

Ash, Feather and Flame

I. Molly

For a while, after that horrible night -- there were only a few, mind you, who knew it for what it was, or called it so -- he stopped.

That's all. Stopped.

Didn't eat unless you put food in front of him, didn't drink unless you put a cup in his hands. Didn't speak unless spoken to and then only if a reply was required. He just...drifted.

I worried about him. Arthur and I did for him, in our own way; he came to stay with us for a while, looked after Ron and the twins. Gracious, I don't know what I would have done, the twins were in their terrible twos -- it was good to have another pair of hands around. I doubt they'd remember him from back then, any of the children. He had that way, you know, of blending into the background.

But I worried. We both did. You could see it in his eyes. Most of the time they settled on whatever was to hand, and examined things -- clocks, plates, whatever happened to be about. It's just that sometimes...well, you have to understand, everyone was celebrating, everyone was toasting to the Boy Who Lived and cursing the name of Sirius Black. He was bitter, I believe. Well, who wouldn't be, nobody really seemed to remember James and Lily, they only thought about Harry. Once Sirius was in Azkaban they forgot about him too, didn't they? And Peter was just a medal on his mum's wall, and a finger in a box.

I don't think any of us know what snapped him out of it. I remember it though. We were having a bit of a do, you know, the old Order -- Arthur and I weren't full members, with the children Dumbledore wouldn't allow it, but we were sympathetic, and after You-Know-Who fell...

Remus was minding the twins, outside, and Arthur was helping clean up after the dinner, taking down the old picnic tables. Percy must have been about four, maybe five, and he was helping with Ron -- such a good boy, Percy, even when he was small -- so I was having a bit of a rest.

I believe, that one time, Severus was there too. He couldn't come to the Order meetings back...before. He was all right once You-Know-Who was out of power. At any rate, I doubt they had ever got on at school, but Severus went right up to him, over in a corner of the yard with the twins, and had a few words. He had something in his hand -- I do believe he was showing him a remembrall, or something similar. Some sort of child's toy, anyway.

I remember thinking, with Severus crouched down next to him and the twins pulling at his sleeves, that's the first time I've seen Remus smile since it happened.

After that he seemed to mend -- almost as if he was just waiting for the right moment. He didn't stay around very long, two or three days at most. We got postcards, of course, from wherever he went, and he traveled a good deal. I don't think he put on an ounce of weight, ever, and he looked downright awful when he came back to England for the Hogwarts job, but at least he was there -- at least he was our Remus, you know, and not some poor dead-eyed boy who'd lost all his friends at once.

These last two years, he'd been positively glowing; he was always a likeable child, but he'd been a quiet man and it was good to see him creep out of that shell, a bit. We always liked having him up the Burrow for dinner. He was a great hit with the children, especially Harry and Ron, of course, but I think Bill liked him quite a lot, too.

After Sirius died...well. I was terribly afraid we'd lose him again. I even spoke to Severus about it, but you know him, he doesn't take human frailty into account. He just said that Remus was a grown man and if he did choose to stop eating or talking we ought to let him starve in silence.

He didn't, though. Once in a while you can see that same dead look in his eyes, but it's not taken him over like it did last time. He still works, he still talks and sometimes even makes jokes. But there's those moments...

And then there are others, when you would think he had a fever -- when instead of the flat hopelessness there's some kind of angry flame. It frightens me more. It makes me worry about what Remus would do if someone pushed him far enough. It's the same thing I see in Harry, once in a while; he's just a boy, and he's had so much taken from him.

I do worry about them. But what can you do? Take them in, love them, feed them. That's all. Wait for time to sort these things out. I do think Remus ought to let Harry come along with him on one of his trips, some summer; do the lad a world of good, and who knows, maybe Remus, too.

Until then, all you can do is love them, and hope it's enough.

The world is very old and nothing is.
Be still. Thou foolish thing, thou canst not wake,

Nor thy tears wedge thy soldered lips apart,
But patter in the darkness of thy heart.

II. Severus

I cannot pretend to know how he felt, nor do I wish to. My own problems are enough to bear, thank you quite kindly; I find that to not only have been a Death Eater, but to have been a bad and traitorous one -- in other words, to have failed even at being evil -- is sometimes more of a stain on one's character than having been evil in the first place.

I was not allowed to attend Order meetings before the fall of Voldemort and I had no wish to. I was unaware of most of the Order's membership until the days following his fall, and even then was not ever a part of that circle. People I had called my friends had killed the people the Order called family. They had lost sons, daughters, brothers, wives, fathers, that I had never even known.

What intrigued me, when I was finally brought to meet these people, was the sheer joy they brought to everything. Their losses seemed not to matter to them in the slightest as they met around dinner tables or drinks in the pub.

It was many years before I realised the grief was too deep, too all-consuming, to be let in at these functions.

There seemed to be only one person who was so unbearably touched by the last horrible night, as if he carried the pain and loss of all of the Order on his shoulders alone. I had never liked him at school, found him melodramatic and spineless, but now he seemed the physical symbol of their suffering, all of them, and it mocked me.

That this one man, with his already-greying hair and lined face and flat, emotionless eyes, should be a living symbol of things I helped to cause, was unbearable. I could not look him in the eye, could not speak to him (and he never spoke, in those days, unless required by politeness or necessity). I avoided dining at the Weasley household because he was there, caring for their brats and in turn being cared for by Weasley, who has always had more generosity than common sense.

I wanted to shake him until his teeth rattled, slap him, anything to be rid of those horrible empty-eyed glances he would make my way, on the few occasions our meeting was unavoidable. I was and am too proud to apologise, to say that there was any part of his suffering which was my fault, because I turned away. I left the darkness and some thanks I got for it.

I had heard Dumbledore saying that the boy -- he was my age, but that was always their way with him -- had lost four of his closest friends in the space of a few hours, and to give him time. After all, whom did he have to live for now? Let him care for the children, and maybe he would find something in them that would break him out of his little prison.

The words circled round in my head, day after day, maddeningly; and on my next trip to Diagon Alley, I found myself grasping a small, egg-shaped bit of glass -- clear on one side, lacquered black on the other, a Findegg.

It's relatively easy to charm a Findegg; they only last three or four years, but I imagine he didn't use it more than that at any rate. By then he was travelling again.

I was glad it didn't take long for the Weasleys to hold one of those awful Order reunions everyone seems to like so well. Rehashing of the glory days. Strictly for those without enough work on hand, to my mind.

It took all five courses of dinner, barely looking at Lupin -- who, admittedly, had hidden himself in a corner as usual, and was feeding the twins listlessly. By the time I felt that there was reasonable enough privacy to do it, Arthur Weasley was clearing off the tables and most of the rest of the Order were off somewhere, chatting irritatingly with Molly.

I didn't want it to take long. I simply went up to him, and knelt, and said I had this and did he want it?

He looked down at the little Findegg, which was reflecting up a small, black-haired boy asleep in a crib, and then at me.

"That's Potter," I said, as one of those godawful twins began to drool on my sleeve.

"Harry?"

"Yes."

He smiled a little, and held it up to the sunlight. "Where'd you get it?"

"Found it," I muttered.

"I can look at Harry whenever I like?"

"That's the idea." Idiot.

He closed his fist around it, and put it in an inside pocket where none of the brats could reach it.

"Thank you," he said quietly.

"Just thought you'd want it," I answered, glad to be rid of the thing.

Molly told me he finally snapped out of it a few days later. He left the country, as far as I know. Good riddance, I suppose.

Thy brain is plagued. Thou art a frightened owl
Blind with the light of life thou'ldst not forsake,
And error loves and nourishes thy soul.

III. Remus

Oh, well, that...I mean I hardly even think about it anymore. There are so many more important things to think about, aren't there? World problems and that. He's come back, after all.

That was what I was afraid of. That he would come back. Now that he is, it's rather as though the worst has happened. So I just keep on. I do as I'm told, follow orders -- I never had much money so it's not as though I miss a steady income to begin with. I live quite cheaply at Headquarters, I almost never need new clothes, I'm very good at mending things myself -- a wizard with a needle, haha.

I do remember the boys, of course. Especially the twins. Oh, they were horrors. I don't know how I managed them, but I felt that I ought to do something to earn my keep, and poor Molly, already pregnant with Ginny. There was that, really, that was what I felt; as though I owed them something. That was what kept me going. I don't recall anything else -- hunger, thirst, any of it. I slept quite well, really. I think because, well, I wasn't thinking.

It's a terrible life, you know, only going on because you owe someone something.

I felt as though I owed everyone, for Sirius' betrayal; as though I could have stopped it somehow. My whole life I've been in debt, one way or another. After James and Lily died, debt was all I had.

At any rate, it was so easy simply...not to think. To just do as Molly told me, look after the twins and Ron, and all three needed plenty of looking-after. Percy hung about, must have been five or so, I think he liked that I was quiet, that I never asked him idiot questions. Quite ahead of himself, Percy, but in some ways a rather sad, lonely child. Perhaps that's why he liked me.

I just existed. I didn't have any worries, I didn't even get hungry. Molly gave me food, I ate; if she didn't, I starved, but I didn't care. It's awful not to care.

I don't really know how long I stayed. I never asked Molly, and we never really discussed it. I doubt she even knows why I left.

Why I did leave...I don't know why Severus did it. It can't have been because he liked me, since he didn't like me, and I didn't like him. Everything's a bit...cloudy. But I know that he was the one crouched next to me, suffering Fred to gnaw on his sleeve, when I found myself holding a little Findegg in my hand, looking down at someone who could only be...

You see I hadn't thought about Harry. Not at all. I hadn't even realised he was still alive, I sometimes think. And there he was...James' son. The son of one of my best friends. In this little glass thing in my hand.

Severus said something, and I know I asked if I could look at Harry anytime I pleased, and he said something about that being the idea.

You see I didn't owe Harry anything. He didn't want anything from me. He was hardly more than a baby. He was just this perfect little...like he represented everything that was good that James and Lily had died for.

Harry was my hope.

Come to that, sometimes I think he still is.

At any rate I realised I was being a fool and that Severus knew I was being a fool -- which was possibly the more motivating of the two -- and so I began to pack, and found a job in Ireland, and from there a job in Boston, and from there one in Quebec. You get the idea. It didn't matter that I was gone, because I could still see Harry anytime I liked. It didn't matter what I was doing, so long as I was doing good things.

I had a boy to think about, after all, who was going to have to grow up in this world, so I was going to make sure it was a good one.

The best-laid plans of men and werewolves, I suppose.

Like I said, I don't think much about it. I just keep fighting. Because of Harry, and the Twins, and Ron and Percy, and little Ginny.

Because someone's got to.

Be still. The Hanging Gardens were a dream
That over Persian roses flew to kiss
The curled lashes of Semiramis.
Troy never was, nor green Skamander stream.
-- Trumbull Stickney