'd written her a letter. Gods, she was panicking.

Anything this letter said would be weighed down by the fact that she knew, and now he knew, and she knew that he knew, and he might know that she knows, even if he doesn't know that she knows that he knows and—yep. A spiral.

As if on cue, the bedroom door creaked open and Lily poked her head through, holding up her beloved blue bag.

"I brought crisps in case we're sad, and sweets in case we're happy," Lily announced as she climbed on the bed and reached out to brush Hermione's riotous curls off her face before she turned to settle next to her and rested her head on Hermione's shoulder.

"It's going to be a good letter, Hermione."

"I know," Hermione sighed, setting the letter down next to her on the bed, and bit down on her lower lip as she stared at the wall of books across the room. Lily's eyes tracked her movements, and she laughed.

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Moony's room is open or you can take mine and I'll crash on the couch or with Kitten some nights."

"Some nights," Hermione echoed firmly. "He snores."

Lily laughed, then looked between the two of them and grinned before she held her hand back, studying her ring nonchalantly as she replied, "Oh, it's fine. James and I are going to take Hermione's room, and she'll take Remus' room."

Well, shit. Hermione did love the idea of staying in his room. Sleeping in his bed, reading his books, listening to his records. She'd been going in there every few days to return books and borrow new ones, and she might have lingered a few times. And fine, perhaps she had maybe considered just crawling into his bed and wrapping herself up in his bedding and staying there forever but obviously, she wasn't that much of a creep. She'd only snifted one of his pillows like three times.

Nevertheless, an excuse to be in his bed—even if she would, tragically, have to be there alone? She was so very on fucking board.

"Yes," she rushed out. "Yes that's... the best plan. My room is far more spacious, really, and there's only one of me and he'll be gone for a while, anyway, so yes, you two should take my room and I'll just—"

"Breathe, Kitten." Sirius laughed, then looked down at Lily. "See? A substantial lack of werewolf in her knickers. It's driving her baty."

"The poor dear." Lily placed the back of her hand on Hermione's forehead and tutted her tongue. "It's clearly terminal."

"Oh, sod off, Mut!" Hermione shot back as she batted away Lily's hand. She tried her best to glare at them, but couldn't help but descend into laughter.

Honestly, they weren't wrong.

"Okay. So now that drama is settled and sleeping arrangements are sorted," she continued, "Lily, you're getting married!"

"I'm getting married!" Lily squealed, holding her hand up again as if she couldn't bear to stop looking at the ring.

"I'm thinking small and quick, but romantic. Followed by drinks and dancing, obviously. My first choice is New Year's Eve, but we'll want all our favourite people there so if the jumper wanker isn't back by then, we'll plan for spring.

"That sounds lovely, Lils." Hermione grinned, then scrunched her brow in confusion. "Wait, what's a jumper wanker?"



19th September 1978

Hermione stretched and rolled over to check the time with her wand but stopped

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"Fine," Lily said with a dramatic eye roll. "It's probably horny teenage werewolf shit anyway...oh my Gods that's why he's a jumper wanker, isn't it? For horny teenage werewolf reasons?" Lily gagged dramatically then giggled. She sat the letter back down on the bed between them and leaned in to hug Hermione again before she pulled back and offered her a reassuring smile.

"I'll go fix us a spot of tea. Read the letter, Hermione."

Hermione watched Lily leave the room and then squeezed her eyes shut as she drew in a few deep, calming breaths as she steeled her resolve. Finally, she opened her eyes and began to read, a smile blooming across her face as she took in his words.



Hermione,

The first night we met, I entered my room and sat on the floor, listening to L often to Hermione on repeat for hours. When you told me you preferred to go by your middle name it was one of the first many things with you that made perfect sense. I thought of course, her name is a Bower song. Of course, the hippy, hippie little white smile is the human equivalent of everything I love.

You smell like Madhup Gardens, to you English.

Remus's cup, chocolate. Me.

When I was a kid, I loved winter mornings the best. After breakfast I would wrap myself in a warm blanket by the fire and, next to a big mug of hot water, my Mum would bring me a steaming mug of hot cocoa, complete with a candy cane to stir, while we read together. You remind me of all the best mornings.

You move like a Bower song.

You smell like love.

I love to ask that you don't write back, as the world I'm doing requires discretion, and I need to remain singular in my focus right now, though, not to be mistaken. You, my beautiful, confusing, radiant little white, are my favourite (and most over-praised) distraction.

This mission, while not without its hardships, has provided me with a sense of clarity and a change in perspective that is... invaluable, to say the least. The least for now, though there is so much more to say.

Oh, while the pull may be mighty, some truths are best served from lips to ears. For now, just know that I'm alright. I miss love. My hands, my name, your brother, our friends. I miss preparing your tea alongside my coffee in the morning. I miss that damn candy dish.

Shed your skin, I miss you.

I hope to be home for Christmas, but I'm not in a position to make promises. I'm not in a position to say so in a great number of things, and I don't believe I'll have the opportunity to write again. But please know that there is nothing in this world that could keep me from this, from you, a moment longer than is absolutely necessary.

I would apologize for coming on too strong, but I know that regardless of knowledge or words, you feel this, too. I will come home to you, Remus, and we will love that till.

Please to safe. Please to happy. Please to there.

-Remus

Oh. Well everyone I said hello. James and to say the question to Lids on their anniversary, so if she doesn't have a ring on her finger yet, go buy some some with love for me. Keep your finger in love, say hello to the Pits, and tell Lids that before she asks you, if course, I

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well, will he know the odds. Take care of each other for me, yeah?
giggles You super friends.

☺

Hermione sat the letter to the side and brought the back of her hand up to wipe away the tears on her cheeks before she looked up to where Lily was placing a cup of tea on the chest of drawers next to the bed.

“Wow.”

“Yeah, wow,” Lily grinned. “He is positively besotted with you.”

“Me, too,” Hermione whispered. She reread the letter, then read it again, before she finally set it aside and picked up the package again, turning it over in her hands a few times. Carefully, she unwrapped it, and let out a small gasp of surprise when she pulled the paper back to reveal a thin, brown leather cord that bore a simple silver charm.

She lifted the necklace from the package and brought it closer to her face to inspect the roughly hewn circular pendant. It looked as if it had been fashioned from an old coin, and a simple X had been etched into the center.

“Gebo,” she said as she ran her thumb over the rune.

“Balance. Unity. Partnership. Loyalty,” Lily rattled off with a grin as she reached forward and picked up the discarded parchment. “Here, there’s another note. Lift your hair.”

Hermione passed the necklace to her, then held her hair aloft and began to read the note out loud while Lily fastened the thin strap of leather around her neck.

☺

Hermione,

I had one made for each of us and applied a bit of charm work. If you hold your thumb over the rune and say ‘Memento mori’ will your wishes and our wishes drift as a physical ‘thinking of you.’
I am always thinking of you. Happy Birthdays, Gemma.
Keep in a little bit of luck by the way call me when.
Yours,
Remus

☺

“So, three things,” Lily began as she watched Hermione smile down at the note, rereading it over and over. “What’s a Cariatid? Do you have any clue what the...Welsh, I’m assuming, says? And finally, we’re going to the apothecary tomorrow.”

“It’s, um, the Welsh equivalent of calling someone ‘love.’” Hermione explained. “I don’t really know the language. I’ve had to translate some old texts though, so I

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Sirius threw a pillow at Hermione.

Lily smiled down at her ring again.

“Okay,” Lily clapped her hands together with an air of finality. “I can work with this. We’ll go to Hogsmeade first, just to get a feel for where he goes and what we could do to get him alone. If things don’t work out, then we will try going about it through the proper means. And there will be no cruising.”

Sirius glared at Hermione for a moment, then looked back at Lily and sighed.

“Fine.”

“Fine.”

“Fine, then. Now, are you two done fighting?”

“We weren’t fighting,” They both said in unison.

Lily laid her head on Sirius’ shoulder as she slipped her hand into Hermione’s, sighing wistfully before she announced, “I love sibling wars.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Sirius said. “Whatever. We’re good, aren’t we, Kitten?”

“I suppose,” Hermione responded with a dramatic sigh. “I love you even when you’re being insufferable.”

“IS he being insufferable, or are you being a little more reactive than usual because you’re worried about Moony?” Lily prompted gently as she lifted her head and shot Hermione a knowing look.

“Both,” she admitted. “I miss just knowing he’s here, you know? We barely even talked, but he was... here.”

“You miss him,” Sirius corrected, slinging an arm around Lily and patting Hermione on the shoulder soothingly.

“Shut up. Yes. But shut up.”

“He’ll be okay,” Lily said softly. “I know he’s clumsy and sly but he’s a lot stronger than he gives himself credit for. And you’ve got us in the meantime. Speaking of...”

“Oh, Gods, not a Lily Evans ‘speaking of,’” Sirius teased.

“Hush up,” Lily laughed and shoved his shoulder. “Anyway, speaking of having us, there has been a... pipe issue, I don’t pay attention to all of the logistics,” She continued with a dismissive wave of her hand, “So, the cottage is a nightmare. Since James insists on doing all the repairs by hand like a muggle—even though Remus literally had to teach him how to use a screwdriver last month—it’s going to take some time, and long story short, we need to move out for a few weeks so we can get it all done before the weather turns.”

“Well, Wormy and I will help with the repairs, of course. The Gods know we’re not as good with all this hands-on shit as Moony is but between the three of us we should be able to get it done fairly quickly,” Sirius said. “You and Prongs will come stay here.

"It happened," Lily replied, lifting her head to look up at her, the sight of her tear-streaked face causing Hermione's own eyes to begin to leak.

"It's so beautiful, Lils. I'm so happy for you."

"It was his grandmother Potter's ring," Lily explained as she moved to sit up. "It was perfect, Hermione, and I just... the second I woke up this morning, I came straight here because I needed to scream and be a girl about it."

"You're getting married," Hermione said in awe as she brought the back of her hand up to wipe at the moisture on her cheeks.

"I'm getting married." Lily sobbed, falling forward into Hermione's arms and clinging to her as they laughed through their tears.

"Oi!" Sirius called out. "Nobody told me we'd scheduled a crying day."

"Sirius! We're trying to have a moment. Get out of my room," Hermione admonished.

"I'm not in your room." He grinned and pointed down to where his toes were just even with the doorframe.

Lily laughed and held her hand up for Sirius to see.

"No fucking way. The bastard finally popped the question? That's so bloody brilliant, Lils," he said with a grin as he stepped into the room and took a seat on the bed.

The three shifted, all testing back against the headboard as Lily held out her ring for everybody to stare at some more. "He was so nervous he dropped the ring in the pudding. I'm gonna marry him so hard."

"The hardest," Hermione laughed. "Have you thought about dates or anything yet?"

"I think my birthday would make a great anniversary," Sirius teased.

"Nobody asked, Mutt," Hermione huffed.

"Watch the claws, Kitten," Sirius snapped back.

"Oookay," Lily clapped her hands together. "As much as I love watching sibling drama unfold, it's getting annoying now. Someone at least tell me what we're mad about so I can pick a side."

"He's all pissy because I won't let him go cruising"

"She wants to ambush Regulus in Hogsmeade instead of just going to Dumbledore or McGonagall and getting a pass to see him at the castle."

"He's refusing to accept that I'm always right."

"She's just got her knickers in a twist because there isn't a werewolf in them."

"Hey! Too far." Lily wagged her finger at Sirius and smacked him on the leg. "Bad dog. Don't make me roll up the Prophet."

Hermione glared at Sirius.

Sirius stuck his tongue out at Hermione.

Hermione flipped Sirius off.

recognize a few words here and there but whatever this says is lost on me. Why the apothecary?" Hermione asked, reaching for her wand. "Hold on, I remember the spell, I think."

She laid the paper on the bed and tapped it with her wand as she muttered under her breath. Lily leaned in and they watched as the words began to shift, moving around and reshaping, until they finally settled again. Hermione grinned so hard her cheeks hurt, then reluctantly waved her wand again to revert the words back to their original setting.

"Happy birthday, Cariad, I promise I'll never miss another one," Lily said wistfully. "Are you kidding me? That is why the apothecary. You two are so cute and you're going on the damn potion before he gets back because we're all far too unsettled to raise a whole litter of werewolf babies."

"Yes, Mum," Hermione teased, then added. "I think they call them pups."

"Of course they do." Lily rolled her eyes as she settled back against the wall along the side of the bed and sipped her tea.

Hermione looked down at the necklace and turned the charm over in her hand a few times, then nervously bit the inside of her cheek as she ran her thumb over the rune. She looked up at Lily, who gave her a nod of encouragement, then pinched it between her thumb and forefinger and whispered, "Nexum."

She could feel her pulse racing just at the mere thought that he would know she'd gotten his gift. She wondered what he was doing, how he would react to feeling his own necklace warm, and could almost imagine the smile he'd have on his face.

Gods, she was a lost cause. She had admired Remus in the nineties, and absolutely had a crush on her older, wiser, handsome professor, but it was in all the most innocent ways. But since he'd walked around the corner from the kitchen — lemon face and all — she had been enraptured by him.

A month of living with him, a month without him, two chaste kisses and a snog, a letter, a note, a necklace, a few dozen cups of tea and an ever-stocked candy dish. It was all just an amalgamation of tiny things, but it was everything.

He was everything, in a way she had never expected. Mating bond aside, Hermione held no doubts about the reality of the situation. She would have fallen for him in any world, in any timeline, even without the hands of fate stringing them together. She would have met Remus Lupin, circa 1978, as her brother's roommate, and become obsessed in an instant, even if nothing had connected them prior to her coming here.

He was kind and studious, with the sort of mind that made her just want to delve into every topic she could think of to keep him talking. He was, clearly, as much of a romantic as he was a cynic. He was soft and rough around the edges, well put-

KEEPER OF THE MOON

together and clumsy, open and closed off. He was handsome and real and a million contradictions all rolled into one incredible package, and he was hers.

“Well fuck,” Hermione began, then gasped when she felt the necklace warm against her skin. The corner of her mouth ticked up into a small, slow smile and she reached her hand back up to the necklace, stroking the rune affectionately and then, unable to resist, whispered the charm again before she dropped it and looked back at Lily.

“Fuck,” she repeated.

“Fuck,” Lily agreed, giving her a knowing smile.

“I love him,” Hermione laughed. “I’m so fucking in love with him. Fuck.”

Lily nodded and squealed, doing a little arm-wiggling happy dance from where she sat on the bed, and then leaned forward to hug Hermione.

“You’re in love with your brother’s jumper-wanking werewolf best friend. This is like one of those Harlequin novels with the trashy-hot covers,” Lily giggled out.

Hermione laughed, and the necklace warmed again.

“Oh Gods, I’m going to be so insufferable about this,” she sighed as she pressed her thumb back to the rune.



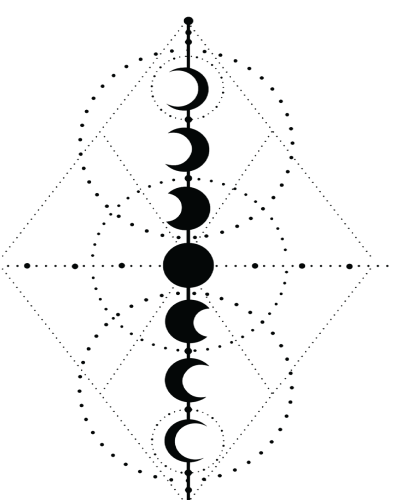
Hermione had been in the seventies for two months, but tonight, as she sat on a bench in the back of Wonder Rollers Discotheque, lacing up a pair of skates under the disco lights to the thumping sound of Higher Ground by Stevie Wonder, she felt like a true, real woman of the seventies.

When the guys had said they’d take her anywhere for her birthday, she’d known immediately that it had to be here. She and Lily had been talking about going for weeks. She had anticipated more of a fight from Sirius, James and Peter, but they’d withheld any grumbling.

Birthday girl perks, she supposed.

Lily had helped her pick out a pair of tight, embroidered bell bottoms and a fitted, deep blue top, and smeared a bit of makeup on her face, then teased her already wild hair up into oblivion before she showed a pair of hoops in her ears and declared her ‘a stone fox, proper fit to go get groovy.’ To Lily’s credit, she felt toxy. She was always more of the ‘throw on the first top or jumper you find and maybe comb out your hair for real this time unless you get distracted by a book again’ type, but she just might have to let Lily play fashion doll with her again.

She wondered how Remus would react if he saw her all done up like this, and then had to fight the urge to reach for the necklace again. They’d checked-in via the charm at least a dozen times today, and she really was trying to not be insufferable about it.



Strange Phenomena

4th September 1979

The sound of the bedroom door being slammed open with a resounding bang caused Hermione to jolt and drop the book she’d been reading. She let out a little yelp of surprise and looked up to see Lily standing in the doorway. Immediately, the alarm bells inside of her mind went off as she took in the state Lily was in. Her hair was a mess, her chest was heaving as if she’d either been running or panicking—or both—and she had a wild, nearly manic look in her eyes.

Hermione leapt from the bed in an instant, asking “Lily, what’s wrong?” as she rushed over and grasped her by biceps, scanning for any sign of damage.

“I... he...” Lily trailed off and let out a shrill scream. She pulled away and bounded over to the bed, then plopped down and let out another scream while she held her left hand up in the air.

Hermione’s eyes went wide, before she screamed in response and ran to the bed.

“It happened?” she asked excitedly as she knelt on the bed next to Lily and reached for her hand. She lifted Lily’s hand up to her face, examining the beautiful ring—a ruby, surrounded by a diamond halo—that now sat on her friend’s ring finger.

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But he'd sent her a birthday gift, and he'd charmed it so they could be connected in some way, and fuck if that didn't make her head spin and her stomach go all warm and fluttery.

It was a good day. They'd had takeout at the flat earlier in the evening, complete with a few drinks and, naturally, a mini dance party, and she'd opened presents before they headed out to the roller rink. James had gifted her a polaroid camera that he'd magicked to produce either muggle or magical pictures with the flip of a little toggle switch near the top. She'd noticed he had a knack for that sort of thing. The record players in their flat and the portable telly that had become a permanent fixture so she and Lily could watch Corrie twice a week had also been magicked by James to work alongside the electricity. Were he not dedicated to becoming an auror, she could only imagine the advances he could make in the world.

Given the war, she couldn't fault him for wanting to be an auror, but she had made a mental note to check back in once she'd ended this damn thing and make sure the DMLE was where he was truly the happiest. She wanted him to be so unbearably happy.

Lily gave her a little silver, heart-shaped mood ring that matched her own—apparently, the theme of the day had been matching jewelry—and a card containing an itinerary for the 'proper girls day' she'd planned for the following week, complete with a morning at the spa and an afternoon of shopping.

Peter had gifted her a few records—Kate Bush's 'The Kick Inside', Talking Heads '77', and Blondie's 'Parallel Lines', all of which were the perfect choices. There was something to be said for Peter's attention to detail, for as airheaded he seemed half the time. He always seemed to know the exact moment to step in, when to hang back, and, clearly, paid attention to the things the people around him enjoyed. It was all rather unexpected.

Sirius, in all his brotherly glory, had gifted her a leather jacket 'so you look almost as groovy as me' and a pair of doc martens she'd been eyeing.

Hermione had never been the material type, but to have been thought of by so many people was mind blowing. She hadn't had many friends in her younger years, and birthdays were often spent doing an outing of her choice with her parents.

During school, the day held a bit of cake and a small trinket or two amidst a sea of homework and revising. She had ignored her 18th birthday entirely, as the whole 'being the second most wanted 'criminal' in the wizarding world while trying to help Undesirable #1 find a way to kill a half-blood supremacist' of it all would have put a dampener on the day anyway.

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So, with all that in mind, she had really never cared much for her birthday. She could get used to this, though. These people — her people now — were wild and boisterous and messy and chaotic. They loved out loud, loved her out loud, and for the first time in her life, she felt as if she was exactly where she belonged.

It was nonsensical, given that she'd travelled twenty years back through time to be here, and she would always miss the people she'd loved in her first life, but this, now, was what mattered the most.

She was home, with the family that, nonsensical as it may have sounded, she was positive she was always meant to have, and she was going to make the world a better place for the lot of them.

She followed Lily out onto the rink, skating and dancing and twirling — and falling, no less than a dozen times — with the guys as the night went on. Eventually, she and Peter tried — very unsuccessfully — to pull off an expert level move they'd seen another pair perform, which resulted in them falling to the floor yet again, laughing the whole way down.

Peter's knee landed, hard, on Hermione's ankle and she yelped in pain.

"Oh, shit, sorry," he rushed out as he pulled her foot into his lap and undid her skate, then cursed again.

"It's broken, yeah?" she asked. Peter nodded and looked up at her sadly as he began to rush out another apology, but she waved her hand to silence him.

"It's fine Pete," she laughed, then winced at the pain and gave him a sheepish smile.

"Okay well it's not fine, but it wasn't your fault. Besides, it's just a quick flick of the wrist."

James came to a stop in front of them, grinning from ear to ear, and Hermione's heart swelled a bit. Getting to see that face, different eyes or not, experience true, pure joy, was quickly becoming one of her favourite things.

"Hi. Didja break your foot? That's not how you're supposed to use feet, Hermione," he quipped.

"Ah, thank you for the clarification, James," she laughed. "Yeah, we had a little tumble, pretty sure the ankle is broken."

"Well, you should have led with that. I hold no strong opinions on the misuse of ankles," James laughed back, then knelt down and extended a hand to try to help her up.

"Here, just put your arms around my neck and I'll carry you. Peter, go get that knee cleaned up and then let me know if you need help with it. I'm going to take her outside so we can..." he trailed off, waving his hand as if he were brandishing his wand, then

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"I remember long ago, another starry night like this..." Lily added as she grabbed his right.

Sirius threw his head back and groaned, then, reluctantly, let them pull him from his chair. "Fine. I'll dance. But I still hate disco."

"That's fair. But you love having sisters." Hermione laughed as she lifted his arm and spun herself around.

"Gods help me, the things I put up with all because I like having sisters," He teased as he lifted his other arm and spun Lily in tandem with her.



I'm having such a good time

I'm having a ball

If you wanna have a good time

Just give me a call

excitement," Lily explained, giggling. "I keep having to remind myself he hasn't asked yet, so I don't scream 'yes, I'll marry you' every five minutes."

"I'm so happy for you," Hermione gushed. "We'll go shopping and get you something absolutely smashing to wear to that dinner."

Lily nodded enthusiastically and sipped her drink. "Do you have something to bitch about?" she asked Hermione. "Other than wanting to baiser la whatever."

"That is NOT on the table for discussion tonight," Hermione laughed. She leaned forward and grabbed Sirius' pack of cigarettes off of the table and lit one, then stared down at the pocket-marked wood surface as she gathered her thoughts.

"It's September first. The new school term started today, and there will be a Hogsmeade weekend next month," she began, then quickly added. "According to what Sirius has told me."

"Kitten..." Sirius said cautiously. "Your point?"

"I want to meet Regulus. Do not shake your head at me Sirius Black. He is my brother, too," she chastised, holding a finger up toward him.

"Hermione, he could be dangerous!" Sirius protested. "I don't know how far into this shit he is yet, but I do know he's already taken the mark."

"Then we'll go with her," Lily said firmly. "You don't know why he took the mark, Sirius, but I guarantee finding out about his secret muggleborn sister will shake him a bit, at the least. Regulus isn't... nobody is born evil."

"Exactly. And it could be the push he needs. Or at the least, we'll know for sure that he's too far gone. But he is our brother Sirius. I need to meet him." She passed her cigarette to Lily and then leaned across the small table, taking his face in her hands. "Look at me. Hear me. I NEED to meet him, Mutt. And it has to be soon."

Sirius darted his eyes to the left and clenched his jaw, then nodded. "Fine. But we are going with you."

"Of course." Hermione grinned as she sat back down in her chair.

"Of course." Lily repeated, smiling over at her.

"So, I'm gay, Lily is getting married, Hermione wants to shag a werewolf and meet a brother." Sirius relayed with a nod.

"And we shall bitch." Lily stated, then held a finger in the air as a new song began to play.

"But first, we dance."

Hermione and Lily shared a sly grin—Sirius was a staunch hater of disco, but they knew he'd fold for them, a fact they absolutely planned to use to their advantage.

"Can you hear the drums, Fernando?" Hermione sang out as she rounded the table and grabbed hold of Sirius's left arm.

scooped Hermione up, cradling her bridal-style as he began to skate toward the exit in the low wall surrounding the skating floor.

"Hold on, because I'm a bit shit at this skating thing and if I drop you and you break the other one, we'll have to put you down like a lame Abrexan," James warned playfully.

"Hey! Isn't there some rule about not making death threats to someone on their birthday?"

"It was a death promise, actually," James quipped as he sat down on a bench and shifted her to sit next to him while they undid their skates and he helped her back into her shoes—well, shoe, on the non-broken foot, as it were. They stood back up, with her leaning on him as she hobbled on one foot, and she threw a wave to Lily, who was currently twirling around with Sirius, the two of them moving as if they'd been born wearing a pair of roller skates.

"They're great at this," Hermione noted.

"Those two are great at everything," James responded, his voice half reverence and half mirth, as he held the door with one arm and helped her hobble through. "I figured you'd rather get outside and handle this the quick way than have it be a whole thing." "You're exactly right, thank you," she laughed.

"You know," he began as they turned left and started walking to get to a private spot where he could cast without fear of a muggle seeing, "I've been trying to figure it out and I think I've got it narrowed down."

"Trying to figure what out?" Hermione furrowed her brow and glanced over at him, her voice laced with confusion.

"You. Why you're different. The cover story is good," James said. "Nearly foolproof, though you should definitely start sprinkling in a French accent on a word or two every few sentences. Still, it's solid."

"I'm sure I've no idea what you mean," Hermione lied, trying to produce an air of finality that fell flat against the way her voice was shaking.

"It's okay. You don't have to tell me," James said softly, then grinned as he added, "As I said, I've narrowed it down."

"And what are these options?" she asked, a bemused smile on her face.

"Well at first, I thought you were a secret spy," James began, holding his free hand up to count in the air. "Then, I decided on secret Dealbreaker spy. Then, a secret Russian spy. But that was early days. I've ruled out all forms of betrayal and espionage now."

"Well, consider me flattered," she laughed.

"As you should be." He grinned as he looked at her out of the corner of his eye.

"So, I'm not a spy and you're back to square one," she pressed.

"Nah. I've got you all figured out. Don't let the stunning sense of humor and beautiful face fool you, Hermione. I was head boy, got all 'O's on my NEWTS, and had the highest auror entrance exams in this decade. I'm not all bookish like you and Lis and Remus, but my brain is good at details."

"I have no doubt that you're brilliant," Hermione said softly. "So, what's that you've figured out about me, then?"

"None," James shook his head. "Can't go saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. You haven't told us for a reason, yeah? So, I figure, timing matters. You'll tell us when you need us to know. Just wanted to let you know I understand."

"It's not, um... it's not that I don't ever plan to tell you guys," Hermione stuttered out nervously. "I just need to... do some other things, first."

"Hey, Calm," James said in a soothing tone. "We're your people now, and you're here with us, specifically, for a reason. Do what you need and tell us when it's time for us to help. All in good time, yeah?"

Hermione turned her head to look at James, blinking in shock for a moment, then slowly nodded. She had absolutely not expected him finding out to be so... easy, and casual. "Yeah," she agreed. "All in good time."

Finally, after far too much hobbling, they reached the end of the building and turned down the semi-darkened alleyway, where James helped her settle down on a low crate. He knelt in front of her and propped her ankle up on his knee, then shoved the leg of her bell bottoms up to her knee. He paused and glanced around again, looking right to left to make sure the coast was clear, then pulled his wand out of the magically concealed pocket of his trousers and waved it at Hermione's ankle.

"Brachio Emendum."

Hermione sucked in a breath through her teeth, then sighed in relief as she felt the pressure cease when her bone stitched itself back together.

"Brilliant, James, thank you."

"Hey, we take care of our own, yeah?" James shot her a grin as he straightened her pants leg back out. "I got pretty handy with healing spells from all those years of Quiditch, so I might as well put them to use."

Hermione grinned—flashes of Harry on his broom running through her mind. Gods, James would have been so proud of him. Would be proud of him. Shaking her head to clear the thought, she shot James a grateful smile and then dug in her bag for her pack of cigarettes, producing two and passing one to him while he moved to help her stand up.

"You need to cast a Ferula. She'll still swell, too much soft tissue in that area." An unfamiliar, very American voice rang out.

"It's okay if you're not ready," she reassured him, reaching out to still his hand and then squeezing her fingers around his wrist. "But it's Lily."

"Hey, that's me," Lily said gently, mimicking his typical retort. Sirius pushed away from the table and walked into the kitchen, then immediately turned back around.

"So does everybody know, then?" he asked as he ran a hand through his hair.

"Yes," Hermione told him, meeting his eyes as she tried to convey the truth she knew—at this point in his life, all of his friends had figured it out. She wanted to tell him more, but she couldn't in the present company. She supposed it was all the same, anyway. His older self did say Lily finally called him out on it this year, so it was a bit comforting to know one thing may not have changed in the face of Hermione's presence here, even though the circumstances would have been different the first time around.

"We do know. And nobody has wanted to say it aloud because we don't want to push you. I won't push you now," Lily said firmly. "I just think you're rather daft for keeping this part of yourself inside and struggling alone when you have so many people who love you and want to see you happy. We don't have to talk about it any further if you don't want to, though. We can just drink and dance."

"No. Fuck it," Sirius sighed heavily and dropped his hands. "Hermione, what's the thing we're supposed to do when stuff is... shite?"

"A D&B," she laughed, then looked over at Lily to explain. "It stands for drinking and bitching. It's a tradition with... an old friend who helped me through a hard time."

"Those happen to be two of the things I'm best at. Count me in," Lily laughed.

"Fine. I'm gay, let's drink," Sirius huffed as he plopped back down in his chair.

"I love you," Lily said simply as she took a drink of her margarita. "Does everybody bitch or is the focus singular?"

"It depends, but we can absolutely all bitch," Hermione responded, reaching out to give Sirius' arm a reassuring squeeze. Gods, she was so bloody proud of him.

"If we're all bitching, I think James is going to propose soon and I'm absolutely losing my mind." Lily raised her glass to her mouth and took a long drink, and Sirius laughed.

"Pads is gonna make an honest woman of you, huh? I didn't think he had it in him," he teased, holding his drink up in a mock toast.

"Lily, that's brilliant!" Hermione gushed, leaning over and pulling Lily into a one-armed hug. "Why are you losing your mind?"

"Well, it's just the waiting. He took a really secretive trip to his family vault this summer and he's just been acting more nervous by the day. Just like at the end of sixth year when he gave me the promise ring. Our anniversary is next week, and he's booked a really fancy dinner. And I'm losing my mind because I'm just... positively mad with

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"Yeah, yeah." Sirius said with a wave of his hand as he pulled his wand out of his pocket. "You birds will be the death of me at some point, anyway."

He flicked his wand lazily toward the record player through the doorway and then shoved it in his pocket as "When I Kissed the Teacher" by ABBA began to play.

"Why are you so moody today?" Lily asked him over his shoulder. "I know why Hermione is so brassed off but you're being an absolute git."

"Hey! I'm not brassed off. I'm just...suffering from ennui."

"Is that French for 'I'm in a mood because the werewolf isn't here for me to snog against bookcases?'" Lily asked in a conspiratorial stage-whisper.

"Sirius Black?" Hermione chafed, snapping him with the towel she'd been using to dry her hands. "You told her?"

"No?" he argued. "Well yes, but only because she stared at me all... Lily-like until I folded. Also, to answer your question, Lils, the French phrase for that would be 'Je veux baisser le loup-garou.'"

Hermione narrowed her eyes at him. She had been trying to learn French from him, bit by bit, to help cover the 'Beauxbatons' storyline because even though they spoke English within the school, it didn't seem plausible that she would have studied there for seven years and not picked up a bit of the language. She had no actual idea what he said but knew him well enough to know he was being lewd, so she snapped him with the towel again.

"Hey! Shut your mouth."

"What did he say?" Lily asked, her bright green eyes sparkling with mischief as she handed them each a drink.

"I'm not repeating that." Hermione deflected as she accepted the drink, then began to sway to 'Dancing Queen'.

"I said she wants to shag the werewolf," Sirius responded, then added. "And I'm not in a mood. I'm just... restless."

Lily and Hermione exchanged a look and then Lily sighed as she walked back into the dining area and sat her drink down. Hermione followed suit, pulling out a chair and sitting down as Sirius did the same, and Lily stared him down.

"Out with it, Lils."

"No. I can't... Sirius, I'm tired of not talking about it," she admitted, slumping down into the chair next to Hermione.

"I don't know what 'it' is," he responded quietly, looking down at the table as he picked at a gouge in the wood with his thumbnail. Hermione sighed and leaned back in her chair, glaring at him until he looked back up to meet her eyes.

"Hermione," he pleaded, shaking his head.

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Hermione gasped and looked around wildly as James fisted his wand in his hand, ready to strike if need be.

"Oh, shit, right, I'm still disillusioned," The voice said, and they watched as the form of a tall, broad shouldered man materialized in front of them, leaning against the brick wall.

"Who are you?" James asked in a demanding tone. "Pull up your sleeve."

"Right, I forgot you guys have all that... shit going on here." The man pulled up both sleeves and turned his arms over, showing them smooth, blank skin, and Hermione sighed in relief. "Didn't mean to scare you two. I was just already hiding and didn't want to blow my cover. But then I recognized you." He said with a nod toward Hermione.

"Recognized me?"

"Yep. Name's Brad. You were sort of... hanging around on the pavement in Fulham back in... would've been July. I was with Henry and Donna. They're why I'm hiding tonight, so..." The man shrugged, and Hermione scanned his face, then laughed.

"Oh! Brad! I remember you now. I'm Hermione, by the way. Why are you hiding from your friends?"

"Ah, well, they're..." Brad began, trailing off and scratching at the scruff on his chin in contemplation. "They are—or were my partners. That went belly-up and I fucked off back to the states for a bit but decided I'd rather have to hide from annoying exes once in a while than live in that shit-hole of a country all over again."

"England isn't much better," James laughed. "James, by the way."

Brad reached out and shook James' hand, then nodded.

"Better than the states if you're a bit light in the loafers. Though, being no-maj-born, I suppose it's worse in that aspect. Can't win, might as well be where the fun's at."

"What the tits is a nama-whatever?" Peter's voice rang out from the end of the alleyway. Hermione looked over her shoulder to see he, Lily and Sirius headed toward them.

"No-maj is the American term for Muggle," Hermione explained. She paused and bit back a grin as she felt her necklace warm again, and quickly pressed her thumb to the rune.

"Sorry, we got caught up talking," she continued. "Did we take too long, or were you guys ready to leave?"

"I'm ready to go home," Lily said with a yawn. "My feet hurt."

"My poor baby," James cooed as he stepped sideways and wrapped an arm around her, leaning in to kiss her on the forehead. "Guys, this is Brad, apparently he and Hermione have a salacious history, in which he keeps finding her on the ground."

Sirius stopped beside Hermione and slung an arm over her shoulder. "A history?" he asked in a gruff voice, looking between her and Brad.

"Hey, don't have a cow, man." Brad laughed, holding his hands up. "I'm not after your girl. I was just hiding and happened across these two."

"Oh, he's not my... this is my brother," Hermione said in amusement.

"Sirius, this is Brad. I met him that night I came to stay with you," Hermione began the introductions, pointing to each person as she spoke. "Brad, that's Sirius, Lily, Pete, and then you and James have already been introduced."

"Sirius," Brad repeated slowly, cocking his head and letting his eyes roam up and down his body a few times before he turned and smiled at the others.

"Lovely to meet you all. I didn't mean to take up so much of their time. I'm serious about that Ferula, though," he reminded James.

"Right, thanks," James nodded, then turned back to Hermione and lifted her foot, casting the bandaging charm before he helped her back into her other shoe.

"So, Sirius," Brad said, giving him a wicked grin that seemed to throw Sirius off balance, as he pressed closer against Hermione's side. "Are you a friend of Dorothy?"

"I don't... know any Dorothy," Sirius rushed out, furrowing his brow in confusion. Hermione rolled her eyes and exchanged a quick glance with Lily, who looked to be holding back her own eye roll.

"Mutt?"

"Yes, Kitten?"

"He's not asking if you know someone named Dorothy,"

"He's not?"

"I'm not," Brad said with an amused smile.

"Oh."

"I'm sorry, my brother is new at this," Hermione giggled, then turned to Sirius and whispered low in his ear. "It's code. He's asking if you're gay."

"Oh!" he exclaimed, his eyes snapping back to Brad. "I... yes, um... that."

"I don't see why you guys don't just say you're gay,"

"Peter!" Lily chastised.

"What, Lily?" Peter asked, shrugging his shoulders as he stuck his hands in his pockets. "I'm not being mean. I just meant I think it's dumb that a straight person could walk around saying they like the opposite sex all day and nobody would bat an eye, but they can't say they're gay. They should be able to say it, is all. I understand why it has to be all... coded. I just think it's bullshit."

"No, it's fine, Pete," right," Sirius said with a tense laugh. He turned to look up at Brad, smiling apologetically as he ran a nervous hand through his hair. "Sorry, I'm new at... talking about it."

to stay, to take him to bed, even just to know what it felt like to have him fucking hold her. But she couldn't, so she did the one thing she could.

"Sit on your hands," she commanded. Remus looked up at her, his face etched with confusion, and she rolled her eyes.

"I'm serious, Remus," she laughed. "Sit on your hands."

"Okay, but if you're about to murder me I do request that you do it downwind of the books. That's a good collection over there," he teased, but complied, wedging his hands underneath his arse as he sat back against the edge of the desk.

"I'm going to kiss you again," Hermione stated.

"Oh."

"Oh," Hermione echoed. She placed her own hands behind her back and clasped them together to keep herself from grabbing on to him. Taking another step forward, she leaned in and pressed her lips to his in a chaste, feather-light kiss. She lingered there, for just a few seconds before she promptly pulled away and took a step back.

"I will be safe, Remus, and I will be here when you get home," she told him as she looked into his eyes.

"Promise?"

"Super promise," she laughed.

1st September 1978



"We're making margaritas," Lily declared as she climbed off of the couch and extended a hand down to pull Hermione up alongside her.

"I'm too bored to do anything," Sirius complained from where he lay on the floor with his legs propped up on the chair in the corner.

"Too bad," Hermione laughed as she strode over and yanked on his arm. "I need a distraction, and I also need to tell you something that will make you very grumpy, so I'd like to see you loosened up with a few fruity drinks first."

Sirius groaned, then rose from the floor and followed them into the kitchen, leaning back against the counter and watching them as they began to mix drinks.

"Honestly, Sirius, if you're going to just stand there then you could at least turn the music back on for us."

"Nobody but you wants to listen to disco, Lils."

"Hey! I like it too." Hermione admonished, brandishing the knife she was using to slice limes at him and then glanced down at it and laughed. "Sorry, that was hand-talking, not... life-threatening."

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took a deep breath, shoving down the myriad thoughts that were spinning through her head, and spoke again.

"I don't speak Welsh, so I've no idea what you just said. But I like you too, Remus," she admitted, then adapted a teasing tone as she continued. "Maybe you're worried you'll miss me. I am quite missable."

"Yeah," he nodded, sounding thoroughly unconvinced. "I'm sure that's it. And I get... well, you know now, so I suppose there's no sense in pretending. I always get a bit feral around the full moon. It just seems so much worse than usual this time. Maybe it's just knowing that I'll be gone for a while, and the fear that comes with not knowing what to expect with where I'm going."

"If it helps with the, um, being away from me part..." she began quietly, looking down to fidget with her jumper again. "I'll be fine. I'll have Sirius and the others. I'm new to the Order and have to train with Moody and jump through hoops before they allow me to do anything real. I'll be safe, Remus."

"Good. I need... that's good, that... you'll be safe. You're supposed to be safe. I think I needed to hear that." Remus began, but trailed off and looked up to the ceiling for a minute. "There's more. About Sirius. I don't know where the line is, what's appropriate to tell you because he doesn't even discuss it with me. But he goes out at night, sometimes. He's slowed it down a bit since you've been here but it's... dangerous, what he does. And I'm worried for the both of you."

"The parks," Hermione sighed, scrubbing her hands over his face. "Yeah, we've... he talks to me, about... him. I'm working on it. He promised me last night that he won't go out there again, but I'll have to see if he sticks to that. Can you just trust that, if nothing else, I have scarier sister privileges? He listens to me. We'll both be okay. You need to go into this mission focused, and not worry about us, okay? I'd like you to stay safe, too." Remus let out a long sigh of relief and dropped his head. "You're right. You two won't let anything happen to the other. And I'll be okay. I... what I'm doing, for the Order, it's important work."

"Then you'll go do important work," she said with a grin. "You'll stop panicking. You can just... be efficient. Set a time to freak out later, yeah?"

He laughed, and flashed her a broad, genuine smile that made her heart leap up into her throat, but as quickly as it had appeared his smile dropped, and he cast his eyes back to the floor. "What if you're not here when I get back?" he asked quietly.

Hermione surveyed him for a minute, then pushed off of the dresser and moved to stand in front of him. She had to something, anything. He was leaving for months, and for as hard as it felt for him, he had no real assurance that she felt it, too. He sounded so fucking wounded, and she wanted to just wrap her arms around him and beg him

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"Hey, it's all good, Darin." Brad grinned. "If you guys are looking for another night out soon, I bartend at a club out in Islington. I just started, so I'm shit at it, but, stop in and let me spill all your drinks anyway."

"Ye-yeah, that sounds... we like drinks," Sirius sputtered out, then looked over at Hermione with a panicked look on his face. She felt a pang of sympathy—he clearly fancied this new guy, but he was so nervous. She just wanted to scoop him up in her arms and tell him he was doing a good job. In lieu of going full-motherly older sister, she just wrapped her arm around his waist and gave him a quick squeeze.

"Sure, Brad, we'll check it out sometime," she told Brad. "What's it called?"

"The Hourglass, just opened in the spring."

The Hourglass, in Islington.

Brad, as in, the bartender from The Hourglass, Brad.

It was surreal, but she could see it now. It was him. The first night she'd taken Sirius and Ron there, she'd spent a bit of time at the bar chatting with the kind older gentleman, who had told her he'd started bartending there in the seventies and eventually went on to buy the club when the owners retired.

He may think he was shit at it now, but he'd grow to love it, she thought to herself. It was pure coincidence, of course. She was bound to run into people from the future here and there, and had even narrowly avoided a run in with her own aunt when she and Lily had gone to a new boutique in Soho a few weeks ago, but it was still... just fucking cool.

"Yeah, man, we'll check it out," James nodded, then returned to babying Lily. Gods, they were cute.

"I'd like that. It was nice to meet all of you," Brad said, though his eyes never left Sirius, who was still very much pretending not to check him out.

Well, clearly, all things start and end at The Hourglass, Hermione decided, because she was absolutely going to get him to that damn bar, for the first time, again. And soon.



You hear your sister calling for you

But you don't know where from

You know there's something wrong

But you don't want to believe in a premonition

STEVIE_SUNSHINE

“Also, you, um... well, your eyes sort of changed colour when we were...in here, before.” She blushed and laughed softly, which only seemed to push Remus further into his spiral. His eyes snapped open —golden, glowing heat that scared straight into the marrow of her bones. She wanted him to never stop looking at her at like.

“You’re not freaking out,” he rasped and forced his eyes shut, shaking his head as if to clear his thoughts. When he opened them, they were green once more, and softer, vulnerable as he asked quietly, “Why aren’t you freaking out?”

“Why would I freak out?”

“Because I’m fucking dangerous Hermione,” he spat, a look of sheer disgust crossing his face. “I’m a monster.”

“Don’t! Don’t you dare call yourself that again.” Hermione bit out, surprising even herself with the harsh bite to her tone. “You are not a danger to me, Remus. You would never hurt me, you ca —” She clamped her mouth shut before she let slip the truth. He couldn’t hurt her. She was his mate, and there was no part of him, wolf or man, that could ever bring her harm.

“You’ve been friends with Sirius and the rest for a long time and have never hurt them,” she spoke again, settling on yet another in her ever-growing pile of omissions and half-truths. “And I’m not in the business of judging people for things they did not choose. Yes, I figured it out. No, I didn’t say anything because what you do one night a month is very low on the list of things I find intriguing about you.”

“No, I haven’t hurt them, but I’ve also never let myself...” Remus cut himself off mid-sentence, his eyes going wide as they snapped back to hers. “You think I’m intriguing?”

“I do,” Hermione admitted, unable to keep a smile from forming on her face.

“You know I’m a werewolf and you’re still... intrigued. But you’re not just intrigued by the werewolf thing,” he said, more of a statement than a question.

“Yes,” Hermione nodded, “I know you’re a werewolf. And while I’m sure there are many interesting things about that side of you, I’m just far more interested in who you are as a person, in your day-to-day life, than I am worried about what you do one night out of the month.”

Remus sighed and drummed his fingers against the desk. “I lied, and I’m panicking. Though it’s more about leaving than anything. It just doesn’t feel right, the idea of going away and being...” he paused and lowered his voice to a near whisper. “Being away from you. I can’t explain it, I — Rydw i mor dist. I just... really like you, Hermione.” (I’m so fucking sad.)

Hermione’s heart ached at the sad, confused tone in his voice and she, too, gripped the wood behind her as she tried to resist the urge to fling herself into his arms. She

23rd August 1978

Remus sat around a campfire with Ford and a few of the other younger men as he watched people move about the expansive clearing. There was a group of kids—pups, he corrected himself—kicking a ball around, some toddlers running while their parents either watched on or gave chase, a few people lounging about on different chairs or benches reading, talking or writing.

Directly to his right, a group of girls who looked to be around the age he'd been in his first or second year at school had set up a table and some folding chairs and were busy making colorful beaded bracelets.

The entire area was alive with activity, and it was mind-blowing, how they all just... lived and existed so freely. Remus wasn't very sure that he liked the idea of this much freedom, were he honest with himself. He loved a bit of fun, but equally appreciated structure and routine. Still, it was nice to see.

Being here hadn't been as terrifying as he had thought it would be. He'd primarily kept to himself. According to Ford—who he had learned was the son of Shawna, from her first marriage, and the stepson of Gibbs, the Alpha—it was customary for a new member to remain fairly isolated through the first full lunar cycle, for a couple of different reasons.

There were a number of archaic customs that the pack held dear, solely for tradition's sake, even though much of the initial belief in the old ways had died out. This custom, in specific, called for a new member of the pack to be assigned a guide, and to interact with a select few people from one full moon through the next.

Should they still wish to remain with the pack, and should they make it through a full path of the moon without the Alpha sensing that they have harmful intentions, then it would be known that their presence was blessed by the moon goddess, and they would be allowed to be fully integrated. It all seemed a bit on the silly side, but Remus had always held a fondness for the old magicks, archaic rituals and rites and the like, so it was intriguing to see some archaism in action.

In his case, he pretty well kept with the guys he bunked with and had been assigned to Otto as his guide—Ford, Alaric, and Todd, one of the other single guys who shared the same expanded tent as him, all came and went quite a bit. It seemed that some people were pack, some were connected through family, such as Ford and Todd, and some were just trusted wanderers that came through once in a while.

It was all the same, really. Having the time to just sit back and people...er, werewolf-watch, as it were, would only help him get the information he needed for the Order,

and he never minded an excuse to read books and not talk to people. Those were two of his favorite things.

"Alright there, Wolfgang Moonzart?" Ford asked.

Remus sighed and let out a bit of a laugh, then shook his head as he brought his cigarette to his mouth and took a drag.

"Not too bad, Cheyy?" He nodded his head toward where the kids were playing and then looked back at Ford. "I had no idea there were so many pups, when I first arrived."

"Yep. Couple dozen, give or take, though there's a good distribution age wise so it seems less daunting. They're always a little wide, but they're nowhere near as energetic for they'll be in the few days after the full."

"Are they, uh..."

"Wolffy?" Ford asked with a laugh. "Nope. I'm not either."

"You're not?" Remus sat up straighter and looked over at Ford, cocking his head as he assessed him and sniffed the air between them. "You don't smell human."

"I'll take that as a compliment," Ford laughed. "Gods, you really don't know shit about how any of this works, do you?"

"Save for the actual turning-into-a-wolf bit, no," Remus admitted.

"Well, you're lucky you have me, Wolf Wolfman," Ford laughed and clapped a hand on his shoulder. Remus furrowed his brow, and Ford rolled his eyes as he clarified,

"Oh, come on! Walt Whitman."

"That's a stretch," Remus laughed.

"Yeah, well... you're a stretch," Ford grumbled, crossing his arms over his chest.

"I'm wounded, Bentley," Remus laughed. "So, all these kids—pups, rather, aren't werewolves? It's not, um... well I suppose I just always assumed it would be passed on, generically?"

"Nope. Well, it can be. It..." Ford started, then trailed off for a moment as if he were considering his words carefully. "Okay, so, two werewolves, in their wolf form, on the full moon equals a full werewolf baby. That's extremely rare, not really something anyone actually wants to do, and the children don't present as wolves until puberty. There's only been one that most of us around here have ever met. Other than that, pups are normal kids, for all intents and purposes, they just tend to be a little more connected to the lunar cycle. For me, I have all the heightened senses, like my meat extra rare, and I get a bit crazy if I don't spend a lot of time outdoors."

"As for why you won't see pups around much, the moon affects them the worst when they're young. It's nothing unbearable, they're actually far less fussy than most children, generally, because of the pack mentality. There are always a dozen pairs of hands ready to hold a new pup," Ford continued with a laugh.

"I always get really amped up for the full and really tired right after. It's the same for the young, just a little more intense. They'll be wired all night and then sleep for like twenty hours straight. Other than that, you couldn't tell they were any different."

"That's actually...brilliant," Remus said incredulously. "As I said. I assumed it would be genetic. I never even considered that someone like me could..."

"Like us," Ford corrected. "Well, I suppose you're worse off than me, but it's all the same. But yes, you can absolutely have pups someday, if that's what you're into."

"Oh, Godric," Remus laughed and shook his head. "I'm far from worrying about any of that."

"You say that now. Just wait until you meet the one," Ford said, the last two words coming out high pitched and sing-songy.

Remus glanced away quickly, in an attempt to hide the blush that spread across his cheeks—because of course he was blushing, having already established how pathetic he was—but it must not have been quick enough.

"Ohhh. Wait. What's that face? You already got someone waiting at home, hmm? What's her name?" Ford paused, then added, "Or his, we don't judge out here. I'm partial to a bloke now and then myself."

Remus chewed on his lip as he watched a handful of pups darting around a big tree on the edge of the clearing as they chased one another. It was nice out here. Idyllic, though he missed the peace of being home.

Missed her, fiercely. It was both a blessing and a curse. He felt a constant ache in his stomach, that goddamned stupid sense of supposed to because he was supposed to keep her close and he was supposed to be near her scent, and he was supposed to and supposed to and supposed to.

All the supposed to's aside, he truly did just genuinely miss her. He missed seeing her face light up when he'd set her cuppa down in front of her in the mornings. Missed watching her hum to herself as she cleaned up the flat or busied herself in the kitchen. Missed watching the way her face would morph and change with nearly every line as she read her books in the evening, as if she were fully immersed in whatever tale was being spun between the pages in her hands.

He missed her and missed her and missed her and he was supposed to and supposed to and supposed to.

Nevertheless, it had been a bit of a reprieve that he couldn't deny he was thankful for. He could think more clearly without her around. His teeth didn't ache, his focus wasn't as... singular as it had become. He could think of her, without her scent hanging in the air or the lure of her laying in her bed directly across the hall from his own and not feel as if he was crawling out of his skin.

were wolves before last night, save for the one who turned me, I suppose. Though I was only four when that happened, so it wasn't much of a meeting."

"Four?" Shawna gasped and reached out to squeeze his shoulder. "Oh, you poor thing. Not much older than our Teeny, I just can't imagine."

"S'alright. My, um... My dad worked for the ministry and had some biased views against werewolves. He said the wrong thing about the wrong one at a Wizengamot hearing one day and..." Remus gestured to the scars on his face by way of explanation. "I'm sorry to hear that. Sins of the father..." Gibson trailed off and looked over to Shawna, a wordless conversation seeming to flow between them before she nodded.

"So, now you're here," Gibson prompted.

"Now I'm here," Remus replied. "I finished school in June and have been living with a friend and his sister in London, but there's so much going on in the wizarding world and I'm out on my own for the first time, and I've just been itching to... I suppose discover is the right word. What I know about myself I learned from a prejudiced father, a muggle Marn, and three books in the Hogwarts library—one of which reported that werewolves keep their tails, even while in their human form."

Gibson laughed and shook his head, then slapped his hands on his knees and rose from his chair.

"Well, you've come to the right place. You're welcome to stay as long as you'd like, Remus, so long as you're willing to follow the rules. There's a lot to learn, but Ford here..." he gestured to where the other had reentered the room. "He comes and goes but should be here a few more days."

"You mind getting him settled in, pup?"

"I can do that, Gibs," Ford nodded, then turned to Shawna. "I got Teeny down, but apparently I didn't do the rabbit voice right, so..."

"So, I better go fix your grave mistake before she wakes the baby," Shawna laughed, then leaned in and kissed Ford on the cheek. "Love you, son. Don't be too hard on the new kid. And Remus, it was lovely to meet you. The younger ones get restless around the moon, but we'll have to introduce you to everyone a bit better in a few days."

"Thank you," Remus said with a nod as he stood and picked up his duffle, then turned to Gibson and offered his thanks, earning a nod in return.

"Alright, new guy," Ford said with a grin. "You'll be bunking with me and some of the other single guys, let's go get you settled, Wolfard St. Wolfington."

"The name thing is going to become a... thing, isn't it?"

☾

KEEPER OF THE MOON

"Yes, I was hoping that I could, for a little while." Remus drummed his fingers against his thigh. The man nodded and pulled out a chair at the little folding table Remus was sitting at, tucked into a back corner of one of the many magically expanded tents he'd passed on his way in.

"Name's Gibson," he said as he extended one hand to shake and gestured toward the kind-faced, dark-haired woman at his side. "This is Shawna, my mate. Alpha and Luna, to most here, though since you aren't pack, we won't hold you to the titles for now."

"Remus. Erm, Remus Lupin," Remus responded as he shook Gibson—the Alpha's hand. That would take some getting used to. Whether it was to his benefit or to his detriment, he couldn't be sure, but he had been raised so far removed from werewolf culture that he was having a hard time wrapping his mind around it all.

He knew the basics—the Alpha led the pack, the Luna was the Alpha's partner, and so on. A lot of it seemed rather animalistic. Children were 'pups' and apparently wives, or whatever their equivalent of that was, were mates, their encampment was a den, and so on and so forth. He really should have brought his journal, if only to make a list of all the things he'd need to keep straight, but he'd wanted to be able to be all-in on this, so, here he was.

"No fucking way," A loud voice laughed out. "Your name is Remus Lupin, and you're a werewolf? They may as well have named you Werewolf McWerewolf. Is your middle name 'Lycan?'"

Remus laughed and glanced through the doorway to see a lad about his age, if not a few years older, sitting on a couch in one of the side rooms of the tent with a little girl of about three or four sitting in his lap as she looked at a picture book upside down.

"Well, my friends call me Moony, though now I fear it falls short," Remus replied.

"Ford, can you get Athena settled for her nap and then come chat?" The woman—Shawna—called out.

"Sure thing, Mom," Ford gave her a mock salute and stood, shifting the girl to hold her under one arm. She squealed, batting at him with her book, and Ford began to tickle her as they made their way out of Remus' sight.

"So those are both your... pups?" Remus asked.

"Teeny and Ford. Two of our three pups, yes. Kids, Children. We're human too, it's all interchangeable, but we do prefer to call them that," Gibson explained. "You don't uh... know much about this, do you, Remus?"

Remus cast his eyes down to his hands in his lap and toyed with the cuff of his jumper, then shook his head. "No, I can't say that I do. I've never actually met any other

STEVE_SUNSHINE

It was a relief, to feel even just a little less desperate over her.

He hated it.

He looked back at Ford and considered his words carefully—given the 'I'm actually on a secret mission for the Order of the Phoenix' of it all.

"Carina," he said with a soft smile, though the name felt wrong on his tongue. Sure, yes, whatever, it was her given name, but she was his Hermione. It wouldn't do to start revealing identities of the people he needed to protect, though, not when he still had a ways to go to figure out where the allegiances of the pack lay—especially with people like Ford and Alaric who came and went as they did.

"Carinnaaaa," Ford drew out in a teasing tone. "Look at you, Wolfbert Von Wolferstein, all starry eyed. She the big deal, then?"

"She's... something else." Remus could feel heat rising to his cheeks, and his cleared his throat, then sighed. "It's complicated."

"Isn't it always?" Ford laughed, "Is she foxy?"

"Yeah. She's fucking gorgeous," Remus confirmed. "And, because that's the way my luck tends to run, she's my best friend's sister. We're not, erm... together, we've just had a few... moments."

"Best friend's sister? You dog," Ford teased, nudging Remus with his shoulder. "Moments, huh? I thought from the look on your face you were going to say she was your—"

"Ford!" Shawna called out from across the clearing, beckoning him over with a wave of her hand.

"Well, shit. When the mother calls," He rolled his eyes dramatically and clapped Remus on the shoulder. "I'm heading out for a bit again tonight, but Todd should be here if you need anything."

"Happy trails, Pontiac."

"Happy tails, Moonrocks," Ford said with a salute.



Somewhere, somehow

Somebody must've kicked you around some

Tell me why you wanna lay there

And revel in your abandon

8th September 1978

☒☒☒

☒☒☒

Remus bolted up from his chair and swayed on his feet, then reached a hand back to brace himself on the back of the chair. He needed to move or think or... *something*

STEVE_SUNSHINE

His little survivor.

Gods. His. His. He'd tried—truly, he had, to stop thinking of her as such, to shake this feeling of possession when it came to her, to remind himself that nobody owned her but herself and not to be mistaken, that was absolutely true. He certainly didn't own her, nor did he want to. He just wanted to... possess her. It was nonsensical, but it was.

Glancing back up to her face to find her still fast asleep, he crouched down next to the bed, bringing him face to face with her forearm. He'd gotten a glimpse of the scar a few times, but hadn't seen it up close, and it was even more horrid than he'd thought. The lettering started a bit higher up on her arm and slanted downward and was still a pinkish red in colour, despite having been healed. A cursed blade, she'd said.

He leaned in a bit closer—grateful for those lupine senses, as there would have barely been enough light to see otherwise—and inspected the smaller marks surrounding the larger scar. The little ridges over and around the letter 'u' and the first 'o' were different. Whereas the rest of the scar was red, these little marks were white, but almost held a silver hue. It was uneven, with around five little marks near the o and three near the u, but the small ridges nearly made it look as if something had bitten her.

Curiously, he brought his hand up and lightly trailed a finger over one of the little lines. Hermione whimpered in her sleep, and he felt a jolt of pleasure straight to his cock—whether from merely touching her skin or from the sound of her moaning, he couldn't be sure, but gods, she was unbearable.

Reluctantly, he pulled away and rose back to his feet. Unable to resist, he leaned down and softly brushed the hair from her face, then pressed a soft kiss to her forehead, allowing himself to linger for the briefest of moments as he drew in her scent one last time before he left.



10th August, 2024

“Well, he’s just a pup, ain’t he?” The tall, dark-skinned man asked as he looked over at the woman next to him.

“How old’re ye, pup?” he directed the question toward Remus, tilting his head and narrowing his eyes, and Remus couldn’t help but squirm in his seat.

“Eighteen, sir,” he replied shakily.

“You really are just a pup, then, aren’t you?” The man mused. “You did alright for the moon last night. But we’ve got things to protect here. We’re fine to let someone pop by and go through the full with the pack here and there, but the boys tell me you’re hoping to stay a bit?”

KEEPER OF THE MOON

I saved you for taking me of my biggest fears and turning it into a good experience. There is no way I could not love much it means to me on the words of I tried – and believe me, I have tried. I'm unsure if you can understand the impact of the way you handled things but just – thank you, I've always been afraid that once people leave, they'd only see the walls.

I rather like that you still see me.

I'll be gone by the time you and Irena wake up, but I wanted to make sure you knew you're welcome to anything on my bedside table – though I'm sure you would have given in to temptation and helped yourself anyway.

You let this case of each other while I'm gone, yeah? I'll be home soon.

Never promise.

– Remus

Oh – I think you were right, because I haven't even left yet, and I'm already positive that you are, in fact, quite miserable.



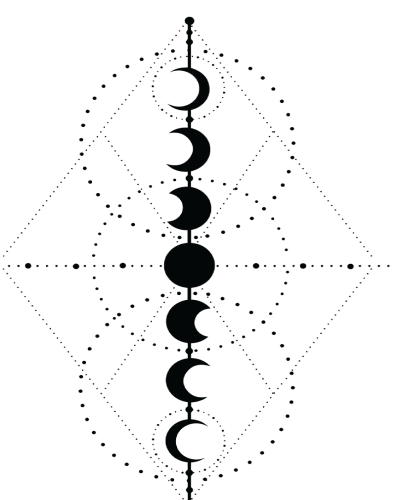
Remus paused with his hand on the doorknob and listened intently to the sound of Hermione's steady, slumbered breathing for a moment before he slowly turned the knob and stepped inside the darkened room. Setting his bag down on the floor near the foot of the bed, he stepped up to the little white bedside table and watched her chest rise and fall steadily for a few beats before he sat the letter down on top of the copy of Interview with the Vampire – some book by a newer muggle author she'd been so excited to pick up last week.

He turned back around, determined to leave, but couldn't resist another glance down at her. Gods, she was beautiful, curled up on her side with her left hand tucked under her face, riotous hair spilling across her cheek and all over the pillow. Her tan skin nearly glowed in the soft rays of moonlight peeking out from under the curtain over her bed, and she looked so bloody peaceful in her slumber that he had to fight the urge to ward the door and just keep her here, exactly like this. Safe and sound, comfortable and blissfully unaware of the danger around her.

He scanned her face, mapping every detail as he tried to commit the entirety of her to memory, before he trailed his eyes down to her arm, where that damn scar was on full display. She tended to keep it hidden, wearing jumpers or long sleeves nearly every day. He understood why, of course, but he still hated that she felt the need to hide any part of herself.

This scar, though inarguably the worst, was hardly her only. He'd noticed the end of a raised white scar on her stomach when she'd been dancing one night, a smattering of burns on the back of her right hand, far too many little ones to count on her legs and arms. There was one on her neck that was a few centimetres long, a little slice through her right eyebrow and one on her left cheek, and some markings on her right shoulder and upper arm that looked as if she'd had a particularly bad case of gravel rash. It was as if she had been through hell. Yet she was still here. And still perfect.

Interlude 2.2



You Tell Me

7th September 1978

Like clockwork, the two days before, the day of, and the two days after the full moon were a cyclical sort of terror that never failed to come, every single month, despite Remus' highest hopes that one day it would just... fucking stop, already.

He'd woken up on Sunday hyper aware of every nerve ending in his body. He could feel his blood pulsing in every vein, feel the slightest breeze drifting across his skin as if it were a heavy-handed touch. His head throbbed, his throat burned, and his very bones felt as if they were going to vibrate out of his skin.

As Sunday dragged into Monday, it grew. His already-heightened senses became even more acute, as though every sound, scent, and flicker of light was amplified, overwhelming his senses. Prior to the last moon, it had been harder than ever before, at home in the flat with her all over everything.

He was nearly certain that he had fisted his cock and rutted into his hand like an animal more in the twenty-four hours prior to his leaving than he had in the entirety of his second year, when he'd first learned how fun giving himself a tug could be. Holding it together, especially when she walked into his fucking bedroom and told him she

KEEPER OF THE MOON

knew he was a werewolf, and she liked him and found him intriguing and then fucking kissed him again had been so—

Nope. He needed to stop that little train of thought, right now. With a groan, he sat up on his cot and reached down to pull on his boots. He needed to walk or move or... something. Anything.

It was comforting to know that he wasn't the only one affected in this way, though. The energy at camp as a whole had been frenzied. Many of the couples were disappearing multiple times a day—*lucky bastards*—and the pups were, true to Ford's words, full of energy, running and screeching and laughing and playing all hours of the day.

The full moon would rise tomorrow night, and the two days after would be slow and calm, and, for the wolves, full of pain. But this pre-moon chaos was actually sort of nice. The pack almost seemed excited about the whole ordeal, which Remus could not, for the life of himself, wrap his mind around.

He yawned and shrugged on a jumper, then stepped out of the tent and scanned the clearing until his eyes fell on Shawna and a few of the others working over in the outdoor kitchen area, so he headed that way to offer his assistance, needing to find anything to do with his hands.

"Good morning, Remus," Shawna said brightly as she scooped scrambled eggs from a large pan onto a row of plates. "Sleep well?"

"Eh. Somewhat. How can I help?"

"You could pour some juice for the pups," Shawna pointed with the spatula to the workbench behind her. "We usually make them do milk in the morning, but the full being tomorrow cancels it out, so, no sense in making them wait until lunch for their sugar."

"I suppose they're all hyped up with or without it," Remus quipped as he nodded toward where Teeny, Shawna and Gils' middle child, was pushing the baby, Leo, back and forth in a pram and loudly screech-singing a song about mermaids while two other pups around her age were quite literally just sort of... jumping up and down beside her as they screeched along.

"Teeny! Don't jostle the pram so hard!" Shawna yelled, then cast a look at Remus over her shoulder. "It's a lot, yeah? Being around all of this? How are you feeling?"

"It's... different," Remus admitted. "Shot so bad, just..."

"Weird?" Shawna prompted. She turned around and grabbed a hand towel to clean up a spill, then slung it over her shoulder and leaned back against the bench to watch as he filled the glasses.

"Yeah. I mentioned a bit before but my dad, he... hates werewolves, passionately so. I was attacked as revenge when he insulted one, and he handled it about as well as you

STEVE_SUNSHINE

Albus had been convinced that, given the weakened state werewolves would be in after the transition, it would be easier for Remus to ingratiate himself with them while their defenses were down.

Remus had tried to argue, but he'd never quite been the best at speaking up. It wasn't that he didn't have opinions, feelings, ideas, what have you. He just never found himself capable of letting go of the fear of being seen as an aggressor. So, as with most things, he had simply nodded his head and complied. Dumbleodore wouldn't have understood, anyway, if he'd explained that being in said weakened states would only serve to make a werewolf even more defensive than usual. The point was moot, as it were. The mission had been given and it was his to undertake.

He zipped up the duffel and then glanced back toward his chest of drawers, uttering a low "ffycin duwiau," under his breath before he walked back over, opened the top drawer, and pulled out the jumper he'd nicked from Hermione, because he was a pathetic bastard who was very clearly losing his mind, but sod it all, he just needed to take it with him.

(Fucking Gods.)

NOT to wank on.

Lily was wrong, though he was sure he would never live her assumption down. To be fair, he may have wanked while he smelled it, and that may have happened an innumerable amount of times, but he didn't wank on the jumper, it was simply... in his hands, and near his face, but never down there.

He was not a jumper wanker.

He just... liked her scent.

A lot.

After he deposited the jumper in his bag, he zipped it up and sat down to lace up his boots, his eyes darting back to the bookcase. He couldn't leave her without a word. Perhaps he should have just let their goodbye earlier speak for itself, but it hardly felt as if it were enough. He doubted anything short of everything would be where she was concerned, but at the least, he could leave her with a goodbye that she could hold on to.

Remus moved back toward the desk and lit a cigarette as he sat back down, steeling his resolve. One letter. He could do this.

"Just be fucking normal about it, idiot," he mumbled to himself.



Hermione,

The idea of people learning the truth of what I am has always terrified me. The others can tell you, but suffice it to say, I've a history of landing it pretty when people do find out. I might not be different.

It all had a dizzying effect on him. He kept coming back to that term, over and over, but really, she was very dizzying. And she had kissed him again. With a sigh, he vanished the little pile of discarded attempts at a letter and pulled out his journal.



September 8th 1978
J-
Because Remus is a bitch, as they say, neither T&M says that's facts & figures. It'll be away for a while. Other business. Dumbledore wants me to infiltrate a pack and sniff around and see if Maddy is trying to recruit werewolves, so I'll be off morning with the wolves for a bit.
I don't want to leave her. She told me that the longer, thought. Glad then she loved me.
She said under 'I love you're a werewolf, Remus,' and T&M's N'd loved me. She isn't afraid of me. She should be. It's bad news for me. I'm certainly afraid enough of myself for the both of us.
I could bitch and moan for hours about all the things I'm feeling about leaving her. But I have to leave. This war is bigger than the both of us, and I need to keep her safe, as off I go.
Do you think this single journey says, 'Maddy, I'm a good heart?' or should I go with the cable-knit? I say says that me bring me my eyes.
I can't pretend I'm not panicking.
I fucking hate this.
She's smart, she's, etc. etc.
-R&G
P.S.: She promised she'd be here when I get home. Super promise, at that. Whatever that means. Maybe some distance will help me figure all this out. Not on my brain with, but much my words, journals, I will come home to her.



Remus closed his journal and stood from his chair to place it on the shelf beside his desk, then stretched his arms over his head and yawned. His eyes caught on the area of the bookshelf right there in the center where he'd... fuck.

It was as if he could still feel her in his hands, still taste her on his tongue. The little gasp she'd made when he'd rolled his hips and – nope.

He most certainly could not go down that road right now. He shook his head and crossed the room, grabbing an old duffel bag out from where he'd shoved it under the bed and began to pack as he ran through his plan in his head.

There was a known pack up north, deep within Kielder Forest in Northumberland that had been rumored to be more receptive to newcomers than most, though coming in as someone new wouldn't be without its challenges, regardless. He had tried to explain to Dumbledore that going so close to the full moon was a poor choice, but

could imagine. My Marn, she tried, but she was a muggle so there was so much about everything that didn't make sense to her. Growing up was... He trailed off, unsure of how much he wanted to share, and grew silent for a moment as he started levitating the glasses to the table.

"It's okay to talk about it. If you'd like," Shawna said softly. "Of course, you don't have to. But, this curse isn't easy on anyone. Did you know I'm a muggle?"

"Oh? One of my best friends is a muggleborn witch, too," Remus said conversationally. Shawna laughed, then turned around and cupped her hands over her mouth as she called out for the pups to eat their breakfast. Gesturing for Remus to follow her, she walked over to relieve Teeny of pram duties and lifted Leo into her arms, patting his back absently as she settled on one of the low benches that had been carved out of a long log.

"I'm not a witch. I know, it's a shock," She began as she patted the bench next to her to encourage Remus to sit. "Most don't even realize a non-magical person can be infected. In truth, very few survive. I was one of the lucky ones. I was camping with my family in the Forest of Dean the summer I turned thirteen, and my older brothers thought it would be funny to take me snipe hunting—are you familiar with the sport?"

"I can't say I am," Remus admitted.
 "I'm not sure of the origins, but essentially, it's a sort of practical joke people play where they take someone out in the woods under the guise of hunting this elusive animal, only to then pretend to leave them. My brothers couldn't have anticipated that I would get spooked and run deeper into the forest. I got lost and was attacked right before sunrise," Shawna explained.

"Gods, that's horrible, I'm so sorry."

"It's okay. I've made my peace, now. Because of the timing, the wolf who bit me shifted back into her human form just a few minutes later—she was only a few years older than me herself, and she was devastated. She managed to get me back to her pack's encampment nearby and their Luna was a skilled healer, so, somehow, I survived. My family was... unrecptive, so that pack took me in. I decided to try attending a muggle university when I became of age, wound up in a short lived, very poor marriage, returned to my pack, and then met Gils one day and the rest was history."

"It seems as if it's all shaken out pretty well for you," Remus noted, nodding toward the baby in her arms.

"Yeah." Shawna smiled down at Leo and ran a hand over his head. "Things have a way, don't they? My point is that most of us got here by messy means. Families don't tend to love it when their kids become rabid animals. You can talk freely, or you can

choose not to, but regardless, just know that you're not alone in whatever you've been through."

Remus nodded, swallowing through the lump in his throat as stared out at the trees. "Mam was a muggle, as I said. She didn't understand things. She'd never lived it. My Dad, he hated what we are with such a passion that it outweighed his love for me as a son. So, growing up it was as if... she only saw the boy, and he only saw the beast. I think maybe I needed someone to see that space between. My Mam was—she passed, three summers ago. Pancreatic cancer, so she went quick. When I had her, though, she was so kind, and worked so hard to be good to me, even when I could sense that underlying fear she always held where I was concerned. But my dad, he..." Remus paused, then laughed. "Chocolate."

"Chocolate?" Shawn asked with an amused smile.

"Chocolate. It's my favorite thing in the world now, because I was never allowed to have it as a child, except for when my Mam would sneak it to me. Dad always told me I wasn't a real boy and found ways to reinforce that. Wolves are canines. Dogs are allergic to chocolate. Chocolate was only for real boys. Despite the fact that I was only... *Wôlf* once a month, I wasn't allowed to play with the other kids in the village or go to primary school because that stuff was for real boys. He beat this idea into my head that I was only a beast. And then my Mam, she worked so hard to make me feel like I was only a boy that it just all twisted up and I guess I just... liked it with her best."

"So, you chose," Shawna said in a knowing tone as she shifted the baby to her other shoulder. "Without any actual guidance to teach you how to be a wolf, and the only knowledge you were given about your nature being toxic and terrifying, you chose to be a boy, and to hate the wolf. You do, don't you? Hate the wolf?"

Remus nodded, still staring out at the tree line, then shook his head.

"Yeah." His voice cracked, so he cleared his throat and tried again. "Yeah. I do. I'm terrified of it. The things I feel sometimes... especially lately. I have people in my life who know what I am, accept me, and they're all convinced that I'm not a danger but... I'm a monster."

"You're not a monster. *Mé* are not monsters, Remus," Shawna said firmly as she stood and laid a now-sleeping Leo back down in the pram. "We're humans, who were cursed against our will. And you can choose to hate this part of yourself for the rest of your life, but you need to be aware that it is a choice that you're making. You could also choose to accept him."

"Him?"

"Your wolf. You feel him, don't you? It's a bit hard to explain to anyone who hasn't felt it. Gibbs has always joked that it would be easier if they just had a damn voice, but

He should have slept. He had to leave before sunrise in order to get through the multiple points of apparition it would take to reach the forest and then hike the few hours to the encampment before sundown.

He had been writing for years. Growing up, there wasn't much else to do, given that he wasn't allowed to play with other children and there was only so much he and his Mam could do to entertain themselves during the long hours his father was at work – or the incredible times when Lyrall would be gone for days or weeks on an excursion – so his mother had shared her love of reading and writing with him, and he had scribbled his musings for years before Dumbledore suggested he start keeping an official journal.

While not a man of many, in the verbal sense, words had never failed Remus. Yet, as had become par for the course where one curly, dizzying witch was concerned—he was coming up short. He needed to leave before she would wake, and some part of him was content with that. They had left off on a good note.

Well, a terrifying one, when she had just so casually revealed that she knew of his Lycanthropy, but then she'd rolled right into the fact that she found him interesting and she liked him and then she kissed him and she, somehow, just... made it okay. He should be panicking over the fact that she knew. When Lily revealed that she did, he threw up and missed two days of classes. When the guys confronted him, he went to Dumbledore and begged to be removed from the school, because he was so convinced that if they knew, he would be tempted to get closer to them, and if he got closer to them, he could harm them.

Hermione had been right, though. He had never harmed them. Save for that godsdamned prank in fifth year—still a touchy subject he and Sirius had mutually agreed not to speak of, because Remus was quite sure he'd never get over it—he'd never even come remotely close to harming someone. There was something to be said for the fact that he'd also only been close with people in a platonic sense, to this point, of course.

Hermione made him feel feral and unsettled.

Possessive.

Giddy.

Dangerous.

Horny.

Sappy.

Bitey.

Somehow, though, she simultaneously settled him. He was terrified of harming her, yet absolutely positive that he was incapable of doing so.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

staring at with the rest of the clan because I'm having my gold pendant mind trying to wrap my head around why you made my teeth hurt and my soul so hard that it felt like it's going to break off and how come the other night when I was brought in to my clan and I brought my cigarette in the sleeve of my jumper you spat the rest of the night trying with a hole in the exact same spot my jumper, which just so happens to look exactly like my fucking jumper if someone had no idea it was a tiger, then? Why do you look at I was like you're afraid it's going to happen and why do you look at it? I like you aren't sure if I'm real and why do you always look in the way of them when you see I was laugh and why do you say so many weird things like that? Tell to the hand thing and what the fuck have you been through the last so many years and how is it that you ended in France for seven years yet you have the pretense to understand French when I was you'd off? Oh you a user or some sort of weird creature I don't know exactly? Oh you here for a reason? Oh, I that reason? Do you know why you made me feel this way? Why even if you fucking tell me?



Remus,
I left early, forgot to tell you that you're welcome to borrow any books you'd like while I'm gone. See you soon, I guess,



My jumper: Just a fuck y godly simple could find you when or how a boy? Just like I hope you and your godly boy? Just a fuck y godly I feel I should allow y have a good job you also I simple could can't be or how y would? My I can't find you in when I'd have nobody to help?

(How the fuck can I smell that you're smelling right now? How do I even know that? I know the fuck can I supposed to walk out the door and leave when I can smell your sweat from across the hall? Does that pretty little cunt taste like Christmas morning, too?)



Remus,
I've felt like I'm having my mind, in both the best and worst ways, since the moment I saw you sitting on that couch, twenty-nine days ago. It would be impossible to feel everything you made me feel in such a short time, but you've the fact that I felt the upmost bond everything the instant I saw you, I've already decided that I'm incapable and relying on the long run. Guess the pretty at school were on the something with that whole "Long I hope" thing after all.

Just I can't help it, I crave you in a way I've never craved anything, I crave your mouth, your voice, your hair -- fuck. That's I should again. Look at yourself, Remus, your fucking yep. Shattering off love poems and wiffing sweaters like a maniac and now you're writing to yourself like a madman. Just I need to journal.



9th August 1978

Remus sighed and balled up yet another scrap of parchment, adding it to the small mountain of discarded letters on his desk, and then slumped forward and rested his face in his hands.

STEVIE_SUNSHINE

the presence can still be felt. I can't imagine how exhausting it must be to try to ignore it all the time." Shawna paused and leaned down to adjust the blanket over the baby, and then smiled over at Remus.

"Tomorrow is the full, so it's wrought with tradition. Everyone sleeps late, and we put on some games for the pups while the rest of the pack bonds and spends time together in the afternoon. Some play music, a few elders tell stories before the sun starts to set and it's time for everyone to head out to the woods. You come find me after lunch tomorrow. I'm aware you're not supposed to be fully immersed in everything until after this next moon, but I'm the Luna. I get to bend a few rules. I'd like you to take a chance on all of this tomorrow, Remus, just let yourself be fully present and withhold any fear or judgement."

"I can... I can do that." Remus nodded. "Thank you, for what it's worth, Shawna. You're too kind."

"Eh. Comes with the whole Luna thing," she laughed with a wave of her hand. "But I think you're a good kid, Remus. At the very least, you deserve a chance to learn that you've always been a real boy."



8th September 1978

Remus sat by the fire, picking at a little hole in the sleeve of his jumper as he stared off across the clearing. The moon was tonight, and his mind was a frenzy, as it always was. This time around, though, just as it had been last month, the frenzy had narrowed—just as every fucking thing had.

Everything came back to her. Everything started and ended with her. Gods, he missed her, and then he felt crazy because he'd known her for less than a month before he'd left, and then he felt sad because he'd been gone for a month, and then that led back to the missing and the crazy and so on and so forth.

He shook his head to clear his thoughts and nodded along absentmindedly to whatever Otto was saying to his left as he pulled out his pack and lit a cigarette.

"How you feeling about tonight?" Otto asked.

"Salright. Same as always, yeah?" Remus shrugged.

"To an extent. It's different when I'm with the pack. Feels more... settled, I suppose," Otto responded, rubbing absentmindedly at his chest.

"I suppose," Remus echoed as he took a drag of his cigarette and watched some of the older guys moving chairs around in the center of the clearing. "How do you get over

the fear of hurting someone, though? Are there wards in place? I didn't really have time to ask last time, seeing as I only got here just a few hours before moonrise."

"Aye," Otto said with a nod. "We set a perimeter a few miles out with repellent wards to keep people away. There's still a mild risk that someone could slip past them but it's nearly impossible."

"And what about all of this?" Remus asked, gesturing broadly. "They're all just going to be exposed here while there are thirty-some-odd werewolves running wild in the woods beyond the clearing?"

"Well, there are a few wards around the clearing to keep outsiders out, but it doesn't matter that... shite, boy, you really are green, aren't you? Is there anything you do know?"

Otto laughed, causing Remus to bristle. He sat up straighter and took a long drag of his his cigarette, then reluctantly shook his head as he admitted, "Not really, no."

"Where did you shift before?" Otto asked.

"Erm... cellars, as a young lad. Then there was a shack, at school. And this summer I've been using a cellar again, at a friend's cottage," Remus explained. He opted not to divulge the fact that he'd spent plenty of time running through the woods with his fellow Marauders, given the whole 'illegal' aspect of the unregistered animagus bit.

"Truthfully? Save for my attacker, I'd never met another werewolf until I came here."

"Shit," Otto repeated, then chuckled. "Right, well, good on ya, boy-o, for having me as your guide. I'm a talker."

"Good," Remus laughed in response. "I'm *not* a talker, usually, but all of this is just... new. What was it that you were saying doesn't matter? As far as the wards around the clearing?"

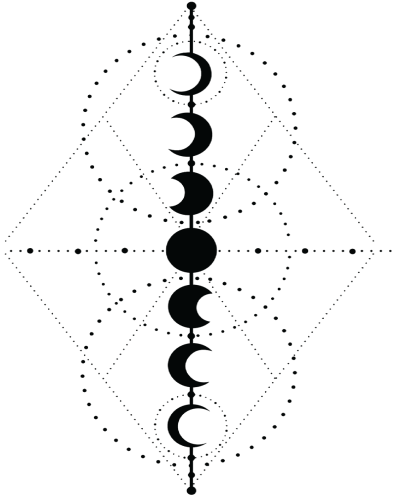
"Right, I got sidetracked by how precious and innocent you are," Otto teased, then shifted to look over at him. "Wolves are possessive, but the pack mentality is strong. There's the hierarchy, of course. We all yield to Gibbs because he's the Alpha. In any form. But there are other aspects of the mentality that extend to bitches, mates and pups."

"Aren't, mates and.. erm... bitches..." Remus began, wincing at the word. He knew it was a product of the whole 'honoring the inner wolf' thing but that didn't mean he had to like it. "Aren't they the same thing?"

Otto guffawed, a deep-bellied laugh, and turned red in the face as he slapped his knee. Remus very much considered the benefit of digging a hole and burying himself in the dirt.

"So bloody green," Otto said, bringing a hand up to wipe tears of mirth from his eyes. "One thing at a time, yeah?"

Interlude 2.1



Refugee

Thermonax,

You drive me fucking crazy and I can't figure out if I want to kill you or



Thermonax,

Rollie Nivola once wrote 'I love you without knowing how or when or from where. I love you simply, without problems or pride. I love you on this day because I do not believe any other day of loving but this.' Should I never understand what he meant until now, because I can't explain it, for all of my attempts at rationalizations, I just simply know that this is I, and that is C.R.C.



He,

I left while you were asleep, had to get on early that day. See you when I see you.

R.



Thermonax

What are you and why is everything about you so fucking strange and so fucking perfect and why do you look at everything like you hold all the knowledge in the fucking universe and if you @!@ in fact hold all the knowledge in the universe then why the fuck aren't you

STEVE_SUNSHINE

He nodded, lighting another cigarette and picking at his sweater again. Gods, all of this made him feel so stupid. And, if he were honest, resentful. He should know these things. Somebody, somewhere, should have taught him about his nature instead of just locking him up or telling him he wasn't a real boy. Even his friends, for as much as he loved them all, didn't seem to understand that he was, in fact, a werewolf. They got it in the general 'Moony goes wofly during the full moon' sense, and they were so supportive, but they tended to overlook it. Not to be mistaken, he wanted to be treated... normal. He just, also, *wasn't* fucking normal, and he'd never even been given any sort of chance to find that balance.

"So, s'far as the wards go, we keep people out to make sure the ones who stay behind are safe, but none of the wolves pose any danger to them so long as they carry the scent of someone in the pack."

Remus' attention piqued at that, and he stamped his cigarette out as he shifted on the log bench and cleared his throat. "How do they, um, carry their scent?"

Scent. That was right. *Good.*

Hermione was supposed to smell like him.

She already did, just a little, somehow.

Fuck, he *needed* her to smell like him.

"Well, the pups are born with it. They smell like their parents, that's pretty simple. The other shit's a bit more...layered, I guess." Otto laughed, then shrugged. "To put it bluntly, the easiest way is rutting. Fucking. Werewolf shags someone, person smells like they got shagged by a werewolf for a bit. Then there's scenting, which is just sort of—you ever seen a cat give a kitten a bath?"

Remus scrunched his brow up in confusion and let out a small laugh. There was never a dull moment with Otto. "Time or two, yeah."

"So, it's sort of similar to that. You've got shagging, scenting, general closeness or proximity, it's all different levels so how long they carry the scent will vary. You'll see a few of the unmated wolves scenting their bitches before we head out tonight. Of course, marking is the big deal."

"And what's marking?" Remus asked, his mind immediately going places it absolutely did not want to go. Sure, he knew wolves were technically canines, but he was more than positive that territorial pissing was where he drew the line.

"What's marking?" Otto repeated under his breath, and then laughed. "Biting, boy." Remus went rigid and his breath caught in his throat. "They bite them? They... they turn people?"

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"What? No, fuck, boy, I can't... you know what, this part is gonna be better coming from... just hold on a second," Otto said as he stood up and brought two fingers to his mouth, letting out a shrill whistle that caused numerous heads to turn toward him.

"Alpha!" he called, waving Gibbs over. Gibbs nodded and held a hand up to the pup he was talking to—a boy of about fourteen who had recently been sent to live with the pack after he'd been attacked and turned in Bulgaria—and then headed their way.

"Otto, Remus," Gibbs said with a nod. "Alright, now?"

"Yes, Alpha," Otto responded. "Just need a bit of help. I was answering some questions for Greente here, but I've hit a dead end. I don't think I'm the right one to explain this part."

"Oh?" Gibbs said, raising an eyebrow. He turned to Remus and extended a hand to help him stand. Remus complied, nodding his thanks, and righted his jumper.

"What's this dead end, then?" Gibbs asked.

"Otto was, erm..." Remus shifted on his feet. "We were talking about how things go with the members of the pack who aren't wolves, and he was explaining some things about scents and... sorry, it's a lot of information."

"Right," Otto nodded. "So, I was just getting to explaining the scent thing to the pup, here. Basically, Remus, the gist of it is that, if someone carries the scent of a wolf, they're marked as that wolf's property, and the other wolves recognize that and stay away."

"That sounds simple enough," Remus said tentatively.

"Yeah, I suppose the scenting thing might be confusing," Gibbs laughed. "What's it you need help clarifying, Otto?"

"Alpha he, uh..." Otto glanced over at Remus and gave him an apologetic smile, then leaned in closer to Gibbs and dropped his voice to a low whisper. "I mentioned the bite and he went all pale and ghosty thinking we turn people."

"You don't know about the bonds? Of all things?" Gibbs asked Remus incredulously.

Gods, digging that hole was starting to sound more and more appealing. In lieu of a verbal response, Remus cast his eyes down to the ground and shook his head as he squeezed his eyes shut, his cheeks heating in embarrassment. There was so much he didn't know. While he was happy to learn, he felt so out of his element here.

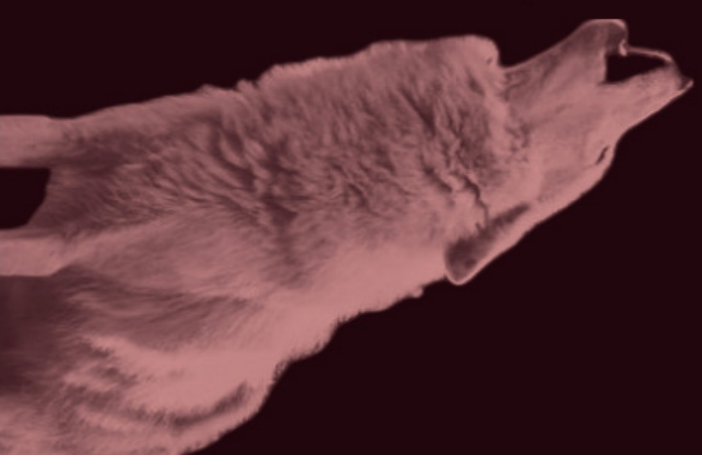
Remus had always been brilliant. He wasn't conceited, it was just a fact. He worked hard, studied harder, took his revising seriously in school, read everything he could get his hands on, and was lucky enough to have one of those minds that just catalogued knowledge in the exact right way to make it all easily stored and accessible. Perhaps, in truth, it had become a sort of crutch for him over the years.

A KEEPER OF THE MOON COMPANION PIECE

Shadow of a Doubt

BY STEVIE_SUNSHINE

HE WAS PATHETIC.
OVER THE MOON
HE'D SPENT HIS
LIFE CHAINED TO.
OBSESSED.
HE WAS OKAY
WITH THAT.



STEVIE_SUNSHINE

In lieu of having physical grace, social prowess, any sort of hold on all this werewolf shit, money or a decent upbringing or anything so many of the other kids at school had, Remus had his mind. Being here, now, in this new environment where he wasn't at least one of the smartest people in the room, if not the smartest, he felt... naked. Exposed.

He wanted to go home.

"Hey," Gibbs said in a calm, steady tone as he reached out and placed his hands on Remus' shoulders. "Steady, pup. You're here to learn. I can see your mind spinning. Slow it down and breathe."

"Otto," he called over Remus' shoulder. "We've got about four hours to sundown. Go let the Luna know that the pup needs some peace."



Peace, it turned out, came in the form of muggle marijuana.

Remus had no complaints about this.

He sat near the fire, toying with a smooth rock he'd found on the ground as he took a long drag off of the joint Shawna had rolled and passed to him, and held his breath until his lungs burned, then slowly exhaled, coughing a bit on the release.

It was hardly Remus' first foray into the world of smoking grass. Sirius had snuck some into the dormitories during their fifth year a handful of times, and he'd found that it was a massive help with the pain in the days after the full moon, so he'd dabbled here and there, but never on a serious level.

This, though, homegrown by the pack, was potent and heady.

He dug it.

"There you go," Shawna said with a bit of a laugh as she crouched in front of him. She rose to her feet and brushed her hands off on her jeans, then nodded to Gibbs, who smiled down at Remus.

"See? A little bit of peace goes a long way. I know this shit can get overwhelming, pup. I know it isn't your scene, and that's okay. But we're happy to help you in whatever way we can while you're here. There are some perks to this wolf shit, you know," he said with a sly grin as he wrapped an arm around Shawna's waist and pulled her to his side, then leaned down and nuzzled his face into her neck.

Remus glanced away, blushing at the intimacy of the moment as he took another drag. *Fuck, he missed her.*

"Perks, indeed?" A gravelly voice rang out.

He glanced up and gave a polite nod as Bernadette—*Bernie*, she'd said to call her—settled down in a chair to his left. Bernie was one of the 'elders' of the pack. Remus

KEEPER OF THE MOON

knew better than to ask a woman her age, but he'd placed her at somewhere around her late seventies.

What he couldn't quite work out, though, was the fact that she was human. There were a few humans living amongst the pack, and then, of course, the pups were basically humans with a tiny dash of wolf-spice, but the humans were all younger and intertwined with werewolves in some way. Bernie just sort of seemed to... be there, though she was very respected.

"I hear you've a lot to learn," Bernie stared as she reached over and took the joint for Remus' hand.

"I suppose I do, ma'am."

"Oh, none of that," Bernie laughed and waved her hand dismissively. "I don't do titles anymore. Not since my Clarence passed."

"I'm sorry for your loss," Remus said softly, dipping his head.

"It's the nature of things. One Alpha dies, the next rises. I'd say our replacements are doing pretty well," Bernie said, gesturing with her wooden walking stick to where Shawna and Gibbs had settled on the other side of the fire.

"You were the Luna?" Remus asked in surprise. "But you're..."

"Human?" Bernie raised an eyebrow and smirked at him. "Yes, well, we are, more often than not, pup. Though it can happen with another wolf, such as with our Alpha and his Luna, that's even more rare than the bond as a whole."

Remus chewed his lip in contemplation as he tried to process her words and pulled out another cigarette—he really did need to watch his smoking, as there wasn't another trip to the nearby village planned until the following week and he was about to run out of the provisions Ford had picked up for him last month, but he was high and jittery from the impending moon and sod it all, he needed something to do with his hands.

"I'm sorry, I'm afraid you've lost me," he admitted as he shifted in his camp chair and brought one of his feet up in the seat to sit sideways and give Bernie his full attention. "I feel... very out of sorts, with so much of this. I don't mean to ask so many questions."

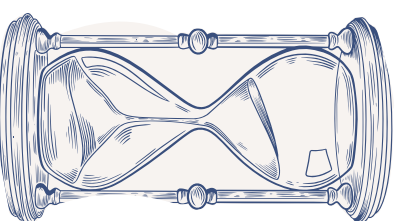
"No mind, pup," Bernie smiled, her withered face crinkling as she reached out and patted his knee. "That's what us elders are good for, yeah? Settle in. As I said, there are some perks."

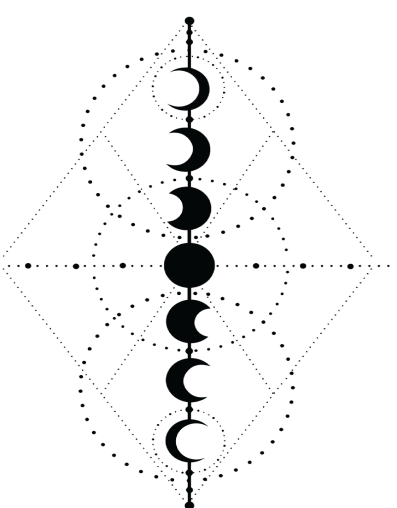
Remus nodded and took a drag of his cigarette, adjusting in his seat again. He felt like he was crawling out of his skin. He supposed he was—er, his wolf was, given the sun was going down soon, but he hated this part of the buildup the most.

It was like he couldn't get comfortable—no matter what he did. He could practically feel the wolf clawing its way to the surface, driving him mad with its desire to have its

INTERLUDE II

Shadow of a Doubt





What a Fool Believes

7th October 1978

“So, what’s the plan again?” Sirius asked in a low voice as he, Hermione and Lily stood side by side, disillusioned with their backs pressed against the stone wall in the alleyway outside of Honeydukes to get a clear view of students from the castle walking by on the street ahead.

“Well... come here, disillusion ourselves, and try to talk to him, and then... that was sort of as far as we got,” Lily whispered back.

“What were you two up gabbing about all night, then?”

“Coronation Street,” Hermione answered.

“Obviously,” Lily added. “Len is getting sick of covering for Ray with Deirdre, *and* now Rita knows he wasn’t at the Legion and there wasn’t even Snooker on that night.”

“Right, because there’s this waitress, Janice, and he’s—” Hermione began to add, but Sirius cut her off.

“Great, wonderful, good, so our plan is... Step one—hide in an alley, step two - talk about Corrie, step three—question mark, step four—save the world, then?”

“Obviously,” Lily repeated.

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“Sirius,” Hermione said softly, reaching out and holding on to his hand. “I love you, Mutt. I know this is hard. But we’re here for you, okay?”

“I know, Kitten. I’m sorry—to you too, Lils, of course. I know I’ve been moody, this is just... bringing up all that old family, least-favourite child shit.”

“Well, if it’s any consolation, I’m sure Hermione will be the least favourite child now that people know she exists,” Lily laughed. “We love you. We’ll love you through it.”

Hermione opened her mouth to protest, but before she could speak, they all went still when they caught sight of Regulus standing on the opposite side of the street across from the alleyway, leaned against the corner of a shop while he talked to a blonde girl who was animatedly waving her hands as if she were angry about something, while he shook his head vehemently.

Regulus leaned in and put a hand on the girl’s shoulder as he stooped down to whisper in her ear. She nodded and patted him on the arm and turned to walk away—Hermione thought she looked rather like Luna, from this distance, but didn’t have much time to consider the matter.

“Oh shit, he’s coming this way. We really should have come up with a better plan,” Lily said in a panicked voice. “Oh, Gods, it’s really him. He’s right there.”

Hermione watched as Regulus reached the end of the alleyway, pausing to glance around, likely ensuring no one was watching him. After a moment, he continued walking. With each step, he drew closer, digging into his pocket and pulling out a pack of cigarettes. He stopped directly in front of them as he brought one to his lips and conjured a small flame to light it.

He was right there, with his back to them, so close that if he took half a step backward, he would be standing on Lily’s toes. Neither she, nor Sirius, nor Lily seemed capable of moving. After a beat, she brought her wand up to press the tip to her head and whispered the counterspell to cancel her disillusionment, then flicked it at the others to do the same, and several things happened all at once.

Regulus heard the soft, unintelligible whisper and spun left. He caught sight of Hermione and a look of confusion passed across his features before his eyes locked on Sirius. The two stood, staring at one another for a mere half of a second, before Regulus took a step back.

His movements were hindered when Lily, whom he had yet to notice, moved to take a step to the side, causing him to trip over her foot and stumble into her. Lily let out a yelp of surprise and clamped her hand down on his arm to steady herself.

“New plan!” she declared, and then, in an instant, the two disappeared in a pop of apparition.

STEVE_SUNSHINE

“Thank you,” Remus rasped, then paused to clear his throat. “I’ll keep that in mind.”
“Yeah, yeah,” Gils laughed and waved his hand. “Enjoy your week and then go claim your witch.”

Remus watched Gils leave and then glanced down at his necklace as he felt it begin to warm again. They’d been at it nearly constantly for weeks. He’d been worried he would be too overzealous with it, but it seemed as if Hermione had her hand on the necklace almost constantly—Not that he was complaining, of course. Remus rather liked the idea of her being a bit desperate for him.

Such a needy little witch.

All for him.

Gods, he was ready to go home to his girl.

☾

*Surrender
Don't let me down
I can't just hang around
Feelin' this way forever*

KEEPER OF THE MOON

Remus stilled and opened his mouth to protest, but couldn't find it in himself to lie, so he simply nodded.

"I thought that was the case," Gibbs pressed his lips together in a thin line, then nodded. "Few of the packs, myself included, received owls from the Order in the spring, so when I opted not to respond, I figured it was only a matter of time before they sent someone. Once you had your revelation about your mate and you still stuck around, I knew there had to be a reason."

"You're right. I'm sorry. I didn't... Well, I suppose I can't rightly say that I didn't come here to deceive you all. I just—"

"You had a job to do," Gibbs interrupted. "An important one. I can respect that. We've heard stirrings about everything that's happening out there. I think, or, I should hope, that it's clear to you that our pack wants nothing to do with the war. Should push come to shove, though, and *only* if it does, we will fight for what's right. And not to be mistaken, I do believe that your people are doing what's right. My pack, we just prefer our life to be peaceful. We've worked hard for that, and would like to protect that the best that we can."

"I understand. And for what it's worth, I am sorry. I didn't mean to disrupt your peace. If I'm honest, I... I needed this time, more than I can put into words. I suppose I was more motivated to undertake this mission when the Order suggested it, even knowing it was asinine, because I was... curious, about all of this. What I've learned here is invaluable, and I'm eternally grateful for everything. I am in your debt, truly. Should there ever be anything you need..."

"I'll keep that in mind, pup," Gibbs said with a soft smile as he stood. "Listen, I'm gonna be blunt here. I don't want your Order sending anyone else out here. But we like you, kid. You fit well. I know you've already declined the invitation to join the pack, but it still stands. Should that push and shove arise, they send *you*. Tell them we won't let any other Order member past the wards without you. Got it?"

"Got it," Remus said with a nod as he stood and shook Gibbs' hand. "And truly. Thank you, again."

"Stick around for Teeny's birthday so Shawna doesn't kick both our asses, and we'll call it even," Gibbs told him as he turned to leave. He reached the exit and then paused before turning back around. "Listen, Remus. You come back any time, yeah? Bring that mate of yours round to meet us, too. She's welcome to come stay at the den with the rest if you ever get the itch to come run with us for the moon, or just want to come for a visit. But if things go sideways out there... that invitation does still stand, and as your mate, that extends to her as well. You need to keep her safe, you bring her here, aye?"

STEVE_SUNSHINE

"Huh?" Hermione furrowed her brow and looked rapidly between Sirius and the now-empty spot where Lily and Regulus had just stood.

"Did she just...?" Sirius asked

"Shit," Hermione said, by way of answer.

"Shit. We can't apparate in and out of the flat. She'll have gone to the cottage."

"Ohhh, Gods, James is going to kill us," Hermione groaned.



Hermione and Sirius popped into the kitchen of James and Lily's cottage, and she had to hold back a laugh at the sight that awaited them.

Regulus was tied to a kitchen chair while Lily very unsuccessfully bobbed and weaved back and forth to try to block the view of him from James—despite the fact that he was a whole head taller than her and could easily see over her—while Peter sat on the kitchen counter casually snacking out of a bag of pretzels.

"Hey, look Reggie! Black family reunion!" Peter said with a grin, pointing at Sirius and Hermione.

Hermione really had tried hard to hate that damn guy, for about five minutes before she begrudgingly admitted to herself that she would be saving him, too. But honestly... Pete was just *fun*.

Lily spun around to face them and squeaked, then ducked down in an attempt to hide behind James.

"Lils. What did you do?" James asked.

"I... well, we were in the alley, and he was right there and then he tripped and..."

"Lily, what did you do?" James repeated. "Why on the green Earth of the Gods is *he* in our bloody kitchen?"

"I... panicked," Lily supplied weakly.

"By *panicked*, she means that she freaked out and kidnapped a minor," Hermione informed James as she walked over to lean against the counter next to Peter. He tilted the bag toward her, and she nodded in thanks, accepting a handful of pretzels as she watched the scene unfold before her.

"Only a little bit!" Lily defended, holding her hands in the air. "Honestly, it's not that big of a deal."

"Not that big of a deal? Lily, you kidnapped a minor!"

"Yes, James, but only because I panicked!"

"I'm barely a minor. I turn eighteen in December," Regulus spoke up in a bored tone.

"She's only a year older than me."

KEEPER OF THE MOON

Shit, Hermione thought. She knew that, were her information correct, he had disappeared around March of 1979, but the reality staring her in the face was tough to reconcile. He was two months shy of eighteen now.

The oldest he ever got to be in her timeline.

“Very helpful, Reg, thanks,” Sirius rolled his eyes as he lit a cigarette and passed it to Hermione, then leaned back against the counter next to her and lit his own.

“Bite me, blood traitor,” Regulus spat back.

Hermione brought the cigarette to her mouth with one hand as she lazily used the other to pull her wand out of her bun and shoot a mild stinging hex at Regulus’ leg.

“HEY! Not cool.” Regulus lifted his leg and shook it a bit, then glared up at Hermione and studied her face briefly before he looked back to Sirius.

“So, this is her, huh? You know, Mother spent the second half of my summer break locked in the attic with Kreacher and a dozen cases of elf wine, yelling to Great Aunt Elladora’s portrait after Father’s little belated bundle of joy popped up on the family tapestry while she was in the middle of hosting a dinner party one night.”

“The poor dear, thoughts, prayers, best wishes,” James spoke up in a scathing tone.

“If you want sympathy for Walburga Black you’ll need to go slither back to your snakes and bitch to them.”

Hermione was taken aback by James’ tone, but she supposed it made sense. Harry had told her about the hell Sirius went through when his family tried to make him take the mark, and James had been the one to help pick up the pieces. She, herself, also didn’t give a shit about Walburga’s attic fits, despite the fact that she was the cause.

Call it preemptive comeuppance for all that portrait nonsense.

Hermione pushed off the counter and walked closer to Regulus, pacing a slow circle around his chair as she studied him. He was a bit soft, really. A pretty boy. He had the typical grey eyes generally found in the Black family and, oddly enough, looked like somebody had taken half of Sirius and half of Draco Malfoy and just short of... smooshed their faces. His nose was shaped like Sirius’ at the end but thinner and a bit pointer like Draco’s had been. Draco’s jaw but Sirius’ chin, and so on and so forth.

“How did you pop up on the tapestry so late, anyway? Some kind of cloaking spell wear off?” Regulus asked in a bored tone.

Circling back around to his side, she checked the hold on the bindings James or Lily had cast, then brought her wand up to the sleeve of his left forearm. She looked down to gauge his reaction, but he merely stared back at her, with one eyebrow raised.

Hermione flicked her wand and split the fabric open, then sighed.

“Ah, yes,” she said conversationally. “I had been warned that you were in the habit of making stupid decisions.”

STEVIE_SUNSHINE

9th September 1978

Remus woke with a start, clasping onto the charm of his necklace, and let out a loud, booming laugh.

She got it.

She was safe.

Fuck, he felt as if he’d been drowning since he walked out of their flat, running on the fumes of a dwindling hope, and now she’d read his letter, and clearly hadn’t run screaming for the hills because she’d put the necklace on and had used it to check in with him.

He was pathetic.

Over the moon he’d spent his life chained to.

Obsessed.

He was okay with that.

Pressing his thumb to the charm, he whispered ‘*Neum*’ and moved to lay back down, then laughed again when he felt the warming sensation against his collarbone a mere few seconds later.

This was going to be so much fun.

Happy fucking birthday, he thought, a wistful smile playing across his lips.



9th November 1978

“You got a second, pup?”

Remus looked up from the book in his lap to see Gibbs standing in the entryway of the tent with a serious expression on his face. He nodded and set his book aside as he gestured for Gibbs to take a seat.

“Otto said you’re thinking about heading out?” Gibbs asked.

Remus nodded, and stretched, twisting a bit to try to pop his back in an attempt to ease the lingering soreness from the full moon. “I was thinking I’d leave next week.

Another couple days to recover and then I’ll say goodbye to Ford and Todd when they pop back up for Teeny’s birthday Sunday. Shawna made me promise I wouldn’t miss the party, of course. I do appreciate everything you and the pack have done for me though, truly. I just...”

“You just need to get home to that little mate of yours,” Gibbs said with a knowing grin.

“And I’d imagine Albus Dumbledore is waiting with bated breath for a full report.”

later, and I popped out six months after that, so I'm sure you can do the math. Female wolves don't shift when they're pregnant, and my mother was going through a 'denying the wolf' phase like a lot of people do, so she'd never had the guts to tell my Dad. When she finally did, after I was born, he flipped his lid. Roughed her up pretty bad, though I didn't learn that part until just a few years ago."

"Shit. I'm sorry, that's tough." Remus winced.

"Yeah." Ford nodded and adjusted the strap of his bag on his shoulder. "So, he finds out, sues for custody on the grounds of her being a danger to me. The case goes in front of the Wizengamot, and I'm sure you can guess the outcome."

"Flycin thagfarn" Remus cursed.

"I don't know what that means but it sounds angry, so I agree."

"Ah, sorry. Fucking prejudice," Remus explained. "I've a tendency to go all Welsly when I'm irritated. So, they gave him custody then?"

"Yep," Ford said with a heavy sigh. "And he was a nightmare. He died in a car accident when I was fourteen—a favour to the world, really—and I came to live with my mother's old pack in Scotland. She met Gibbs a year later when he came to visit an old friend he had in her pack, and we moved out here. It was a major adjustment, and I was a petulant kid, so I hated it."

"And now?" Remus prompted.

"They're my family. I couldn't live here full-time. Too much of a traveller. I suppose if I were more wolfy it would be different, but I just get the weird energy and the sense of smell. Once I did come to run with the wolves, though, I learned a lot. Grew," Ford sighed. "I still hold a hell of a lot of anger toward the Wizengamot for taking me away from a family that loved me and giving me to a father like that, but I'm more settled now, too. Reconnecting with family helped, and all that sappy shit. There had to have been other kids like me that missed out too, because of the fucking stigma, and I'd like to see the laws change for the better, you know?"

"Yeah. I get it. Times are tense all over and I know werewolf rights are hardly at the forefront of everyone else's mind, but it'd be nice to be able to just choose whatever career I wanted, shit like that, like any other bloke my age," Remus said.

"Well for what it's worth, I hope that when all this war shit ends, things get better for your kind."

"Awwww, Chrysler, you going soft on me?"

"Watch it, Wolfster Moonsworth."

1



"You'll have that." Regulus rolled his eyes and glared back at her as if he were unaffected, but Hermione did not miss the way his throat bobbed when he swallowed hard, nor did she miss the pained look in his eyes when he glanced down at the dark mark and then tried to twist against the restraints to turn his arm over, as if he couldn't bear to look at it or have it exposed to the world. Regulus Black, it appeared, did not bear the Dark Lord's mark proudly.

Interesting.

She studied him for a moment and then leaned in close, holding eye contact with him as she wordlessly repaired the rip in his sleeve. She also did not miss the way his shoulders slumped in relief for half a second before his defenses came back up.

Straightening back up, she pulled back her sleeve to show him her scar, then finally answered his question. "Pretty much. Protective magic wore off the night your kind did this. Too much trauma from repeated exposure to the cruciatus curse, and a cursed blade," she told him in a conversational tone, then pulled her jumper back down. "You'll have that."

Regulus stared down at her sleeve for a long moment, his jaw flexing, then made a big show of rolling his eyes. "So. Bastard half-sibling, idiot brother, idiot brother's friends. What's the plan here? Kidnap the Death eater and...?"

"I panicked!" Lily defended again.

"Hey, shh..." James reached out and gathered her into his arms to hug her, then pulled back and cupped her face in his hands. "Nobody is mad, baby. We were all just surprised. You panicked. It's okay. You did good."

Hermione bit back a grin at their cute little display, then walked back over to where Sirius and Peter stood and threw up a silencing charm around them.

"Peter, I'm sorry you got dragged into this." She laughed and gave him what she hoped was an apologetic look as she absently lifted her necklace and placed her thumb to the rune. She had been working extra hard to not hate Peter, and even harder to not hate herself for the fact that she couldn't find a single thing to hate.

For the millionth time, she found herself wondering what on earth could have happened to take him from this to what he became, but that was an issue for another time. She had two years until Peter became a spy, and three until he did his worst, but she only had five months until Regulus was lost forever. Priorities.

"Salright," Peter said with a shrug. "My family sucks, I get it. Want another pretzel?"

"No, thank you." The necklace warmed in response and she sighed in relief, then smiled gratefully at Peter before she turned to Sirius. "Mutt."

"Kitten."

"Talk to me."

KEEPER OF THE MOON

"I knew he had it, Hermione, but seeing it..." Sirius trailed off, running a hand through his hair as he pinched his brows together.

"I know. Did you see how he tried to hide it, though?" Peter piped up. "Not very. I'm proud to be evil' of him, was it?"

Sirius looked taken aback, but Hermione barreled on before he had the chance to argue. "I noticed that, too, Peter," she said, then turned to face Sirius more fully. "It's your call. I can go about this a number of ways, but if you want to try first. He's your... Well, he was your brother first. There's history there that I don't want to get in the way of."

"I want some fucking answers," Sirius said bluntly. "But I don't know where to begin and he's not going to be honest anyway."

Hermione's face lit up and she grinned and launched herself at Sirius to hug him tightly, then pulled back and grabbed his cigarettes out of his shirt pocket as she reached behind him to grab her beaded bag off of the counter.

Shifting the items to her left hand, she brought her wand up to cancel the silencing charm and then accio'd a chair to position it directly across from Regulus, who was currently engaged in some sort of half-silent standoff with James and Lily. She lit a cigarette, deliberately holding it out just enough that the smoke would waft into his face as her head swiveled between the three of them.

James was glaring at Regulus, who was grinning at Lily, who was, in turn, glaring at James.

"So, was that the plan, Evans? Kidnap me and tie me to a chair to force me to watch you two have a cuddle? If you needed a third, you could have —"

"Shut the fuck up," James spat out, taking a step forward. Lily let out a strangled sort of squeak as she lunged forward and grabbed James by the arm, her face so flushed she nearly resembled a tomato.

"James, don't let him get to you. He doesn't even matter."

"Thanks for the reminder, Evans." Regulus rolled his eyes, then added, "Nice ring. Pick that out all by yourself, did ya, Potter?"

"Oi!" Sirius called. "You three bickering all day or can we get on with it?"

"But I didn't even get to hex him yet, Pads," James fake whined as he shot Sirius a grin.

"I'll give you second dibs, then," Hermione said, reaching up to pat his arm reassuringly.

"Have I told you you're my favourite, yet?"

"At least thirty times, yes, James," she laughed, then turned back to look at Regulus as she took a drag of the cigarette.

"Would you like one?" she asked, holding the pack out to him.

STEVE_SUNSHINE

Sure, there were wolves such as the one who had sired him, who chose evil, and were likely begging for a place amongst the ranks of the Death Eaters, but shitty people were going to be shitty people, and werewolves were, at least primarily, humans. They came in all forms and personalities, just as the rest did, and save for a single fucking day a month, they were pretty well driven by whatever moral compass they would have followed regardless of a blood curse.

People like the Order couldn't see that, though. Remus was, not to be mistaken, all in on the cause. But the idea that recruiting werewolves was such a big deal was laughable at best to begin with. They were humans, who transformed into beasts that could not even be fucking controlled for one night a month. In theory, sure. The git who called himself the dark lord could let them lose on the full moon to eat people, but even he had no way of predicting or controlling what they'd do or where they'd go. It was all a foolish notion.

At the most, recruiting werewolves could bring in more bodies, but more bodies could be found anywhere. Alas, society had decided they were beasts first, and even the Order, progressive and understanding as they thought they were, couldn't seem to wrap their minds around the fact that being a werewolf didn't mean...

Oh.

Oh.

Remus almost laughed out loud as realization hit. The burden he'd been carrying, placed on his shoulders by his father at the age of four years old, lightened just enough that he felt as if he could breathe easier for the first time in his life.

Being a werewolf did not mean he was a monster.

It meant he became one, once a month—an important factor, not to be overlooked, yes—but it was not all it was.

It was not even the most intriguing thing about him, according to the one person who—all cards on the table—Remus cared to hear the opinion of more than anyone else. He really *had* needed this. As tough as the distance was, and as much as he missed the comforts of home, missed his friends, missed *her*—his mate—to be able to return home with his mind a little clearer could only be a good thing.

"Well shit," Ford said, pulling Remus from his thoughts. "Sounds like we've got more in common than I thought. I had a lot to learn when I came here too, and I was scared shitless at first, but I think I'll always be glad I did it."

"When you came here? I guess I assumed you grew up in the pack. Were you older, then, when your Maa and Gils were mated?"

"I was about fifteen. I'm twenty-one now. But I, uh..." Ford trailed off for a moment. "Well, shit. It's a long story. My parents met at university, got married three months

KEEPER OF THE MOON

"Turns out she's the big deal."

"You're shitting me," Ford gasped, dramatically clutching a hand to his chest.

"Nope," Remus grinned.

"You found your MATE and you didn't even know? What did you just think 'mmmm this chick makes me feel really biley, strange.' Or something?"

"Uh... Kinda. Yeah. Actually, that's exactly right. Though I suppose I was a bit more tortured and self-loathing about it," Remus said.

"Well shit, Wolfy," Ford laughed.

"Yeah."

"Well does she dig you?"

"She uh... yeah." Remus' smile widened and he scratched at the back of his neck. She *was* into him, too. That day in his room, Gods, it had been so fucking clear. She'd been gasping and moaning, grinding on him, and she'd smelled so—

He cut himself off with a shake of his head, then finally confirmed, "She digs."

"Oooohhh, she diggins," Ford trilled.

"Piss off, cunt."

"So testy," Ford laughed and tutted his tongue. "So how are you not already running screaming back to her to get on with all the...matey things?"

"I'm, um..." Remus busied himself lighting a cigarette as a means to stall.

"Well, couple things, I guess. This has been really good for me. She already didn't expect me back for a few months at the earliest and while I'm more than ready to get on with all the things I guess some part of me feels like I've got more to learn here. I'm more settled with all this werewolf shit than I was before, and I guess I want to give it just a bit more time, another moon or two at most, to make sure my head is right. It's, uh, for life, they say, so I figure I'd do my best to make sure my shit is straight before I go dump all this bond shit in her lap."

The half-truths rolled off his tongue with ease, because really, it did all have some merit to it. Remus had never realized how much he needed this until he'd been here, in it. Especially now, having learned about the bond—he had no idea what would have become of him by this point had he remained at home surrounded by her and her scent and her fucking hair and her jumpers and her peppermint tea and her dancing and gods, he fucking missed her.

He had needed this. This was good. But he was ready to be done. For all he could tell, not a single member of the pack had any desire to deal with anything related to magical society, let alone an evil wizard that wanted to kill half-bloods, muggleborns and muggles. Any creature with half a brain would be able to discern how well that agenda would fare for themselves once Lord Dickface was done using them, as it were.

STEVIE_SUNSHINE

"I'm a bit indisposed... Carina, innit?" Regulus tilted his head, narrowing his eyes as he studied her.

"I go by my middle name, Hermione."

"Why?" He grimaced. "That name is so... clunky."

"Oh, is it clunky, Regulus Arcturus?" she retorted, over-enunciating each syllable.

Regulus threw his head back and laughed, deep-bellied and boisterous, and Hermione's heart clenched. He looked so boyish, then. He was only a year younger than she and Sirius and the rest, but there was a strange sort of youthful softness in him that she couldn't quite place. Like despite being a seventeen-year-old Death eater who, in all fairness, also seemed to be a bit of a cunt, he still felt like a baby that she just wanted to scoop into her arms and keep safe.

This was her brother, now, too, and he clearly needed a big sister to set him straight, just as Sirius did—albeit for wildly different reasons.

"I like you," Regulus declared. "Shame you're the one who had to be hidden away, they could have sent the dog to the pound instead," he continued, jerking his chin toward Sirius. "Might've been cool to have a sister."

"Well, I'm here now. And I *am* your sister. Sirius says I'm brilliant at the role."

"Yeah, you are, Kitten."

Hermione turned her head to where Sirius was now hovering nearby and grinned up at him.

"And you're the best brother. Honestly, we're so lucky," she praised, looking at Regulus out of the corner of her eye to gauge his reaction. His previous tension had returned, and his jaw was clenched so tightly that she could see the muscle twitching as he glared at Sirius.

"There. That, right there," Hermione said, pointing a finger at Regulus.

She spun around and looked at the others, then back up at Sirius, who seemed to understand her message loud and clear from just the look in her eye.

"James, Lils, Pete, could we uh... have the room, if you don't mind?" Sirius asked.

Hermione waited as they cleared out, then brought her wand up to adjust Regulus' restraints, manipulating the binding to wrap around his left wrist with a small tether to the arm of the chair that allowed him to move his arm enough to reach his mouth. She passed a lit cigarette to him, and he looked at it suspiciously for a moment before he finally relented and accepted it.

"So what? Family bonding time, then?" he asked sarcastically.

"Yep," Sirius said as he pulled a chair up next to Hermione. "This is *my* sister, just so we're clear. Mine. But she's a bleeding heart, and she's decided there might be something in you worth saving, so here we are."

"Isn't that quaint?" Regulus rolled his eyes. "Finally learned how to be a fucking brother, did ya?"

"Hey, that's not..." Sirius yelled as he began to rise from his chair, but Hermione shot her arm out and shoved him back down.

"We are absolutely *not* doing this yet. We're going to approach this with respect, and honesty." She told them as she reached into her bag and pulled out a small satchel of potions.

"I'm not above mild hexes, babbling beverages, truth serum and legilimency, so it will work best if you both calm your asses down."

"Salazar, she's crazy, isn't she?" Regulus laughed.

"Absolutely bloody insane." Sirius beamed with pride as he patted Hermione on the knee. "It's my favourite thing about her."

"*She* is right here."

"Okay, Kitten. No need to go all Moony on me."

At the mention of Remus, Hermione latched on to her necklace and pressed her thumb to the charm, activating the spell wordlessly once more, which she'd taken to doing at a very reasonable rate of every other second of every single day, give or take.

"Here's what's going to happen," she said firmly once she was finished. Turning to Sirius, she flicked her wand at him and hit him with a silencing charm. "I love you, Mutt. But our brother is going to talk first, and we're going to listen."

Sirius glared at her and opened and closed his mouth a few times, then relented and nodded.

"Good. Now, Regulus," she continued on, turning to face him. "There are things I can't explain to people yet. Things that it may be necessary for you to know very, very soon. You have no reason to believe me, or to trust me, but whether you take what I'm about to say seriously or not, it needs to be said."

Regulus stared her down as he took a long, slow drag of his cigarette, then waved his hand as if to say, 'go on.'

"Your life quite literally depends on your willingness to work with me. This is not a threat. I'm not saying that I or anyone else are a threat to your survival, Regulus. I am, however, telling you that you will *not* survive to the end of the school year if you cannot let me help you."

Regulus sat silently, simply staring her down for what felt like hours, though it was likely only a few minutes, and then dropped his cigarette to the floor, stomping it out with his foot. "Do I die swimming?" he asked quietly.

Hermione was home, now and he had wanted to turn around and go back home from the very instant he had walked out of her bedroom the night he left.

Now, though, it had reached a fever pitch. Finally having the answers to what the hell had been going on in his head over her had both helped and hurt the situation at hand. He knew what this was now, knew without a doubt that it was real, and that it wasn't going away.

But he *knew* now, and he knew all of those feelings and thoughts and urges weren't born of some secret wolfy desire to harm her, and he wanted to go home and just... smell her, a bit. Still, there was the whole 'stupid fucking important mission' factor, so he would have to settle for this tiny connection.

He'd been talking with a couple of the little girls who liked to busy themselves making jewelry and little baubles about having a necklace made for Hermione--and listening to the pups ooh and aahh and go all starry eyed over him getting his mate a gift, which... okay, it was kind of cute--when one of them suggested a set so they could match 'like friendship necklaces' and the idea to charm them struck him like a lightning bolt.

It was perfect. Some possessive part of him rather liked the idea of having her wear something he'd given her, so the necklace in general pleased him. But he'd been running on blind faith to convince himself she was safe, so the prospect of having a tangible way to check in was too tempting to avoid. From what he'd learned, once they'd sealed the bond, he would be able to feel her in a more tangible way, but until that point, this would help.

Well, until that point, if that point came. She would, of course, need to be amenable to the idea of being bound to a broke, moody werewolf for life, but for all his skill in the art of over-thinking himself into a panic, he just hadn't been able to bring himself to worry that she didn't want this.

She knew. She, likely, didn't know that she was his mate, as he was the damn wolf of the two and he'd only just learned that little tidbit himself. But she knew anyway. She felt it too, wanted him too. She even said she liked him, and, cheesy as it was, he was still riding the high of that little confession.

"Is the letter for that girl you mentioned?" Ford asked as they made their way from the third apparition point toward the trail that led into the village. "Karen, right? Your roommate's sister or sister's roommate or whatever?"

"Carina," Remus corrected. "Yeah. It's her birthday soon."

"She must be pretty special, Wolfpawin Wolfson."

"Aye, Generic Car Brand Name," Remus laughed. "She's uh... well, I didn't know a lot of this wolf shit, yeah?"

"Yeah..." Ford said, raising an eyebrow at him.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

"Shut up, Chevy." Remus blushed as he vanished all the balled-up bits of parchment on the cot next to him and then finished wrapping the necklace before he slid it inside of the envelope. Shawna had given him and sealed it. He stood and tucked his own necklace under his shirt—very proudly not doing a little happy dance over his excitement. Gods, he hoped she liked it.

He also hoped she didn't think he was a creep, but chances had to be taken. In lieu of being able to just fucking *go to her*, as he'd so desperately wanted to do so many times since he'd arrived, some semblance of a connection to her would have to suffice.

Stupid fucking Dumbleodore and the stupid fucking Order giving him stupid fucking important work to help protect the stupid fucking world.

They were all lucky Hermione had to live in said world, because—though he would never say it to anyone else—the fact that the war put her in danger, too, was the only thing that had kept him from going home the second he woke up after the full moon a few days ago with the knowledge of what she was to him.

He wasn't a monster. Well, he was, but he wasn't any more of a monster than usual when it came to her. This was fate. She was his, and he was going to claim the hell out of her as soon as he was done with all this... stupid fucking important shit. He was rather looking forward to the claiming aspect of the whole thing.

Remus bent down and re-tied his shoe, then tucked the letter into his satchel before he grabbed his jacket and gestured with his hand for Ford to lead the way as they exited the tent and headed into the woods.

The two were handling a supply run into a nearby village—*nearby* in that it was only a four-mile walk, three points of apparition, and then another three miles away; deep as they were in the forest. Remus was taking the opportunity to send off a letter and gift for Hermione's birthday. He wasn't sure, given the distance, if it would arrive on time, but he had to do *something* for her. He couldn't stomach the idea of the day passing by without her knowing she was on his mind, pathetic as that may make him.

He *was* pathetic, when it came to her. Desperate and yearning and soft, in addition to all the feral, manic feelings. She had this way about her, that made him feel everything, all at once, and he craved her. She was his mate, yes, but she was also so fucking intelligent and funny and kind. Even with his previous lifelong resolve to never fall for anyone, he was quite certain he would have been head over heels for her, bond or not. But the bond *did* exist, and he could feel it pulling at his chest every waking moment, beckoning him back to her. He wanted to go home. Not to his flat and his books and his records and his bed. All of those familiar comforts would be rather lovely to return to, sure. But home was no longer four walls and a row of bookshelves. Home was no longer a collection of rooms and material objects.

STEVIE_SUNSHINE

"I suppose it would be more appropriate to say you die *not* swimming." Hermione forced a small on her face, even as she felt a little twinge of pain in her chest. He nodded, then laughed and shook his head.

"You don't seem surprised," she noted.

"I have this friend. She's important. She's... well a bit of a secr, I suppose, though it's more like she just knows things sometimes. She keeps bringing up water. Telling me to stay out of the water, telling me to learn to swim. It's hard to explain," Regulus said.

Hermione gasped as the realization hit her, and she almost laughed. Of course it would be her mother. "The blonde girl you were arguing with today before Lily panicked."

"Kidnapped me," Regulus corrected.

"*Pinkie*," Hermione reiterated. "That girl was Pandora..I'm not sure what her last name would be."

"Rosier."

"Huh. I wouldn't have guessed that." Hermione sat back in her chair and nodded thoughtfully. So Luna's mother was a Rosier? As in 'pureblooded, bigoted Death eaters' Rosier. Well, that was certainly a surprise.

"Do you know Dora?" Regulus asked.

"No, I just... knew someone very similar to her." Hermione cleared her throat and glanced over at Sirius, then back to Regulus. "Let's address the parade of elephants in the room. You and Sirius hate each other. You're a Slytherin, he's a Gryffindor, so you have the house rivalry element, too. Your family tried to force him to take the mark at sixteen. He fled to James' family for protection. You stayed behind, and now, two years later, you're a marked Death eater. From what I hear, you were all in on the pureblood ideology."

"Ten points to... whatever, I don't know where you went to school."

"Not important," Hermione said swiftly. "I'd like to ask some questions. I have veritas serum, and I'm a good enough Legilimens to get inside your brain, but a bad enough one to make it hurt like a bitch. So, honesty will make this go a lot quicker."

Regulus stayed silent and looked at Sirius, studying his face for a moment, then looked back at Hermione. "You should dose me."

"Truth serum? Are you sure?"

At his nod, Hermione rose from her chair and administered a few drops of Veritas serum, then settled back in and glanced at Sirius, who gave her a reassuring nod and squeezed her arm.

"Okay then. Let's start easy. Regulus, Sirius is right here, silenced. If there is anything you need or want to say to him, now is the time."

"I hope he dies," Regulus spat, looking surprised with even himself.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

“Okay, that’s... that’s big. Why do you hope he dies?”

“Because he left me.”

Sirius lurched forward in his chair and started moving his mouth rapidly as if to argue, but Hermione held up a hand and continued speaking.

“Are you loyal to the Dark Lord?”

“Yes.”

“Do you *want* to be loyal to the Dark Lord?”

“I don’t... I don’t think I do, anymore. I used to be sure, but now I don’t know.”

“You remind me of someone I knew once,” Hermione said softly.

“Was he also unbelievably gorgeous, and ridiculously incredible?” Regulus teased.

“Gorgeous, yes. Looked quite a bit like you, if you were blonde and... pointier. He was a major prat, though. He once made a choice because he had been raised his entire life to make that choice. It was the biggest mistake he made, once it was said and done.”

“Why are you telling me this, Hermione?”

“Why did you take the Dark Mark, Regulus?”

“You ask that as if I had a choice,” Regulus scoffed, “It was my duty to the family. Sirius refused and left, and I was the heir to house Black. What else was I supposed to do? Let centuries of legacy die out? It’s not all fucking black and white. I have parents, cousins, aunts and uncles. Well, we do, I suppose. It doesn’t matter what I do or don’t believe. I had a duty to uphold, and I upheld it.”

Hermione opened her mouth to respond, but Sirius began stomping his foot and tapping her on the leg as he glared at her. With a sigh, she waved her wand and canceled the silencing charm and then, for good measure, silenced the room.

“You’re a fucking coward,” he spat at Regulus the second he regained his voice.

“Yes,” Regulus responded, then winced, likely displeased with the effects of the Veritaserum.

“You could have fucking left. You could have found a way, just like I did.”

“How?” Regulus yelled, stomping his foot to emphasize his words as he glared back at Sirius. “I’m not *you*, Sirius. I didn’t have a fucking James Potter to run to. I was sorted into Slytherin—at eleven years old, by the way, you may remember, because that’s when you decide to all but write me off as being nothing but a blood purist piece of shit before I was even old enough to comprehend what all the shit Mother and Father spewed even meant. I didn’t have a support system. I didn’t have anyone who would take me in. The only people I surrounded by were the other Slytherins, and I didn’t even have a fucking *brother* because you didn’t think twice about what you were leaving me to deal with when you left.”

“Regulus, I—”

STEVIE_SUNSHINE

Gibs looked out across the clearing for a moment in contemplation, then shoved his hands in his pocket and looked back down at Remus. “There are a number of little things that all sort of add up to the big picture. The pull to her scent. That urge to mark her, so bad you can feel it in your teeth. The list is a mile long, but all roads lead to the same point. You see her, and you know. The wolf chooses. Say you remove the idea of trying to rationalize everything you feel away and just *feel* it, it all just boils down to one thing, doesn’t it?”

One thing. Hermione was everything, in all of the best and the worst ways. She was gorgeous and mysterious and confusing and hilarious. She was a shit dancer that he never wanted to stop seeing dance. She was smart and funny, and she made him feel... everything. She made him feel like he was supposed to feel everything. He was supposed to keep her safe, to make her happy, to bite down on her fucking neck, because she was his. *This* was theirs, and gods, it was so fucking tight.

“She’s mine,” Remus barely whispered, the words rolling out of his mouth as if they had grown legs and crawled their way out of his chest without his knowledge.

“Well, there you have it, then,” Gibbs laughed.

“Bout time to go shake off these meat suits and run. We’ll talk more about this tomorrow, yeah, boy-o?” Otto added as he gestured to where the other pack members were beginning to gather near the path they’d take into the forest to prepare for their transformations.

Remus nodded lazily and rose from his chair, his feet carrying him behind the others of their own volition while his mind continued to spin. Gods, it was true. Right. The exact thing that he hadn’t been able to put into words. She belonged to him, and he to her. And yes, yes, of course, she was her own person and of course she was Sirius’ best friend and of course he didn’t dare to claim ownership over someone without getting to know them first, and of course all of the appropriate and right and just things.

And, of course, he had so many questions. There was so much to learn. He wasn’t even sure what this all meant. He just knew it... *was*.

Every breath he had taken since he’d rounded that corner and saw her perched on the couch in an oversized, threadbare jumper, all wild-hair and wide-eyes, with her lips wrapped around a cigarette, had belonged to Hermione Black.

Hermione was his *mate*, made for him, and she felt it too.



13th September 1978

“You ready, Moonrocks?” Ford asked as he poked his head inside of the tent. “Gods, how many letters did you... fail to write?”

He wasn't sure if he had been speaking aloud, or if, perhaps, his internal struggle was written across his face. Either way, the calming voice of Gibbs rang out as a hand clamped down on his shoulder.

"You wouldn't have realized it because you've never learned," Gibbs said softly. "And because you deny your wolf, pup. Did you think you wanted to hurt her?"

Remus nodded slowly, then slumped forward and pressed his palms to his eyes as he groaned.

"Yeah. I... there was this, uh... this spot on her neck, and it was just..." he trailed off and gestured to the side of his neck, then slumped back in his chair and lit another cigarette. He was keenly aware that he was going to run out at this rate, but he was also keenly aware that he didn't rightly give a fuck right now.

"Ah. Man, I still remember how bad my teeth hurt," Gibbs laughed. "Listen, pup, it's all normal. Anything you felt. Is she... you know her? She's someone good, yeah?"

"Yeah," Remus laughed. "Yeah, she's..." he trailed off and brought a hand to his chest, rubbing absently as he tried to choose his words. "Well, she's my best friend's sister and we all share a flat so it's awkward but she, um. She likes me." His voice cracked and he shook his head again as he brought his cigarette back to his mouth. Gods, he felt foolish.

"The neck thing," Otto spoke up. "That's the marking bit, I was telling you about earlier. It's... well, I've not been through it all personally, but none of it's a bad thing."

"I would imagine it was terrifying, not knowing what was happening," Shawna soothed as she took a seat in the chair next to Remus.

"Did you... um... when the... when it happened, did it happen for... for you, too, or is it just...?" He stuttered out, mentally cursing himself at his inability to form a coherent sentence. He wanted to scream, or cry, or something and he was relieved and freaking out and he was crawling out of his fucking skin, and Hermione was *his*.

His mate.

Gods, it was so right. This is what it was supposed to be. That feeling, since he'd first looked into her eyes, as if she was just so fucking *his*. All those urges and feelings, none of it had been wrong.

"When the bond snapped into place, the mate feels it as well. Although I've heard it's not as intense for the mate if they're human, it's still quite powerful. So yes, if you have met your mate, she would have at the least felt the pull. Although depending on a great number of things, she may not have recognized it for what it was either," Shawna explained softly.

"I have. Met her, I mean. I think. I don't know um... it feels as if I'm sure," Remus said. "Though I didn't know about this whole thing at the time, I couldn't really put words to how it all felt, so I suppose I could be mistaken."

"No." Regulus shook his head. "No, I'm not finished. You're this fun, hilarious, wonderful guy to all your friends. I get that. You were the best fucking brother in the world, while I had you. You were always the exact opposite of me in every way, but I idolized you. You could talk back and buck tradition, you could take the abuse, and you'd still walk around whistling with a smile on your face. I was never strong enough, I—I went along to get along, I suppose. But that didn't mean I was a lost cause. That day I sat on that stool and they put that mangy fucking hat on my head, though, did you know I *begged* it to put me in Gryffindor, so I could learn to be brave like my big brother?"

"Fuck, Reggie..." Sirius sighed as he slumped back in his chair and ran a hand through his hair. "We were kids, man, and I just... you were all 'yes, sir' and 'no, ma'am' and just... the perfect fucking son. Which our mother was all too keen on reminding me of, every chance she got. And I guess when you got sorted, I just..."

"You gave up on me," Regulus said. "I saw it in your face, Sirius. You were watching my sorting, and I kept my eyes on you the whole time because I was so anxious. You looked hopeful, like you believed I might get sorted with you too, and then the fucking hat called out Slytherin and I saw the disappointment in your eyes, for half a second. Then you turned your back to me. I was thrown into the snake pit, and I did what I do best. I followed the rules and got by. And yeah, at some point, I started to believe all the shit. Why not? This great, powerful wizard who was going to make the world a better place for people just like me? I took this mark, and I did my duty to the family, and I was fucking proud to do it. But now... they've asked things of me. I've done things and it's real and it's not... this isn't who I want to be."

Regulus sighed and flexed his jaw as he looked away, staring intently at the far wall, while Sirius stared down at his hand in his lap. Hermione gave them a few moments as she wordlessly cancelled the binding charms Lily or James had placed around Regulus—she didn't have the heart to keep him tied up after all of that, truthfully—and handed them each a cigarette.

"Thanks, Kitten," Sirius said softly.

"You have a sister now." Regulus shook his head and let out a bit of a laugh before he brought his cigarette to his mouth. "Can't believe dear old Dad got a muggle up the duff—no offense, Hermione."

"*We* have a sister now," Sirius corrected. "She's incredible. And I think I, uh... I think I'm better at being a brother now."

In lieu of a response, Regulus looked down at his left arm and flexed his hand, then laughed again.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

“Regulus,” Sirius tried again. “I was a shit kid. Growing up in that house, pitted against one another constantly, I think I was already pre conditioned to think the worst of you, and you of me. But we do have a sister now. And she’s a really important person, in a lot of really important ways. When she says she knows things, it’s because she really does. I don’t want to...” he cleared his throat and cast his eyes up to the ceiling, blinking back tears as he took a long drag of his cigarette.

“Look, Reggie. The way I see it?” Sirius rose from his chair and carried it back over to the table, then leaned against the far counter. “You’ve got the most important witch in the world to you, and the most important witch in the world to me, both telling you that this path you’re on leads to a shitty fate and a watery death, and soon. That’s enough for me. We can hash all this past shit out, we can fight and scream, but at the end of the day, I don’t rightly want you to fucking die, kid. You’re still my brother.”

“What am I supposed to do?” Regulus asked softly, the words barely audible.

“That’s easy, Reggie.” Hermione smiled as she reached forward and patted him on the knee. “You let your big sister take care of you.”



31st October, 1978

“Because I voted, and you lost,” Hermione called out as she adjusted the cloak of her costume in the mirror.

“Christmas isn’t until December,” Sirius argued.

“And? That doesn’t mean we can’t decorate early. I like the lights.”

“Fine. You don’t play fair, you know? Always using that damn sister thing against me,” Sirius grumbled. “I’ll split the difference. We can decorate midway through November.”

“Good. That’s what I wanted anyway.” Hermione said matter-of-factly as she stepped out of the bathroom and into Sirius’ room next door.

“How do I look?” she asked as she did a little spin, showing off her simple white dress and red hooded cloak

“Seriously? Little Red Riding Hood? The big bad wolf is going to *love* this when he gets home. We’ll need pictures for sure.”

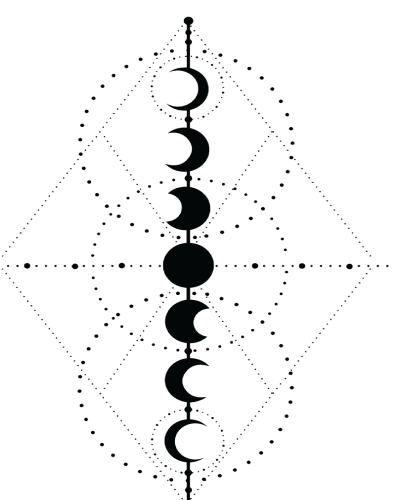
“That’s what Lily said,” Hermione replied as she looked down, smoothing the front of her dress. “I wasn’t going to dress up, but she guilted me.”

“She’s good at guilt,” Sirius responded as he sat on the edge of the bed and began to lace up his boots.

“Are you nervous, Sirius?”

“Fucking terrified,” he admitted with an easy laugh.

Interlude 2.3



Surrender

8th September 1978

Remus bolted up from his chair and swayed on his feet, then reached a hand back to brace himself on the back of the chair. He needed to move or think or... *something* Fuck, how did he not see it?

“Woah, there, pup,” Otto rushed out, stepping up to Remus’ side and guiding him back into his chair. “Did you get him too high, Bernie? You know you’ve gotta go easy on the younglings like this. The boy is all skin and bones.”

“Oh, hush, you,” Bernie laughed. “I think I just shook his little head up. Poor pup.”

“What happened, Bernie?” Shawna asked in concern.

“He didn’t know what the bond was, but judging by that reaction, I’d wager he’s already met her,” Bernie answered, sounding downright gleeful.

“Oh, Remus,” Shawna gasped.

Remus stared at the fire, the thoughts in his mind spinning by far too fast for his focus to land on a single one. A fucking mating bond, because of *course* it was a mating bond. He was smart. He knew some creatures had bonds, and he knew that he didn’t know shit about being a werewolf so he should have put it all together, really. Why didn’t he put it together?

"Wrong," Bernie repeated. "It could be argued that it is sort of the werewolf equivalent of marriage. Of course, we often hold a celebration, much like a wedding ceremony. But there's a difference, Remus, in being together and being mated. You've heard Shawna referred to as Gils' mate and assumed it was the same for everyone here?"

"Well... erm, the couples, at least, I supposed..." he brought a hand up to rub the back of his neck.

"A few of them," Bernie spoke soft and slow, as if she were trying to make sure every word landed in the deepest recesses of his mind.

"Shawna and Gils, Florence and Ray—he's my youngest pup—Cheryl and David, a few others, they're all mated pairs. The rest are just... chosen partners. Which, not to be mistaken, is a union just as honoured and cherished as the rest. But as I mentioned, nature finds a balance. Sometimes the man or woman chooses their partner. For those lucky few, like my Clarence and I, the wolf chooses."

The wolf chooses.

Remus went still and slowly brought his foot down out of the chair, a strange pricking sensation skating up his spine. "The wolf chooses?"

"It does. Surely, you've heard of mating bonds, being a Wizard? Werewolves are amongst the breeds of creatures who have fated mates, Remus. The wolf chooses," Bernie repeated, then sighed wistfully. "I saw my Clarence one day while I was walking home from the church with my little sister and our eyes locked from the opposite sides of the street and we just simply... were. Clary always said it was like everything just snapped into place."

Remus went completely still.

The world seemed to shift beneath his feet, and he felt an eerie sense of realization sinking in, as if every cell in his body had been out of place and he'd never noticed until it all snapped back together the second his eyes locked onto her deep, chocolate gaze.



*Baby I don't understand this
But that's alright
I can take a little pain
I've been winnin' and losin'*

Hermione nodded and gave him a small, sympathetic smile. She and Lily had managed to drag him—not too reluctantly, surprisingly—out to The Hourglass three times since her birthday, and he'd gotten on famously with Brad the bartender, but had, thus far, been able to keep things at arm's length because Brad was working when they went out to dance.

He and Sirius would talk and flirt a bit, but he'd get busy, tending bar or the girls would drag Sirius out to the dance floor. It had been good for Sirius, she thought, to sort of ease him into things.

Tonight was different, though. Brad had the night off and would be attending The Hourglass' first annual Halloween Bash as Sirius' very-much-a-real-date. How the first of something could be considered annual, she hadn't the slightest clue, but she digressed.

Her brother had a *daaaaattttttee*.

She was so freaking excited for him.

Hermione left the room and indulged Sirius by letting him snap a few pictures of her in her costume before she demanded he do the same—he had, aptly, chosen Han Solo, which hadn't surprised her in the least. In addition to Brad, they'd be meeting up with Lily, James and Peter, so she stashed her camera in her bag so she could get pictures of the whole group.

She was so excited to go out and celebrate with everyone, but it was yet another thing that just felt a little empty with Remus gone. If he stuck to the same timeline as he had in... well, the other timeline, he would be back in sixteen days. She could do sixteen days.

Giving her necklace a quick squeeze, she turned and followed Sirius out of the flat as they made their way to the apparition point.



"So, you really think Reggie is going to come around?" Sirius asked, showing his hands in his pockets as they walked out of the alley down the block from the bar.

After everyone had calmed down at James and Lily's a few weeks ago, Hermione had told Regulus to think things through, and left him with the promise that if he decided he wanted to make a change, they would help him.

They would have to walk a very thin line, because she was all too familiar with how much Albus Dumbledore loved to use children as pawns in wars, but she told Reggie they would go to bat with him for the Order, and she made a silent vow to protect him from any bullshit they may try to pull.

She wasn't sure if he would take her up on the offer, but as it stood, they would be waiting in Trafalgar Square at noon on Christmas Day. If he didn't show, well... she

hadn't worked that part out yet, but she was absolutely not above using one of the secret passageways into Hogwarts that few others in this time knew about to go pull a 'Lily Evans Panic Episode' and drag him out of there, kicking and screaming, to keep him safe until the war was over.

She had a long list of people to save this time around, and she was not about to fail the first.

"I think he's just a kid, like we all are, and I think there should be grace given. He deserves for us to believe in him," Hermione answered honestly. "Currently, the Order isn't recruiting child soldiers, even though Voldemort clearly has no qualms about doing so. I happen to come from a time where it's rather opposite. I only know of one person who took the Dark Mark at sixteen, whereas a whole slew of us were fighting for years before the war ended when I was eighteen. Sometimes, choice is an illusion. Other times, choice is survival. I think at the least, he deserves a chance."

"I suppose you may be right. I know you've got all that... super-badarse time traveller knowledge under your belt and all. I'm just anxious about the whole mess. Not sure if I'm more worried he won't show, or that he will show, along with a whole team of his little snake buddies ready to trap us."

"He's our brother, Sirius. I am an adopted, muggleborn time traveller and you took a chance on me. You can give him one, too. We've got our own little army too, yeah? We'll all go together."

Sirius smiled down at her and shook his head, then slung an arm over her shoulder as they continued their trek toward the bar, rounding the corner to see the others already waiting for them.

Lily and James had been engaged in a tense debate about whether to be Luke and Leia from Star Wars or Danny and Sandy from Grease for Halloween, but clearly, they had compromised—and by compromised, she meant, of course, that Lily got her way, because they were Danny and Sandy. Peter was a very muggle version of a wizard, complete with a staff, and Brad was... also Han Solo.

"Great minds, eh?" Brad said with a laugh as he gestured between himself and Sirius. Sirius blushed—honestly, he was so adorable. Hermione was reveling in all the cute little first-real-crush stuff—then nodded.

"Yeah, I suppose we should have coordinated," he said with a grin.

"It's all the same. You look amazing." Brad smiled as he held his arm out for Sirius, who mumbled out a thanks and looped his arm in his—blushing again, of course.

"They're so sweet, I'm gonna die," Lily gushed as she stepped up to Hermione's side. "And look at you! Moony would eat you alive if he were here."

way. He fidgeted in his seat, shaking the leg that still had a foot on the ground as Bernie began to speak.

"Otto and Gilsie thought you might do well with a little hope," she said softly. "While I may not be a wolf myself, I know a thing or two. I've birthed seven pups and was mated to my Clarence for over fifty years. I know, I know—I don't look a day over thirty, but it's true."

"Thirty?" Remus put a hand to his chest, feigning shock. "I would have said twenty-five."

"A charmer," Bernie laughed. "That will serve you well someday, when you find her." He looked toward the fire and took another drag of his cigarette and rolled his neck as he bounced his leg, waiting for Bernie to continue. Sure, yeah, whatever, he'd charm some girl someday. If he could ever learn how to talk to the only girl in the world he'd ever wanted to charm without his brain melting out of his ears.

"Hmmm," Bernie hummed, then continued speaking. "We all know Lycanthropy is a blood curse. Ancient magic. Magic has always had a way of finding its balance. For werewolves, the way in which it finds that balance is by bestowing a gift upon them."

"A gift?" Remus asked. He rested his elbow on his knee and chewed his nails, rolling his neck again. Soon, now. An hour or so at best before they'd all start to head out to the woods. Gils had been right, though. A little bit of peace did go a long way. For as jittery as he was, he would normally be pacing a hole through the floor at this point.

"Indeed," Bernie smiled and turned her head to scan the clearing, looking out at all the various people gathered. Remus did the same, his eyes catching on a couple who—true to Otto's word—seemed to be engaged in that kitchen-bath scenting... thing.

He could do that, he thought. He had, really. Licked and kissed and sucked on Hermione's neck, and she'd whimpered and sighed and rolled her hips and then—*fuck*, he needed another fucking cigarette.

"What do you know of the familial structure of all of this? You've heard some terminology you may not be used to, yes?" Bernie prompted.

"Well, it's nothing I've not heard before," Remus began. "I suppose it all makes sense in the context of things. I don't rightly care for women being called bitches, though to be fair, I've been raised in society and not in a pack and I'm sure that influences my opinion."

"Oh, I'm sure," she laughed. "Go on."

"There's, um... kids are pups, the... dwelling, place to live, whatever, is the den. Wives are mates, etcetera, etcetera," Remus said with a wave of his hand.

"Right. Right. Wrong," Bernie said calmly, ticking her fingers as she went. "Wrong?" Remus furrowed his brow and began to chew on his thumbnail.

haired, staring down at her like he wanted to devour her. She was very ready to get on with the devouring, as it were.

“What I meant,” he began as he brought a hand to her thigh and ran it down to her hip, “is that I can smell all of you.”

“All of me?”

“Hmmm,” he hummed again and leaned down, trailing his nose across her jaw until his lips were against her ear.

“I can smell how wet you are for me, little mate. I can smell your cunt when you’re dancing or reading. When you’re sleeping right across the fucking hall from me. Always so ready for me, aren’t you?” He punctuated his question with a roll of his hips.

She tried to respond honestly, but the ‘yes’ came out as more of a breathy, nonsensical moan and he chuckled low before he pulled back again.

“Do you have any idea how crazy you make me?” He laughed and shook his head as he sat back on his heels and ran a hand through his hair.

“Yes,” Hermione nodded, then giggled. She braced herself on her elbows and looked up at him. “You make me crazy too, Remus.”

He ran a hand over his mouth and sighed, then dropped his shoulders.

“We should talk.”

“We should.” She nodded, “There’s still a lot you don’t know.”

“I’ve gathered that.” He laughed, “And I’ve got a few pieces put together, I think. But I can’t...”

“Can’t think straight?” she asked with a giggle.

“No, I can’t fucking think straight. Look at you, spread out before me, smelling like that. The things I want to do to you...” Remus trailed off and brought his hand to her stomach, sliding it under her jumper and trailing his fingers across the skin just above the waistband of her trousers.

“We should talk.” She sucked in a breath as his feather-light touch ghosted across her stomach, causing goosebumps to spread across her skin. “We should take hours to have this big conversation—it is big. And important.”

“Oh? I’d imagine it is important.” Remus fisted the hem of her jumper in his hand and slowly—tortuously slowly—began to push it up her stomach.

“I have scars,” she whispered, suddenly feeling self-conscious.

“I have more.” He smiled lazily as his hand continued its journey, pushing her jumper up until it reached her collarbone. She lifted up as he pulled it over her head and then, feeling emboldened, because how could she not when he looked at her like that, she reached around to her back and unhooked her bra, then slid it off and tossed it to the floor.

“Fuck,” Remus rasped out, half groan, half growl, as he looked down at her breasts. Hermione rose to her knees in front of him and grasped the bottom of his shirt, pulling it over his head and throwing it aside, and they knelt, bare chested, staring at one another for a brief moment before she spoke again.

“Time travel!”

“Fuck.” He repeated. He reached out and trailed his fingers over her shoulder and across her collarbone. “I bit you, before, didn’t I? You already smelled like me when we met. And your arm... I touched it, the night I left, when I brought the letter to your room, and we both reacted. I didn’t know at the time why but it’s... a mating bond thing, for the scar to... feel good, for both of us.”

She nodded as she ran her hand over a long scar that ran sideways from his ribs down to his naval.

“In 1998. I was dying. You bought me time.”

“I was older, then.” He brought his hand up to the side of her neck. “I didn’t mark you, though. I would have been... thirty-eight?”

“Mmmm,” she hummed, running her hand up his chest. “You were thirty-three, when we met. You never told me about the bond. I was—you were my Defence professor.”

“I was well behaved, then,” Remus laughed and shook his head, then moved to cup both her breasts in his hands, brushing his thumbs over the nipples. Hermione whimpered, her fingers digging into his shoulder. “A professor, hmmm? Were you hot for teacher, little mate?”

“Uh-huh. Thought you were...” she trailed off and moaned softly as he kneaded her breasts. “So smart. So dreamy.”

“Why are you here? Do...” he trailed off for a moment and tore his gaze away from her chest to look back into her eyes. “Do you get to stay? Are you going to leave me?” he asked, his voice soft and vulnerable.

“Never. Never, Remus. I swear it,” he told him, tears stinging in her eyes as she leaned forward and pressed a kiss to his shoulder. “The war. It stopped, but it stopped for all the wrong reasons. It started again, and I was a central component because of who my best friend was. A lot of bad things happened. Everybody died. You... you died. It was just Sirius and I left. Tomorrow, I’ll tell you everything. But I came back to set things right with the war, and to help my brother, and because I...”

Hermione took a deep breath and pulled back, cupping his face in her hands as she continued, “You’d been... things happened, and you were alone for years until you met me. But it wasn’t... good, because of my age. I met you in 1993. I was thirteen. You

knew me for five years and could never tell me who I was to you. And then you died. I couldn't let that be your story. I couldn't let that be all you had."

Remus pressed his lips together in a thin line and released his hold on her breasts. Hermione gasped, taken aback, but before she could spiral in her surety that he was going to shove her away and run screaming, his mouth was on hers again. They tumbled back onto the bed and he settled between her legs, their bare chests pressed together as he dove into her mouth like he wanted to drown in her and Gods, she *was* drowning in him, and she never wanted to come up for air.

He was growing again, a low animalistic rumble vibrating in his chest as the stimulation against her nipples sent shockwaves of pleasure across her skin, and she moaned and rocked her hips as he broke the kiss and stared down at her—golden eyed and feral.

"Fuck," she breathed out, her core clenching at the sight. He closed his eyes and shook his head, then looked back down at her, emerald meeting amber once more, before he sighed and dropped his forehead to hers.

"You came back for me," he whispered. "Well, to end a bloody war, which is, admittedly, a much bigger deal, and for your brother, but still, you..."

"I came back for you. I wanted you to have something good, Remus. I... I wanted this bond to be a good thing for you."

"You'll explain everything later?" he asked, mirroring her statement from earlier.

"Yeah. I... Remus, I want this. I want you. I know there's so much to talk about, but I don't want to stop."

Remus pulled back, rising to his knees again as he trailed his eyes down her body and back up. "If we do this, Hermione... You're my mate. You understand what that means, right? I'll want to mark you, I—*fuck*, I need to mark you. You make my fucking teeth hurt." He laughed and shook his head, "But werewolves mate for life, Cariad. Are you sure you're ready for that?"

Hermione giggled, then nodded. "I know what it means. I know it's for life. And respectfully, Remus, I have traveled twenty fucking years through time to be where we are right now, so if you don't seal this bond, I'm going to start... I don't know. I'll torture you."

"Oh? Torture, huh?" he asked, a bemused smile playing on his lips as he ran his hands up her sides.

"Yep. I'm talking totally barbaric. Medieval torture tactics. I'll come roll around in your bed three times a day, so everything smells like me. I'll... start wearing vests around the house so you have to see my neck all the time. Tiny little shorts too, just for fun. And I'll... complain. A lot."

He growled and broke the kiss, pulling back just enough to look in to her eyes and he held her there, locked in a heated stare with a predatorial smile playing on his lips as he raised his leg and braced his knee against the door and used his grip on her hip to pull her forward, the new position leaving her angled so her shoulders were pressed against the wood behind her.

He moved the hand gripping her hip back and forth, grinding her against his thigh and continued to hold her gaze as he released his grip on her hair and began to trail his hand down her neck, across her collarbone, and between her breasts, descending down her stomach until he'd reached the hem of her jumper.

Hermione moaned and rolled her hips as she felt heat begin to pool in her lower stomach. Gods, she felt like she was on fire and he just kept fucking staring at her. She'd always hated being watched. Something about being the center of attention always made her hands shake and her stomach roll, but she'd grown rather fond of the way Remus watched her. Had missed it, even, in the time he'd been away.

His eyes on her made her feel safe. Seen. Wanted. But this, now? Those green eyes she'd missed for months staring back into hers as she rode his thigh, and he began to slide his hand under her jumper? She felt fucking powerful.

"Remus," she whispered, sucking in a breath as his calloused fingers slid up her stomach.

"Did you know that I can smell you?" he asked, sliding his fingers higher, until he was teasing the skin just below her left breast.

"Yeah," she licked her lips and arched up into his touch. "Like Christmas."

"Mmm. Nadolig," he confirmed with a grin. He pulled his hand away and she gasped, mourning the loss of contact, but before she could react, he reached down and grabbed her other thigh, lifting her so that both legs were wrapped around his waist and then turned them around to walk toward the bed.

"Christmas fucking morning. Such a sweet little gift." He leaned in and ran his nose along the side of her neck, inhaling her scent, and then growled as he lowered her to the bed and hovered over her, caging her head between his forearms as her legs remained hitched up around his hips.

"But that's not what I was referring to." He descended on her again, devouring her mouth. She felt as if she might choke on his tongue. She also felt as if she would die if she didn't.

Remus nipped at her bottom lip, and she gasped and rolled her hips. He snarled and pulled back, his chest heaving as he rose to his knees and stared down at her. She released her hold on his hips and let her legs fall to the bed and took a moment to appreciate the view. Gods, he was perfect, kneeling over her, all breathless and messy-

undoubtedly owed at least in part to the magic of the bond, simply hearing Remus call her that seemed to lock some integral piece of her existence into place.

There had always been something off, for Hermione. Long before she became a time traveller, before the battle or the night at Shell Cottage, before she'd even met Remus in her third year, before she even learned magic existed, she had always just been... off. From as early as she could recall, she had this inexplicable sense of knowing that she belonged somewhere she hadn't found yet.

She thought, in her nearly-twelve-year-old folly, that she'd found that place when she discovered she was a witch. She thought she'd found it when she first arrived at Hogwarts. She'd been sure the first time she'd stepped into The Burrow. She thought it over and over again with Ron and Harry, and she thought it, again, while lying on the floor of the sitting room of 12 Grimmauld Place with Sirius and Ron. And she'd been sure, once more, the night of her birthday as she'd laced up her skates, that she was where she belonged.

None of these things were wrong, not entirely. But this, right here, with him? This was it, all along. She didn't understand every facet of the bond, wasn't even sure if she cared to. All she knew was that for her entire life, she had belonged somewhere she couldn't put a name to, and Remus fucking Lupin had just whispered that name against her lips.

"Finally." The word came out nearly a whimper, and she felt tears of relief spring to her eyes, but then he pressed his lips to hers and nothing else mattered. She'd fought a war, he'd fought two. She'd traveled twenty years through time, he'd spent twelve years in solitude. They'd both lost everyone they'd love, they had fought and survived and lived and, in his case, even fucking died to get here, and now some of that hadn't happened yet and some of it never would but none of it mattered because they were here, and she was his.

Finally.

Hermione parted her lips as Remus licked his way into her mouth and their tongues danced together, hard and demanding. He fisted his hand in her hair and tilted her head back to deepen the kiss as she wrapped her arms around his back and grasped the fabric of his shirt in her hands, desperately clinging to him for fear of breaking the moment. Gods, she felt as if she'd stop breathing if he stopped kissing her —though to be fair, she wasn't sure if she was even breathing at all.

Remus shifted and nudged her leg apart with his knee, and she moved on instinct, hiking one leg over his hip to give him better access as he pressed his thigh against her core. He tightened his hold on her hair and kissed her harder as he gripped her hip with the other hand and she began to rock against him, moaning into his mouth.

"Bringing out the big guns, aren't we?" He quirked an eyebrow at her as he brought his hands back to her hips. "You're sure?"

"Remus, *please*."

He threw his head back and groaned, then leaned down and pressed a chaste kiss to her lips.

"I could listen to you beg for hours," he whispered. He kissed her again, then began trailing soft, open-mouthed kisses over her chin, down the column of her throat, and to her collar bone, where he paused to suck her skin into his mouth.

Hermione rolled her hips, grinding against him through their clothing as he continued his descent, his mouth moving over the swell of her breast until he finally, finally cupped her breast in his hand and sucked her nipple into his mouth, rolling his tongue over the sensitive peak.

She moaned and latched on to the back of his head, burying her fingers in his hair as he trailed his free hand down to grip her hip and began grinding back against her, meeting her thrusts until she could feel her arousal soaking through her jeans. Remus looked up to meet her eyes, his mouth still wrapped around her breast, and she gasped. "Godsdamn, I think that's the hottest thing I've ever seen," she whimpered.

He laughed, releasing her nipple and then placed a soft kiss in the valley between her breasts before he propped his chin on her chest and reached up to brush the curls off of her face.

"You're so beautiful," he said softly. "My mate."

"Say it again. Please." She whispered.

Remus groaned and buried his face in her chest, his body shaking with laughter. "You're going to kill me if you keep begging so sweetly, little mate." He grinned at her, then began kissing his way down her stomach.

"Cariad," he whispered, as he trailed his tongue along the bottom of her ribcage until he reached her side.

"Cymar. Mate." He slowly kissed down her side until his mouth reached her hip.

"Mine," he growled, sinking his teeth into her hip —not enough to break the skin, but fuck, she wished he would.

"Remus, please," she whimpered.

"I know, Cariad. I've got you," he vowed against her skin as he dragged his mouth from her hip to ghost his lips along the skin just above the waistband of her trousers. He pulled back and looked up at her again as he brought his hands down to her button and she nodded, blushing lightly.

"I—I've never done that. Or... well, anything," she admitted softly.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

He smiled, a proud, triumphant grin. “All for me, then, hm?” he asked as he unzipped her trousers and began to work them down her hips. He rose back to his knees as he pulled them off of her legs, then hooked his fingers in the sides of her knickers. He paused for a moment and closed his eyes, seeming to deflate a bit, and then looked back at her, open and vulnerable.

“I’m a virgin, too,” Remus whispered.

“Good!”

“Good?” he asked, laughing softly as he began to tug her knickers over her hips and down her thighs.

“We’ll learn together, then,” she declared. She lifted her feet so he could slide her knickers off the rest of the way and then sat up, her hands shooting to his waistband as she began to fumble with his belt buckle, clumsily undoing it and shoving it to the side before she unbuttoned his trousers and began to shove them down his hips along with his pants.

Her hand caught on his wand in his pocket and she gasped and looked up at him.

“Shit. Silencing charms.”

Remus nodded and scrambled for his wand, casting a quick muffliato and locking the door and then he spun it in his hand a few times as he looked down at her.

“Fuck. I just realized I don’t remember the contraceptive charm. I don’t suppose I paid much attention to the reproductive unit of charms class. Kind of... never thought I’d do this,” he admitted sheepishly.

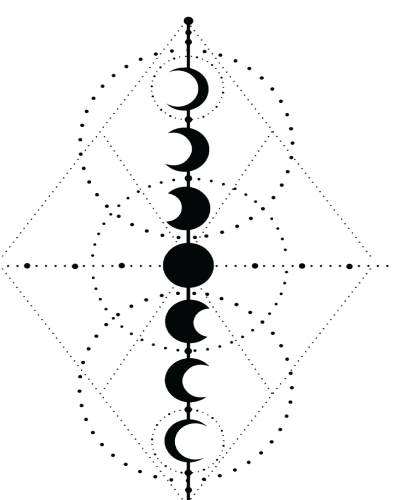
“It’s Nulla Conceptio. You just have to press the tip right here.” She pointed just below her stomach, then watched as he followed her instruction. A wave of warmth settled underneath her skin as a faint pink glow rippled across her stomach from hip to hip before it disappeared and she nodded up at him. “I’m on the potion, too. Lily made me after I got your letter. I, um... I told her I’m your mate. Sirius knows as well.”

“Good. On all fronts. I’m glad they know, but I’m also glad we’re... doubly protected because we have to be logical about things but, fuck, Hermione, this bond... you have no idea how badly I want to...”

“Yeah.” She nodded, swallowing roughly, “Me too. But. Logic. I’d imagine we will have to make a conscious effort to prioritize logic over instinct often but right now...”

“Right now.” He pushed on her shoulder, showing her lightly, and she fell back against the bed giggling as he settled between her thighs again. “Right now, you’re mine.”

He placed his hands on her knees and slid them down her thighs, pushing her legs apart as he moved to lay on his stomach, bringing him eye level with her center. Hermione bit her lip and cast her eyes up to the ceiling, suddenly feeling very aware of the fact



Love Her Madly

14th November 1978

My Mate,

The words sunk into Hermione’s brain, wrapped themselves around her veins, and soothed something deep within her that she had never been able to put words to before. This was it. THE moment. The absence she’d felt since she fell to the floor of that corridor the moment that Remus took his last breath.

She had thought, or at least, assumed without applying much thought to the concept at all, that fully sealing the bond would soothe the ever-present ache she’d grown so familiar with.

Life had been chipping away at it, piece by piece. First, with her acknowledgement of the bond. Then when she accepted Harry’s magic during the adoption ritual, and finally, when their eyes locked and the bond snapped into place all over again, the ache had lessened more and more to the point that it had become so bearable she barely noticed it.

Now, though—here, pressed against the door of his bedroom as those words flowed from his lips to her ears - it felt as if the ache had never existed at all. In some way,

STEVIE_SUNSHINE

that the lights were on and his face was right there. She had never even looked at... all of that so closely, let alone anyone else.

Oh Gods, she thought, what if it's weird or funny looking or smells bad? I showered this morning, but that was hours ago, I hadn't expected him to be home yet so what if I didn't wash well enough or —

She would have, undoubtedly, spiraled further, but she found herself incapable of thinking straight when he pressed his nose directly against her clit and inhaled, deeply and audibly, then made that damned, incredible, half groan, half growl sound again. Remus must have sensed her tension, because he brought a hand up to her hip and began rubbing slow, soothing circles with his thumb.

"Look at me, Carriad," he said softly. "Don't hide from me. I want to see your eyes. We're learning together, right?"

"Right. Together." She looked back down at him, a pulling sensation moving deep within her core when she took in the sight of him with his head between her thighs while he looked up at her with pure, unfiltered desire.

"Good girl." He flashed her a triumphant grin and then sunk his mouth down on her, licking slowly all the way up until his tongue found her clit. She gasped and he let out a small hum, then circled her clit again as he studied her face to gauge her reaction.

She sucked in air through her teeth and then moaned and nodded, and he continued his ministrations, lavng at her clit as he slid his hand up her thigh and ran his fingers through her slick heat. He dipped the tip of his middle finger inside of her and she gasped again, then whimpered as he sunk it in farther.

He found his rhythm then, sucking her clit into his mouth at the same time that he crooked his finger up to press against the front wall of her cunt and she moaned loudly, finding herself more grateful than ever before that silencing charms existed.

"Oh Gods, Remus, just like that," she begged. She reached down and buried her fingers in his hair, grasping on to him as he slid a second finger inside of her and repeated the motion, bending his fingers over and over while he licked and sucked on her clit, working her into a frenzy.

She could feel her release building low in her stomach, coiling tighter and tighter with every pulse suction from his mouth, every bend of his fingers. Her skin felt flushed and tight, every nerve ending in her body acutely aware of the impending explosion as she continued to climb higher and higher.

Remus was devouring her, moaning and groaning around her clit as he fingered her, as if he were the one being driven to the brink. Hermione threw her head back, her back arching off of the bed, and he banded his free arm over her waist, pinning her hips in place as he continued to feast on her cunt like she was his last meal.

“Remus, Remus, I can’t—oh my Gods,” she whimpered, clamping her thighs tight around his head. He growled into her, his teeth scraping against her clit just barely, and the coil snapped. Her thighs began to shake as her stomach tightened and her cunt clamped down on his fingers and then began to spasm, clenching and unclenching rapidly as she came, and came, and came, wave after wave of pleasure so blinding it was nearly painful coursing through her veins as she screamed his name, shrill and high, positive that she sounded like a woman gone mad but too far gone to care.

Remus groaned again, releasing his hold on her clit and yanking his fingers free as he began to lick her all over, sloppy and frenzied as if he were trying to lap up every drop of her release and she collapsed back on the bed, her stomach and thigh muscles spanning at random from the force of her orgasm as she tried to catch her breath and he just...

Kept.

Fucking.

Going.

“Remus,” she whined, pushing against his forehead and letting out a soft, incredulous laugh. “Too much. Too sensitive. I died, I think.”

He whined back, but reluctantly pulled away and grinned at her. His hair was a mess from her hands, his face was glistening, wet, all covered in her. It was provocative, and filthy, and so fucking perfect.

“Mae’n ddrwg gen i, Cariad,” he said as he placed a kiss on her thigh and rose back to his knees. “Rwy’n hoffi hymny Gallwn i foddi yn y cunt bach pert hwn trwy’r dydd fycein.”

“I have no idea what you just said.” Hermione laughed. “You’re going all... Welsh.”

“Ydw i?” he said, cocking his head, then laughed at himself. “I meant, Am I. Sorry. I do that. I said...”

He began, leaning in and planting his mouth above her navel, speaking against her skin as he kissed his way up her body.

“I’m sorry, love.” He nipped at her collar bone, then licked his way up her neck to nibble at her jaw.

“Then, I said, I like that,” he continued, licking his way into her mouth as he ran his hand down to her thigh and spread her legs wider, nestling between them. He pulled back to look at her and brushed her hair back from her face, keeping his hand on the top of her head as he moved his hand from her thigh back down to her core.

“And I said... I could drown in this pretty little cunt all fucking day.” He sucked her bottom lip into his mouth as he dipped a finger back inside of her and she sucked a breath in through her teeth, then sighed.

“Fuuuuckkk,” he groaned as he squeezed his eyes shut and huffed out a stuttered breath, then looked back down and crooked his finger beneath her chin to tilt her head back. “Do you have any idea what it does to me to know that you’ve been here in my space, in my bed, waiting for me?”

“Um... Good things, I hope?”

Remus laughed and leaned in to press a kiss against her forehead, wrapping his arms around her and pulling her against his chest as he responded, “Aye, Cariad. Good things.”

He pulled back to look into her eyes once more and let out a breathy sort of half-laugh, half-sigh. “There are so many things I want to say to you, Hermione. So many questions I want to ask, and this is all... it’s a big fucking deal. I’ve replayed the way this conversation would go in my head for two months, but now I’m home, and you’re safe, and you’ve been sleeping in my fucking bed, and I can’t think straight.”

“I can’t think straight either,” she admitted. “There is a lot to say, and we’ll say it all, Remus. But right now, I just... I just think there’s only one thing that matters.”

He nodded, his throat bobbing as he swallowed, and he leaned in closer, running his thumb over her lip. “Only one thing that matters. Only ever you.” he said reverently as he closed the distance between them and whispered against her lips.

“My mate.”



But what a fool believes, he sees

No wise man has the power to reason away

What seems to be is always better

Than nothing at all

Hermione nodded and took a step closer. “I *never* break a super promise.”

Remus let out a soft laugh, then brought his hand up to cup her jaw and stroked his thumb over her lip before he closed the distance until their faces were only a few centimetres apart.

“Did you know?” he asked, his voice a low, desperate whisper.

Hermione looked back up into his eyes and nodded, just once, and Remus growled softly, low in his throat. He took another step, his chest pressing against hers, then bent his head and buried his face in her neck.

“Did she know what?” James asked curiously.

Hermione shot her hand out to silence him, then brought it to the back of Remus’s head and threaded her fingers through the hair at the nape of his neck, cradling him to her while he drew in her scent. Tears pooled in the corner of her eyes — she wasn’t sure if it was from relief or anticipation or what, but they were there, all the same — and she heard Remus let out a shaky laugh before he pulled back and took her face in both of his hands.

He pressed his forehead to hers, locking eyes with her once more, and whispered, his breath ghosting across her lips.

“*Mine.*”

“Yours,” she whispered back.

Remus groaned and cursed under his breath, some string of Welsh she couldn’t be bothered to try to decipher, and then, before she even had time to react, he reached down and grabbed her by the arse with both hands, lifting her off of the ground.

Hermione gasped and wrapped her legs around his hips as he turned and headed down the hall toward his bedroom without another word, ignoring James’ confused questioning and Lily’s giggles. Sirius, the good brother that he was, had been quite pointedly ignoring the entire exchange, but he and Lily both knew, so they could fill James in. She was a bit preoccupied.

They reached the bedroom and Remus flung the door shut behind him, then turned around and pressed her against it, her legs still wrapped tight around his hips. He went to speak, but paused and sniffed the air, then stepped back and lowered her to the floor.

Remus turned around and surveyed the room, then spun back around to face her, stalking toward her and crowding her against the door. He placed his forearm against the wood just above her head and looked down at her, cocking his head as he asked, “Hermione, how long have you been sleeping in my bed?”

“Umm... since about a month after you left,” she admitted sheepishly. “James and Lily needed to stay for a bit when the cottage flooded, so I took your room and let them have mine. And then I just... didn’t want to leave.”

“Please, Remus, I need you,” she begged. She reached down and slipped her fingers beneath the waistband of his trousers and resumed her earlier efforts, shoving them down over his hips and arse.

“So impatient, little mate,” Remus laughed into her mouth. He rose off of her and pulled his trousers and pants off the rest of the way, tossing them carelessly to the floor and then settled back on his knees between her legs as he reached down and fisted his cock in his hand.

Hermione settled back against the bed and let her eyes trail down his chest, past the scars she so desperately wanted to kiss and touch and run her tongue over, slowly, for hours — later, she decided. They’d have time — down to where he was slowly running his hand up and down his hardened length and —

“No,” Hermione rushed out, shaking her head as she lifted herself up on her elbows, her eyes still trained on his movements.

“Huh?”

“That’s not... Remus that can’t go in there, are you crazy?”

Remus blinked at her in stunned silence for a moment, as if he couldn’t process her words, then looked down at himself and laughed. “I mean, I’m as new at this as you are, Carriad, but I’m pretty sure *this* going in *there* is how the whole thing works.”

“Well yeah but it’s... is it supposed to be so... much?”

“I haven’t exactly made a habit of measuring other cocks, Hermione,” he laughed.

“Stop laughing at me,” she pouted, then groaned. “I don’t have a frame of reference either, but that thing looks like you’re going to kill me.”

“I suppose it’s a good thing you already died when my mouth was on your cunt then, yeah?”

“Remus!” Hermione whined, rolling her eyes.

“Okay, okay, I’m sorry.” He chuckled and held his hands up in supplication. He leaned in and propped himself above her on one elbow as he cupped her cheek with his free hand.

“I’ve got you, Hermione. It’s me and you, okay?” he murmured, brushing his thumb over her bottom lip. “We’ll take this nice and slow, I promise. If you need to stop, you just say the word.”

“No,” she shook her head. “No, I don’t want to stop, I’m just... nervous.”

“Me too,” he confessed. He leaned in and kissed her, soft and slow, over and over until she felt herself relax underneath him, and then he sighed in contentment and pulled away to smile down at her. “I would never harm you, Carriad. I can’t promise it won’t hurt a bit at first. But you’re my mate, aren’t you? We’re made for this. You can take me.”

"Okay." She nodded, "I'm ready. We can do this."

"Good girl." He rasped out, leaning in to kiss her once more before he pulled down and took himself in his hand, lining the thick, broad head of his cock up with her entrance. "Put your hands on my shoulders and squeeze as hard as you need to. If you need me to stop, just say the word, yeah?"

Hermione nodded and braced her hands on his shoulders, and they locked eyes as he took a deep, shuddering breath and slowly began to push forward, stretching her as he began to fill her. Hermione tensed and gripped his shoulders tighter as she whimpered at the intrusion.

"Just breathe for me, Cariad. I've got you," he cooed, his voice strained as the tendons and muscles in his neck and shoulders flexed from the effort of holding himself back.

She nodded, drawing in a deep breath and exhaling slowly as he sunk further into her. She felt a sharp pinch as he breached her hymen and she cried out, digging her nails into his shoulders as tears sprang to her eyes.

"Remus, it hurts," she whimpered.

"Shh, I know, I know. That was the worst of it, Cariad. You're doing so well. Just a little more, okay?" he murmured softly as he brushed her hair out of her face again and rested his hand atop her head, still staring into her eyes.

"Okay," she whispered, relaxing her grip on his shoulders. He thrust again, filling her deeper until he was fully sheathed inside of her, bottoming out against her cervix. They both froze, their chests heaving.

She could feel him everywhere.

It was unlike anything she had ever imagined. She felt like she was being stretched so wide around him, could practically feel him in her stomach, so deep and overwhelming and fucking *perfect*. Painful, yes, but an interesting sort of pain, more pressure and fullness than an actual ache.

He stayed perfectly still, giving her time to adjust to the feeling of him inside of her as he leaned in and began peppering soft kisses all over her jaw and the side of her face, whispering praise and encouragement as he waited for her to adjust.

"So perfect, Hermione," Remus rasped as he ran his nose along her jaw. "You feel so perfect. You're taking me so well, Cariad. Such a good little mate."

Hermione sighed in contentment as she relaxed beneath him, and she tilted her hips, rocking them experimentally and sucked in a breath at the feeling of his cock retreating and then sinking back inside of her.

"That's it," Remus praised. He brought his hands down to her hips and began to move in slow, shallow strokes. Hermione spread her legs farther, running one hand down to his back and clinging to him as he thrust inside of her.

"You two can complain all you want amongst yourselves, but I'll hear no more of your Christmas decorating slander," she admonished them as she continued to decorate. "Christmas is my favourite."

"Mine, too."

Hermione stilled, her heart leaping into her throat as her eyes fluttered closed and she drew in a deep, ragged breath through her nostrils.

Chocolate.

Coffee.

Old Books.

"Remus," she breathed out as she spun around, nearly dropping the box of ornaments. Lily darted forward and took the box from her hands, but Hermione barely noticed, as she was far too busy staring at him while he lingered in the doorway that led from the foyer to the living room.

That was, after all, what they did. Lingered and stared.

He was *home*.

Thank Merlin.

She knew, of course, there was a chance that his time with the pack could wind up being shorter or longer than it had been the first time around, given that she could hardly predict the ripple effect of her presence in this timeline. Still, given that he'd been gone so long already, she hadn't expected him home until at least the sixteenth, when his journals showed that he had returned before.

Gods, she had missed him, and now he was here, and just as climbable as ever, and he was *home* and he *knew*. She stood rooted in her spot as they stared at one another, eyes locked together, for what felt like hours, but could have been a matter of mere seconds.

"Moony!" James called out as he leapt from the couch and bounded across the room to hug Remus. Remus patted him on the back a few times and then wrenched himself from James' grasp, looking back at Hermione as he studied her face intently.

He studied her often, or, had, prior to his leaving. There was the staring, and the watching, and many other looks, but this one was the studying, as if he were trying to learn her. He took a few steps into the room and nodded hello to the others as he set his bag down in the striped chair, then pivoted and walked toward Hermione with slow, purposeful steps, stopping an arm's length away.

"Hi," she said softly as she smiled up at him.

"Hi," he echoed. He reached up and twisted a curl around his finger, the corner of his mouth tilting up into a lazy, contented smile.

"You came back."

"You're here."

it off of one of the two Han Solos, she surmised. She'd tried to tell Sirius Han didn't carry a lightsaber, since he wasn't a Jedi, but Sirius had merely waved a hand and argued that it made him look cool.

She looked around for a moment and then nudged Lily aggressively with her elbow to get her to look at the sight she'd discovered—the aforementioned two Han Solos, making out against the brick wall of the building.

"Oooooohhh," Lily called out teasingly. Sirius shot out his middle finger over Brad's shoulder and continued kissing him for a moment, then broke away with a smile and laced his fingers together with Brad's as they turned around to face them.

"We, uh..." Sirius began, but trailed off and ran his hand through his hair. He glanced up at Brad, who nodded down at him in encouragement.

Sirius lifted their hands up for all to see and said, in a proud, radiant voice, that made Hermione certain she would have traveled through time every day for the rest of her life in order to have this, to have been able to see him have this.

"We're going steady," Sirius announced proudly. Hermione squealed and launched herself into his arms as the others erupted into a chorus of over-the-top cheers and whistles.

"Love you twice, Mutt," she told him as she wrapped her arms around him and squeezed as tightly as she could. Sirius breathed out a small laugh and hugged her back.

"Love you twice, Kitten," he dropped his voice to a low whisper and leaned in closer.

"You did it. I didn't have to wait this time."



14th November 1978

"I still can't believe you let her talk you into decorating so early," James said to Sirius as he leaned back against the couch and propped his feet on the coffee table.

"Well, you've got another thing coming," Lily shook the ornament she was holding at him, "Because I've decided we're getting a tree and decorating this weekend. Everyone can come round for cocoa and egg nog. We'll have to see which night works for Brad and Peter. I want everyone there so we can go all out now that the cottage might not fall apart at the first gust of wind."

James and Sirius groaned, and Hermione laughed, shaking her head as she balanced a box of ornaments on one hand while she placed them on the tree with the other, humming and swaying along to Sinatra crooning *Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas* from the record player.

"You feel so good, Remus, she whimpered. He continued to drive into her, over and over, maddeningly slow as his fingers dug into her hips so hard she was sure she'd have bruises. Fuck it. She was a witch. Dittany existed. Though maybe she'd keep them. She thought she might like that.

"You're so fucking tight," Remus growled, his voice strained as he gripped her harder, still thrusting slowly and evenly. "Gods, Hermione, you're incredible."

"Remus," she moaned his name and looked back into his eyes, then trailed her hand from his shoulder to his face and cupped his jaw as she leaned up and kissed him, fast and rough, their teeth knocking together as he continued to move inside of her.

"Fucking hell, Hermione, I can't—" He pulled back from the kiss and closed his eyes, drawing in a slow breath through his nose as he shook his head. His fingers dug into her hips even harder, and his muscles flexed.

"Remus, look at me," she whispered. He snapped his eyes open, a brief flash of gold passing through them as he looked back at her. He looked almost pained, and something inside of her felt equally thrilled at the effect she was having on him, flattered that he was trying so hard to go easy on her, and angry at the sight of him looking so damn tortured.

"I can take it," she told him, her voice full of determination. "Never hold back with me. Whatever you need, love. It's yours. Tell me who I am and take what you need."

Remus growled and crashed his mouth to hers, then pulled back, hovering with just the tip of his cock inside of her. "My Mate," he groaned into her mouth. "Are you sure, Cariat? I don't want to hurt you or..."

"Shut up and fuck me," she demanded. She ran her hand down to his arse and shoved, hard, sending him plunging into her, fast and hard, as they both moaned.

"Fuck, Hermione, you drive me crazy."

"This is ours, right?" Hermione asked softly. "You and me. I am your *mule*. Stop holding back and claim me. I won't break."

"Famous last words," Remus teased. He sat back on his knees and dug his hands in to her hips as he began to move, his arm muscles flexing as he pulled her back on to his cock with every thrust of his hips, filling her hard and deep, over and over again until she felt herself begin to climb, sweat pooling between her breasts and beading on the back of her neck.

"You look so fucking perfect spread out on my cock, Cariat." He growled low in his throat, staring down at where they were joined as he fucked her harder. He ran one hand up her stomach and cupped her breast, kneading and squeezing the flesh roughly and rolling the nipple between his fingers.

"Please don't stop, Remus," Hermione begged, rocking her hips to try to meet his thrusts. "You feel so fucking good."

"Never," he vowed. He settled back on top of her and ran his hand from her breast to her side, splaying his fingers over her rib cage and holding her there as his other hand remained on her hip.

He devoured her mouth again, rough and messy as he continued to snap his hips, setting a brutal pace that had her whole body bouncing with every thrust, and then he broke the kiss and looked down at her; his eyes now completely gold.

"Oh my *Gods*, I'm so close," she moaned, digging her nails into his back.

"Tell me you're sure," he demanded, his voice rough and guttural. "Tell me I can."

"I'm sure. Please, I'm sure."

"Yeah, you fucking are." Remus grinned and leaned in, placing a soft kiss on her jaw and then working his way down the side of her neck, alternating between gentle bites and sucking hard until he made his way to the juncture where her neck met her shoulder. He sucked in a long, steady breath through his nose, still thrusting into her rapidly, and then groaned.

"Please, I'm yours, Remus. Please," Hermione begged, rocking her hips as she clung to him, her nails raking down his back in her desperation to, somehow, drag her even closer.

"Mine," Remus snarled as he sunk his teeth into her flesh.

Hermione had expected the bite to hurt, at worst, or to be uncomfortable at best. What she hadn't anticipated was for it to be the single most incredible thing she'd ever felt in her entire fucking life. She screamed, falling apart immediately as an orgasm crashed through her with such force that her entire body began to shake. Her cunt spasmed around him, gripping him so tight she felt as if they'd be locked together forever, and he groaned as he broke his hold on her shoulder and began to lap at the wound.

"Fuck, Hermione, I can feel you squeezing my cock," he rasped, thrusting into her even harder as she continued to fall apart around him. "Such a good little mate, fucking drenching me with this tight little cunt."

"Remus I can't... fuck, I feel so fucking full," she moaned, her body jerking as she came down from her high. She felt herself relax around him as his thrusts became erratic and unmeasured, stretching her wider with every movement.

"I'm gonna come, I can't... fffcin uffern... fucking hell, you're gripping me so tight, Cariatid," Remus growled. He thrust again once, twice, then threw his head back and groaned that deep, chest-rumbling growl as she felt him begin to throb, spilling his release inside of her, the action somehow stretching her even wider around him.

anyone at school and hadn't sense, and of course, there was the whole little mate thing, so she really had no reason to feel threatened.

And she didn't feel threatened. She just... didn't quite like the idea that this woman was looking for him and asking about him and thinking about him. Bitch.

"Sirius and James just stepped outside, and Remus is away dealing with some family stuff," Lily said as she leaned back against the bar.

"Oh, that poor thing. You simply *must* tell him I'm thinking of him. I'd love to get together for lunch sometime, but he seems to be rather elusive since we left Hogwarts."

"Pretty sure he was eluding you in school, too," Peter mumbled against the mouth of his beer bottle.

Hermione bit back a laugh, but Lily snorted.

"Yeah, well, Remus has been a bit preoccupied," Lily told Divinia with an easy smile, then turned to Hermione and clasped her hand on her arm. "Oh! Speaking of! Hermione, did I leave my blue bag in you and Remus' bedroom the other day?"

"*Their* bedroom?" Divinia sputtered.

"Oh, you hadn't heard?" Lily asked innocently as she turned back to Divinia and smiled brightly. "They're just *so* perfect for each other. And it's like something out of a romance novel. Remus just never had an interest in *anyone* until he met his best friend's little sister. You should just see how adorable they are together, Divi. You can hardly keep them off of each other."

Hermione turned and buried her face in Peter's shoulder to keep from bursting out in a fit of laughter. Lily was laying it on thick, but Gods, it was fun to watch.

"Right, well, I um... I should get back to my friends. It was nice to see you all," Divinia rushed out, then spun on her heel and stalked back across the room, all hip-swinging priorities forgotten.

"Lily?" Hermione swatted her on the arm, finally laughing.

"No, trust me, Hermione, that was justified," Peter chuckled as he stood from his barstool and stretched. "She pretended to be failing runes to get Remus to tutor her fifth year and then spent the rest of the time we were at school trying to drool all over him. He told her no a million times but she just... refused to believe him? Honestly, he said she creeps him out."

"Ah. So, Lily went all 'mother lion protecting her cubs' then."

"Yes." Lily sniffed laughily. "And I'll do it again. I'm gonna bottle the memory of the look on her face," she giggled, then looped an arm through Hermione's, who in turn, looped hers through Peter's. "Let's go find the guys. I'm tired."

They walked outside, and Hermione immediately laughed again at the sight of James on the sidewalk, having a one-sided high-saber battle with the air—he must have nicked

life was to dislocate her hips for as hard as she was swinging them back and forth with every step.

"Lillyyy!" the woman rang out as she rushed Lily and leaned in, planting air kisses on either side of her head.

"And Peter! So good to see you both? Is everyone here?" she asked in a hopeful voice as she glanced around the room.

Shit. This woman obviously knew them all and Hermione was absolutely positive Sirius wasn't ready for the magical world at large to know about his sexuality. She looked back out across the floor and was relieved when she saw James, Brad and Sirius heading out the side door, likely to have a smoke. Good.

"Most of us," Lily said coolly. "How are you, Divinia?"

"Oh, just lovely, Lils, you would not *believe* how much I'm loving auror training," Divinia answered as she regarded Hermione curiously.

"Love the red riding hood costume." She grinned.

"Divinia, this is Hermione, Sirius' sister. Hermione Black, Divinia Greating. She was at school with us and is an auror trainee with James."

"Sirius has a sister?" Divinia asked, her voice laced with surprise as she tilted her head and studied Hermione. "How come you didn't go to school with us?"

"I'm a dirty little secret, actually," Hermione laughed. She and Sirius had already decided that the more people knew that one of the dark lord's most loyal supporters had a half-blood kid roaming around—technically or not, the better. "My Mum was a muggle, so I went to school abroad."

"Well, I love a fun backstory," Divinia laughed as she tossed her hair over her shoulder.

"Charmed to meet you, Hermione."

Hermione and Lily glanced at one another, a knowing look passing between them. This was yet another instance in which she was glad to have a good female friend. Men never quite seemed to grasp certain social queues amongst feminine people. Peter would have *absolutely* missed the slight tone change in Divinia's voice that turned 'Charmed to meet you' into 'I've already decided I'm better than you' but she and Lily absolutely did not.

"Likewise," Hermione smiled politely back.

"So, Lily, Peter. Where are the rest of you tonight? Is Remus around?" Divinia asked, a hopeful tone in her voice that made Hermione bristle. Ah. So, this was why Lily had warned her against biting. Such a shame, because if the bitch didn't wipe that dreamy little look off her face she —

She absolutely needed to calm down. She almost laughed at herself. Whatever. So, this random girl from school had a thing for Remus. She already knew he didn't date

She could feel every pulse and twitch of his cock inside of her as he collapsed on top of her and she lay underneath him, panting as she tried to catch her breath. She felt *too* full, almost as if something foreign had taken hold around the base of his cock and was pressing insistently against her inner walls, every ragged breath either of them took causing her cunt to flutter around him and intensify the sensation.

"It's too much, Remus," she whimpered. "Something is... too much."

Remus pulled back to look at her, concern etched across his features, and he moved to pull out of her, but winced and sucked in a breath.

"Oh, fuck, what's —" he froze, his eyes widening as he looked down at where they were joined, and then back up at her, shock marling his features.

"Hermione..." he whispered, his voice horror-stricken. "I'm... I'm stuck."

"You're stuck?" she asked, frowning her brow. She rose up on her elbows as she looked down and tilted her hips back, trying to pull away, then groaned when she felt something dragging inside of her, pressing against her everywhere, overwhelming her with a wave of pleasure.

"You're stuck."

"Shit, Cariad, I don't..." Remus scrubbed a hand over his face and tried to pull away again, and Hermione moaned, then batted at his chest.

"Stop doing that," she protested.

"Well, I'm sorry!" he said defensively. "I'm fucking stuck, Hermione, I don't know what I did."

"No, it's okay, just..." She paused for a moment, worrying her bottom lip between her teeth as she thought. "Do you think you can like... roll us over?"

Remus nodded and leaned in, hitching her legs up over his hips and then slowly, awkwardly, rolled them over. He settled with his back against the wall above the bed as she straddled him. She sighed in relief, melting into him as she rested her head on his shoulder.

"Better, Cariad?" he asked softly. He brought one hand up to her back, slowly trailing his fingers up and down her spine as he brushed her hair back with the other hand and rested his cheek against her head. Hermione nodded against his chest and squeezed her pelvic muscles experimentally, eliciting a sharp gasp from Remus.

"Don't," he groaned, then laughed.

"We're going to be stuck like this forever, and we're going to die naked." Hermione said in a grave voice, then laughed.

"Well, I can't think of a better way to go." Remus retorted. He brought his hand up to her face and turned her to look at him as he leaned in and kissed her softly, then

pulled away and pressed his lips to her forehead. Hermione sighed happily and rested her forehead against his shoulder as he began to toy with her hair.

She felt so... content. Complete. Happy. Way too full of whatever the hell was going on down there, sure. But Gods, this was everything. She let her eyes drift closed as she relaxed against his chest, relishing the feeling of his hands in her hair, when two realizations hit her at once.

"You're a werewolf," Hermione mused. "Are you braiding my hair?"

"We established this," he responded lazily. "Yes."

"No, I mean, you're a werewolf," she told him, rocking her hips to emphasize her point. "As in... wolf. *Canis lupus*. Canine... functions. Also thank you."

"Oh, my fucking Gods," Remus groaned.

Hermione giggled and sat up to look down at him. He shifted her hair over the front of her shoulder and then reached down to take her hair band off of her wrist to secure the end of the braid. "You knotted inside of me."

"Oh," Remus closed his eyes and sucked in a breath, then laughed. "Oh. Well, I like that."

"Did it feel good?"

"Fucking incredible," Remus admitted. "Are you okay? Does it hurt?"

Hermione shook her head and toyed with the end of her braid as she smiled down at him. "No, I... I liked it. I *love* it. It just caught me off guard."

"I feel like such an arse," Remus sighed and gave her a small, apologetic smile. "I'd um... I'd read about this, once, but the books at Hogwarts were full of such bullshit that I guess I just didn't think..."

"It's okay. I think you're supposed to knot me, yeah?" she asked coyly, then leaned in and pressed a soft, lingering kiss to his lips. "If I feel *right*, Remus."

"Yeah," he growled. "Fuck yeah, I am. This, right here, Cariad. My pretty little mate, stuffed full of my knot, bearing my mark." He reached a hand up and trailed his fingers over her shoulder. "Yeah, baby, I'm supposed to knot you. It feels... You're so fucking perfect."

She shivered as he ran his fingers over her mark, then brought her own hand up to trail over the ridges of the already-healed scar and sighed in contentment.

"Do you like it?"

"Hermione, I swear to you, I'm not exaggerating when I say this—I have never liked anything more than I like the sight of you, marked as mine," he told her as he leaned in and trailed his tongue over the mark. Hermione whimpered, sucking in a breath and he laughed against her skin. "Careful, Caried. You keep clenching that tight little cunt down on my knot and we're never going to get unstuck."

Sirius Black, at eighteen years old, in this very bar, dancing with a man. *Again*, at that. Not Sirius Black, nearly-forty, nervously dancing with John the muggle banker for the first time after years of loss and terror. There was so much more to come, so many things left to do, but this?

She had gotten him out of the damn parks, and he was dancing. This, right here, was the exact thing, the exact moment that led her back here. Hermione was determined to save the world, to save everyone she loved now, and everyone she loved before and would love again someday. But the task was daunting and felt nearly insurmountable at times, and fuck if she hadn't needed to see this.

Her eyes stung with unshed tears as she felt a pang of longing in her chest. She loved her brother, dearly. And he was her brother. In magic, in name, in blood, yes. But he was her brother in her heart, most of all. Still, once in a while, she felt the absence of the person he had been before. Who he was when they formed this bond. The man who held her when she cried, stitched her back together, met her where she was at and loved her through it all.

He deserved the world, and she had been determined to give it to him, and now she was here, leaning against that same bar, watching him dance on that same floor. It was beautiful and bittersweet and so fucking perfect. She missed him, but she had him, and she would never take that for granted.

He would be so Godsdamned proud of her.

"You okay, Hermione?" Lily asked as she stepped up to her side and rubbed her arm in a soothing gesture.

"Huh? Oh, yeah, sorry, I just..." Hermione trailed off and wiped a tear from her eye, then gestured toward the dance floor and laughed at herself.

"It's rather brilliant, innit?" Peter mused. "I'm happy for him."

"It is," Lily said wistfully. "I like Brad. I hope it sticks. He's so funny."

"Right?" Hermione laughed. "They say opposites attract, and clearly it's true with you and James, but those two are basically the same person, minus their appearances."

"Hey, it works out then, yeah? Sirius' loves Sirius," Peter laughed, then groaned as he stared at something over Lily's shoulder.

"Oh Gods," Lily laughed. "Do we want to know?"

"Divinia."

"Shit, Hermione, don't bite her." Lily rushed out with a bit of a laugh.

"Huh? Rude. I don't bite."

Hermione turned around to see a tall, leggy blonde woman striding purposefully toward them—purposefully, in that she was quite sure the woman's sole purpose in

were just a one-time thing. My Dad passed last winter, though, so I spend a lot of time helping my Mum run the shop now, so I haven't had much time to date."

"I'm sorry to hear that," Hermione said softly. "What kind of shop?"

"Thanks, it's uh... he was always in poor health, and had been sick a long time, so even though it was a sudden case of Dragon Pox that did him in, it was one of those things where you're sort of ready for it. Still his hard but... Salright. It's, um, pretty cool actually. Jewelry shop. It's a family business, goes a few generations back. Magical jewelry, of course. I've been sort of doubling as an apprentice and helping manage things on the office front so that's why I'm not out as much as I'd like to be. Things are busier close to the holidays."

"Magical jewelry?" Hermione grinned and held out her necklace. "This is, um... Remus had it made for me, and sent it for my birthday. It's charmed to warm on his end if I activate it, and vice versa. I'd never given much thought to magic being applied to jewelry, but it's actually been really great."

Peter leaned in and inspected the pendant, running his finger over the rune and then nodded in approval.

"Moony's a romantic, who would've thought?" he laughed. "Yeah, those sort of communication charms are common requests. We make pieces with protective enchantments, all kinds of nifty things. I've been collaborating with one of our charmsworkers on a concept for two-way journals, too."

"That's brilliant, Peter," Hermione smiled. "So, charms are your thing, then?"

"Yeah. I was a pretty average student but that's always the one class I excelled in. I think it's because I grew up helping out in the shop but, either way, I like it. Keeps me pretty busy, but it'll slow down after the new year."

"Well, good. We'd like to see more of you. It's always more fun when you're around." Hermione nudged him with her shoulder and grinned over at him. She meant it, honestly. It was hard to rationalize the feelings of what he had become in her future with who he was now, but the more she got to know him, the more she just genuinely liked the guy. He was a bit of an airhead, were she honest, but he was hilarious, and kind, and clearly had an area where he shined.

The idea of what could have happened to change all of this nagged at her more every time she spent time with him, though. She had to figure it out. With her here, now, she'd never allow things to progress to the point where he held the power to put Lily, James and Harry in danger, anyway, but she was invested in Peter's wellbeing now too. Lost in her thoughts, she took a sip of her drink and turned around to lean back against the bar, déjà vu hitting her as she watched Sirius dance and laugh in Brad's arms.

"Hmmm," Hermione hummed, rolling her hips. "That would be a shame, wouldn't it?"

"A travesty, really," he agreed, bracing his hands on her hips as he began to move, thrusting inside of her lazily. "They'd have to put our faces on milk cartons. We'd die of dehydration. I'd imagine."

"Well, I can't think of a better way to go," Hermione echoed his words from earlier as she rocked back and forth on his cock, taking him deeper as his knot drug over her g-spot with every small movement. "Fuck, Remus, it's so intense."

"Yeah?" he asked, his voice low and gravelly as he wrapped his arms around her back and crushed her to his chest, bringing his mouth down to her ear as they continued to move in tandem. "You like riding that knot, don't you? Such a good fucking girl," he rasped in her ear, his breath ghosting across her skin and sending shivers down her spine.

"Love it when you call me that," she moaned, feeling her skin flush as she rocked her hips faster.

"Noted," he laughed, tilting his hips up to try to drive himself deeper as she moved on top of him. "I'll praise you so good, sweet little mate. You deserve it. So beautiful. So perfect. Taking this cock like a fucking dream. Fuck, I could stay buried in this cunt forever, Hermione."

"Feels so good. Your knot. I feel so fucking full, Remus. I'm gonna..." She broke off into a moan, darting her tongue out to wet her lips as she whimpered, "I'm so close."

"Good girl. *Good fucking girl*. Keep going." Remus stilled his movements and leaned back against the wall. He wrapped one hand around her hip, and palmed her breast with the other before he slid it down her chest to her stomach and growled, deep and raspy.

"Wanna fucking breed you," he snarled as he stared down at his hand on her stomach with blazing, golden eyes. "Pump you so fucking full, keep you trapped on my fucking knot so you have to take it all."

"Gods, Remus, that's so fucking hot," she moaned, rocking her hips harder, her movements becoming sloppy and disjointed as she felt her orgasm drawing nearer and nearer with every slide of his knot against her inner walls and every thrust of his cock against her cervix.

"Yeah?" He chuckled darkly as he moved his hand to trail his knuckles over her stomach from hip to hip, then ran his hand back up her body to trace the mark on her shoulder. "You'd do such a good job, wouldn't you, little mate? Let me rut into you over and over, keep you so full of my cum that you can taste it until your stomach swells with my pups?"

Hermione nodded, shivering as he ran his fingers over her mating mark, then moaned.

“Yes.” She nodded again, arching her back as she felt herself barreling closer to the edge. “I’ll be so good. Give you babies. Pups. Give you everything. I swear. Fuck, Remus, I’m gonna come again.”

“Good girl!” He praised as he pulled her against his chest again. “Keep going, Cariad. Come all over my knot like a good little mate and I’ll fill you up again.”

“Remus, please, move, I can’t —”

“I’ve got you,” he growled, tightening his hold as he began to snap his hips, thrusting up into her in short, shallow movements, and she fell apart in no time, screaming his name, her back arching so hard that his grip became painful as he followed her over the edge, the throbbing of his cock inside of her pushing her just south of the point of pain as he filled her again.

She melted into him once more, struggling to catch her breath as he kissed her face and rubbed her back, soothing her as she came down from her dizzying high, and she savoured the feel of being in his arms, of finally having him, having this.

Not just this, as in the super-hot, kno-ty werewolf sex, although that, too, was absolutely something she planned to savour, over and over. But *this*. She was here, in his arms, and she was his. They were eighteen and alive. None of the worst things had tainted his life, yet, and none of the things that had ruined the both of them were going to happen if she had any say about it.

And she did. She was Hermione fucking Granger, time traveller extraordinaire, and she was going to give them all the best damn life she could wrench out of this Godsforsaken world.

“After the war,” she sighed against his chest. “I’ll give you a billion babies. Or... two. That might be my limit.”

“Four.”

“One.”

“Seven.”

“Remus!” She laughed as she sat up to look down at him. “That’s not how this is supposed to work. You were supposed to say three.”

“I can’t. I died.” He shrugged.

Hermione rolled her eyes and held out her hand to summon her wand.

“Well shit, Cariad, don’t hex me,” Remus laughed.

“Oh hush. I’m all... sweaty and thoroughly shagged and stuck on top of you for the foreseeable future. I need a cigarette.” She waved her hand in his face dismissively as she summoned the ashtray off of his desk and the pack of cigarettes out of the pocket of his trousers.

“Well hell, Lils, don’t threaten me with a good time and make me sad all at once,” Hermione teased, then smiled when, as if on cue, her necklace warned. She would never get tired of this. The gift had been beautiful and thoughtful and sweet and all the things, but it had also been so... necessary. She’d needed these little — constant, as they had become — reminders that he was okay, and that he was still with her, even while he was gone.

“Oi!” James called from where he was holding the door to the bar open. “We’re dancing now!”



Hermione laughed as Peter held her hand aloft and twirled her in a circle. He didn’t like dancing as much as the rest of them, but once he’d gotten a few drinks in him he was good to go. He spun her back towards him, and she shook her head to the beat as she brushed her hair out of her face, then glanced over to where Lily and James were practically mauling one another in a booth near the dance floor.

“Gods, they’re insatiable,” she laughed.

“They look like they’re not too far off.” Peter nodded over her shoulder at Brad and Sirius, who were wrapped tightly around one another, dancing slowly despite the fast-paced beat of ‘Psycho Killer’ by The Talking Heads.

“I’m sure you and Moony would be just as bad if he were here. I’ve caught enough bits and pieces to know you two are pretty into each other, yeah?”

Hermione nodded, then laughed and gestured for Peter to follow her off of the dance floor as she headed toward the bar for a drink.

“We um... well I suppose, yes, we are into each other. But I’d only gotten here a few weeks before he left, so we’ll have to see how it all shakes out,” she said, toying with the pendant on her necklace as she accepted her drink from the bartender with a grateful nod.

“Well, for what it’s worth, I think you’re both great, and when great people get together it’s... great,” Peter said, raising his bottle of Guinness in a mock toast.

“Well, for what it’s worth,” Hermione laughed, “I think you are pissed. But thank you, Pete.”

“So, what about you?” she asked, glancing over at him. “Got your eye on any lucky ladies? Or lads, I don’t want to assume your preferences.”

“Ehnh. I like a bit of everything.” Peter shrugged as he took a long sip of his beer. “I dated a girl in third and fourth year. Charivy. Then a bloke back home a few summers, messed around with this Ravenclaw guy for a while sixth year. Few other girls that

"No," she shook her head and pulled back to look up at him. "No, *I'm* sorry. It's not fair to hold what I've been through against you. And I promise, I won't. I just can't... if you need space, when we fight, then I want to give you that. I just don't think I can handle you stomping away without a word. If something happened again and I didn't get to..."

"Okay. Okay." Remus buried his face in her hair and inhaled deeply as he brought a hand up to rub soothing circles on her back. "I *do* need to walk away sometimes. I'm sorry if that's hard, but when I get worked up, I just need a few minutes alone to clear my head. Especially with this bond, it's... I think there may be times when I need to step outside of all of the urges and just breathe so I can calm down. What can I do to make that easier for you?"

"Maybe just... just tell me?" Hermione suggested. "If we could find a way for you to just... call a timeout?"

"Time out." Remus nodded. He pulled back again and cupped her face in his hands, pressing his lips to her forehead. "I can do that. I can't promise it won't take time to make it a habit, but if that's what you need, Cariad. Anything for you."

"Does... does that include letting me be with you for the full moon tonight?" Hermione asked hopefully.

"Hermione..." he sighed.

"Well yeah, she needs to," Brad's voice rang out from behind them.

Hermione spun around to see Sirius and Brad taking their seats at the table. She glanced up at Remus and he nodded and nudged her forward, so she led the way across the room to join them.

"Are we having our first fight?" Sirius asked with a yawn as he spread some jam onto a piece of toast.

"No," Hermione said.

"Yes," Remus corrected.

"Tonight's the full." Brad turned to Sirius and leaned in to kiss him on the temple, then snatched the jam jar from his head. "They've been out here arguing because she wants to stay with him and he's telling her no."

Hermione opened her mouth to say something about him eavesdropping, but before she could speak, Brad gestured to his ear with the handle of the butterknife. "Lupine hearing. All the perks of the wolf thing without the furballs, remember?"

"Right. I forget about that, I'm sorry," Hermione smiled sheepishly.

"Don't be." Brad waved her off and pushed the jam jar back to the center of the table as he began to dig into his breakfast. "So, what's up, Wolfbert? You're being all 'boohoo I'm a scary werewolf' about this?"

Remus glared down at his plate for a long moment, his jaw ticking as he clenched his teeth and drummed his fingers on the edge of the table, then he breathed out a heavy sigh and looked up at Brad.

"Look, Brad, I know you're used to the free-range pack thing, but my wolf is even more unpredictable locked up in a cellar like that. I understand that, in theory, she'd be fine. I'm simply not comfortable taking the risk when I won't be in the right state of mind to protect her if something happens."

"She's not just yours to protect, though, Remus," Brad said. "Woah, Hermione thought to herself as she and Sirius exchanged a glance. It was rare that those two used each other's real names.

"She belongs to the wolf, too — no offense, Hermione," Brad continued on. "Sure, your wolf doesn't have the same thought patterns as you do, but the instinct is still there. It is quite literally impossible for your wolf to harm its mate."

"I get that." Remus nodded. He picked up his fork and shoved some eggs around on his plate. "I just... I don't think it's a necessary risk to take."

"Knock it off." Brad said firmly.

"Knock what off?"

"The self-loathing werewolf thing. First of all, it's boring me. Second, you're wrong. It *IS* necessary. Especially this month. This will be the first full since you've sealed the bond. Your wolf hasn't smelled her all over you yet, so he isn't used to it. When he does, you're going to tear yourself to shreds trying to find her."

"Really?" Sirius sat up straighter in his chair as he looked between Remus and Brad in alarm. "Christ, Moony, that's... rough."

"Really?" Brad nodded. "And there are a dozen other reasons. You'll be calmer with her nearby, more able to relax into the transformation, so it won't be nearly as painful as you're used to. She won't be freaking out all night, so you won't get that nagging 'something's wrong' feeling through the bond, which will help you have an easier night. And so on."

He paused and took a sip of his coffee, then added with a shrug. "Besides, weren't you the one who was just teasing James that he'd have to get used to deterring to his wife once he and Lily are married? Put your money where your mouth is and deter to *your* wife."

"I don't remember a wedding, I must have been sloshed," Sirius quipped.

"Neither do I. I suppose you and I must've hidden in a broom closet and shared a case of elf wine," Hermione joked back as she cast her eyes back down at her plate and used the side of her fork to cut into a piece of sausage.

She looked back up as she brought the food to her mouth to see Brad staring daggers at Remus, while the latter stared down at his plate, his face nearly crimson.

"Sister," Sirius stage-whispered behind his hand, "I've a feeling the boyfriends know something we don't."

"Remus?" Hermione furrowed her brow in concern and cocked her head as she studied him, trying to discern what was wrong.

"*Oh* this is brilliant," Brad laughed, slapping his hand on the table. "You didn't tell her. This is so much fun."

"Remus..." she repeated slowly. "What did you not tell me?"

Remus sighed and scrubbed his hands over his face, then slumped back in his chair and looked back up at her apologetically.

"I didn't... not tell you. I just suppose... Well, we *do* live in a civilized society, not a pack, so I didn't think it would matter to you, and I didn't see the need to freak you out, or..." he began to ramble, but Hermione shook her head vehemently and cut him off.

"Remus," she repeated a third time.

"In, erm... in packs, sealing the bond is sort of... well in lieu of... Standard societal traditions... it's the, um, equivalent of..." he dropped his voice to a low whisper that Hermione couldn't make out from across the table, and Brad chuckled under his breath.

"Bit louder for those of us who don't have woly senses," Sirius ordered.

Remus sighed and reached across the table, taking Hermione's hand in his. He stroked his thumb over her wrist and looked into her eyes, then began to speak softly.

"The, uh... werewolf packs generally have their own customs and rites. When a mated pair seals the bond, or when an unmated pair still makes the choice to... give and accept the mark, it's the closest thing they have to a marital binding. So, technically speaking, we would be..."

"Werewolf married," Brad chimed in.

"Werewolf married?" Sirius asked.

"Erm... yeah. Technically speaking, of course." Remus shifted in his seat, then sighed.

"I didn't tell you to keep it from you, Carriad. I just didn't want to overwhelm you, and I didn't think it would..."

"You didn't think I'd care?" Hermione asked incredulously.

"Well, when you put it like that," Remus laughed and shook his head. "I just meant, I didn't think it would... mean that, to you."

"Does it mean that to you?" Hermione asked.

"It's... difficult to explain. You're my mate. That's... bigger than marriage, honestly. Don't get me wrong, I'm still a wizard, so traditional marriage is still important to me.

"Hermione," he said, his voice a low warning.

"No. Just wait, Remus. Please."

Remus sighed and his shoulders dropped, but he stayed rooted in his spot, one hand on the doorknob with his back turned toward her as she moved across the room to stand a few feet behind him.

"Is leaving what you need, when you're angry?" she asked softly. He stayed still and silent for a moment, then, slowly, nodded his head.

"Okay," She swallowed through the lump in her throat, "But I need you to hear me out on two things first. Can you do that?"

He nodded again, his back still turned toward her, and she cast her eyes to the floor as she began to speak.

"It is my job to fix you, Remus. *Not* because I think you're broken. Not because I think you need fixing. But because you are *mine*, just as much as I am yours. I... I care about you so much. Aside from the bond, aside from being Moony and The Mate, even just as Remus and Hermione, you are so important to me. But I *am* your mate, and this bond works both ways. All of the things you feel, the need to protect me, the possessive urges, what I feel sort of..."

Hermione trailed off and chewed on her lip as she searched for the right way to put how she felt into words. It was difficult, truly, to reduce so much into a few simple sentences, but she had to try.

"It um... mirrors it. Balances out, I suppose. I need to take care of you, Remus. To nurture you. I want to, undoubtedly, but I also need to. I understand that you're working very hard to fight the aspects of this bond that don't really fit in with the whole 'we live in a civilized society' of it all, and I appreciate all of the effort you're putting in to respect my autonomy, but I need you to understand that there are things that are hard for me, too. The idea of you being in pain, of you being alone or scared or—" her voice cracked, and she clamped her mouth shut as she drew in a deep breath through her nostrils.

"The second thing is this. The walking away. If you need space, when we fight — because let's be honest, Remus, we are going to fight. Often, probably — then I can try to respect that. But you don't... you can't just stomp away from me out of anger without a word, I can't—I lost you." Hermione broke off into a sob, and Remus moved with an almost unnatural speed.

He spun around and reached out, pulling her toward him and crushing her to his chest as he wrapped his arms around her. "It's okay. Breath, Carriad. I didn't think, I'm so sorry."

“Yes,” Remus admitted. He leaned back against the little slab of counter below the serving hatch and shoved his hands in his pockets as he tilted his head back and squeezed his eyes shut.

“Yes,” he repeated. “But it’s still unpredictable. There are too many variables, and I’m not in control of my mind at all. I won’t be aware, cognitively, of anything that’s going on, and if something went wrong... Hermione, I won’t take the risk. I refuse.”

“You’re not the only one who gets to make the choice here, Remus.” Hermione’s voice went up a few octaves—she could admit, she did get a bit shrill when she was angry, as Ron had always said—and she shoved her chair back to stand and face him.

“When it comes to your fucking safety, it *is* my choice!” Remus countered. He shoved off of the wall and took a few steps toward her until they were nearly chest to chest as he stared down at her. His nostrils flared and his eyes flashed gold, causing her to shiver. Not out of fear—she was never scared of him when he got all wolfy. It was just... powerful, in a way that was hard to put into words, as if she could physically feel the energy rolling off of him.

“You are my *mate*, Hermione,” he growled. “You have no fucking idea how hard I work to fight through these instincts that tell me to lock you up and keep you safe from everyone and every fucking thing. I bust my arse to not descend into this... animalistic fucking need to just... *Own* you.” He squeezed his eyes shut and drew in a ragged breath, his chest heaving, then looked back down at her again.

“I respect you. I respect your freedom. But I don’t think you understand, yet, this constant battle I’m in to choose logic and reason over instinct, Cariad. I *have* to protect you. Do you understand that?” he asked, softening his voice as he reached his hand up and trailed his knuckles down her cheek. “Even from me.”

“I know, Remus. I do, but you’re being... you’re not thinking clearly, because I don’t need to be protected from your wolf. And, what? I’m supposed to just lay in bed alone knowing you’re in fucking pain? That you’re alone, locked up in a dirty cellar, and you expect me not to want to do something about it?”

“It’s not your fucking job to fix me, Hermione,” Remus said sharply.

“Yes, it is.” The words slipped out before she could stop them. She *had* meant them, to an extent. Not in the sense that he needed fixing, but more to the point that it was her job to take care of him. Before she could explain, though, Remus’ face fell. He quickly recovered, setting his jaw and glaring down at her before he shook his head and backed away.

He spun on his heel, grabbing his jacket off the shelf near the entry to the foyer and headed toward the door, but Hermione was faster as she flung a locking charm over his shoulder just as his hand reached for the knob.

This is just... it’s just different, I suppose. But I guess it does mean that to me, yeah. To put it simply.”

Hermione took a slow sip of her tea, then nodded as she carefully placed the teacup back down and dabbed at her mouth with a napkin.

“We’re werewolf married,” she stated.

“We’re werewolf married,” Remus nodded back.

“Well, I’ll still expect a pretty ring and a honeymoon someday,” she told him, picking up her fork. She speared a piece of egg and popped it into her mouth, then chewed and swallowed.

“Does this mean I’m a Lupin now?” Remus laughed and picked his fork back up, shaking his head.

“Not yet, Cariad. That requires paperwork and hoops and a formal binding, I believe.”

“Yet,” she echoed. “Hey, Remus?”

“Hmm?”

“I’m basically your werewolf wife.”

“Yeah, you fucking are.” He grinned.

“That means I win,” she said happily. Remus groaned as Brad and Sirius laughed, and Hermione dug back into her food, smiling smugly to herself.



Hermione sat against the wall on the low bed in James and Lily’s cellar with her arm wrapped around her knees as she chewed on her nails, eyeing him from across the room. She focused on her breathing, taking shallow, measured breaths, and fought the urge to leap off of the bed and rush to him as his grey, furry form lay huddled on the floor.

Watching the transition had been brutal. Remus had broken down at the last minute, screaming at her to leave, but she’d refused and scrambled over to the bed. It hurt. She knew, of course, that it was impossible, physically painful for him, in ways she would never understand, but watching him twist and contort as his bones snapped and his body morphed had made her feel like her chest was carving in.

She fucking *hated* this.

He’d fully transformed about ten minutes ago, and had collapsed to the floor, panting and shuddering. She wanted to go to him, to... pet him, as strange as that felt to think, to soothe him and tell him it would be okay, but she was scared.

Godsdamn it, she thought to herself. What was she doing? She couldn’t be scared of him. She refused. That was not how this was going to go down. Her mind made up,

she took a deep breath and climbed off of the bed as she began to move toward him, taking slow steps with her hand extended.

As she drew near, he lifted his head and turned, golden eyes locking on her. He slowly twisted his body and rose to stand on all fours, rearing back on his haunches as he tilted his snout up and inhaled, rough and loud, then snarled. Hermione took a step back, and he whined.

He cocked his head and darted his tongue out to lick his... lips? She wasn't exactly sure of the entire anatomy of a werewolf, truly, but she digressed. He began to move toward her, slowly, backing her up until her knees hit the back of the bed.

She stumbled and her back hit the mattress as her feet remained on the floor. Remus... Well, Moony, she supposed, in this form, hovered over her, staring her down for a moment, and then brought his snout to her knee as he began to smell her, dragging his nose from her knee down to her ankle.

He made some sort of satisfied rumbling sound, then worked his way back up to her knees and began to nudge them apart, shoving at her left thigh with his head.

"Remus..." she gasped, swallowing roughly as she felt panic rise in her chest. He ignored her — really, because of course he couldn't understand her like this — and continued to move her legs until he had her positioned with her legs spread wide. He brought his snout back to her knee and slowly dragged his nose up her thigh, and up, and up, until he had buried his face between her legs.

"Moony, no!" she begged, boldly reaching down and shoving at his head.

Oh, Gods, she thought. Not like this. Please, not this.

He didn't move away, but he didn't act, either. He merely... smelled her, there, then gave another rumble of approval before he backed up and looked at her expectantly.

"Moony," she repeated softly, pointing at herself. "*Mate*."

He dipped his head, almost as if he were acknowledging her statement. She wondered if, at the very least, he understood that word.

"Mate," she repeated softly. "You recognize me, yeah? You won't hurt me."

Moony cocked his head, and she sat up. Slowly, she extended her hand, and he stepped forward, then nuzzled his face into her palm. Hermione giggled and turned her hand to scratch at the fur under his chin. He rumbled again, an almost purring sort of sound, then moved to shove his head at her chest, urging her to back up on the bed.

Hermione complied, scooting back against the wall and he leaned down and gathered part of the quilt in his mouth, giving it a bit of a tug and then looked up at her again.

"You want me to lay down?" she asked.

Again, he just cocked his head, because wolves couldn't talk, and really, she wasn't sure why she kept trying. She moved back to the edge of the bed and kicked her shoes

Hermione yelped, then groaned dramatically. "Fiiiiinnnee. If you insist on neglecting me."

"We're at the wrong end of the bed," she added, as an afterthought.

"Eh. Semantics. A bed works however we decide," Remus yawned.

"That's just silly."

"Why is that silly? Anything could be a bed, really."

"A loaf of bread couldn't be a bed."

"Why not? It's nice and soft, it'd only take a quick extension charm."

"I can't stand you."

"That's alright, Cariat. I much prefer it when you're laying down anyway."

"Okay, bread was a poor example. Umm... bricks. A pile of bricks."

"Easy."

"Oh, come on!"

"I'd just lay on them and you could lay on me. Solved."

"So chivalrous."

"Only for you," he whispered, pressing his lips to her forehead as he reached down and pulled the quilt over them.



"What time do you need to leave for James and Lily's?" Hermione asked as she turned from the stove and began plating the breakfast she'd made.

"Technically, sunset is around Four, so I'll try to get there about Two, to visit a bit before I commence with the 'screaming in their cellar for fourteen hours' bit."

"Hmm," Hermione hummed. She brought her wand up and levitated the plates as Remus grabbed their drinks and followed her to the dining table. She stayed silent for a moment, choosing her words carefully as she arranged the four place settings on the table, then, finally, looked up at him as he sat her tea in front of her.

"I'm going with you."

"Hermione, no. It's dangerous."

"No it's not," she said firmly as she picked up her fork and speared a bit of scrambled egg.

"You don't know that Cariat, and I won't take the risk."

"But you do know that. You've told me enough about your time with the pack, Remus. I am your mate. Even if I weren't marked, your wolf would recognize me by my scent, and he wouldn't be a danger to me. But I am marked, and that makes me even safer, does it not?"

"Always so ready for me, aren't you?" he rasped out, the sensation of his warm breath ghosting across her skin causing the hairs on the back of her neck to stand at attention. Hermione groaned, then giggled as she rolled over to her back and smiled up at him. "I am." She nodded, "Though it's hardly fair to hold that against me when you're playing dirty."

"Dirty?" Remus laughed as he leaned in and darted his tongue out to lick the side of her neck. "And how am I playing dirty?"

"You know exactly what you're doing, Remus John Lupin."

"Do you mean this?" he questioned, shooting her a mischievous grin before he leaned in and scraped his teeth over her neck.

"Remus!" Hermione gasped.

"Reemnuusss," he mocked, then leaned in to kiss her.

"You have no idea how badly I want you again, Cariad," he murmured against her lips, then pulled back and brushed her hair off of her face. He let his hand rest on the top of her head and then pulled back and kissed the tip of her nose. "But I know you've got to be sore. You need a break, little mate."

"Sore? Me? Never." Hermione protested, turning her nose up at the suggestion. "I have never been sore a day in my life. I don't know where you're getting your information from, but somebody has clearly been lying to you. We should launch a full-scale investigation. Contact the DMLE immediately."

Remus shook his head and laughed as he leaned in to kiss her again, then rolled off of her and flopped onto his back to gather her into his arms.

"I'm sorry I've been so... repetitive. It's..."

"Wolffy things." Hermione propped her chin on his chest and looked up at him. "The moon is tomorrow. Or... tonight, now. You don't need to apologize, Remus. I'm your mate, aren't I? I'm sort of built for this."

"Yeah, you fucking are," he half growled as he reached down to cup her face in his hand. He stroked his thumb over her cheek, then sighed. "I just don't want to be... too much."

"Never," Hermione said firmly. "Nothing about you is too much for me, Remus. Besides... I like having sex with you. I am perfectly content with having a lot of sex with you. I would very much like to continue having a lot of sex with you."

Remus laughed and wrapped his arms around her tighter, then kissed the top of her head as he sighed into her hair.

"I suppose that's a good thing. Because I could have sex with you all day. But the issue is that I could. I basically did, today. And I likely will tomorrow. So you, little mate, need to rest while you can," he ordered, slapping her lightly on the arse.

off, then shifted back to the center and pulled the quilt down as she settled on her side and brought it over herself.

She watched Moony for a moment as he stared her down, then he stepped closer to the bed and nuzzled his face in her neck, sniffing over where her scarred mating mark rested. He opened his mouth, and she tensed, mentally cursing herself for doing so.

He licked at the mark, swiping his tongue over it just a few times, and then pulled back and nudged at her chest again. Taking the cue, she scooted over until her back was against the wall and he climbed up next to her, the bed creaking beneath his weight.

Hermione rolled to her back as Moony settled beside her. He pressed his snout to her stomach, directly over her womb, and inhaled deeply, then let out a grumbling sort of whine — disappointment, she thought, and Hermione laughed as she reached down and scratched at the scruff behind his ears.

"Sorry, Moony. No pups yet. Give us some time."

With a heavy sigh, Moony whined again and moved up the bed, resting his head on her chest and swinging an... arm? Leg? She really did need to learn the correct terminology, here — over her. He nudged at her stomach a few times with his paw, whining a bit more, then sighed heavily.

"Poor, dramatic wolffy," Hermione giggled. She buried her hands in his fur, relaxing underneath him as the soft vibrations of his contented rumbling lulled her to sleep.



8th December 1978

Hermione woke with a start to the feeling of something warm sliding across her clit and gasped, panicking for a moment as she jolted upright and looked down, relieved to see Remus — in human form — with his head buried between her legs. Realizing she must have slept straight through the night, she sighed in relief, then gasped as he slid two fingers inside of her, immediately curling them up to reach that spot that always drove her crazy.

"Remus," she moaned, reaching down to fist her hand in his hair.

He laughed against her cunt, sending shivers down her spine as he worked his fingers inside of her.

"Bore da, Cariad." He pulled back to grin up at her.

"Good morning to you, too, love." Hermione giggled, then gasped as he crooked his fingers faster.

"Turns out you were right, and I didn't eat you alive last night, so, best to correct that, aye?" Remus winked at her, then dove back down, sucking her clit into his mouth and

rolling it between his lips, alternating between applying suction and flicking his tongue as he worked her into a frenzy.

Remus John Lupin, Hermione had discovered, ate pussy like it was the reason he had been placed on this earth. He was insatiable. He'd told her, that first night, that he could *'have in this pretty little cunt all fucking day'* and Gods, had he meant it.

He was pulling out all the stops, groaning against her flesh, devouring her clit, toying with her g-spot, and she was crashing down in no time, screaming at the top of her lungs as she came with such force that she doubled forward at the waist, tightening her hold on his hair to the point that she was sure she'd pull it out.

He continued to lap at her as she came back down, then, finally, relented and crawled up on top of her, licking his way up her neck and delving into her mouth. She groaned at the taste of her on his lips, and kissed him back messily, until they finally broke apart, panting in each other's faces.

"You're okay," he said.

"It was nice, actually," Hermione said with a lazy, contented smile. Though Moony was very disappointed that my womb is empty, I imagine he'll be filing a formal complaint."

Remus laughed and shook his head, then leaned in to kiss her again. "Me too. We'll get there, though. Everything really went fine?"

"I did. There was a moment where he um..." Hermione blushed, then laughed. "He sort of... smelled me, down there, and I panicked for a minute, but I think he was just... making sure you'd been doing your job."

Remus groaned but nodded and laid his head against her chest. "Sounds about right. The whole, 'primary driving force of the bond' bit."

"Yep. It was nice, though. He was very well behaved. He sniffed me out a bit, and then he checked out my neck, I think he was making sure I was marked. After he saw that I was, he threw a hissy fit about the lack of pups, and then he just snuggled up to me and I fell asleep. The only issue is that it was like sleeping inside of a fireplace. Your body temperature is already insane in your human form, but your wolf is hot as hell," Hermione paused, then added, "I'll have to dress lighter next time."

"Next time?" Remus asked. "Are you sure? You don't have to do this every month, Cariatid."

"How did it feel? To have me there?" She asked, running a hand through his hair as she met his eyes.

"Better," he admitted. "It may not have looked it, and it certainly still hurt, but the transition was easier. I don't usually remember much in wolf form, but as you said I'd mentioned in my journal before, I remember the emotions, where you're concerned,

We've got the flowers for my bouquet sorted now, and the reservations are set. I think the only big thing left is making sure we pick up the paperwork for the portkey to France from the ministry on time."

"On it," Hermione nodded.

"Then we're set." Lily grinned as she closed her notebook.

"We're having a wedding, guys!"

"I still think I'd make a lovely flower girl," Sirius declared.



7th December 1978

Hermione lay on her stomach with her head propped on her arms near the foot of the bed as she watched Remus bent over the desk, scribbling furiously in his journal while he bounced his leg and drummed on his thigh with his free hand.

He was bursting with nervous energy, as if he were crawling out of his skin. She knew he got like this when the full moon was near, but given the timing of his mission, she hadn't really witnessed it first hand yet. In August, he'd been antsy right before he'd left, but he'd primarily kept to his room, and this was the first time he'd go through the transformation since he'd been back.

"What time is it?" she asked with a yawn.

"Half past three." Remus looked over his shoulder and smiled at her as he set his pen down and rose from his chair. He stretched and twisted his back before he closed the short distance between them and knelt down next to the side of the bed.

"Did I wake you, Cariatid?" he whispered against her skin as he began to plant soft kisses along the slope of her bare shoulder.

"I'm not sure," Hermione sighed in contentment, "I don't mind, though. How are you feeling?"

"Wobbly." He breathed out a laugh and turned his head, resting his cheek against her shoulder blade.

"Wobbly?"

"Yeah. Sort of... like I'm vibrating. It's hard to explain."

"Is there anything I can do to help?"

In lieu of a verbal response, Remus pressed his mouth against her skin and began to kiss a slow, teasing trail up to the peak of her shoulder, where he sunk his mouth down over her mating mark and nipped lightly at the skin.

Hermione moaned and arched her hips off of the bed, and Remus growled, low and guttural in her ear.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

"That sounds lovely, Remus," Lily gushed, scribbling away in her notebook.

Hermione leaned in and placed a kiss on his cheek, just as the teasing began.

"Who knew Moony was a... Pete, what's a flower expert called?" James asked.

"Dunno, Florist?"

"A woman," Sirius declared.

"Oh, sod off, Padfoot." Remus rolled his eyes as he slung his arm around Hermione and pulled her closer. "Your sister likes my knowledge of the French flower language."

She really did. Hermione had been a bit caught off guard by Remus' quiet romanticism, but she was finding herself quite spoiled by it all the same. He wasn't showy or over the top in his affection. He preferred subtle gestures. Fixing her a cup of tea in the morning, braiding her hair, bringing her home a flower he'd picked after he'd walked to the shops, writing little notes to leave around the flat for her to find.

He really shone, though, in the physical department. Not just... the physical, though he was, *most assuredly*, shining there — over, and over, multiple times a day — but as a whole. He was constant in his affection, always holding her hand, touching her back, snogging and cuddling, playing with her hair, kissing her forehead, pulling her into his lap every chance he got.

Often times, he'd simply sit with his hand on her leg or even a finger linked with hers, as if he had to be touching her. Which was a very good thing, given the fact that Hermione was quite positive she'd become untethered and float off into oblivion if Remus stopped touching her for even a moment.

They were ridiculous.

She loved that for them.

"Hey! Not cool with the 'your sister' thing!" Sirius called out as he pretended to gag.

"I'm barely tolerating all the touchy-huggy stuff."

"And the smelling like he shags her thing," Peter added helpfully.

"You can't even complain, Wormy. I'm the only one who has to smell that," Brad teased as he walked back in from the kitchen and sat a few bottles of Guinness on the coffee table.

"I can smell it." Remus whispered lowly in Hermione's ear, then nipped at her earlobe.

"Oi! Bad wolf!" Peter leaned over from the striped chair and knocked Remus on the knee.

Hermione giggled and turned her head to plant an audible, smacking kiss on Remus' lips just to be a nuisance, then turned her attention back to Lily. "So, let's go over the whole thing again."

"Right. You and I are dress shopping next week. The guys have agreed to go full-muggle, so they're scheduled to see the tailor to get fitted for their suits on Thursday.

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it seems. I remember being pleased, then disappointed, and then content. And then waking up with you here was... *Gods*, Cariad, it was everything. But I don't want you to feel obligated."

"Hush," Hermione commanded. "You're mine, too. When we have a place for you to run in the woods again, I'll relinquish some nights so you and the guys can go play. In the meantime, I liked being with you. Now, that's settled. How are you feeling?"

"Rough," Remus admitted as he banded his arms around her waist. "Everything hurts. It always does."

Hermione sighed, blinking back the tears that were threatening to spill from her eyes, and began to run one hand through his hair as she trailed the other up and down his back.

"Is there anything I can do to help? What do you need, love?"

"I just need you, Cariad. I just need this."



25th December 1978

Hermione leaned her head on James' shoulder as they sat huddled on the edge of the fountain in Trafalgar Square. Lily was perched on James' lap, with Brad next to him, while Peter and Remus walked along the side of the fountain, goofing around and holding their arms out to balance themselves.

Sirius, on the other hand, stood rigid as he stared out across the plaza. She wanted to wrap her arms around him and tell him it would be okay, but she knew her brother well enough to know he needed a minute. She wasn't sure if he was more anxious over the perspective of Regulus not showing up, or over the chance that he actually might.

It was only half past eleven, but they'd all opted to meet here early before heading back to the flat to open gifts, and Lily had brought along a few thermos' of hot cocoa — Hermione was nearly positive Remus had already drank an entire thermos to himself, to no one's surprise — so they were content to sip the warm beverage and people watch for a bit as families and couples milled about, looking at the Christmas decorations throughout the square and snapping pictures.

Suddenly hit with an idea, Hermione jumped up and dug in her bag to pull out her camera, then flagged down an older couple to ask them to take a picture. She checked and made sure that the muggle settings were switched on — once again giving mental praise to James' handiwork, and then called everyone to attention.

Remus settled down next to James and pulled her into his lap. Peter sat next to Remus, slinging an arm over his shoulder. Lily and Hermione tilted their heads together from

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their separate lap perches while Sirius, albeit begrudgingly, settled next to Brad and flung a leg over his lap and an arm over his shoulder, and pressed his cheek to his.

"Now, say, 'Ethel Bergmann is the most beautiful woman this side of the North Sea.' The little old man called out.

Everyone laughed, grinning as he snapped the picture, and the woman —Ethel, it would seem —swatted at him playfully with her handbag.

"You lot just ignore my George," Ethel laughed as she plucked the Polaroid from the camera and held it up to watch it develop.

"Oh, would you just look at that!" she gushed. Hermione rose to take the camera and photo back from them, smiling down at the picture as Ethel passed it to her.

"You have such a beautiful group of friends, young lady."

"They're my family," Hermione beamed.

"Fuck yes we are!" Sirius called out.

"And they're horrid, as you can tell." Hermione smiled apologetically as Ethel laughed and waved her hand.

"Oh, you're only young once. Let the boy say a few bad words. Merry Christmas, dearie."

Hermione waved as she watched them leave, then turned to make her way back to her friends, only to run straight into Lily.

"We're in a fight," Lily announced. "Oh, my Gods, I love this picture."

"Are we?" Hermione asked. "I know. I need to duplicate it, so we all have copies."

"Yes, we are. I'd like two so I can frame one and scrapbook the other."

"Well shit. Is it a bad fight? Two it is. We should come back next year and recreate this."

"The worst fight *ever*," Lily sighed. "We absolutely should recreate it. Maybe next year our Petey will be all grown up with a girl on his arm."

"Will we ever make up? Or, a werewolf, if he gets his way."

"I can't imagine we will. We'll likely hate one another forever."

"That's unfortunate."

"What's unfortunate?" Remus asked as he walked toward them and moved to stand behind Hermione, wrapping his arms around her waist and resting his chin atop her head.

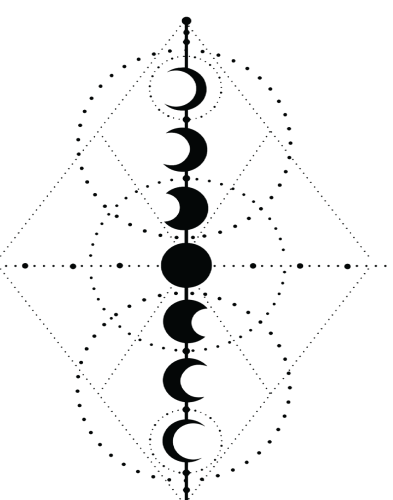
"Hermione and I are mortal enemies now."

"Egads," Peter said.

"Did you just say 'Egads' Wormtail?"

"It's a new thing I'm trying. Prongs."

"Could you try to *not*?"



Give a Little Bit

2nd December 1978

"No cummerbunds," James held a finger in the air as he lay on the floor with his head in Sirius' lap. "That's my only request."

"Which I have no problem agreeing to," Lily smiled down at him as she sat on the couch while she and Hermione leaned over her wedding planning notebook, "I'm just saying that if you aren't going to offer any other opinions, you can't complain if I choose something you hate."

"I vote for the purple ones" Hermione pointed to one of the pictures Lily had clipped from a magazine and stuck to the page, "With the greenery. Those are your two best colours."

"Asters and Daisies," Remus chimed in without looking up from his book as he continued to draw lazy circles on Hermione's back with one hand. "Asters are for love. Daisies for new beginnings. Perhaps Ivy for the greenery, as it represents fidelity."

Hermione watched with a bemused smile as he glanced up and realized all eyes had turned to him.

"I suppose she could add some chrysanthemums. For hope." He shrugged, a faint blush colouring his cheeks.

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“Sod off, Pads.”

“Why are you two enemies?” Brad asked, tipping back a thermos to try to get the last few drops of hot cocoa. “Damn it, Wolfiam Wolfsworth. Bloody cocoa fiend.”

“It sounds so weird when you say *Bloody* all... American like,” Sirius mused.

“But darling, I can be British too, innit? Fancy a spot of tea?” Brad teased.

“Why are we fighting, Lily?” Hermione asked, giggling as Remus attempted to hide from Brad by burying his face in her hair.

“WEREWOLF MARRIED?” Lily screeched, then glanced around, blushing as she realized their surroundings. She lowered her voice and leaned in closer. “Sirius told Peter who told James who told me that you two being all... sealed and bonded and whatever means you’re basically *married*, and you didn’t even tell me!”

Remus’ body shook as he laughed into her hair and Hermione sighed, then laughed again.

“I’m sorry, Lils,” she said sheepishly. “It’s... not untrue, but it’s... a pack thing. It’s not recognized by Wizarding society, and we don’t live in a pack, so I just didn’t want to make a big deal out of it. Besides, your wedding is in six days! Let’s focus on that.”

Lily narrowed her eyes at her and crossed her arms over her chest, then sighed. “Fine. But I’m not letting this go. You got werewolf married and we didn’t even celebrate.”

“Oh, we celebrated,” Remus chimed in, very unhelpfully. Hermione elbowed him in the stomach, and he laughed and lurched back, just in time for Sirius to playfully grab him in a headlock. She rolled her eyes as James and Peter joined in and settled back on the edge of the fountain between Lily and Brad, huddling together for warmth as they watched the Marauders goof off.

Hermione felt that all-too-familiar blooming in her chest again, as if her heart were swelling like the Grinch. These people—her family—were incredible. She just wanted to keep them like this forever. Unmainted by the death and betrayals of two wars, safe and happy.

Together.

“Mature,” she heard a flat voice drawl from her left. She looked up to see Regulus standing near the fountain with the collar of his coat pulled up over his ears and his hands in his pockets, as if he were trying to disappear inside of the heavy, charcoal coloured wool.

“Regulus! You came.” Hermione grinned and rose to her feet to walk closer to him and looked him over, taking note of a large, purplish bruise running along the side of his jaw. “Are you okay?”

“I... told them. Could we talk somewhere less public?” His voice was whisper quiet as he looked down at her. He looked so young, vulnerable. Gods, she really did just

want to scoop him up and keep him safe. Three months—but this was a start. She'd be damned if he ever set foot in that cave.

She nodded at him, then turned to look at the rest. "We'll meet everyone back at the flat, okay?"

"Hermione, are you sure we shouldn't use Go—*our* place?" James asked tentatively. "He'll see where the flat is if we walk him there from the apparition point."

"I'm sure, James," she said firmly, then turned to look back at Regulus, holding eye contact with him as she continued to speak to James. "He's with us now. He's safe."



"Let's do gifts first," Hermione said softly as she took Regulus' arm and led him to the yellow chair. She shoved him down and then patted him on top of the head when he opened his mouth to protest. "None of that, now. I'm the oldest, I'm the boss."

"Technically, I'm the oldest," Brad said playfully as he settled on the end of the couch.

"Who even are you?" Regulus asked.

"Boyfriend," Sirius said casually, as he sat sideways in Brad's lap.

Hermione was practically vibrating with pride. Gods, if only his older self could have seen him now. She was overwhelmed with love today. Granted, it *was* Christmas. She loved the holiday and hadn't really had a good one in a few years, at that.

But this Christmas was the best she'd had yet. She still had so much work to do, but she had already accomplished multiple impossible feats. Remus, content and happy, for the first time in his life. Both Black brothers—*her* brothers—in the same room on Christmas without a single hex being thrown—yet—and Sirius, so comfortable in his sexuality now that he'd just climbed onto his boyfriend's lap in front of Regulus without a second thought. There was work to do, sure, but the work she'd done mattered, so fucking much.

Ever the mind-reader, Sirius caught her eye and threw her a wink, and she grinned back at him.

"Huh." Regulus nodded. "Didn't see that one coming."

And that was that. Simple. Easy. She saw when it hit Sirius, like a physical wave of relief as he relaxed back against the arm of the couch and threw his legs into Pete's lap. He'd come out to another person, and it was okay, again. She fucking loved this for him. She and Lily passed out gifts, and she surprised Regulus when she plopped three packages in his lap. They moved around in a circle as they opened their presents, until Hermione had a nice assortment of record and books next to her and had pulled on a new hand-knit jumper from Lily, which matched the one she'd knit for Remus—and, of course, came with the now-requisite 'Jumper Wanker' joke.

Remus threw his head back laughing and Hermione blushed, then laughed as well.

"Erin... Brad?" Sirius began.

"Smell better," Remus said.

"Huh?" Lily rang out.

"Chevy, fucking pay attention to her scent," Remus laughed.

Brad glared at him but listened and inhaled deeply as he leaned closer to Hermione, then laughed incredulously. "Oh. Oh! *You're* the big deal, Hermione!"

"I *am* the big deal," Hermione laughed. "Carina is my first name."

"Oh my goodddssssss," Lily groaned. "Why is everyone being cryptic? You guys know I get cross if I don't know the drama."

"Sorry, Lils," Remus shot her an apologetic smile, and Lily simply waved a hand, turning her focus back to Brad as she crossed her arms over her chest and raised an eyebrow at him.

"I um... have some wolfy traits, Lily-Pad," Brad explained sheepishly. "I'm not a werewolf, but I have the heightened senses. Remus discovered the whole mate thing while he was with the pack and had mentioned Hermione but, apparently, I'm not the only one with two names, so when I smelled him all over her, I thought he was just... you know..."

"Shagging her," James and Peter finished for him in unison.

"Oi! That's my sister!" Sirius protested with a grimace.

"Well, he *is* shagging her!" James said defensively.

"I need a fucking drink," Sirius groaned.

"So, you can smell the... mate thing?" Lily asked.

"Yeah," Brad nodded. "He's marked her now, so she carries his scent. There are other ways for someone to carry the scent, though marking is the most potent. It just took me a minute to realize how strong his scent was on her."

"I smell like youuuu," Hermione said in a sing-song voice as she looked up at Remus.

"Yeah you fucking do."

"*And* she smells like they've been shagging," Peter chimed in matter-of-factly.

"I need two drinks," Sirius grumbled.

"Drinks!" Lily declared as she pushed off from the counter.

"Well, shit, Chevy," Remus said, removing a hand from Hermione's waist and extending it out toward Brad. "Welcome to my little makeshift pack, I guess."

*Don't you love her madly
Don't you need her badly
Don't you love her ways
Tell me what you say*

"I met Ford while I was with the pack and he pointed out that my name is basically... Werewolf Werewolf, and his name is a car brand. Or the Ford part is. I didn't know his full name, so I hadn't made the connection when you lot were talking about Brad," Remus explained.

"You're a werewolf?" Sirius asked.

"Sweet! This is becoming a thing, isn't it? Do I get a werewolf?" Peter joked.

"I bet there's super-hot lady werewolves out there. What's a lady werewolf called?" James mused thoughtfully.

"They're still called werewolves James, and I'll hex you," Lily said calmly.

"No, Sirius." Brad shook his head, "I'm not. My mom is, though. She's mated to the Alpha of the pack that Remus spent time with, so we met through that. I was traveling a lot, as you know, prior to starting this job, so I popped in to see everyone a few times while he was there."

"I thought you were muggleborn, though?" Sirius asked. "Not — not that your blood status would matter. Or that I would mind if you were a werewolf. I'm just... caught off guard, I suppose."

"I know. I should have told you, but this is new, and the magical world isn't exactly accepting of my family's kind. I am muggleborn. My Mom was a muggle and was turned when she was thirteen. It's rare for a muggle to survive, but she did. She met my dad in university while he was here studying from America. After I was born, he learned what she was and sued for custody. It was... a mess. The case was heard by the Wizengamot because she's classified as a magical creature and he won. He took me back to the states and then when we learned I was a wizard... well, shit sucked." Brad shrugged.

"I didn't mean to keep anything from you. My parents couldn't agree on my name so they just... gave me both. Dad called me Brad and it's what I'm used to, but my mom always called me Ford so that's just what's stuck with the pack."

"Well shit." Sirius laughed, "So you know our Moony?"

"I do. Wolfwolf Mcwolfoffington the Third and I are well acquainted," Brad laughed and turned to face Remus and Hermione.

"*You* have some explaining to do, Rocks," he said, pointing a finger at Remus.

"Me? What the hell are you on about, Chevy?"

"I like Herman more than you. I decided that just now." Brad shrugged. "So, I want to know what this whole... mess is? Why are you eating Sirius' sister's face, and why does she smell like you've been *very* well acquainted with her if this Carina girl you were mooning over and writing fifty seven failed letters to is the big deal? How is that fair to her, exactly?"

Finally, it was time for Regulus, who had been watching them silently, to have his turn.

"Go on, then, Reggie. Top ones from me," Sirius encouraged him. Regulus raised an eyebrow as he reluctantly peeled back the wrapping paper and opened the packaging, then let out a loud, booming laugh when he saw the contents. He reached in and pulled out an old, stuffed dragon. It was green, and clearly very well loved, as it was threadbare and ragged, with a missing eye and a bit of fluff coming out of the tale.

"You kept Buckley?" he asked quietly, looking over at Sirius, who gave him a quick nod.

"Yeah. Well, I bribed Kopsy to fish it out of the bin before Kreacher found it and vanished it."

Regulus nodded and looked down at the dragon, then gingerly placed it back in the box.

"Was that yours, when you were younger?" Hermione asked.

"Couldn't go anywhere without it." He smiled softly as he looked down at it.

"He was an absolute nightmare," Sirius smiled fondly. "Couldn't even sit at the breakfast table without Buckley there. Mum made him bin it the day he turned five."

"So, you kept it all this time?" Brad tilted his head to look up at Sirius in his lap and ran a hand down his arm.

"Yeah, well. It was important to him." Sirius shrugged. He took a sip of his firewhisky and then cleared his throat.

"Right. Let's get on with it, then."

"Oh! Yes." Hermione grinned at Regulus. "The next one is sort of a joint effort."

Regulus opened the next present, looking up at Hermione in confusion when he lifted the two journals out of the box.

"They're a prototype. Peter has been working on them. Two-way communication. Here, I'll show you."

She set both journals on the coffee table and drew a smiley face in one before she closed the cover, and they all watched as the doodle appeared in the second.

"Salazar," Regulus breathed out. "That's actually brilliant, Peter."

Peter blushed and mumbled out a thanks, and Hermione nodded excitedly.

"He's incredible with charms. We added blood wards, so even if someone opens it while there's a message waiting they won't be able to see anything unless they're of the Black line. Sirius and I will share this one, so we can all contact each other when you're back at school. That way if anything happens and we need to get to you..."

"Oh. Right. I don't..." Regulus cast his eyes down to his lap. "I'm not used to all this... happy shiny stuff you lot have going on. But thank you. This is very thoughtful."

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He set the journal aside and moved on to the last box, laughing when he saw another Lily-knit jumper.

“Handmade with love, and it’s green? Always knew you were sweet on me, Evans.”

“Black, I swear to fucking —” James turned in his seat to glare daggers at Regulus, who merely raised na eyebrow and pulled the jumper over his head, then smoothed a hand over the front.

“Easy, Prongs,” Remus laughed, shaking his head.

Hermione rolled her eyes and then leaned over to whisper into Remus’ ear. “Can you come with me for a moment? I want to give you your gift in private.”

“Didn’t you already give me my gift this morning, Cariad?” he murmured back.

“Down, boy,” she laughed as she pulled him to his feet.



“A potion.” A soft smile played on Remus’ lips as he cocked his head and teased, “Are you poisoning me?”

“Not yet.” Hermione drummed her fingers on the edge of the desk behind her. “I wrote the brewing instructions down before I came back, because it isn’t... well it hasn’t been invented yet. But I wanted to make sure I could get all the ingredients and brew it successfully before I got your hopes up.”

“This sounds big.” Remus’ voice was cautious as he lifted the large bottle of murky, blue potion up to the light.

“It’s called Wolfsbane. It hasn’t been invented yet. The ingredients are very expensive, so, the availability of this is actually what drove you to take the job at Hogwarts, as you couldn’t afford it yourself.”

“Wolfsbane?” Remus furrowed his brow.

“You drink it every night for the week leading up to the full moon, and once you make the transformation, you’re still... you, cognitively,” Hermione explained. “Not entirely, but you’ll be aware enough to fight any stronger urges.”

“Wait.” Remus sat the bottle to the side and rose from the bed to stand in front of her, grabbing her hands and squeezing them tightly. “Hermione, do you mean I’ll still... be me, in my mind?”

“Yeah. You said that as long as you took it every night that week, you kept your mind and could just curl up in your office harmlessly.”

“I love you,” Remus blurted out. “Shit.”

“Shit?”

“Not... not shit. I just... didn’t mean to say it, like that. I had the whole thing planned, with my gift. I was going to give it to you and say all this stuff and I — But fuck,

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“Brad, you know everybody,” he began, “Save for that oaf over there eating my sister’s face. Oi! Quit suffocating her and meet my boyfriend, cunt.”

“Your boyfriendccccccmddd,” Lily and Hermione gushed in tandem as Hermione broke the kiss and smiled up at Remus. He sighed and, still holding on to her waist, turned them around so that his back was against the counter.

“Hi Brad,” Hermione waved.

“Hiya, Herm —” Brad began, but was cut off when Remus let out an incredulous laugh.

“Chevy?” Remus asked in disbelief.

“Wol- um... Rocks?” Brad’s mouth fell open, and he shook his head, then laughed.

“Huh?” Hermione scrunched up her face, looking between Brad and Remus in confusion.

“Well, what the shit, Buick?” Remus laughed.

“Wait, do you two know each other?” Sirius asked, furrowing his brow.

“Yeah, we, um... met.” Brad ran a hand through his hair and looked at Remus over Hermione’s shoulder with a desperate look on his face, as if he were at a loss for what to say. She tilted her head back to look up at Remus and he shook his head, a look of stunned disbelief still etched across his face.

“Remus?” she asked softly.

“Cariad, that’s *Ford*,” he told her.

“Oh, my Gods!” Hermione squealed excitedly. “YOU’RE FORD?”

“Who the fuck is Ford?” Sirius bristled.

“It’s... um... My name is Bradford, technically. It’s stupid, it’s... my mom...” Brad sputtered, then opened and closed his mouth a few times.

“Oh, shit,” Remus breathed out and shook his head. “Ford it’s okay. They know.”

“What do we know?” Peter asked as he shoved a handful of popcorn into his mouth.

“How am I supposed to know what we know?” James shrugged. “Give me some popcorn.”

“They know about...” Brad began, gesturing between himself and Remus.

“Could somebody please just speak in a complete fucking sentence?” Sirius groaned.

“Sirius, I can explain, I...” Brad trailed off again, looking lost.

“They know I’m a werewolf, Chrysler.” Remus reassured him softly. “It’s fine.”

“Well fuck, you could’ve led with that, Wolfman-Werener Overdrive.”

“Okay. Pause.” Lily laughed. “Someone — *one* person, please — explain what’s going on before that vein in Sirius’ forehead explodes. How do you two know each other, and why are you using weird names?”

18th November 1978

Hermione hummed in contentment as she felt Remus' hands snake around her waist. He leaned in and kissed her on the cheek, then propped his head on her shoulder as she stood in James and Lily's kitchen, stirring a pot of hot chocolate on the stove.

"My Mam always made it the muggle way, too. Well... obviously, she did, given that she wasn't a witch," he laughed. "But still, I just think it tastes far better like this."

"I think most things do. I don't mind using a little magic in the kitchen, but... I'm not sure if it's a mental thing, being muggleborn, but I just feel like some things are better done by hand."

"I can think of some things to do by hand," he whispered in her ear and nipped at her ear lobe.

"Gross," Peter called teasingly from his perch on the counter. "Cute, but gross. Learn how to whisper better, Moony."

"Eat me, Wormtail," Remus laughed as he extended his middle finger toward Peter. "I would love to, truly, my dear friend, but your witch is scary and if she hexes my arm off, I'll never finish stringing this popcorn and then Lily will hex off my other arm."

"Too true," Lily agreed from somewhere behind where Hermione continued to focus on her cocoa duties.

"You're lucky we all love you enough to do everything the muggle way," James grumbled.

"Oh hush," Lily laughed. "You guys don't understand the Christmas spirit because you've never had the joy of actually putting in the work and seeing all the decorations come together."

"Seconded," Hermione called.

"Third...ed," Remus added.

"No fair, Moony. You're supposed to be on our side," James whined.

"I like them better," Remus shrugged as he leaned in and kissed Hermione's cheek again. "This one lets me kiss her."

"Well shit, Moony, if you wanted to kiss me again you only had to ask," James retorted.

"Are we playing spin the bottle again?" Sirius asked, entering the room.

"You guys made it!" Lily gushed.

Hermione moved to turn around, but Remus took the opportunity to press his lips to hers and she melted into him, sighing against his lips as she deepened the kiss.

"Yep. Sorry we were late, we stopped in so Brad could pick up his paycheck and we got to taking to his boss," Sirius explained.

Hermione, I *really* love you. Not because you're this bad-arse time traveller who brings me cool future potions, though obviously that helps, and not just because the sex is great, or the mate thing, though I suppose that helps as well, but I—"

"Remus," Hermione laughed. "You love me?"

"I do." He nodded. "I love you."

"I love you, too."

"Shit."

"Stop saying shit, this is supposed to be romantic!" She swatted at his shoulder, and he laughed and wrapped his arms around her.

"I'm sorry, I'm bugging this all up. I do love you, though."

"Well, I suppose that's good, considering you're stuck with me."

"A heavy burden, indeed. Speaking of..." Remus released her and walked over to the chest of drawers.

"If this is about to be a Lily-esque speaking of..."

"Nope." He sat down on the bed and patted the spot next to him. Once Hermione had sat down, he placed a small box in her hand and gestured for her to open it.

"Don't freak," he cautioned. "It's okay if you don't like it."

"I do not freak, Remus." She rolled her eyes as she removed the lid of the box and looked down, then corrected, "I'm freaking, Remus."

Remus laughed again and leaned in to kiss her on the cheek. "It doesn't have to be now. But this was one of three requests, yeah? I figure down the road we'll make it official and get you that name change and honeymoon, but I wanted you to have these, for when you're ready. Whenever you're *truly* ready. There's no timeline, okay?"

"You got us rings," Hermione shook her head incredulously as she reached into the box and pulled out a thick golden wedding band, holding it up to the light to inspect it before she sat it back down and picked up the remaining two items—a thinner gold band, and a matching engagement ring with a small opal flanked by two simple diamonds.

"Not technically, no. I didn't go buy them or anything. They, um... They were my parents'. My Mam gave them to me before she died. She told me that..." Remus trailed off as his voice became thick with emotion and cleared his throat. "My Mam gave them to me before she died. Told me that someday, I'd meet the girl of my dreams, and I'd slide this ring on her finger and—anyway, I just thought that... Well, when you're ready to be married, I'd like to use these."

"Well, we're already werewolf married," Hermione teased. She looked back down at the rings, drawing in a ragged breath as she felt tears stinging at her eyes. His mother's wedding rings. She hadn't ever gotten the chance to know either of his parents, and

while that was no big loss as far as Lyall Lupin was concerned, she knew from both the journals and everything Remus had told her in the last few weeks that Hope had been so important to him. And he wanted *her* to wear Hope's ring.

"They're beautiful, Remus," she whispered reverently.

"*Jou're* beautiful." Remus muttered, then turned to take her hand in his.

"There's never been a single thing, Hermione. Since I was four years old, there has never been a single thing that has made me feel as if this curse was anything less than one long death sentence. There's never been a moment where I didn't hate everything about myself, because of my Lycanthropy, until I realized what you were to me. Until I realized that this bond existed, because of this curse.

"And, as... hopeful, or delusional as it sounds, I think I would have loved you anyway. In any lifetime, I would have found you, with or without this bond, and I would have loved you. Even if I had never been attacked, I would have stepped into that sitting room five months ago and you would have been mine."

He leaned in to press his lips to her forehead, breathing her in, then pulled back and cupped her face in his hands. "I would walk back through every bit of hell. I would relive every full moon. I would do it all again, to have you. My mate. My werewolf wife." He chuckled and kissed her on the nose, then smiled down at her.

"You don't have to wear the rings yet. They're just symbolic. *This*," He placed his hand over where her mark lay under her shirt, "is for life either way. I just want you to know that I love you, and I'm serious about you in every possible way."

"Remus," Hermione choked out a sob and brought her hand up to rest over his on her shoulder.

"I... I can't top that," she laughed and picked the box up off of her lap as she looked back down at the rings. "I love being marked by you. It makes me feel so complete, and... a million things. I love having the mark, and if I'm honest, I hate that I can't just walk around with it on display all the time."

"Yeah," Remus huffed out a laugh. "It's, uh... tough. Wolf thing. Not being able to have everyone see that you're marked as mine."

"Well then," Hermione smiled and extended the box out to him. "It looks like you found a solution to that, yeah?"

"Really? You mean it?" Remus asked hopefully.

"Just the opal, for now? If that's okay? I think I'd like the wedding bands to wait for... wizard marriage. But I could wear the engagement ring. I *want* to."

Remus picked up the ring and sat the box to the side, then sank to his knees in front of her and kissed her, hard, sliding his tongue into her mouth and nipping at her lips before he pulled back with a triumphant grin.

"I like you," he declared playfully as she lit one and passed it to him, then lit her own. "Well, that's good. You're stuck with me. Literally, it would seem." Hermione rolled her hips. "I don't suppose you know how long this takes to... not knot?"

"I do not know when the knot will not knot." He shook his head, then grinned, "I'd guess maybe... twenty minutes, give or take? It was starting to recede until you got all needy again."

"Hey! I'm not... needy."

"Mmmhmm. Whatever you need to tell yourself, little mate."

"I'm making everyone quit smoking after we end the war."

"Two," Remus declared, holding up his fingers. "Two. You're right. You're perfect and brilliant and bright and two is absolutely correct. Have I told you how pretty you look today?"

"Two." She nodded in agreement. "But I'm still making you quit. You can keep calling me pretty, though. Just... don't ever call me bright again," she laughed.

"Why not?"

"You um... future you once called me 'The Brightest Witch of Her Age' and it sort of became a whole... formal title, and I hated it because..." she paused, blushing, and then added, "Well, I liked it when you said it. But then everyone else said it, and I hated that it wasn't just... ours."

"Gods. Future me." He shook his head as he leaned over and ashed his cigarette in the ashtray. "That's going to take some getting used to. You'll tell me the whole... thing tomorrow, yeah?"

"Yeah."

"Good. I won't call you bright. But on the bright side, there are lots of things that only I get to call you now." He leaned forward and pressed his lips to hers, peppering her with kisses in between his words as he began to rattle off little titles and terms of endearment.

"Carrad. Beautiful. Mine. Mate. Love. Good. Fucking. Girl."

"Remus," she groaned. "Don't start."

"Fine." He relented with a laugh. "Wait! I have a future question. Just one, for tonight. Your name..."

Hermione grinned down at him and shook her head. "Yes, Remus. I'm named after a Bowie song."

"I fucking knew it. My dream girl."



"Right? If only everyone could have it as easy as us."

"Truly simple, aren't we? Nearly boring. Just a case of preschool aged Lycanthropy, a professor/student mating bond, one bitten forearm, you literally dying, a blood adoption and twenty years of time travel."

"Not to mention a double dose of war. Total snoozefest." Remus leaned in and kissed her on the cheek, then nuzzled her neck as they continued to watch the newlyweds dance. Eventually, their little solo jaunt ended, and others rejoined them on the dance floor, but Hermione was content to lean back in his arms and people watch for a while longer.

Until the single most shocking thing that had ever happened in her war-fighting, time-traveling, horcrux-destroying, magical-tooth-alteration-having, bank-robbing-turned-dragon-riding life occurred.

"Dance with me?" Remus asked, tilting his head to the side to look down at her.

"Have you been Polyjuiced?"

"Nope."

"Did Sirius place you under the Imperius curse?"

"Dance with me," he laughed. "You're ruining my big moment."

"Oh? It's a big moment, is it?"

"Mhmm." Remus leaned in and kissed the side of her neck, dragging his nose over her shoulder, then nudged her forward as he rose from his seat.

"You don't dance, Remus."

"You do." He shrugged as he held his hand out to her. "It's important to you. I'll be dreadful at it, but you're pretty bad, too, so we'll step all over each other's feet, together."

"Are you sure? You don't have to just because I like it."

"Hermione, do you honestly think I would subject you to a life where you never get to dance with your husband?"

"Werewolf husband. And... future husband," she corrected as she placed her hand in his.

"Call it what you want, little mate, so long as you throw that word in there somewhere." He grinned as he led her to the dance floor.

She wrapped her arms around his waist and pressed her face against his chest, and they began to sway to 'Wonderful Tonight' by Eric Clapton. Remus wrapped his arms low around the small of her back and propped his chin on her head as he hummed along to the music.

It was heaven. They were, in fact, rather terrible at it. Somehow, they managed to sway too hard and almost tipped over to the side no less than three times, and they absolutely mangled one another's feet, just as he'd predicted, but it didn't matter.

As the song ended, she pulled back to smile up at him, then rose up to kiss him, but squealed in excitement and pulled away quickly when she heard the DJ announce the next song. She whipped her head around, then looked back up at Remus.

"Go." He grinned, squeezing her hip. "I promised to hold space for sacred sibling rituals. I'll get you all to myself later."

Hermione nodded and surged up to kiss him quickly before she spun on her heel and locked eyes with Sirius, who had turned away from Brad and was already heading toward her.

"Hey, Ray!" Hermione called out.

"Hey, Sugar." Sirius winked, grinning from ear to ear. "Tell 'em who we are."

She giggled and collapsed against him, clasping on to his forearms as they threw their heads back and began to belt "The Cover of 'Rolling Stone' by Dr. Hook.

Sirius grabbed her hand and held it aloft as he spun her in a circle and she shimmed her hips as she giggled and sang, trying—and failing - to mimic the deeper parts of the song. On her second or seventieth spin, or somewhere in between, she caught sight of Regulus sitting at the bar, tapping his foot on the bar at the bottom of his stool and mouthing the lyrics.

She gasped and tapped Sirius on the shoulder excitedly, then grabbed him by the chin and turned his face toward the bar.

"I'll be damned," Sirius laughed. "Little snake knows a muggle song."

"He knows *the* muggle song. Let's go," Hermione laughed. She looped her arm in Sirius' as they half-danced, half-walked their way toward Regulus. He shrunk back against the bar, shaking his head vehemently as Hermione pointed her finger at him and sang along to the song, and then, finally, the smile he'd been holding back broke free, and she cheered in victory.

Before he could run, they crowded in on him and Sirius grabbed him by the arm to pull him from his seat as they forced him into the middle of their dance.

"Must we... shimmy?" He groaned.

"Yes." Hermione grabbed his shoulders and shook them back and forth, giggling at him.

"It's much easier if you stop fighting it," Sirius told him.

"Come onnn Reggie," Hermione begged. "Thirty seconds... you can do it... it helps."

He sighed in defeat and tipped back his beer bottle, then held it up in the air as he joined in for the last chorus.

"And we keep getting richer, but we can't get our picture on the cover of the Rolling Stone," They chanted in unison.

“Rolling Stone!” James and Peter called out from somewhere behind them.

Hermione laughed and continued on, soaking up the moment. Regulus was wound so tight under all his layers of pureblood, Deatheater, Slytherin, angry, abandoned younger brother, De Facto Black heir bravado, but when she managed to chisel out a tiny little crack in his façade, the light that shone through was beautiful.

He was going to be okay. She was going to make it so much better for him, too.



11th January 1979

Hermione wasn't sure if she'd ever get used to the way it felt. It was, inexplicably, new and familiar every time. There was always a moment of connection first. His eyes would lock with hers, or he'd whisper in her ear or press his lips to her mark, at the exact moment that he thrust inside of her. Hard and fast, or so slow that she felt like he'd never stop sinking further into her depths, it didn't matter. The connection was always there. Safe and comfortable, overwhelming and nearly obscene in how quickly it caused her need to rise.

Need. Gods, she was so incredibly, pathetically, entirely needy for him. She couldn't get enough. Thankfully, neither could he—a blessing, truly, for she felt as if she may actually implode if the time ever came when she had to go more than a day without feeling this. Without feeling him.

Remus pressed his free hand to her stomach and ran it up her chest, hooking his arm under hers in the process and pausing to palm her breast before he continued his journey until he wrapped his long, slender fingers over her shoulder, right over that spot that mattered most. He leaned in, his breath drifting across her skin as he ran his nose from her shoulder blade and up the side of her neck, breathing in her scent as he moved up along the side of her neck and finally, finally, his mouth brushed the shell of her ear. She felt that distinctive pulling sensation, low in her belly, as her body readied itself for him. Her skin felt flushed, her pulse racing.

So fucking Needy.

He traced along her ear with the tip of his tongue and nipped lightly at the lobe before he finally, finally, moved as he rasped in her ear, “Mine.”

Remus' hands dug into her hip and her shoulder in tandem as he pulled her back against him and thrust forward, hard, filing her to the hilt in one swift motion. She was barely standing, the very tips of her toes bent against the floor as he impaled her on his cock and she gasped, then moaned, low in her throat.

“Oh, Gods, Remus, I can't—”

“Right, so, turns out we've got some newbies out on the floor tonight. It's come to my attention that they would very much like to not have the spotlight on them, so, to that, my palm has been greased very handsomely to say —” The DJ paused and, sure enough, James and Lily were bathed in the glow of a spotlight. James was all but preening under the attention, and poor Lily was redder than her hair.

“And this is a direct quote; ‘shut up and let us love you,’” The DJ continued. A chorus of laughter rang out across the bar, and Lily rolled her eyes, but relaxed a bit as she leaned into James. “So, this message goes out to James and Lily Potter, from your family. ‘May you never stop dancing, may your love continue to inspire even the coldest of hearts, and may you accept this as payback for taking the fall with Filch when Peeves heard you in the broom cupboard seventh year.’” The DJ read aloud from a card in his hands, then shrugged. “Whatever that means. To the Potters!”

The bargoers cheered and clapped, uttering their congratulations, as ‘Let's Stay Together’ by Al Green began to play. James and Lily whipped their heads to the side to glare at Sirius in unison, who held his hands up in supplication and laughed, then James gathered Lily in his arms as the two began to dance.

“Okay, what's the story there?” Hermione asked.

“This was the first muggle song James ever learned,” Remus began to explain.

“He pried me with an entire box of chocolates from Honeydukes to tell him what her favourite song was. ‘Course, I had a mouth full by the time I answered, so he spent weeks the summer before our fifth year trying to find a record of ‘Lesser Zephyr by Alger Ween.’”

“You didn't correct him?” Hermione laughed.

“I could have, but Sirius, Peter and I were having far too much fun watching him make an arse of himself in front of confused record store clerks. He eventually got it right and spent ages learning it, and—because it's *James*—he decided that the thing that would finally win the affection of the girl who blushes if someone says her name too loudly in public would be to serenade her in the common room one night while half our house was studying for the first exam of the year.”

“Oh, Gods.”

“Yep. She hit him with a jelly-legs jinx and told him never to speak to her again.”

“She must have been so embarrassed.”

“She was an absolute tomato,” Remus laughed. “Though she later confided in me that, that was the night she realized she was in love with him. So, naturally, their little back and forth was worse than ever for the rest of that school year before they finally pulled their heads out of their asses and got together in sixth.”

“Ah, young love. These kids today are so dramatic,” Hermione sighed playfully.

Regulus flexed his jaw and looked down at the table for a minute, then nodded. “I’m working on it. You’re persistent. Believe it or not, I do appreciate that. I’m just not sure I know how to relax anymore.”

“We’ll get you there,” Hermione reached across the table and rubbed his arm affectionately.

“You know, this isn’t my first ‘help heal the damaged brother’ rodeo,” she told him teasingly.

“Ah, yeah,” Regulus laughed and nodded his head toward Sirius out on the dance floor with Brad. “I guess you did a good job with that one. Though if you tell him I said that, I’ll hex you.”

“I did.” She nodded, “Though he wasn’t the first either. I suppose I have a habit of collecting strays.”

“Woof?” Remus playfully nipped at her ear. Hermione giggled and turned her head to kiss him, and Regulus groaned.

“Amddd, that’s my cue. I’m going to go bribe Peter into buying me a drink since France thinks being seventeen makes me a child.”

Hermione laughed against Remus’ mouth as Regulus walked away and deepened the kiss, parting her lips as he slid his tongue into her mouth and ran his hand up her side. She sighed and turned to wrap her arms around his neck as she kissed him back, diving into his mouth as their tongues danced together, over and over, until he nipped at her lip and let out a soft growl.

Reluctantly, she broke the kiss and pulled back, then patted him playfully on the chest.

“Down, Moony,” she teased.

“I’m trying,” he laughed. “You’re too sweet, Cariad.”

Hermione turned back around, lest she melt and climb back into his mouth to latch on to his tonsils, therefore allowing him to descend into a growling, werewolfy mess in the middle of a public place—which, while exceedingly tempting, she had to begrudgingly admit was not a wise idea—and watched their friends on the dance floor for a bit.

Her eyes tracked Sirius as he went over and whispered something to the DJ. He noticed her watching and gave her a little salute, his eyes sparkling with mischief.

“Dyma nî’n mynd,” Remus muttered.

“Speak English or teach me Welsh,” Hermione intoned.

“I said ‘here we go.’” He laughed, “He’s up to something.”

Before Hermione could respond, the lights over the dance floor dimmed and the music stopped as the sound of the DJ—very wety—clearing his throat drifted out of the sound system, causing herself and a number of others to grimace.

“You can. You *are*,” he nearly growled, pulling her back against him and sinking even farther. “You always do. Fuck, you take me so well, little mate.” He stayed still, fully seated inside of her as he kissed his way along her jaw, then shifted back, using his grip on her shoulder to bend her forward.

“Brace your hands against the wall.” He ordered as he released his hold on her shoulder and trailed his hand down her spine.

Hermione listened, because of course she did. She was, after all—

“Such a good girl!” Remus praised as he pulled almost all the way out before he slammed back in and began to move. He set a brutal pace as he began to rut into her, hard and fast and wild, and so fucking deep that she could feel him in her stomach.

He gripped her hips, pulling her toward him with every thrust and she moaned and arched her back and pushed against the wall, trembling in desperation to take him even deeper. She needed more of him, more of this, always.

“You’re so fucking tight,” he rasped out, that animalistic, growling sort of growl to his voice that she loved of much sending shockwaves of pleasure through her core. She knew without turning around that she’d see the change in his eyes.

Hermione whimpered, her cunt clenching around him as she felt herself rising, every hard, deep stroke of his thick cock driving her closer to oblivion. Remus snaked an arm around her waist and pulled her upright, crushing her back against his chest as he sank his mouth down on her shoulder, sucking and licking at her mark and she was done for.

“Oh, fuck, Remus, please don’t stop,” she begged.

“There’s my girl. Let me have it, Cariad,” Remus rasped into her ear. As if on command, every muscle in her body tightened and then released as she came with a harsh, throaty moan, reaching a hand back to dig her fingers into his thighs for leverage as he fucked her through her orgasm.

He stilled his movements, running his hand along her side as he gave her a moment to catch her breath and then reached up to turn her head toward him, kissing her roughly before he smiled against her lips and pulled back.

“My turn.”

Hermione shrieked as he moved his hands to her waist and pulled her off of his cock, then turned to—very unceremoniously—toss her down to the bed.

“Feral,” she giggled.

“For you? Always,” Remus chuckled. He reached down and lifted her hips, then placed his hand between her shoulder blades and positioned her just the way he liked her—back arched, knees splayed wide, the side of her face pressed against their mattress—and then leaned in, nipping at her arse cheek playfully before he began to kiss his way up her spine.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

"Always," he repeated, speaking in the brief spaces between his ministrations.

"Endlessly."

"Perpetually."

"Constantly."

He reached her shoulder and dragged his nose up her neck, then back down to her mark and let out a contented, sighing sort of growl.

"Infinitely," Remus rasped as he flicked his tongue over the scar. "Forever fucking feral for you, little mate."

He sunk his teeth in—not hard enough to break the skin, but enough that she felt it everywhere, praise be to the Gods for that fun little facet of the mating bond—just as he thrust inside of her, filling her so fast, so completely that it stole her breath.

He growled and then snapped, fingers gripping her hip and tangling in her hair as he moved, and moved, and moved, barreling into her in a frenzy as he chased his release. She loved him like this, loved him, could never fucking get enough.

"So bloody perfect. Love the way this greedy little cunt sucks me in."

"Feels so good, Remus," Hermione moaned, rocking her hips back to meet his thrusts as she clawed at the sheets.

"Yeah?" Remus rasped out, with a bit of a low, laughing lilt to his voice.

"You were made for this, weren't you?"

"Yes," she whispered, arching her back harder as she tried to take him deeper. "Made for this. Made for you. Yours."

"Mine," he growled. He pulled out abruptly, and she opened her mouth to protest but he used his hold on her hip to flip her over to her back and settled between her thighs, lifting one leg to prop her foot on his shoulder before he slammed back inside of her.

"Fuuuuckkk," she groaned, her eyes rolling back in her head as he thrust furiously, his left hand digging into her thigh as his right snaked up to palm her breast.

"Open your fucking eyes," Remus commanded, pinching her nipple. "Look at me while I knot this tight little cunt."

She snapped her eyes open, burning gold flooding her vision as he stared down at her, and she felt her cunt clench around his cock.

"Good fucking girl. You're going to take it so well, aren't you?"

"Yes," Hermione panted, heat creeping up her spine as every hard slam inside of her pushed her closer to another freefall. "I'll take it. I'll be good. I can... oh, I can feel it."

"Yeah? You feel that fucking knot swelling for you, don't you, little mate?"

"Please, Remus, I need..."

STEVE_SUNSHINE

"Right." He rolled his eyes again and took a sip of his drink, then leaned back in his seat.

Hermione tilted her head and studied him while he watched James and Lily on the dance floor. Regulus was downright broody as he watched the new bride and groom spin around the dance floor. For roughly the tenth time in the last week, she had the feeling there was some piece of the puzzle she hadn't put together yet.

To be fair, he was the brooding type, but there had been a few times—such as the day Lily panicked and Hermione had observed Regulus watching Lily with a dopey grin while James stared him down like he wanted to rip his head off, or when he would aim a flirty jab at Lily in a way that seemed designed to get under James' skin - that she really couldn't decide whether he hated one or both of them, was in love with one or both of them, or was just bored and brooding.

Lily tended to get jittery around Regulus. She'd stumble over her words and stare a bit too much, too often, which should have been concerning, given that she was an engaged—well, married, as of three hours ago—woman. But James had a level of strangeness where Regulus was concerned, too. Where Lily got the jitters, James just got... stoic, which was so very unlike him. Three or four times now, she'd noticed the two just staring each other down, stone faced, for ages.

Everyone had been spending loads of time together between Christmas and New Years as they prepared for the wedding, so it was hard not to notice. Hermione had almost asked Lily why they were all being so strange, but she wanted to respect whatever... said strangeness was. Lily would talk to her when and if there was anything she was ready to talk about. In the meantime, Hermione rather liked getting to watch all of the little pieces come together.

It was like an episode of *Corrie*.

Remus, ever the observer, tickled her ribs to bring her attention back to the present and she blushed at being caught drifting off into her little introspective world yet again. He kissed the tip of her nose and propped his chin on her head and Regulus made another fake gagging sound.

"So, is this just what you two do? You fit about dancing and annoying people, and he just stares and hangs on you like a monkey?"

"I like to envision myself as more of a rucksack, but yes," Remus answered for her.

"Stop deflecting and brooding. I just want to see you have fun," Hermione said softly.

"I know you've been through a lot these last few years, and I've made it my mission to see you relax."

KEEPER OF THE MOON

her eyes drifted over to Remus—all dapper in a fitted muggle suit, which undoubtedly shot things to other places.

She forced herself to look away - lest she dissolve into a fit of mate-y neediness on someone else's altar - and looked over at James to watch him, watch Lily. He was radiant and teary eyed. In a move that shocked absolutely nobody, James decided he had enough waiting and rushed down the steps that led up to the altar to meet them at the end of the aisle.

"Gimmie," James said, holding out his hand.

"Erm... Who offers this witch's hand to be bound by the Gods to this wizard?" The officiant's words came out as more of a question. Hermione, Lily, Peter and Sirius all four scoffed in tandem.

"Well, it's *my* hand," Lily rolled her eyes. She turned and rose up to her tiptoes to kiss Remus on the cheek, then looped her arm around James' and proceeded to practically half-drag him up the stairs, as he seemed to have tragically lost all rational thought - and his eyes - somewhere in the bustle of Lily's dress.

Hermione bit back a laugh—sometimes she really did forget that, despite the wizarding school-to-full-adulthood fast track of the magical world, or the whole 'child soldier in a magical blood war' of it all, they really were just a large bunch of randy teenagers.

Remus stepped up to her side and placed his hand on the small of her back and she breathed in deep through her nose, drawing in his scent as they watched James and Lily pause for a very aggressive snog, then situate themselves in front of the officiant.

The officiant gaped at them, looking absolutely befuddled at their display. Lily waved her hand in a sort of 'get on with it' motion, and the poor, ancient looking wizard barreled on.



Hermione broke away from Sirius and made her way to the table near the bar, giggling as she reached for her drink.

"I can teach you to dance if you don't know how, Reggie," she teased her brother as she turned to stand in front of Remus' barstool and settled back between his legs.

Remus banded his arm around her waist and leaned in to bury his face in her neck. "Gross." Regulus rolled his eyes. "I know how to dance. I'm just used to dancing in a more... *refined* setting. Besides, this is not an occasion I find... celebratory. And you're a terrible dancer."

"Hey!" Hermione laughed. "Lily and James are the most celebratory occasion, thank you very much."

STEVIE_SUNSHINE

"I know what you need, Cariad. Not yet. Patience. Be a good girl for me. Wait just a little longer. You can do it." Hermione nodded, scrunching her face and tightening every muscle she could control as she fought back her impending orgasm.

"Don't fucking come," Remus growled, snapping his hips faster as he lifted her other leg and pinned them back against her chest.

"I can't... I'm so close."

Remus released her legs and crashed down on top of her, kissing her softly as he slowed his movements. Hermione whined into his mouth, and he laughed, tearing away from her as he began to kiss his way along her jaw and down the side of her neck.

"Poor little mate. You're trying so hard to be good for me, aren't you?" he whispered against her neck, nipping at the skin just below her ear as he continued to move, thrusting inside of her in deep, languid strokes.

"Mmmmm," Hermione whimpered. She ran her hand up his back to fist in his hair.

"You're so perfect. You're such a good girl. I'll give you what you need." He continued moving down her neck, licking and sucking and biting his way down until he was teasing around the edges of her mating mark.

"Please, Remus," Hermione begged as she grasped his arse with her free hand, pinning him against her as she rocked her hips, trying to outpace his slow, punishing movements. She could feel his knot swelling larger inside of her, stretching her so wide that the pressure was making her head spin, so fucking close that it was driving her crazy.

"Tell me," he commanded as his mouth hovered over her mark.

"Yours. I'm yours. Yours, Remus, please, let me come."

"Mine," he snarled. His chest rumbled against hers with the deep, throaty growl, and then, finally, he gripped her hip and buried himself to the hilt inside of her as he sunk his mouth down on her shoulder, licking and sucking over her scar as his knot locked them in place.

Hermione cried out, eliciting a string of curse words and desperate pleas as her orgasm washed over her and Remus followed her over the edge. She could feel every pulse, every minute throb of his thick cock as he came inside of her. Her cunt gripped him like a vice, spasming around his knot, and she came, and came as he continued to attack her mark, until she felt tears leaking out of the corners of her eyes.

Remus collapsed on top of her and kissed her forehead, her nose, her cheeks, her chin, everywhere he could reach, between utterances of how perfect and good and so very his she was, and she trailed her fingers up and down his back, relaxing into the moment until the weight of him became uncomfortable.

"Roll," she laughed out as she tried to catch her breath. Remus hooked her legs around his hips and rolled to his back, arranging her on top of him and she rested her head on his chest.

"I love you, Cariat. You're so perfect," he praised, whispering as he pressed his lips to her temple. "I love you. I love you. I'm going to marry the hell out of you."

"Well, that's the plan. We'll sort of be double-married, yeah?"

"Double married. That means we win, right?" Hermione teased.

"What are we winning? What were we competing for?"

"I don't know, Remus, don't ask me to think while you're still knotted inside of me. Aren't you just supposed to nod your head and tell me I'm right? Go back to the praise," Hermione scoffed in mock indignation and nipped at his collar bone.

"You're so right. You're always right. Have you ever been wrong in your entire life?"

Remus asked, pulling his head back to look down at her. "Honestly, it's like every time I think you can't get any more right, there you are again, in all your correctness."

"Good job," Hermione yawned, patting him on the chest.

"Hey, that's my line."

"Did you tell anyone else how good they were before me?"

"Well obviously not," Remus laughed as he began to play with her hair. "I was a mere awkward teenage werewolf virgin until you corrupted me, little mate."

"See? So, by law, since the phrase wasn't used until after we were werewolf married, it's marital property, which means I own fifty percent of it. And if anyone did the corrupting, it was you."

"You wish I would have corrupted you, don't you? Bet you used to throw up a sticking charm on the curtains around your bed back at school and cast a muffliato and think about all the ways you wanted your professor to corrupt you."

Hermione scoffed, because how dare he say something so inappropriate and so very true. "I would never."

"Hmmm," Remus hummed as he continued to rub at her scalp and run his fingers through her hair. "And if I said I wanted to see you in a Hogwarts uniform, diligently working on an essay at the desk over there?"

Hermione flushed and buried her face in his chest as she refused to answer, but Remus kept going.

"I would come up behind you. Place a firm hand on your shoulder. Lean in to inspect your work..."

"Remus, stop it." She tilted her head back to glare up at him.

Remus grinned and leaned down, bringing his mouth close to her ear.

She had never understood why, when she was younger, it seemed that it was hard for Sirius and Remus to look at Harry sometimes, despite how much they loved him, or why they couldn't help but bring up, at the most random of times, how very much like his father he was.

Gods help her, she got it now, because James closed his eyes to draw in a deep calming breath, and she was there, in a future she never got to have, standing with Harry on his wedding day and she loved him so fiercely that her heart was going to explode.

Then he looked down at her with those bright amber eyes, and her mind snapped back to the present, and she really was here, in her now, on his day, and Gods, she loved him so much that her heart did explode every time she looked at him.

"Hey!" James called out playfully, poking her in the ribs. "I'm supposed to be the emotional one today."

"I think the bride is supposed to be the emotional one, Pads," Peter interjected.

"Rude, Wormy!" James gasped in mock indignation. "It's my party, and I'll cry if I want to."

"But Kitten's the one crying," Sirius teased. Hermione rolled her eyes and huffed as she reached up to wipe a tear from her cheek.

"I am not crying, because I am under strict orders from the bride to not cry any more until after the ceremony, and if any of you breathe a word of this to Lily, I will hex your skin purple," Hermione warned.

"I look dashing in purple," Sirius said defensively.

"He does," Brad called out from the pew.

Hermione laughed and turned back to James, straightening his tie again, and then smiled. "You *are* getting married today, and I'm so glad I get to be here."

"Me too," James nodded. "You're important, you know?"

"You, too." She nodded back and leaned in to hug him, savoring the moment before she stepped back and grabbed him by the shoulders to reposition him where he needed to be. "Now. Enough mush, James Fleamont Potter. It's time to get you married."

She ushered Sirius and Peter back to their spots, stopping to straighten the latter's collar, and then nodded to the officiant who gestured to the organist.

They all turned and waited as the officiant raised his wand and the heavy double doors slowly swung open, revealing a sight that shot a lightning bolt of pure adoration straight to Hermione's heart. She gasped and covered her mouth as she immediately and unapologetically defied Lily's strict crying ban, because how could she not?

The vision Lily Jane Evans cut standing at the end of the aisle on Remus' arm was easily one of the most beautiful things Hermione had ever seen, in either of her lives. She was so enthralled that it wasn't until they were a third of the way down the aisle that

Lily confessed her dream had always been Paris, but she feared it would be too much of a hassle, Hermione had challenged her with a resounding—it's your day, Godsdammit—the plans had shifted.

With James' discount as a now-official employee of the ministry, the international portkey had been more than affordable. Peter managed to score a few cramped rooms at a lovely hotel in Wizarding Champs-Élysées thanks to a connection with an affluent family the jewelry shop had done business with for years.

They found the quaintest little chapel, opted for a restaurant with a good bar and an even better dance floor in lieu of a formal reception, figured out the dresses, flowers and tuxedos, and the rest was history.

According to Remus—who, it was important to note, Hermione had absolutely *not* snuck off to meet after Lily fell asleep last night, and who she had also absolutely not dipped out in to the hallway to meet for a quick snogging session under the guise of getting ice while Lily was in the shower this morning, not in the slightest, because she absolutely did not defy Lily's order that they were in this together and none of the boys could see either of them until the chapel—James had been so excited that they'd practically had to sit on him to hold him still long enough to shove him in to his suit, hence the need for Sirius to redo his hastily-done up tie.

Hermione was never shy about admitting how mushy and ridiculous she and Remus were together. They were sappy and romantic and, of course, there was the whole... primal, wolfy, feral side of things once the doors were closed, so they really were a lot. But James and Lily were equally ridiculous in their own right. They were just so genuinely giddy about one another, constantly blushing and giggling and—quite often—literally bouncing around in their excitement for one another.

Freaking adorable.

She continued watching her brother struggle with the tie and tried her best not to intervene, but ultimately, she just had to help. With a bit of a laugh, she stepped forward and thrust her bouquet at Sirius as she nudged him out of the way.

“Ah, Kitten saves the day again. You'd think after seven years at school I'd have remembered how to tie these.”

“Well, it's a good thing you have me, then,” she joked as she turned to James and began fidgeting with his tie.

“I'm getting married.” James grinned down at her.

“You know, it's the craziest thing, James! My friend Lily said the same thing just this morning,” she teased as she finished with his tie and smoothed her hands over the front of her jacket. She looked up at his bright, smiling face, a million emotional, joyous, devastating feelings hitting her all at once.

“You've done a wonderful job on this week's homework, Miss Granger. You're the most gifted student I have ever taught. So... dedicated to your studies,” he ripped at her ear and she shivered as she stifled a moan. “Though, I'm afraid there's another student that's only a few points behind your marks.”

Hermione rolled her eyes and relented. She sat up and looked down at him, all wide-eyed and indignant. “But Professor Lupin, that's impossible! I wrote an extra seven inches on my last essay.”

“Ah, yes, Miss Granger. But *this* student wrote eight. Now, you're such a bright student, I'm sure we could put our heads together to come up with a way for you to earn some extra credit, no? Surely, you could handle another nine inches without a problem, aye?” Remus grinned. He ran his hands up her side, then back down to her hips, and she arched her back, rolling her hips, but then he moved his hands back up and tickled her ribs.

“Remus! No fair,” she squirmed and giggled, then collapsed back on top of him.

“Told you. You were so hot for teacher, little mate.”



25th January 1979

Hermione sat, tapping her foot nervously as she waited for Dumbledore to speak. He'd asked to talk to her and Sirius alone prior to the start of the meeting, and she just knew he had something up his sleeve. Unbeknownst to this Albus Dumbledore, Hermione had spent six years attending the Albus Dumbledore School of How to be Used and Abused by... Albus Dumbledore—she'd think of a better name later, she decided then—so she had him at an advantage.

She had, very politely, insisted that it was so vital that no seeds of distrust were sewn within the Order, given that she was so new to the fold, so if the information were not extremely private, then, really, wouldn't it be best to set an example of straightforwardness and discuss it openly? Naturally, Sirius had merely slung his arm over her shoulder and told Dumbledore that the queen had spoken, so he'd eventually relented.

They'd been playing the waiting game as everyone moved through other orders of business, until Dumbledore finally rose from his chair and walked around to stand with his back to the table as he faced everyone.

Dumbledore clasped his hands together and smiled softly, his bright blue eyes twinkling as he scanned the room, and Hermione had to physically force herself not to roll her eyes or scream at him. Remus squeezed her leg—undoubtedly feeling her unease through the bond—and she pressed herself closer against his side.

Sealing the bond had created a sort of connection between them, though it wasn't anything fantastical or over the top. They couldn't read each other's minds or any of the other things that had been told in stories of fated mates across the ages. It just simply heightened their awareness of each other. She could smell him from farther distances than should be possible, and she wouldn't be surprised if he could smell her for kilometers.

They had a tendency to move in tandem—such as how the previous night, they were snuggling on the couch Remus picked up a bookmark off of the arm of the couch and passed it to Hermione at the exact instant she decided to end her reading for the evening, or how a few days ago Remus had knocked a coffee mug off of the counter and she'd reached a hand out to grab it without even turning her head away from the stove.

There were, obviously, sexual components in the mix that were rather incredible, but this sort of emotional flow back and forth between them was her favourite part, even when it was stressful. Any time Remus felt something in excess, she could feel it sort of flowing down the bond toward her. She didn't necessarily feel it herself, she was just aware of it. The two of them, most assuredly, had a lot to learn about the business of being bonded, but she was more grateful for it by the day.

She tensed against his side as Dumbledore stepped back toward the table and shuffled some papers around, pretending to busy himself—she knew him too well, was far too familiar with how he worked to command the attention of the room, to take the act as anything less than the move to build anticipation that it was—and then, finally, relaxed a bit when he turned back around and began to speak.

Here he fucking goes.

"I have two very important matters to discuss with everyone tonight." Dumbledore began as he casually leaned back against the table and folded his arms over his chest.

Anecdote.

"First, I have been given permission from the Black siblings to share a bit of news with everyone. I'll ask that all questions are held until the end," he paused, building the tension—she'd learned, over the years, how much of a performer he truly was, but seeing it now that she held all of the knowledge she did, it was almost unnerving.

"As you all know, we have feared Voldemort was recruiting child soldiers. Those of us at Hogwarts have tried to keep a close eye on things, and have, of course, had our suspicions, but given the size of the school and the boundaries we must keep in place to respect the autonomy of our students, we've merely had to... observe, to learn who to keep an eye on."

Hermione dug her fingers into Remus' thigh with her left hand and gripped Sirius' hand tighter with her right as she forced herself to maintain a mask of calmness.

"I might scream." Lily laughed again and then turned around to hug Hermione. "I'm so glad you're here with me. I know it's just been a few months, but we've become so close in such a short time and I can't imagine doing this without you by my side."

"I love you so much, Lily, but we just agreed not to cry again," Hermione laughed, squeezing her back before breaking away from her and reaching for her bag. "Now. Tradition. I know you didn't want to be too cliché, but as the dress is new..."

"Hermiiiiioooooomeeee," Lily groaned playfully.

"One thing! Old, blue, and borrowed," Hermione defended as she fished the bracelet out of her bag and stepped back toward Lily to slide it onto her wrist.

"It's nothing fancy, and honestly, it looks a little out of place with the gown, but this is one of the most important things I own and—at the risk of sounding selfish, there's a part of me I can't explain that just needs you to wear this on your wedding day," she explained as she ran her thumb over the bracelet.

It was simple—a thin silver chain with a little blue dolphin charm. Honestly, it was so very *late nineties* that she just had to hope Lily didn't ask too many questions, but seeing it on Lily, on her wedding day healed some little corner of Hermione's heart that she hadn't even realized was still cracked open, as she thought fondly of the day when she and Harry had glamourised themselves and snuck off to a Christmas Faire to try to shake off the tent-induced depression.

"I love it. It's so unique," Lily flashed her a genuine smile. "Is it important to you?"

"It is. The friend I mentioned before, the one I said was like a brother to me..."

"The one who James reminds you of?" Lily asked.

"Yeah," Hermione cleared her throat, then continued on, "Yeah, he really does. There was this time where I was really down, and he dragged me to this little craft vendor market to cheer me up. I guess he spotted me eyeing this, and he surprised me with it later. He... the way you're always so intuitive with how I'm feeling and know the exact right thing to say or do, he was like that too. So, it's silly but, this is important to me, and he was, and you are, so, wear the bracelet, and let's go turn you into a Potter."



Hermione stood to the side of the altar, fidgeting with the bouquet in her hands as she watched Sirius fuss over James' tie. Peter - taking his self-imposed job of trying to get Regulus to smile extremely seriously - was standing near them, making faces at the poor kid as he sat shifting awkwardly in the front pew next to Brad.

It was just the eight of them, for a single night in Paris, but Lily had reassured her over and over that it was all she wanted. They'd talked about booking a little chapel near Godric's Hollow and inviting more of the Order to make it a bigger thing, but when

again. She'd never seen a picture of the first time this day happened. She didn't even know if it had been the same date.

When Lily stepped into this dress at the bridal shoppe, she'd burst into tears over how perfect it was. Did she get that experience the first time around? Would she have even been at that shop, in that neighborhood, on that day? Would she have had a different dress?

In all the big moments, it was hard not to feel the weight of the way that her presence was changing their lives. But then Remus would lean in and smile against her skin as he kissed her, or she'd catch Sirius and Brad slow dancing in the kitchen, or Peter would gush to her for hours about his latest charmwork, or she'd hype James up about another magic-nugget hybrid project, or—one of her favourites—Lily would burst through her bedroom door and order Remus out so she could flop down next to Hermione and vent about one of those things that the guys just wouldn't understand.

Maybe Lily hadn't had Paris before. Maybe she hadn't had the ivory lace gown with a million buttons and the perfect little appliques along the bodice? Maybe there were things they would never have, now that she was here. But neither she nor Lily had ever had the dynamic they had found in one another before. Truly, she had developed such a unique space with each of her friends, within the setting of their whole group, that was irreplaceable, and she knew beyond a reasonable doubt that she mattered to them just as much as they did to her.

Maybe they all had different things when their lives played out before, but they had Hermione now, and she had them, and they were going to live this time.

She'd remained relatively confident in her mission, but if nothing else had convinced her that she could help defeat that snakey bastard for a second time, she had solid proof now. Not only had she gotten Sirius and Regulus Black living under the same roof again, but it had been an entire week and they'd only gotten in one fist fight. Which, to be fair, they'd needed—and despite their insistence to the contrary, she and her brothers all knew those punches weren't actually thrown over the last score.

"You're the most stunning bride I've ever seen, Lils," Hermione whispered.

"Stop, you're going to make me cry again, and then you'll cry again, and I'll cry harder, and we just redid our makeup," Lily laughed as she carefully dabbed underneath her eyes with her fingertips. She turned this way and that in the mirror, inspecting herself, and then grinned. "I'm getting married."

"You're getting married?" Hermione giggled, shaking her head in disbelief as she added, "In *Paris*, on New Year's Eve."

Respect the autonomy of our students.

She'd be the first to admit that she'd always been a bit volatile, but she had never wanted to launch herself at someone and just claw their fucking eyes out as badly as she did in that moment, as the man who played the world's longest game of mental chess to keep Harry alive so that he could die at the right time pretended to give a single rat's arse about the autonomy of children.

"One of the students that we suspected to have taken the mark was Regulus Black. However," Dumbledore paused, setting the stage again for the gasps and murmurs that rang out, then held his hand up to quiet the room. "It is with an abundance of joy that I share with you all that, over the Christmas holidays, young Mr. Black decided to renounce the views of his parents and seek refuge with his older siblings. I am told he is doing quite well, which is a relief to hear. Though, there is still much to discuss."

"Such as?" Hermione called out, unable to stop herself. She knew he had a point, and she was getting rather tired of listening to him pretend to give a shit about her brother when his prejudice against Slytherins was infamous, with or without the Death-eater aspect.

"Ah. Miss Black." Dumbledore smiled at her. "While we are very pleased with your brother's decision to defect, and, it goes without saying, so grateful that he has a good support system behind him, there are still... facets of the situation that I find myself struggling with."

He looked around the room for a moment and sighed heavily, as if he were bearing a great weight.

"Due to house and familial allegiances, Mr. Black will be finishing his last term via correspondence. While he is a bright student, and more than capable of working alone, as an educator I would be remiss if I did not express my concern in him missing out on such an important era of his school days. I fondly remember all of the parties and shenanigans that most assuredly do not happen the week of graduation." Dumbledore adapted a knowing smile, and a few people scattered around the room chuckled. Gods, he really did know how to work a crowd.

"If you're suggesting we send him back to that school—" Sirius began, but Dumbledore held his hand up again to silence him.

"I would never deem it appropriate to tell you how to handle your brother's education. I just felt the need to get it off my chest, so to speak. I believe, Mr. Black, as Alastor and I have discussed, that the real issue lies in the position the Order is in. We currently have no route to information on any plans or movements the other side may be making, which, as we all know, makes it rather difficult to strategize."

KEEPER OF THE MOON

“So, what are you suggesting here, Albus?” Alice Longbottom asked in a no-nonsense tone. “You want to ask Regulus to spy?”

Hermione bristled and moved to stand, but Remus tightened his arm around her back and Sirius squeezed her hand tighter. Lily reached over Remus’ leg and gripped on to her knee as Petter did the same from Sirius’ right side. She felt a hand squeeze her left shoulder and looked over to see James with his arm slung around Remus to hold on to her as well.

Her people, *Her family*, holding her down because—well, she really was a little volatile. She knew they had to look like a strange tangle of limbs restraining a feral beast, as she could feel how angry her face looked, but she didn’t care.

“Not necessarily,” Dumbledore said. “I am merely suggesting that we consider all options.”

“There *are* no options.” Hermione forced her voice to remain calm, despite the fact that the ‘tangle of limbs’ situation was belying her frenzied state for all to see.

“Miss Black?”

“I said,” she spat through her teeth, “There. Arc. No. Options. The Order does not allow members who are not both of age and graduated from school, correct? As my brother still needs to complete his final term, he does not meet the criteria to become an Order member.”

“This is very true,” Dumbledore nodded. “Though, were he to wish to help the Order, I’m sure that an except —”

“No,” Sirius said firmly.

“He’s already defected, he can’t exactly waltz back in and say ‘sorry guys, took a bit of a holiday, back to killing muggles we go’ without arising an arsenal of suspicion,” James scoffed.

“Well, given that it’s only been a few weeks, I’m sure that —”

“Forgive me, Albus, is there a part of the word ‘no’ that you’re not understanding? I believe between the six of us, here, we know roughly eight different languages. I’m sure we could rephrase it, if need be,” Hermione raised an eyebrow, as she stared him down.

“Nein,” Peter said dryly.

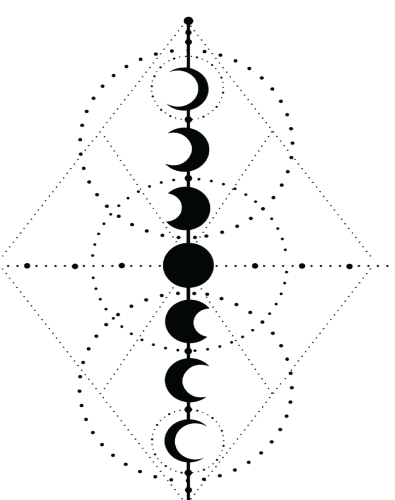
“Non. Niet,” Sirius added.

“Nac,” Remus chimed in.

Dumbledore laughed nervously before Lily and James had the chance to speak up.

“Message received,” He chuckled. “Though I must ask that we just... let the thought rest on the table, for a bit.”

“Albus,” Hermione said casually, pulling her hand out of Sirius’ to inspect her nails in a display of boredom.



Let's Stay Together

31st December 1978

Hermione’s hands trembled as she did up the tiny buttons lining the back of the dress. She glanced up to meet Lily’s eyes in the mirror as she drank in the serene, enraptured look on her face.

Harry truly was the spitting image of James, with Lily’s eyes, yes, everyone who had been lucky enough to know the last two generations of the Potter line knew as much. But there was more of Lily in Harry than people seemed to realize. The way the left corner of her mouth tilted up, just slightly, when she was content. The little v between her brows when she was trying to work out a problem. The sass, most assuredly.

And the love. *Lily’s love*. That Godsdamned world-saving power that permeated your entire sense of self if you spent even the briefest of moments bathed in that love—just as it had been with Harry. She found herself wishing he could be here to see this—an odd thought, given most children weren’t present at their parents’ wedding, but a feeling, nonetheless.

There were things Hermione would never know. Throughout the entire whirlwind process of helping Lily plan the day, she’d found herself wondering, over and over

STEVIE_SUNSHINE

“Yes, Miss Black?”

“Do you aspire to be the kind of man who sends children off to war to die in his stead?”

“Excuse me? I can assure you, I would never.”

Hermione snorted, then nodded. “How marvelous, that you feel so confident in your morality at the present time. I’m sure you’ll understand though, after hearing your little... speech tonight, I’m a bit concerned. I’m not sure if anyone else agrees...” she trailed off, looking around the room as she set her own scene.

She had, after all, gone to the Albus Dumbledore School of Manipulative Mind Games.

“Please, forgive me for speaking so plainly.” She smiled sheepishly and shifted her seat, displaying how oh-so-very nervous she was. “It’s just that, while I know I’m new to the fray, as the leader of the Order, we all put a lot of faith in you. It goes without saying that sending Regulus back into... Well, any of it, would be dangerous. Were he to attempt to return after defecting, his very life could be at stake in his family home, back in the Slytherin dungeons and, of course, with Voldemort. So I suppose... well, umm...”

She chewed her lip and looked down at her lap because oh gosh look at me wither under authority, then spoke in a softer tone.

“Well, in truth, Albus, from everything I’ve heard, you’re the brightest wizard of your age, so, there is simply no way that the thought of using Reggie as a spy even crossed your mind without you being aware of the risks. So, um... this all just reads a lot like you are willing to risk a child’s life.”

She was laying it on thick. Regulus was of age, but the Wizarding community took education extremely seriously, so given that the idea of him still being enrolled in school kept him labeled as a child in the minds of the masses, she knew her words would hit their mark.

Hermione went quiet for a moment and bit back a grin as a people started to speak in hushed, indignant whispers.

“Well sir, Albus, I’ve got nephews out there. Bill’s turning nine this year, should I have him fitted for his spy gear now?” Gideon Prewett called out.

The irony wasn’t lost on Hermione that Bill would fight in this war, and nearly lose his life to the same werewolf that had cursed Remus in doing so.

“No, that’s not —”

“Eh, Charlie may be younger but he’s the brute. We’ll just give him a sword and send him into battle,” Fabian added.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

"Albus, I hate to say it, but they've got a point," Frank Longbottom spoke up, to a chorus of agreement.

"Right," Came the gravelly voice of Dorcas Meadows. "I mean, Regulus is a poncy little shit, but he isn't even done with school, and the odds that they would kill him if he tried to go back are higher than him surviving."

"Where would the line be?" Peter asked. "If we say 'well, he's only one term off from graduating' then next time is it 'sixteen is fine' and then so on and so forth until you've got a bunch of twelve-year-olds running around saving the world?"

Spot-on, Pete.

"Quiet," Moody ordered roughly. "We ain't sending a kid back to those fuckers. Albus was just... thinking out loud. We can all move on."

"No?" Alice spoke up again. "I'd like to have children someday, Moody. How am I supposed to feel safe with them attending Hogwarts if *this* is the mentality their headmaster has?"

Oh.

Oh, that *hurt*.

"Exactly?" Lily yelled out. "What precedent would we be setting? Is that the future we have to look forward to?"

Oh, that hurt, Hermione thought, squeezing her eyes shut for a moment.

"I'm sorry for the misunderstanding," Albus said sheepishly, holding his hands up in supplication. "I taught nearly everyone in this room, so, I should hope it goes without saying that aside from my tendency to put my foot in my mouth, I would never truly send a child into a dangerous situation."

"That's not good enough," Sirius' voice was calm and focused, "You weren't putting your foot in your mouth. You were willing to risk Regulus' life to gain information on Voldemort's next moves."

Dumbledore sputtered and looked at Moody for help, who just shrugged at him. Hermione let things simmer for a brief interval, when an idea struck her. She leaned into Remus and whispered in his ear, and he nodded slightly at her before he spoke up.

"I think things got a little too tense," Remus laughed. "Obviously, Hermione and Sirius are worried about their brother, given what he's been through, so it's a sensitive subject. Nobody wants to believe you would put a child in harm's way, Albus."

"Right. It's just that... Well, prior to now, I never would've thought you had it in you, so I'm a bit shaken." Sirius nodded.

"My concern is what happens the next time. Regulus being marked proves that there are children being recruited. As Peter said, the next could be even younger. What if

STEVE_SUNSHINE



Give a little bit

I'll give a little bit of my life to you

Now's the time that we need to share

So send a smile, we're on our way back home.

Regulus brought a hand up to his cheek and looked away, struggling again. “I told Mother and Father I was out. That I was done. Turns out you’re not that special, Sirius. Dear old Dad throws a few punches as a parting gift to every heir before he disowns them.”

“Shit,” Sirius shook his head in disbelief. “You actually did it?”

“Yeah, well...” Regulus grew quiet for a moment, and looked down, brushing invisible lint off of his jumper before he spoke again. “Like I said I thought I wanted this. I was wrong. If you two say there’s a better way, I’d like to try that.”

Hermione lunged off of the bed and wrapped her arms around Regulus, who stood stock still while she hugged him.

“I know you don’t know me, so it doesn’t matter yet. But I’m so fucking proud of you, Reggie.” She squeezed him tighter, and, to her delight, he nodded slowly and returned the hug, wrapping his arms around her and burying his face in her shoulder.

“I can’t go back to school,” he told her quietly. “I only had one term left, but I’m not the only marked Slytherin and now that I’ve defected...”

“We’ll handle it,” Sirius said gruffly. He stepped up beside them and looped his arm around Hermione’s back as he brought a hand to Regulus’ shoulder. “I’ll owl Dumbledore in the morning, and you’ve got a room here. You don’t fuck this up though, got it, Reggie? If you’re doing this, you’re all in. Hermione and I are your family now. This, *right here*? This is what the Blacks become. Not that washed up, abusive pureblood shit. Not anymore.”

“Not anymore,” Hermione echoed. “We’re going to end the war, and you’re going to live this time, Reggie.”

“This time?” he asked, pulling back to look at her. He furrowed his brow and looked rapidly between her and Sirius.

Shit. She wasn’t ready to tell everyone yet. She still needed to access a pensieve, get a few more ducks in a row... She thought quickly and nodded, offering him a bright, genuine smile.

“This time,” she repeated. “This is a new beginning. You’re starting a whole new life. The old one? Deatheater, arschole kid? You were just existing. This time you’re going to *live*.”

“Gods,” Regulus groaned. “Are all of you this... mushy?”

“Yes,” Sirius grinned as he broke away from them and slung an arm over Regulus’ shoulder. “Now, let me introduce you to our favourite friend.”

“Please tell me there aren’t *more* of you,” Regulus groaned.

“This one is special. It’s tradition,” Sirius reassured him.

“D&B!” Hermione announced proudly.

they came to you and asked to spy? Surely you can’t blame us if we would like some reassurance,” Hermione said.

“Of course. If there is anything I can do to —”

“A vote,” she interrupted. “I would like to propose a vote on whether or not the Order supports involving children who have not finished their schooling in any aspect of the war. Should the majority rule that they do not, then a simple magical contract can seal the deal, and nobody will ever be able to question your dedication to keeping your students safe, Albus.”

Moody sighed and sat back in his chair, then rapped his knuckles on the table. “I second. All in favor of a magical contract stipulating that no associate of the Order of the Phoenix will involve school-aged children in any matters of war?”

He paused as every hand in the room went up. Hermione did not miss that Dumbledore’s was the last to rise.

“Majority rules,” Moody rapped his knuckles on the table, “Now, let’s get on to the next order of business.”

“Ah, right, yes,” Dumbledore nodded. “We’re still trying to make sense of the meaning, but we were informed by a contact in the Department of Mysteries that a prophecy has been unveiled.”

Gasps rang out around the room, and Hermione felt bile rise to her throat. No, she reminded herself, it wouldn’t be that one. She had plenty of time still. Dumbledore wouldn’t interview Trelawney until early 1980. She tried to rack her brain for anything she knew about another prophecy, but came up empty.

“Settle,” Moody barked out.

“Thank you, Alastor.” Dumbledore dipped his chin and smiled at the gruff auror, then turned his head back to face the room. “Now, as you all know, Divination is not an exact magic. Thusly, prophecies can be a bit... murky.” He smiled that friendly, placating — *calculated* — smile and Hermione’s breath caught in her throat. Another prophecy, and he was hiding something about it all over again.

“That being said, for the sake of clarity, we’ve isolated the important part and would like to share it with all of you tonight, in the hopes that we, as an Order, can put our heads together on the matter. Emmanine, if you please.”

Dumbledore turned and smiled fondly at a small witch wrapped in an amethyst shawl, and Hermione fought back the smile that tugged at her lips. She’d met Em only twice before her death, but she had been so unbelievably kind.

“Thank you, Albus. I only have the beginning of the prophecy available tonight, but we believe it to be the part that matters most, as it were.” Emmanine cleared her throat

and picked up a piece of parchment off of the table in front of her as she began to read aloud.

“The traveller who belongs to the wolf, born of two names, bears the power to vanquish the Dark Lord. When the one within whom the duality exists wields the sword, all who stand against them shall fall.”

Hermione stopped breathing as a million thoughts hit her at once. She couldn’t say she was surprised. There had been a prophecy about Harry, there being one about her wasn’t a far stretch. But now there was one, and the game had changed. Things weren’t adding up, though. Why were they only sharing two lines? The prophecies she’d heard were always... well, a bit convoluted, in truth, but longer, nonetheless, with far more information.

She risked a glance over to Dumbledore as both Remus and Sirius dug their hands into her skin to the point of pain, to find him carefully scanning everyone’s faces.

Calculating. Planning. Always fucking scheming.

He was hiding something, smiling all the while, as if he were perfectly innocent. She had him at the advantage, though. She was likely the one person in the room who knew the whole truth about him, and she would be damned if she let anyone else fall victim to his special little brand of ‘mentoring’ again.

He was nearly radiating smugness over how well he was manipulating the masses.

Enter Hermione.

Albus Dumbledore had no idea that he’d just unleashed a monster of his own making.



Let me say that since, baby, since we’ve been together

Ohh, loving you forever is what I need

Let me, be the one you come running to

I’ll never be untrue

“Carina Hermione Jean Granger Black Someday-Lupin,” he said dramatically. “Would you, my dearest mate-slash-werewolf wife, do me the honor of wearing this ring, so that every sorry bastard who sees you knows that I’m going to make you my witch-wife someday?”

Hermione threw her head back and laughed, then nodded as she held her hand out for him to slip the ring on as she remarked, “Lily is going to scream.”



Lily screamed and grabbed Hermione’s hand, holding it up to the light, then smacked her on the shoulder.

“You should have put both on.”

“Hush.” Hermione laughed. “Help me take these drinks to the sitting room. I’m gonna steal Regulus and Sirius for a chat.”

“Fine.” Lily sighed, “But this isn’t over.”

Hermione rolled her eyes as they made their way back to the others. She caught Sirius’ eye and gave him a nod, then stepped over to Regulus and knelt down next to his chair, placing a hand on his knee. “Hey. Can we talk now?”

Regulus eyed her for a second but nodded reluctantly and followed them as she led her brothers down the hall to her room.

“Nice room,” Regulus said conversationally as he leaned against the desk. “Cool bookshelves.”

“Thanks.” Hermione smiled up at him as she climbed onto the bed next to Sirius.

“The books are mostly Remus’, but I’ve been adding to his collection slowly.”

“Ah.” Regulus nodded. “You two share this one, then?”

“We do. The spare across the hall used to be mine, that’s where you’ll sleep tonight.”

“So, big sister is shagging the werewolf?” Regulus asked with an amused smile.

“Oi! I don’t know what you think you know —” Sirius bristled, but regulus cut him off.

“Oh, come off it, Sirius. Severus told me our Fourth year after your little stunt. If I’d intended to tell anyone I would have by now.” Regulus rolled his eyes, then looked back at Hermione. “Is that safe, Hermione? The whole... shagging the werewolf bit?”

“It is. I’m his mate,” she said proudly.

“Oh? Like Veelas and shit?” Regulus nodded, then shrugged. “Whatever. That’s cool. Anyway, ‘m here. As requested. What do you two want from me?”

“I’d like to know if you being here means you’ve chosen to defect,” Hermione said, matter-of-factly.

“And I’d like to know about that bruise on your face,” Sirius chimed in.

real friend. And your baby. *Harry*. I — Gods, I don't understand how I could get so fucked up, I swear I could never do that to you. I *won't*. I won't do anything to hurt you guys. To hurt him. He was..." Peter shook his head and laughed softly, a small smile breaking up the tension on his face.

"Well, Godric, Prongs, even as a tyke he looked like they pulled him right out of your arse, didn't he? I'll take the vow. I'll swear my life to protect that kid. All of you, you're my family, and your kids will be someday too. Please, you have to know that I'm not that person. Don't..."

Peter paused and looked around, locking eyes with a few of them, before he finally turned to Hermione. "Please don't let me become that person. Please."

"We won't. I swear it. I promise you, Peter. When I first came back, I'll be honest. I was so ready to hate you. But then I met you, and I saw how you're just... so genuinely fucking good. Before I even left the Order meeting that night I knew I was going to make sure you were okay, too."

"She's good at that," Sirius finally spoke.

"Well, then it's settled." James finally broke through the tension and clapped a hand on Peter's back. "Don't kill me, and we'll be square."

Hermione sighed in relief, then smiled when she felt Remus wrap his arms around her waist and pull her back to his chest, kissing her temple. "wyt ti'n iawn, Cariad?" he asked softly, then clarified, "Are you alright?"

"Yes, love. I'm okay," Hermione nodded. She let herself melt into him for a moment while they all took a bit of a break, then finally moved back toward the box of memories on the table.

"This memory provides a bit more context." She held up the vial of her memory, labeled Shrieking Shack as she spoke. "This is from my third year. When Sirius Black escaped Azkaban."



"What the fuck, Hermione, you said I was handsome!" Sirius groaned.

"You were!" she laughed. "Once you were able to shower and change your clothes. And after a few dental charms, and... you *were*, I promise."

"She really was hot for teacher, wasn't she? Did anyone else see how much she was checking Remus out?" Brad laughed.

"Told ya." Remus grinned, then grinned. "Gods I looked fucking old."

"You were very handsome." Hermione leaned in and kissed his cheek. "I might have been a little hot for teacher."

"Gross."

"Exceptional input as always, Reggie," Peter nudged him with his shoulder playfully and then sighed. "Merlin, I was a piece of shit, wasn't I?"

"Was. You won't be this time," Sirius said firmly.

"To be fair, Peter, as a rat, you were quite pleasant," Hermione teased. Peter flipped her off, then laughed.

"So, Peter was a rat for that long? Gods, his mind must have been half gone. It's so dangerous to remain in your Animagus form for an extended period of time." Lily shook her head in disbelief.

"He was. After he slipped away, he — sorry Pete, I know this stuff is hard to hear. We're just going to refer to the evil future Peter as Scabbers." Hermione laughed.

"Scabbers was weak and terrified, all the time. I think whatever motivated him to swear allegiance to Voldemort really scared him."

"Well. Fuck that fucker. He's not getting me this time," Peter declared.

"Hell no, he isn't," James agreed.

Hermione made her way back to the table and summoned the bottle of whisky and shot glasses she'd placed on the little counter under the pass-through earlier and lined them up as everyone else sat down.

"What happened to Harry?" Lily asked. "After? Did he... we would have wanted him to go to Remus, if Sirius was gone. Alice and Frank after that, but it doesn't seem like that happened."

"It didn't," Hermione sighed. "With Sirius in Azkaban, you and James dead, and Remus being a werewolf, Dumbledore stepped in. But not in a good way. Which brings us to this." Hermione unscrewed the lid of the bottle and filled the shot glasses, then pushed one to each of them. "There's so much bad shit to tell you all, so we're going to play a drinking game. I call this 'take a shot every time Albus Dumbledore put kids in danger on purpose.'"

"What the fuck?" James' eyes snapped to hers. Hermione nodded and gave him an apologetic look.

"Dumbledore refused to let Remus take Harry. He played on Remus' insecurities by telling him he couldn't support a child because the anti-werewolf legislation would keep him from providing a stable life — completely ignoring the fact that being Harry's guardian would have given him full access to the fucking Potter vaults."

"Fyyy," Remus hissed.

"Fuck in Welsh, indeed, Moony." Peter shook his head.

"So, what happened?" Lily looked down at the table as she twirled the shot glass with her fingers.

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"The fucking Dursleys. Drink." Hermione downed her shot, then summoned the other glasses back to refill them.

"Vernon and Petunia? That mother fucker," James spat as he slammed his glass back down on the table.

"Yes," Hermione sighed heavily and shook her head. "To be fair, with Lily's sacrificial protection, it was safest, magically, for him to be around Evans' blood. But they were as shitty as you would imagine they'd be to him. Dumbledore knew and left him there. I'll never know the reasons why, but with everything else, I'm sure it was a manipulation, too. He could have easily found a safe place for Harry, altered his appearance, there are no bounds to what could have been done magically to protect him, but he just... Left him with those bastards."

"So, you and Harry were friends at school, then?" Brad asked. "That's kind of trippy. Wait, did you guys like... were you a thing? Oh! Were you married? Is that why they feel connected to you, a marital bond?"

"Gross!" Hermione laughed. "Sorry not like —Gods, Harry was so funny, and handsome, of course. But no, we weren't like that at all. But yes, we were at school together. He was my *best* friend. And eventually, we fought side by side to end the Second Wizarding War, after Voldemort rose back to power."

"How the... he came back?" Regulus slumped back in his chair and ran a hand through his hair—a habit he and Sirius both shared. She rather adored the similarity.

"He did. Slowly, then all at once. Harry and I were in our first year at school the first time he faced Voldemort, as a parasitic entity living on the back of our DADA Professor's head. He was trying to steal the philosopher's stone, which Dumbledore had hidden in the school. Drink. Harry managed to get the stone, and when Professor Quirrell tried to attack him to take it, he sort of... disintegrated, because Lily's sacrifice had protected him from Voldemort and... he was literally on the back of the guy's head." Hermione shuddered.

"Our second year, Lucius Malfoy wanted to discredit Dumbledore and was all worked up over a muggle protection act, so he snuck Tom Riddle's diary, which turned out to be a horcrux, into Ginny Weasley's cauldron in Diagon Alley. Through the diary, Ginny was manipulated into opening the chamber of secrets and unleashing a Basilisk. Multiple students were petrified, myself included, but Harry, again, faced down Voldemort, this time in the form of a spiritous apparition of his teenage self. Twelve years old. Drink."

"Third year was less Voldemort and more... werewolf professor, Azkaban escapee. Demons all over the school. Fourth year, Barty Crouch Jr. Polyjuiced himself as Moody to pose as our instructor and enter Harry into the Triwizard Tournament. The

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wrap her arm around Peter's shoulders, Lily guided him until his head rested in her lap and began running her fingers through his hair.

"Lily, I love you," Peter rasped as he shook in her lap. "I love you so much, I don't understand. I... I'm so sorry. I'm so fucking sorry. Your baby, Lily, I sent that fucking monster after your baby, and he *killed* you, I can't breathe, I can't—"

"Remus," Hermione called over her shoulder to where Remus and Sirius were both still rooted in their places, silent and still as they stared down at the now-still pensieve. "MOONY! Get my bag, *Please*."

He shook his head and blinked a few times, then nodded as he rushed it over to her. Hermione snatched it out of his hands and rooted around inside until she pulled out two vials of Calming Draught and handed one to Remus.

"For James, okay?" Remus nodded and buried his nose in her hair for a second before he rose to his feet and moved away from them.

"Peter, you have to breathe," Lily's voice came out strangled through her own tears. "You didn't, okay? Not... not yet, but you have to calm down right now."

Hermione leaned down and brushed Peter's hair out of his eyes, her heart cracking at the tortured look on his face. "Lily's right. It hasn't happened yet. I need you to take this for me, okay? It's just to help calm you down."

Peter nodded reluctantly and sat up, slumped against Lily's shoulder as Hermione brought the vial to his lips. He swallowed down the potion and closed his eyes, his chest heaving as he continued to sob. As the potion worked its way through his system, his breaths began to even out, and Hermione reached out and cupped his face in her hands.

"Better?" she asked. Peter nodded, and she smiled at him, then looked over her shoulder to find the others watching them. James' eyes were still narrowed, but he looked far calmer.

"Okay. We're good now. See? We can talk this out. Obviously, something happens in the next two years that causes Peter to betray James and Lily. But it has not happened yet. Are we going to fight, and cause division, and *make* it happen, or are we going to stick together and make sure that these two stay alive this time?"

"No," James shook his head. "No, it's not happening this time. Pete, I—fuck, Wormtail. I have to believe that whatever becomes of you, to turn you into someone who would do that, it isn't in you yet. You don't fucking *let* it get in you, okay? If anything happens, anything seems off, anything goes bad—"

"I swear," Peter's voice cracked as he scrambled to his feet. He moved toward James and reached out tentatively, then second-guessed himself and took a step back. "James, I swear. You, specifically. You were the first person who was ever nice to me. My first

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because this is all just the tip of the iceberg. You'll... you *will* see James and Lily's bodies, in this memory. If anyone wishes to sit it out —"

"No," Remus said firmly as he stepped up to Hermione's side. He laced the fingers of his right hand with hers, then grabbed Lily's hand on his right side. "We all need to be together on this. Even when it's hard. Every step, remember?"

Hermione nodded and gave everyone a moment to object before she tipped the vial and took a deep breath as she reached out and grabbed Sirius' hand on the other side. With a final look around, she leaned down, and they all plunged head-first into that fateful Halloween night.



"Merlin's saggy fucking balls," Hermione groaned. "Brad, hold him."

Brad nodded and lunged forward to wrap his arms around James, who had launched himself at Peter the second the memory ended. Sirius stood completely still, looking shellshocked, and Remus had tightened his grip on Hermione and Lily's hands to the point that she could feel hers going numb. Regulus moved toward James and covered his front as he leaned in and whispered something in his ear, too low for her to hear.

James continued to glare at Peter as Regulus spoke, but eventually nodded and went still. Hermione squeezed Remus' hand and broke away from him to round the pensieve and step in front of Peter, who had backed himself against the wall, tears streaming down his horror-stricken face.

"Peter"

"No," he whispered, shaking his head. "No, Hermione, I couldn't. I *would* never. I — He was a baby. Please tell me it isn't real, please. I can't —" his voice cracked and she dove forward, wrapping her arms around his neck.

"It's okay. You have to breathe, okay? I'm so sorry. It's real, but it's... two and a half years away. Something had to have happened that scared you, or broke you, but it's not going to happen this time, okay?" Hermione tried her best to adapt a soothing tone, but was nearly certain it fell flat beneath the weight of her own tears.

"No," he choked out again. He pulled back and looked down at her, completely broken as he shook his head again. "No, Hermione, there's nothing, I — James, Lily, *please*, you have to know there is nothing that would have made me do this to you. To your baby, I... oh my Gods, he was a fucking *baby*."

Peter jerked away from her with such force that his head knocked back against the wall and he sank to the floor and buried his face in his hands. Hermione knelt down next to him, rubbing his back, and Lily rushed over toward them. She stood silently as she watched him, then turned and sat down on the floor next to Peter. Reaching out to

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final task was a trap that led Harry to a cemetery in Little Whinging, where Voldemort, with the help of Peter, used Harry's blood to help... grow himself a new body, it was a whole ritualistic thing. Another student was killed. Harry nearly died. Dumbledore somehow spent the entire year working alongside 'Moody' —who he clearly knows very well —without suspecting a thing. Drink."

"Fifth year, we had a shit blood purist temporary headmistress who made life hell. At the end of the year, Voldemort was after the rest of the prophecy about Harry. He tricked him into believing they'd captured Sirius so a number of us escaped the school and went to the department of mysteries to rescue him. It was a trap. Sirius nearly went through the veil that night, while dueling with Bellatrix, but Remus grabbed his arm at the last minute, thankfully, I can't imagine - "She trailed off, shaking her head, and leaned in to hug Sirius tightly. "I like it best when you don't die."

"Me too, Kitten," he agreed.

"Sixth year, Draco Malfoy —Narcissa's son —was forced to take the Dark Mark because when his father was arrested after that battle, Voldemort moved into Malfoy manor and began threatening Narcissa's life if Draco didn't comply. He tasked Draco with fixing a vanishing cabinet to let Death eaters into Hogwarts and killing Dumbledore. That year, Draco was... we'd never gotten along. We hated him and he hated us, but he was so broken. He looked so fucking sick, tortured and he —well, Dumbledore knew, the entire time, what he'd been tasked with and did nothing, even when two other students nearly died." Hermione paused to take a shot and light a cigarette, then kept on.

"Draco didn't have it in him to actually kill someone, when he came face to face with Dumbledore. He was... an absolute arse, and such a prissy little bitch, but he wasn't bad. Just... fucking raised by Lucius Malfoy. This part —everybody shut up, in advance." She laughed and held up her hand. "I know you all hate him, but there are things you don't know yet. Severus Snape killed Dumbledore, but it was at Dumbledore's request. He was dying anyway, and Snape had taken a vow to Narcissa to protect her son. Snape was actually loyal to the Order of the Phoenix."

"What the fuck?" James shook his head.

"No way," Sirius protested.

"Way," Hermione confirmed. "I have pensieve memories to back that up, too. When Voldemort first learned of the prophecy, he went to Dumbledore and begged him to protect you guys. I've seen the memories myself. Dumbledore quite literally said 'and what will you give me in return?' and used the situation to turn Snape into a spy for the Order. He played the part expertly. Voldemort never suspected a thing."

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"I'm sorry, are we supposed to believe that Snape was a good guy?" Sirius shook his head.

"No. He was an absolute arsehole. He was my potions professor and, while he was, admittedly, brilliant at teaching, he was horrible in the way he treated children. The amount of times he called me or someone else names in class or outwardly bullied us was... deplorable. However, he also spent the entire time that we were at Hogwarts, and beyond, protecting Harry behind the scenes. He saved his life more than once. Shiny people can still have good qualities. Sirius, in the future, once told Harry the world isn't made up of good people and Deathbeaters. It's not all black and white, you know? Snape was a grey area. He was an arsehole, but he wasn't evil."

"Severus did that?" Lily looked up at her through teary eyes.

"He did. He... he was in love with you, Lils."

"Yeah." She nodded, sniffing as she wiped her nose on the sleeve of her jumper. "That's a big part of why we stopped being friends. Well, there was... I'm sure you know a lot of it. But he was really jealous, and got meaner over time. I've always sort of thought it was because I never saw him like that. Still, he... he tried to help us. And he helped our son. That's really good of him."

"He wasn't all bad. I don't think anyone is." Hermione smiled softly at Lily.

"Severus is my friend. Sort of. He's more like... someone I spend time with, in the absence of having other people around. Good to study with, things like that. He's not all bad. He's just... the Blacks aren't the only parents who fuck their kids up." Regulus said.

"I'd like to talk more about him, later." Hermione told him. "With me changing things, the prophecy won't come, and he may not defect. But if there's still a chance, I'd like to try."

Regulus nodded, and she poured another round of shots.

"After that, with Dumbledore dead, the war began. Hogwarts wasn't safe anymore. Harry and I were labeled Undesirable one and two, respectively, by the ministry. We spent most of what should have been our seventh year on the run, living in a tent, tracking down vague clues Dumbledore left us when he could have just... written a letter. Explained it better. He wanted us to put the pieces together on our own, like it was a game."

"We eventually learned that Voldemort made horcruxes. I know, it's... a nasty bit of dark magic. Regulus..." She turned toward him, leaning over Remus to place her hand on his.

"Reggie, in March of this year, two months from now, you disappeared. Everyone thought for years that you had displeased Voldemort and gotten yourself killed. While

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care of me and make things better. I'm glad I have a sister. And I'm glad it's you," he admitted, the potion-induced truth rolling off his tongue with ease, even as he grimaced at his own words.

"I'm glad I get to be your sister, too, Reggie." Hermione took a breath, swallowing around the lump in her throat, before she asked, "Regulus, since you came to live with us on Christmas, have you truly renounced your allegiance to the Dark Lord, and have you betrayed the loyalty of anyone in this room?"

"Yes, I have renounced my allegiance to the Dark Lord, and no, I have not betrayed the loyalty of anyone in this room, since I came here on Christmas," Regulus pulled a face Hermione couldn't decipher, then leaned back in his chair and grinned.

She smiled at him and looked over to James and Lily, who appeared to be having a very heated nonverbal exchange. She watched them for a moment, and Lily caught her eye, looking panicked, and shook her head slowly. *Wend*. Hermione furrowed her brow as she pondered Lily's reaction. Obviously neither of them had sold out anyone. They were the ones who were murdered. Lily looked back over to her and widened her eyes, then, very slowly, cast her eyes from Sirius, to Regulus, back to Sirius, and then looked up at Hermione again, begging silently.

Oh, she knew something was going on there. Or at least had gone on. Her mind started to spin with possibilities. Something involving Regulus and Sirius... a betrayal... Well, Sirius would have certainly felt betrayed when they were at school if... wait, did Lily... was that why James and Regulus were so... starey?

Hermione's eyes went wide, and Lily shook her head and mouthed *later* so she nodded, fighting back a laugh. Later, indeed. She was most assuredly getting to the bottom of that.

"I think it goes without saying that James and Lily didn't get themselves killed but, for posterity's sake —James, Lily, have either of you ever betrayed the Order of the Phoenix?"

"Absolutely *not*," Lily vowed, her voice riddled with relief.

"Well, not yet, though given the way you seem to have a personal vendetta against Dumbledore, I'm beginning to wonder if we might." James shrugged.

Hermione nodded solemnly as she rose from her chair and held up the memory vial. "We might," she agreed. "But let's do this first. This part is going to be... impossible hard." She moved toward the pensieve as the rest began to follow and held up the bottle. "This is Sirius' memory of that night. He was the first to find James and Lily. And then he had a confrontation with the secret keeper afterward. The secret keeper was someone in this room, though I firmly believe they were manipulated into their betrayal, and it has not happened yet, so I'm going to ask everyone to remain calm

Hermione squeezed her eyes shut and took a deep breath, then opened the box of memories and pulled out the vial marked 'Sirius —Halloween.' She paused for a moment, contemplating, and then picked up the bottle of Veritaserum. "Perhaps this is the best way. Would everyone be willing to take a drop of this and answer a question before we view the memory?"

"Of course," James said as he held his hand out for the vial. A few of the others nodded, but Regulus had fixed her with an inquisitive stare.

"The Secret Keeper was someone in this room, wasn't it?"

"Just... wait, okay Reggie?" Hermione bit the inside of her cheek to keep herself from blurring out the truth and then waited until the vial had made its way around the table and back to her. She took a dose and set it back down, then looked down at the memory in her hand again.

"I am mostly loyal to the Order of the Phoenix, in that I have a well-earned distrust for many of the senior members, but I have always been loyal to our side of the war, and I have never betrayed anyone in this room," she declared as the Veritaserum took hold, then began to question the others.

"Sirius. Have you betrayed the loyalty of the Order of the Phoenix, or of anyone in this room?"

"Shit no, Kitten," Sirius scoffed. Hermione let out a bit of a laugh and moved on, asking Remus, then Brad. She got to Peter and had to dig her nails into her palm to keep herself grounded.

Please, don't let it have happened yet, please don't say we've lost him already.

"Peter, have you betrayed the loyalty of the Order of the Phoenix, or of anyone in this room?"

Peter shook his head vehemently, but sputtered a bit, then said.

"No. Not in that way. But... fucking Veritaserum. Sirius, I snogged Martine fifth year when you were dating her but you're like, *really* gay, anyway, so I just didn't think it would matter. And really, she kissed me, but that's the only betrayal," he rushed out in a single breath, then groaned and threw his head back. "Shit, I'm sorry. It was such a dick move not to just tell you."

Sirius laughed, deep and booming, and reached over the table to ruffle Peter's hair.

"It's fine, Peter. I *am* like really gay. Glad someone was snogging the poor girl."

Everybody laughed and Hermione took a moment to catch her breath as relief washed over her. She moved on to Regulus, amending the question a bit for him. "Reggie."

"Sister?" He paused and tilted his head as he appeared to be in thought for a moment.

"Yeah. I'll still allow it. Blood adoption is rooted in ancient magic, so I respect its validity. And sometimes I used to dream about having a big sister who would take

we were hunting the horcruxes, we discovered this." She reached into the bag on her lap and slid the note across the table toward him.

"He nearly killed Kreacher placing Slytherin's Locket in a cave, and when you found out, you realized that he was trying to make himself immortal, so you gave your life to destroy the locket, to try to stop him."

"Reggie," Lily gasped, bringing her hands to her face as her eyes filled with tears.

Regulus stared down at the note, his jaw ticking, and nodded. "Do I need to do it again?" he asked softly.

"No. No, Reggie. I promise you. Nobody is dying this time."

He nodded, and then, in a move that surprised her, rose from his chair and walked around to kneel down next to her and wrap his arms around her, nearly pulling her out of her seat with the force of his hug. "That's two months away, Hermione. Maybe even less. I can't..." He sighed and pulled back to look her in the eye, then very dramatically batted her hair out of his face. "Thank you. I love you. I'm glad you're my sister."

"I love you too, Reggie." She smiled up at him with watery eyes, and he pulled back and scoffed.

"Gross. Don't weep on me," he drawled. Shooting her a wink, he patted her hand in her lap and made his way back to his seat, locking his typical mask of stoicism back into place, but she didn't care because her brother *loved* her.

"So, from there, we did the Godsdamn thing: until we got caught by Snatchers and taken to Malfoy Manor, where I was given the scar on my arm. And that brings us to the next memory," Hermione held up the vial marked Shell Cottage and then looked over at Remus.

"Are you sure?" she asked him softly.

"All in." He leaned in and kissed her, crashing his mouth down on hers and sliding his tongue between her lips, then pulled back. "Okay. Now I'm ready."

"Sirius is right. I would have kicked your arse if I were there," Lily shook her head as she plopped back down in her seat and stared Remus down.

"That's not even me yet, Lils." Remus held his hands up in supplication and laughed.

"Well, I'd like to go on record and state that if you ever let Hermione die because you're too much of a pussy to bite her I'm gonna—wait, no, no, don't... ewwww stop looking at each other like that," James groaned, covering his eyes with his hands.

Remus' eyes sparkled as he continued to hold Hermione's stare for a moment, then she playfully shoved him away and turned her attention back to the group. "So, that brings us to the end. And to what led me here. After I recovered from that, Harry, Ron and I... um, well, we broke into Gringotts, stole Hufflepuff's cup out of Bellatrix Lestranger's vault, escaped on the back of a stolen dragon, destroyed the cup, and then

went to Hogwarts to find the last horcruxes. There was a massive battle. We managed to destroy Ravenclaw's Diadem, and then we realized that..."

"You robbed a bank?" Peter and James both laughed in tandem.

"Fucking hell, Cariad, a dragon?" Remus shook his head. "How did future me not drink himself into oblivion worrying about all the shit you got up to?"

"She's a badass, are we even surprised?" Lily laughed. "Ignore them, go on."

Hermione sighed and gathered her strength as she took a sip of her drink.

"Harry was a horcrux. Things got bad, in the battle, and Voldemort called for his forces to retreat. Said he'd call things off if Harry met him in the Forbidden Forest. Voldemort tried to kill him again, but... Lily's love kept him safe. You loved your baby so much you saved the world twice, Lils." Hermione reached up to wipe a tear from her cheek as she watched Lily break, swiping away tears of her own as she leaned against James.

"It didn't end there, though. Voldemort sent Narcissa to check and make sure Harry was dead. She hid her face and asked where Draco was — she was just a Mum trying to protect her child, too. She and I talked after the war — and once she knew he was alive, she lied for Harry and told Voldemort he was dead. They made Hagrid carry him back to the castle and Voldemort made a big show of bragging about him being dead."

"Then, Neville Longbottom pulled the Sword of Gryffindor out of the sorting hat and killed Nagini, Voldemort's pet snake, which was the final horcrux. Harry jumped up and the battle was back on. He and Voldemort duelled, but there was this... I wasn't there for this part, which I'll explain in a minute, but from what Neville told me, their spells locked in midair and held for ages and then just sort of... shot back down and they were both gone. Harry died," Hermione sobbed and turned to bury her face against Sirius' chest for a moment as she caught her breath.

"I... the Order won, but everybody died. Most of the Weasley's... Molly's husband and half of their children, and they were family, for Harry and I both. So many of our friends. Seventy-four in total. Remus... um, Remus died and I —" she broke down again, and felt Remus' arms wrap around her as he pulled her into his lap.

"Shhh... he hushed, rocking her gently. "Take a minute, aye, Cariad? Nobody is going anywhere."

Hermione nodded against his chest and closed her eyes as she soaked up his warmth and let him calm her down. She'd known this would all be hard, and she was so glad to finally get it off of her chest, but Gods, it had been so much for one night. She could hardly stop now, so close to the end, but she'd needed... this. A moment of peace, and, true to form, *her* peace had delivered.

just got me, more than anyone ever had. Until later, when Sirius became that person. Well, older Sirius."

"Yes, and you'll all be pleased to know that I have been informed that I stay devilishly handsome," Sirius grinned.

"Thank Merlin. I thought I'd have to leave you for the pool boy once you hit thirty," Brad quipped. Sirius cocked his head and raised an eyebrow at Brad, who blushed and cleared his throat.

"He's stunning. I promise," Hermione confirmed. "There are things that I need to say that are going to be impossible hard to hear. Even Sirius and Remus don't know the entire truth yet. Certain aspects just... I needed to do it like this. All of us together. But it *is* going to be hard to hear. Which is why I've warded the door. Nobody leaves this flat until everyone at this table is calm and in agreement on how we move forward."

"Well damn, Hermione, did you just flat-nap us?" James huffed out a laugh as he grimed at her.

"I did. A large portion of what I have to say will make everybody angry, and I needed to ensure that everybody remains in this room. But we're going to fight it out together, got it?" She paused and waited for everyone to agree. At their answering nods, she continued, "I've given it a lot of thought, and I think it will be best to withhold exact dates. But a few years from now, there was a prophecy delivered that spoke of a child who had the power to defeat the Dark Lord. Essentially, this child's identity was narrowed down to two possibilities. Neville Longbottom, and Harry Potter. The Order put both families into hiding, protected under Fidelius Charms."

"A few years?" Regulus asked. "They'd be babies, maybe toddlers at the most."

"Exactly," Hermione sucked in a breath, already feeling a lump forming in her throat as she readied herself to deliver the next part of the story. "The secret keeper for Godric's Hollow was changed, last minute. The replacement turned out to be a traitor. On Halloween, Voldemort entered the cottage and he... James tried to hold him off, but he killed him, and cornered Lily and Harry in the nursery. Lily, you gave your life for him. In doing so, you enacted an archaic type of magic: Sacrificial Love. It acts as a sort of blood curse. So, when Voldemort turned his wand to Harry, he became the first and only person to survive the killing curse. Because he tried to harm Harry, though, Voldemort died, and the war ended. But things got bad all over again, which is part of why I'm here."

"But he... he was just a baby," Lily's voice cracked as tears began to stream down her cheeks.

"Who the fuck was the secret keeper?" James demanded.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

"Love you twice, Mutt." She turned to Remus on her right and leaned forward, burying her face in his neck and breathing him in for a moment, then smiled against his skin.

"Scent power?" he asked teasingly as he kissed her head.

"Mmmhmm. Brain fuel." Hermione drew in a few long, calming breaths as she let his scent wash over her, strengthening her resolve, then finally turned back to face the rest of the table. She took a long, slow drag of her cigarette, and began to speak.

"I did know some of you. Not everyone. Sirius and I were very close, and Remus was... well, he was actually my professor, my third year, and then remained a mentor afterward. I met a couple of you once or twice as well." She wanted to keep it vague for now, until she got to the meatier parts of the story, and in truth, she *had* met both Peter and Brad, in different ways. "Remus knew of the mating bond, but, given our age difference, he—well, *future* him, he never told me about it."

"She *was* hot for teacher, though." Remus grinned.

Hermione rolled her eyes and took another drag of her cigarette, then looked down, picking at her thumbnail as she continued, "I was born Hermione Jean Granger, to an amazing set of muggle parents, and I attended Hogwarts. A Gryffindor."

"Atta girl!" Peter leaned over the table to high five her and James pumped his fist in the air. Regulus rolled his eyes.

"On the Hogwarts Express on the way in 1991, on the way to my first year at Hogwarts, I met a kind boy named Neville Longbottom, who needed help looking for his lost toad, Trevor." She smiled fondly at the memory.

"Longbottom, eh?" Peter asked.

"Yes. Frank and Alice's son. Neville was the first friend I made... ever, really. While I was helping him look for Trevor, I met two other boys. Ronald Weasley—the youngest of Arthur and Molly's boys—and... Harry." Tears welled in her eyes, and she cleared her throat as she forced herself to speak through the lump in her throat.

"Harry James Potter."

Lily gasped and her hand flew to her mouth, and James grinned proudly.

"No fucking way!" James' mouth fell open, then split into a wide, gleeful grin. "When we talk about kids, we always say we'd name our first boy after Lily's granddad. What's he like?"

"Incredible. Amazing. He was... well, in my time, before I came back here, he was everything. He looked just like James, with Lily's eyes. Everyone told him as much, over and over—the amount of times Sirius accidentally called him James or Prongs." She laughed and shook her head. "Ron and Harry were my best friends. But Harry, in specific, he was the first person to become like a brother to me. The one person who

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Remus wrapped his arms around her tighter and peppered kisses all over her face as she started to breathe normally again, causing her to squirm in his lap.

"Better, Cariad?" Hermione nodded and leaned in to kiss him. She turned in his lap and started to move back toward her seat but thought better of it and stayed put. She rather liked his lap, and this was hard and emotional, and she was staying in the lap time zone, she decided, thank you very much.

"Okay." She nodded to herself as she looked around the table at the others. "So, Remus died, which caused me to suffer a weakening of my magical core, due to the incomplete mating bond from the night at Shell Cottage, I basically... collapsed on the ground in the middle of the battle, screamed my lungs out for hours until McGonagall slapped me in the face, then went catatonic for days."

"Like, full zombie mode?" Peter asked.

"Full zombie. Everybody was gone but I was... honestly, I can share more about all of the bigger emotional stuff another time, it would be too much right now. Suffice it to say I was in a bad place. Everyone kept telling me it was all in my head but I knew it wasn't. Sirius was there for me, but he had to watch me question my sanity and lose my shit without being able to tell me what was wrong because of the Unbreakable Vow."

"He took me home with him, and he just... became everything to me. It was such a hard time for us. We'd just lost everyone, and Sirius had already lost everyone once before, and I was dealing with this... break, with my magic. He put me in Remus' old room and gave me his journals, so I eventually learned about the mating bond and we were finally able to talk about it—though Ron is really the one who figured it out, he was better at reading between the lines."

"Okay, I'm sorry, this is all so tragic, but I have to point out how romantic that is. You reading his journals, in his room," Lily sighed wistfully.

"Stealing my jumpers," Remus teased, pulling at the sleeve of the one she was wearing—honestly, she couldn't recall if it had been hers, or his, or hers that she'd taken from him in the future, they were all mixed together these days.

"Hush," Hermione laughed. "Anyway, so, in trying to heal from everything, Sirius and I danced a lot, drank even more. One night we were drinking with Ron, and he mentioned how he'd never danced with a man in a romantic sense, so I dragged them to a bar. The Hourglass, where I had a lovely chat with the owner, a stunning older man—who still had all his hair—named Brad." She smiled over at Brad, who grinned proudly.

"Sirius met a muggle banker that night, had a nice time. I'd been spiraling for weeks by that point, just so stuck on how much I wished I could undo it all. Ron was with us, and he was chatting up some guy, and Sirius just made this off-handed comment about

how he wished he'd had me around to kick his arse into gear at that age and it just sort of... clicked into place that I could do this."

"So, enter Hermione Black: Time Traveling Defender of the Universe?" James smiled.

"Pretty much. Narcissa, with her husband being off in Azkaban, was far less of a cunt than usual. She performed the adoption using an old ritual that requires you to essentially... take on the magical essence of a deceased member of the line you're being adopted into, so since all purebloods are sort of interconnected, I took..."

"Harry's magic," Lily whispered in awe. "Oh, wow. That's what we feel in you. Our... our son's magic."

"Yeah." Hermione sniffled. "I didn't know, since mine are muggles, that parents could feel that connection but... honestly, when it was time to choose, there was just no other option. He was my Harry."

"So, like... a fourth of your magic is our kid?" James rubbed his hand over his chin, then grinned. "Oi! Moony! Get your paws off of my quarter of a daughter!"

"Oh Gods, please don't let this become a thing." Remus grumbled.

"Oh, it's a thing. C'mere, Moony. Give your quarter-father-in-law a hug." James teased.

"So, the time travel part?" Brad asked Hermione, effectively ignoring James' antics.

"Ah. Time box. It's a really old, very not legal device that works sort of like a time turner, but by the decade. Draco Malfoy gave it to me, the day Narcissa agreed to do the ritual, and now I'm here."

"Do you have to go back?" Regulus looked up at her, his brows pinched together in worry.

"Nope. Promise. The box disappeared when I arrived. It's why they were outlawed. You wind up stuck in the time you've traveled to. And my soul is a bit busy in my body,"

Hermione laughed, "So when David and Jeanette Granger have their daughter later this year, she'll simply be a different soul born into the world."

"That's wicked, honestly," Peter laughed.

"Okay. So, what's the plan then. Horcruxes, and then we get the fucker?" Lily asked excitedly.

"Yes. Though at this point—I know that the locket isn't placed in the cave until March. From the best we could figure out, the cup went into the LeStrange vault in May. Then there's the ring, the Diadem, and the Diary, which may or may not be at Malfoy Manor already. He won't have Nagini or Harry this time, so there are less to destroy but it may still prove difficult to round them all up."

"Well, we're in. Whatever you need," Sirius told her as he squeezed her shoulder.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to be so blunt about it," James said with a bit of an incredulous laugh as he shook his head. "It's just that Lily and I both, we've noticed this sort of... thing, where you're concerned."

"It's in our magic. It's like my magic feels... maternal toward yours, in a sense. It's like we can feel our magic in you. It's hard to put it into words, I suppose," Lily added.

"Magic is sentient, and familial magic is all interconnected. My Mum says she can feel her magic in me, too." Peter chimed in as he looked rapidly between Hermione, James and Lily as if he were looking for similarities.

"No, she can't be. Lily would have to already be..." Regulus began, but trailed off as his eyes went wide. He looked quickly from James, who was very pointedly staring at the wall across from him, to Lily, who was positively pink in the face, then back at the table.

"You're a Black. You have to be a Black, because you have Black blood. You warded the journal with it," he finished, speaking so softly that Hermione had to lean forward to hear him.

Hermione very forcefully directed her thoughts away from the spiraling path her mind was begging to go down about *that* particular reaction, then shook her head.

"As wonderful as that would be, no, I'm not your daughter. I, um... I know why the two of you feel connected to me, though. I'm actually surprised, I had no idea you would feel it. But it's sort of near the end of everything I need to tell you. As for the Black blood, Regulus... you're right. I *am* a Black. Though, I became a Black via blood adoption in July of 1998, when Sirius adopted me as his sister. But you are still my brother, to me, in every sense of the word, and I'm so sorry for lying to you."

"Well of course I'm your brother." Regulus cleared his throat and straightened, a mask of indifference falling across his face.

"So, you're a time traveller. And clearly you were close with Sirius. That's... a lot, Hermione." Brad took a swig of his drink and shook his head, "Did you know all of us?"

"That's sort of... part of the whole story."

"Right." James laughed. "Sorry for the derailment, we've just been wondering why we felt this sort of... vibe with you."

"It makes perfect sense that you do." Hermione nodded. She took a deep breath and looked over to Sirius. He grinned at her as he pulled a pack of cigarettes out of his shirt pocket and lit one, then passed it to her before he lit his own.

"Love you twice, Kitten. You're gonna be okay. I'm right here."

to have an emotional moment. I love you all very much. What I've found here has been beyond anything I could have dreamed of. I feel... I feel like I was always meant to be here. But *I am* here for a reason, and it's time that everyone knew what that reason was."

"Of course you're meant to be here," James grinned at her. "You're ours now, silly."

Hermione laughed and nodded to Remus, who leaned in and kissed her cheek before he and Sirius stood and moved down the hall. They reappeared moments later, carrying the heavy pensive between them, and positioned it on an end table in the living room that they had transfigured to serve as more of a pedestal, before they brought their wands up and cast the series of spells Hermione had instructed them on, so that they could expand it to fit everyone.

"Woah. Where did you guys get a pensive? This is *serious* serious, yeah?" Brad asked in surprise.

"Of Reggie here nabbed it from dear ol' Dad's study the day he left," Sirius explained, ruffling Regulus' hair as he went by. "He just wanted to piss him off because the sick bastard likes to have a drink and watch the highlights after he knocks his kids around, but it works out."

"So, this is... 'truth serum and memories to prove my story' kind of big," Lily breathed out, shaking her head in disbelief. "Okay. We love you. We're here. If you have a way to end this war, and there are things we need to know, we're your people."

At everyone else's utterances of agreement, Hermione took a deep breath and began to speak.

"My birthdate of record is 19th September 1959. But I was actually born in September of this year. 1979."

"I knew it!" James shouted, slapping his hand on the table. "Lily, I told you."

Hermione blinked in surprise, then let out a bit of a laugh. "I'm going to be honest, James, when you said you had it figured out, I half expected your assumption to be that I was a Jedi."

"I considered that! But... well..." James ran a hand through his hair and looked over at Lily as they seemed to be engaged in some sort of silent conversation, before Lily finally looked back at her and spoke.

"Hermione, are we..." she shook her head "I can't believe I'm asking this, but... well, we sort of feel this..."

"Are we your parents?" James asked.

Hermione blinked in surprise. Her mouth fell open as she sputtered out a series of half-words, trying to find her bearings.

"We need to know what else the prophecy said, before Dumbledore decides what it means and runs with it," Remus, who had been relatively quiet while she spoke, finally chimed in. "And we need to make damn sure that nobody finds out she could be the traveller, because she's not becoming a fucking pawn in his games all over again."

"I told you, Lily, he's a great son-in-law. Our quarter daughter sure knows how to pick 'em," James elbowed Lily, who groaned and rolled her eyes.

"Oh, Gods, James. You're insufferable. I hate this already," she laughed. "Okay. Prophecy. Horcruxes. I'm in."

"Me too. Thine? Since Sirius said... whatever." Peter shook his head, "I don't know what could have happened. But I've seen the outcome this time. If there's a single thing that seems out of place, I'll tell you guys. I'm not going to become that monster. I'm in, for whatever you need, Hermione."

As the others agreed, Hermione relaxed back against Remus and sipped her drink. The feeling of having everything out in the open was more freeing than she'd even anticipated. She could do this. They would do this.

"Hermione," Lily said after a few minutes of banter. "Could you tell us more about Harry? I know you can't tell us too much, but just... a little, maybe?"

"The bracelet was from him." She smiled, pointing to the dolphin bracelet Lily still wore. "He loved trade tart and the colour blue. His favourite song was 'Gimme Shelter' by The Rolling Stones—we had 70s music in common, though I suppose it's just music now," Hermione laughed. "He was kind and brave and incredible. All the girls thought he was so dreamy. He was sassy as hell. Oh! And he was wicked at Quidditch. He'd never even seen a broom before he came to Hogwarts, and then he made Gryffindor Seeker in his *first* year."

"Oh, fuck yeah!" James yelled. "That's my boy."

"I... I do have to say, it's not... it's not something I like to think about, but with me being here, and things changing, there's a chance, um..." Hermione trailed off and chewed on her lip as she tried to decide how to word the fear she'd been carrying.

"Stop." Lily reached across the table and grabbed her hand. "I hope, for your sake, that our boy comes back to you as the same Harry you had, with all the best parts, and none of the parts that were tainted by the bad. But any child we have is going to be so ridiculously loved and spoiled by everyone, and they're going to get to grow up with all of us. You can't let yourself spiral about whether or not he'll be... him, okay?"

"Okay. You're right," she nodded as she shifted in Remus' lap, then took a moment to look at each of them individually.

Her brothers, the lot of them. Her sister. Her mate. Her family.

Hermione had never put much stock in divination, or fate, or all that unseen, unprovable sort of magic, but she knew, simply knew, that, somehow, this was where

she was supposed to be. Likely because she made it that way. Self-fulfilling prophecy, undoubtedly, though she couldn't be bothered to care. She had them, and she was ready for the fight.

"Well then." She raised her glass in the air.

"Here's to ending this shit."

G

Oh, a storm is threatening

My very life today

If I don't get some shelter

Oh, yeah, I'm gonna fade away

13th February 1979

"This was a trap," Hermione said plainly as she took a seat. She'd enlisted Regulus' help to expand their little dining table and Geminio up some extra chairs before anything everyone over under the ruse of a game night.

"Is it a good trap or a bad trap?" James asked as he leaned back in his chair and raised an eyebrow.

"It's... the kind of trap that changes things. It has to do with the prophecy."

"I've been really stressed about that." Lily toyed with the charm on her necklace nervously as she spoke, "It's... it's got to be about Brad, hasn't it?"

Peter nodded in agreement, and Brad laughed. Hermione pressed her thumb to her own necklace, earning her a low laugh from Remus before he did the same.

"I mean, sure, I get how it could sound that way but I'm hardly a defector of evil."

"Well, you travel. Your mother is a wolf. Brad, Ford." Regulus shrugged. "Don't sell yourself short."

"It's possible." Hermione nodded. "Though this isn't the first time a similar prophecy has been delivered and, much like that first time, it's ambiguous enough that it could wind up applying to different people at the same time. But I'm nearly positive that..."

She trailed off and looked first to Remus, then to Sirius, who both nodded at her in encouragement.

"The prophecy is about me, because I'm the only one who knows how to defeat Voldemort."

"What?" Lily shrieked. Peter grunted out a confused sort of choking sound. James raised an eyebrow. Regulus stared. Brad laughed, then realized everyone else didn't think it was a joke and immediately sobered.

"There are things I haven't told everyone yet. Though Sirius and Remus do know the majority of things, there are facts that even they don't know yet. I'm sorry for lying, but I hope you'll understand why. I'd like to tell you all the truth now, if you'll let me. But it will require a few safety measures."

"Hermione, this sounds serious." Peter leaned forward in his chair and scratched at the stubble on his jaw. "Are you okay?"

"I am." She smiled at him and squeezed Remus' hand tighter. "I am now. But it is serious. So, before we begin, I need to know if you all trust me."

"Of course we trust you." Lily furrowed her brow in confusion. "How could we not?" Hermione smiled and reached for her bag, then set the little wooden box of memory vials and a potion bottle on the table.

"If at any point, anyone would like confirmation on what I'm saying, I have Veritas serum. I won't be offended if you ask me to take it. Before I begin... I just need

KEEPER OF THE MOON

Hermione continued to sob while Remus soothed her, running his hands through her hair and whispering against her forehead as he calmed her down. Eventually, she pulled back to look at him, a sad smile on her face as she reached up and cupped his face, running her thumb over the thick ridge of the scar that cut across his right cheekbone.

“I love you so much, Remus. I know you want to protect me, but I just can’t...”

“You won’t back down.” He nodded, his smile equally melancholic as he reached down to grab her by the chin and tilt her head back. “I love you, Cariad. You’re mine. I won’t let you be in danger. You have to know that. I’ll fucking... I won’t let anyone hurt you. If you need to stay, we stay. But you are going to communicate with me. You’re going to tell me whatever it is that you’re still holding back on, and you’re going to let me be there every step of the way. If you’re taking that bastard down, then I’m at your back when you do it, little mate. Got it?”

Hermione shivered at the commanding tone in his voice. She was all ‘feminism’ and ‘equality’ in all measures, most assuredly. But *her* man going all wofly and possessive and commanding over his mate?

Mortals.

“Got it.” She nodded, “I... there were a few more things I needed to get in order first. Will you help me?”

“Always, Cariad.” Remus leaned in and kissed her head, then whispered against her skin, “Every step of the way, yeah?”

“Yeah. Every step.” She nodded and took a deep breath, then moved to open the bedroom door. “Sirius, can you come here?”

“Sure thing, Kitten,” he called from down the hall. He appeared in the doorway a moment later and took one look at her tear-stained face before he immediately moved into the room and gathered her in his arms.

“You’re going to be okay,” he told her softly. “Whatever sneaky shit the Order thinks they’re doing about this prophecy doesn’t matter. You’re the one who knows how to end this, and you’re going to do it on your terms, yeah?”

“Yeah.” She smiled into his shoulder as she hugged him back. “I think it’s time, though.”

“You sure, Kitten?”

“I’m positive.” She pulled back to look at him, casting a glance over to Remus, and then nodded to herself.

“I need to tell everyone the truth. All of it.”



STEVIE_SUNSHINE

“No. Don’t do that,” Remus urged. “You’re not... you’re not wrong. The urge to protect you, to lock you up until this whole bloody war is over? Hermione, I fight that every fucking day. You have no idea how hard I fight against it. Wanting to keep you away from the war isn’t new. You are my fucking *mate*, Cariat. I’d set the Godsdamned world on fire to keep you safe. I feel that, twenty-four seven. But I fucking love you, and this is an actual, active threat. Any decent man would give a shit if his... fiancée, wife, whatever, were in danger. The instinct is strong. I don’t deny that. But it is not the only way in which I feel for you. You can’t just... blame the wolf shit every time I worry.”

“I know,” Hermione sighed and rubbed at her temples. “I know, I didn’t mean to insinuate... I just mean, we can’t just run, Remus. We can’t leave everybody behind.”

“We could, though. Even just for a while, until there’s been time to figure out what Dumbledore is up to. We could talk to Brad and Sirius, take them with us for a few weeks, and we can put protections in place for everyone else. Maybe... Well, Peter’s place couldn’t be more secure, now that he’s living in the flat above the jewelry shop, with all those wards. We could put James and Lily’s place under a Fidelius Charm, have them take on Reggie for a bit. I’m sure Pete wouldn’t mind being the Sec —”

Before he could finish his thought, Hermione lunged forward and clamped her hands over his mouth to silence him. She parted her lips to try to speak, but she broke, a ragged sob tearing out of her throat as she collapsed against him.

“Shit, Cariat,” Remus hissed, wrapping his arms around her. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to scare you. I’m just so worried. I just want to keep you safe.”

She sobbed harder against his chest —snorting all over his jumper, which she idly noted that she would find embarrassing at any other time, but she was quite sure her mind was broken at the present, so it hardly mattered.

Peter.

He was going to suggest making Peter the fucking secret keeper because nobody knew that part yet. How could she tell them? She couldn’t even make sense of it herself. Sweet, mildly oblivious, hilarious, kind, talented Peter, in barely more than two years, would be the one who ruined them all. It seemed impossible to rationalize.

When she’d first met him, she’d been so determined to hate him, and then, begrudgingly, admitted to herself that she owed it to everyone to try to save him, too, but now it was personal. He was her friend, too, and she loved him so dearly that she felt as if her heart may burst every time he prattled on about charmwork or cracked a joke or offered her a bite of whatever ever-present snack he was munching on. She couldn’t figure out how it all went wrong. The only conclusion she’d been able to reach was that whatever it was, it couldn’t have happened yet.

KEEPER OF THE MOON

After all the Order members spent a fair amount of time freaking out about the prophecy, he had hushed the rabble and began to—shockingly—lay the groundwork for his manipulation.

Obviously, it was of the utmost importance that we learn who this traveller is, you see, because it is both the duty and the honor of the Order of the Phoenix to assist them in any way that they can, but of course, of course, we don't want to set our hopes too high or have any wires crossed so if you do believe you've learned anything, then best to just come only to him, as he has oh so kindly and graciously and not at all as an attempt to scheme offered to help organize and investigate any informational leads and blah blah blah.

Yeah, fucking right.

Hermione knew exactly how Dumbledore had handled being given information about Harry's prophecy in the past—which, essentially, consisted of Snape begging Dumbledore, the founder of the Order, to protect a family of Order members because an evil wizard wanted their baby dead, to which Dumbledore basically said, 'what do I get out of the deal?'

The aurors found the vial of Snape's memories in Harry's pocket when they took his body away. When Kingsley told her and Sirius about their findings, and allowed them to view the memories, that had been her final Albus Dumbledore breaking point, though if she were honest, she'd been disillusioned with him as a whole for a long time.

"You told me how he handled Harry's prophecy," Remus finally said as he took another long drag of his cigarette.

"I did. And they're hiding something about this prophecy."

"Exactly. So, we need to go," Remus insisted.

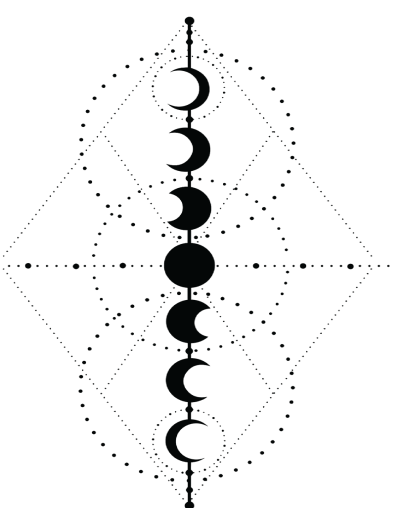
"Go where?" Hermione sighed in exasperation and shook her head. "I have a job to do here, Remus!"

"You don't have to, though, Cariad." He shook his head and reached out to grab her hand. "You can give Moody the information about the horcruxes and we can... we'll go to the pack. Gils and Shawna will take us in."

"You don't want to live with a pack, Remus. You've been so clear about that."

"It doesn't matter now. It doesn't. If I join, you'll be pack too. You'll have everybody's protection. You would like it there, we can... you and Shawna would get on famously, and Sirius would be welcome, because of Brad."

"And what of everyone else, Remus? James and Lily? Peter? The entire world? You don't want to leave everyone else behind, either. You don't want to go live with the pack. This is just instinct, love. You're perceiving a threat to your mate, and you feel connected to the pack, so —"



Gimme Shelter

25th January 1978

“You have to calm down.”

“What the fuck do you *mean* I need to calm down?” Remus all but roared, shaking his head in disbelief as he dropped to his knees and dug a duffel bag out from under the bed. He tossed it onto the mattress and spun to face her, all golden eyed and feral and she sighed and stepped up to wrap her arms around him.

He balled his fists at his sides and stood rigid as she pressed her face to his heaving chest and ran her hands up and down his back, then finally relented, enclosing her in his arms and burying his face in her hair as he drew in her scent to calm himself.

“You’re panicking,” Hermione said softly.

“Of course I’m panicking, Hermione. How could you expect me not to? I have to keep you safe, and they’re fucking up to something.” He sighed in exasperation and stepped back to lean against the desk as he lit a cigarette. Hermione watched him smoke for a moment, chewing her lip in contemplation. He was a wreck. She couldn’t blame him. She would have been, too, if she wasn’t so well-seasoned in Dumbledore’s particular brand of bullshit.