

You That Have Whetted Consciousness

It shouldn't take this long -- Harry figures Hermione already knows it -- but he realises one day that he's never seen Lupin.

Not really.

It's the summer after fifth year, horrifying fifth year, and Harry comes to Grimmauld Place missing Sirius -- missing, missing, missing, though he only had a year and a half to know him, really know him. If Hermione misses Sirius, she doesn't show it, but Hermione has become strangely adept at showing nothing. Ron might, but Ron, Harry has realised, is vaguely self-centred. It's not annoying, but it's come to his attention. He wonders if he is the same, sometimes.

The adults are like Hermione, closed off from Harry and his grief as if afraid to touch it, because he knows most of them didn't like Sirius and are horrified at themselves to find they're relieved he's gone.

Lupin, whom Harry has always thought was the epitome of self-control, often leaves dinner if Sirius or the Blacks are mentioned; not storming out as Harry would have done had he been more energetic in his grief, but quietly folding his napkin with a peculiar, withdrawn expression on his face, and taking his plate to the sink before departing. Molly hasn't time to worry about Lupin; she has children of her own to worry about. Kingsley and Arthur and Moody all say to let him alone, which is probably wise. Tonks is too young to know what to do, and Snape too alienated even if he wanted to do something. Dumbledore dispenses platitudes about time healing wounds, which Harry has trouble believing in, now, just like he has trouble believing in Dumbledore himself.

Lupin sometimes leaves meetings, too, but usually on some pretext -- an urgent call to a mission, or checking on the children (Harry and his friends are still The Children, which rankles him deeply).

This isn't why Harry has taken to watching Lupin, though. He watches Lupin because he desperately wants to be closer to him, to learn that quiet self-control that doesn't kill all emotion like some. He wants to hear someone tell him stories about his parents and if Lupin dies most of those stories die with him. He wants to be a good wizard, and Lupin is the best wizard he knows.

Watching Lupin, he uncovers the man's secrets slowly. Even when working in the back-garden, planting summer vegetables and flowers that are sturdy enough the malevolent estate won't kill them, Lupin wears long-sleeved shirts, high collars, trousers or old worn jeans, though he has no trouble going barefoot. He sweats because of it, but no-one ever sees more than a glimpse of wrist or throat or ankle.

The clothes themselves are camouflage; not baggy, as one would think, merely to hide what Harry discovers is an unhealthily thin body. No, Lupin mastered that and moved onwards to a higher art of concealment. His clothes give a sense of bigness to him, make him seem larger than he is -- he pulls it off because he's tall, Harry suspects, taller than Sirius or Professor Snape or even Dumbledore. His clothes make him look ten, twenty pounds heavier, most of the time, which brings him up to just about the weight he ought to be. The slouch helps, too. Harry didn't realise he was taller than Dumbledore until he saw him reaching for the top of the back-garden wall, once, fingers crawling up the stone; body fully extended, he gripped the top and pulled himself up, crouching on the ledge of the wall -- apparently, for no other reason than to see what might be seen.

Crouched that way, eyes searching for something, Lupin looked like Harry imagined he did at school -- happier, full of mischief like his father and Sirius, young. James was twenty-one when he died, which means -- adding Harry's age onto that, less one -- Lupin is only in his thirties to begin with. Everyone his father's age looks older; Snape from bitterness, Sirius from prison, Lupin from his disease. A wrecked generation, Harry will think later, though for now he merely thinks it weird.

Harry doesn't know Lupin's birthday, though he'd like to. It must be during the school year, otherwise surely someone at Grimmauld Place would mention it.

He wants to be seen watching him. Harry wants to be noticed by Lupin, he wants him to take Harry under his wing, but of course Lupin has no obligation to Harry; not father or godfather, though he was kind to him at school. Lupin has no reason to pay Harry special attention.

Harry wants it all the same, he just doesn't know how to ask without being forward and strange.

One day, in early August -- this year Harry was allowed to come to Grimmauld Place sooner, lest he try to run away and get there on his own -- Lupin comes to the door with Tonks in his arms, limp and bleeding in a dozen places. Harry is the only one around, since Ron and Hermione have a distressing habit of vanishing together and nobody else will stay at Grimmauld Place if they can at all help it.

He lingers in the kitchen doorway while Lupin eases her into a chair and begins efficiently taking down medical supplies from one of the cupboards. Lupin has no shirt on, as shocking for him as nudity would be for anyone else; his shirt is torn into pieces, Harry sees, and wrapped around Tonks' right arm and leg.

"Remus?" Harry ventures. They're allowed to call him that now, and the name comes easily after practice, but it was awkward at first.

"Harry? You're good with your hands, come help me," Lupin answers, gesturing to Tonks as he unpacks a box of gauze wrap and three types of potion, each in plain plastic bottles inscribed with their contents and S. Snape below. "Get those rags off her, would you?"

"Sure," Harry says, accepting a pair of kitchen shears and cutting the knots, unwrapping the wounds as gently as he can. Tonks makes pained noises, but she doesn't complain as loudly as Harry would.

"There was a bit of a fight," Remus adds, by way of explanation. "Nymphadora, are you conscious?"

"Fuck you," comes the faint reply, as Harry begins unwrapping her leg, pushing aside the tattered robe-end and ripped trousers underneath. Remus is examining her arm, bending the elbow clinically, testing each of the fingers.

"Come on, Tonks, that's no way to talk to your ministering angels," Remus says gently, and Harry gathers up the shredded shirtpieces, shoving them to one side. Remus gives him a quick nod.

"If you're not squeamish, you might stay and learn something," he says. Harry eyes Tonks' arm; from elbow to wrist it's nothing more than shredded flesh, and he thinks he sees bone. He swallows bile and nods.

"If you think you're going to throw up, Harry -- "

"I'm fine," Harry says. A bare glance of approval, all that can be spared, and Remus casts a numbing charm; Tonks sighs with relief.

"This is going to feel particularly odd, Tonks."

Harry watches as Remus enchants his own hand, then begins to slowly pick apart the strips of flesh, finding the origin of each slash and realigning the skin and muscle, as though he's assembling a frayed rope. He smooths his thumb down each piece as it's put back in its proper place, and it stays there; Harry watches fresh blood fill the injured sinew. In some places, the skin heals together again, leaving a faint darkish scar.

Not unlike, Harry realises, the ones that crisscross Remus' chest and upper arms, the sides of his ribcage, his back. Not all of them are claw-marks; there are white lines across his shoulders where the wolf presses through, and down his arms as well. Harry looks, cautiously, for a bite-mark, but it must be elsewhere; on running prey, a wolf will go for the legs, he recalls.

For all he's thin, and Harry knew that, Remus has muscle like ropes under his skin, holding him together. He has a very efficient-looking sort of body, aside from the scars.

There are some places Remus can't heal Tonks, or the skin has been too-long-dead; he has Harry pass him the green potion, more of a salve really, and rubs it efficiently into the gaping gashes before wiping his hands on one of the rags, and reaching for the gauze.

"Arm's done, Tonks," he murmurs. Her leg is less badly hurt, and only the calf needs any real attention. It's short work, and then he sits back on his heels.

"Harry, will you wrap that, please?" he asks, and Harry accepts the gauze, working as he'd seen Remus do, slowly so that it doesn't bunch or wrinkle, tightly enough that it'll support the muscle. He realises Remus has been talking the whole time, to Harry, telling him what he was doing and why. He also realises this has little to do with him and everything to do with Remus remaining calm in the face of a difficult, blood-soaked task.

"All right, Tonks," Remus says, lifting her head gently so that she looks at him, and he can make sure she understands. "You can go upstairs and sleep for a while, or we can take you to St. Mungo's. If we do, there are going to be a lot of uncomfortable questions. If we don't, you may scar."

"I don't scar," she said faintly.

"All right, upstairs it is. I can take her, Harry, have yourself a rest for a bit."

Remus vanishes up the stairs, this time with her arm over his shoulder instead of carrying her, and Harry stands in the kitchen, wondering what to do with himself. He finds he's breathing fast; now that the urgency has worn off, he's allowed to panic. That's nice.

He asks himself what Remus would be doing, and promptly begins tidying up, disposing of the rags in a bucket along with the remains of the gauze, too little to use on anything, and the bits of robe and trouser Remus tore off while he was fixing Tonks' leg. He fetches a shirt from his room, one of his less hideous hand-me-downs, and gets a butterbeer out of the chilled cold-foods cupboard, along with some soup.

He can't heat the soup, he realises, since he's not allowed to do magic and the stove in the kitchen requires wood, but he sets it out anyway and uncaps the butterbeer.

Footsteps on the stairs, and Remus' voice.

"She's sleeping, so she'll be all right -- " he pauses at the bottom, and Harry wonders if he's been a little too helpful, seemed a little too desperate to please, as Remus' eyes fall on the butterbeer and the soup.

"Bless you, Harry," he says, and Harry warms with the approval. "Are you eating? Yes? Good, come sit and...oh, it's cold, of course." A quick flick of a wand, and the soup steams. "Inconvenient, the Restriction...here we are." He drops into a chair, looking as tired as Tonks did, and takes the

first pull of butterbeer from the bottle, though Harry has set down a glass for him. Harry eats his soup, watching as Remus fills the glass.

"I appreciate the help, Harry. I checked her leg -- the wrapping was fine. You remember that spell when you're out of school. More than once, it's quite literally saved my hide. But," he adds, slouching forward over his soup, "It does rather drain a person."

"I brought you a shirt," Harry says quietly, indicating the folded plaid shirt with a tilt of his head. He's still as embarrassed as if Remus were walking around naked. The scars that run as far up as his throat are something Harry thinks few people see. "It's mine, but I got it from Dudley so it ought to fit you."

"Oh -- thanks. Thanks very much," Remus says, suddenly self-conscious as he reaches for the shirt and pulls it around his shoulders. Even on a fully-grown man, Dudley's shirts are almost too big. "That was thoughtful of you."

They eat in silence, mainly. Harry can feel the weariness on the other man, and lets him be, wondering if he shouldn't take his food elsewhere. Remus draws a breath, and sips his beer again.

"I used to nick shirts off your father, at school," he says quietly, his voice strangely subdued. "For a long time we were the same size, and then in sixth year suddenly they didn't fit anymore -- he used to complain I stretched the shoulders on them. It was peculiar for me to realise I was bigger than James. He filled a room with his presence."

"Oh," Harry answers, drinking in the details, though the last few words bring Snape's pensieve memories to mind. Remus sees it, he must; he eats another spoonful of soup, and continues.

"It wasn't all arrogance, either; especially after fifth year. He realised he was mortal and he could make mistakes, and since I was now bigger than him, if I chose to I could shake him like a terrier," he says with a small grin. "And did, once or twice. It was good for him. Your mother never would have paid him any mind otherwise."

Harry grins back, a little.

"I did worry about them when you were born -- they were young to be parents, James especially, but he had honestly changed. Something few people do, after the age of fifteen or so. I didn't change much. Nor did Sirius," he adds, regretfully. Harry is silent; it's the first time he's heard Remus say his godfather's name.

"I should have come for you," Remus says, seeming to forge ahead, while he rises to rummage in the cupboard for another butterbeer. "By the time I'd heard about it, you were already with the Dursleys, and...do you want one?"

"No, thank you," Harry answers, trying to keep his voice from cracking. Remus returns to the table, and Harry wonders if he's even going to continue, or if he's been distracted.

"I should have," Remus finally muses. "But I had lost my whole world, all my friends, in one fell blow...I was never any good at making friends."

"Your students liked you," Harry points out quickly.

"Yes -- that's a bit different, though. It doesn't matter, anyhow. I didn't think of you when I should have, and I couldn't really have done anything at any rate...but it wouldn't have hurt to try. I'm sorry about that, Harry. Especially knowing you now."

Harry studies his soup. "Dumbledore wouldn't have let you do anything anyway."

"That's very true. There's a limit to what we can do for you even now. It won't always be this way, Harry."

"No, just through school."

"It seems like an eternity now, I grant you."

"Yeah."

And another silence, before Harry looks up to see Remus studying him, almost curiously.

"If you liked, Harry," he says, looking oddly hesitant, "That is, I'm not your father or Sirius, and I really have no right to your time or attention at all -- but if you liked, if you wanted someone to sort of...if you need a NEWTs tutor...though Hermione would probably be better, she'll have read all sorts of books about the NEWTs, I did when I was her age..."

"You'd be my tutor?" Harry asks, trying not to sound over-eager.

"Yes...or...well, McGonagall's a good teacher but she doesn't make a terribly good mentor. There are a lot of...erm...see, a growing lad likes another man to talk to, doesn't he?"

Harry wonders if the question on the end was a rhetorical flourish, or a real question; it's hard to tell.

"Just...I can see all the questions you want to ask, Harry, and if you want to ask me, you could," Remus says, weakly. "I can't promise I'd be able to

answer them, but at least you'll know someone thinks about you more often than to wonder if they shouldn't check to make sure you're still eating properly."

Harry looks away before Remus can see the flush on his cheeks. As much as he likes the idea, he's unused to the attention -- attention in that way, from someone who considers him a person and not a symbol.

"I'd like that, I guess," he says.

"Yes?"

"Yes."

"Well. That's good then," Remus says, clearing his throat. "Is there...anything you did want to talk about?"

Harry bites his lip.

"My dad and mum," he says softly. "I don't know anything about them, really...bits here and there, that's all. If...if you can. I'd like to know what they were like. Really, I mean. I don't care if they weren't perfect, I just want to know."

Remus nods, eyes darkening slightly. "That I can tell you," he says. "You deserve that much."

He exhales, apparently thinking, and then sets his soup aside. Even fully clothed, he suddenly seems naked in front of Harry, but neither of them are ashamed, now.

"I met your father before Hogwarts, in a shop just off of Diagon Alley, when we were nine or ten..."

END