

Chapter 18 moony, wormtail, padfoot, and prongs

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It took a few seconds for the absurdity of this statement to sink in. Then Ron voiced what Harry was thinking.

" You're both mental."

" Ridiculous!" said Hermione faintly.

" Peter Pettigrew's dead!" said Harry. " He killed him twelve years ago!" He pointed at Black, whose face twitched convulsively.

" I meant to," he growled, his yellow teeth bared, " but little Peter got the better of me... not this time, though!"

And Crookshanks was thrown to the floor as Black lunged at Scabbers; Ron yelled with pain as Black's weight fell on his broken leg.

" Sirius, NO!" Lupin yelled, launching himself forwards and dragging Black away from Ron again, " WAIT! You can't do it just like that -- they need to understand -- we've got to explain --"

" We can explain afterwards!" snarled Black, trying to throw Lupin off. One hand was still clawing the air as it tried to reach Scabbers, who was squealing like a piglet, scratching Ron's face and neck as he tried to escape.

" They've -- got -- a -- right -- to -- know -- everything!" Lupin panted, still trying to restrain Black. " Ron's kept him as a pet! There are parts of it even I don't understand, and Harry -- you owe Harry the truth, Sirius!"

Black stopped struggling, though his hollowed eyes were still fixed on Scabbers, who was clamped tightly under Ron's bitten, scratched, and bleeding hands.

" All right, then," Black said, without taking his eyes off the rat.

" Tell them whatever you like. But make it quick, Remus. I want to commit the murder I was imprisoned for..."

" You're nutters, both of you," said Ron shakily, looking round at Harry and Hermione for support. " I've had enough of this. I'm off."

He tried to heave himself up on his good leg, but Lupin raised his wand again, pointing it at Scabbers.

" You're going to hear me out, Ron," he said quietly. " Just keep a tight hold on Peter while you listen."

" HE'S NOT PETER, HE'S SCABBERS!" Ron yelled, trying to force the rat back into his front pocket, but Scabbers was fighting too hard; Ron swayed and overbalanced, and Harry caught him and pushed him back down to the bed. Then, ignoring Black, Harry turned to Lupin.

" There were witnesses who saw Pettigrew die," he said. " A whole street full of them..."

" They didn't see what they thought they saw!" said Black savagely, still watching Scabbers struggling in Ron's hands.

" Everyone thought Sirius killed Peter," said Lupin, nodding. " I believed it myself -- until I saw the map tonight. Because the Marauder's map never lies... Peter's alive. Ron's holding him, Harry."

Harry looked down at Ron, and as their eyes met, they agreed, silently: Black and Lupin were both out of their minds. Their story made no sense whatsoever. How could Scabbers be Peter Pettigrew? Azkaban must have unhinged Black after all -- but why was Lupin playing along with him?

Then Hermione spoke, in a trembling, would-be calm sort of voice, as though trying to will Professor Lupin to talk sensibly.

" But Professor Lupin... Scabbers can't be Pettigrew... it just can't be true, you know it can't..."

" Why can't it be true?" Lupin said calmly, as though they were in class, and Hermione had simply spotted a problem in an experiment with Grindylows.

" Because... because people would know if Peter Pettigrew had been an Animagus. We did Animagi in class with Professor McGonagall. And I looked them up when I did my homework -- the Ministry of Magic keeps tabs on witches and wizards who can become animals; there's a register showing what animal they become, and their markings and things... and I went and looked Professor McGonagall up on the register, and there have been only seven Animagi this century, and Pettigrew's name wasn't on the list."

Harry had barely had time to marvel inwardly at the effort Hermione put into her homework, when Lupin started to laugh.

" Right again, Hermione!" he said. " But the Ministry never knew that here used to be three unregistered Animagi running around Hogwarts."

" If you're going to tell them the story, get a move on, Remus," said Black, who was still watching Scabbers's every desperate move. " I've waited twelve years, I'm not going to wait much longer."

" All right... but you'll need to help me, Sirius," said Lupin, " I only know how it began..."

Lupin broke off. There had been a loud creak behind him. The bedroom door had opened of its own accord. All five of them stared at it. Then Lupin strode toward it and looked out into the landing.

" No one there..."

" This place is haunted!" said Ron.

" It's not," said Lupin, still looking at the door in a puzzled way. " The Shrieking Shack was never haunted... The screams and howls the villagers used to hear were made by me."

He pushed his graying hair out of his eyes, thought for a moment then said, " That's where all of this starts -- with my becoming a werewolf, None of this could have happened if I hadn't been bitter... and if I hadn't been so foolhardy..."

He looked sober and tired. Ron started to interrupt, but Hermione, said, " Shh!" She was watching Lupin very intently.

" I as a very small boy when I received the bite. My parents tried everything, but in those days there was no cure. The potion that Professor Snape has been making for me is a very recent discovery. It makes me safe, you see. As long as I take it in the week, preceding the full moon, I keep my mind when I transform... I'm able to curl up in my office, a harmless wolf, and wait for the moon to wane again.

" Before the Wolfsbane Potion was discovered, however, I became a fully fledged monster once a month. It seemed impossible that I would be able to come to Hogwarts. Other parents weren't likely to want their children exposed to me.

" But then Dumbledore became Headmaster, and he was sympathetic. He said that as long as we took certain precautions, there was no reason I shouldn't come to school...." Lupin sighed, and looked directly at Harry. " I told you, months ago, that the Whomping Willow was planted the year I came to Hogwarts. The truth is that it was planted because I came to Hogwarts. This house" -- Lupin looked miserably around the room, -- " the tunnel that leads to it -- they were built for my use. Once a month, I was smuggled out of the castle, into this place, to transform. The tree was placed at the tunnel mouth to stop anyone coming across me while I was dangerous."

Harry couldn't see where this story was going, but he was listening raptly all the same. The only sound apart from Lupin's voice was Scabbers's frightened squeaking.

" My transformations in those days were -- were terrible. It is very painful to turn into a werewolf. I was separated from humans to bite, so I bit and scratched myself instead. The villagers heard the noise and the screaming and thought they were hearing particularly violent spirits. Dumbledore encouraged the rumor... Even now, when the house has been silent for years, the villagers don't dare approach it...."

" But apart from my transformations, I was happier than I had ever been in my life. For the first time ever, I had friends, three great friends. Sirius Black... Peter Pettigrew... and, of course, your father, Harry -- James Potter."

" Now, my three friends could hardly fail to notice that I disappeared once a month. I made up all sorts of stories. I told them my mother was ill, and that I had to go home to see her... I was terrified they would desert me the moment they found out what I was. But of course, they, like you, Hermione, worked out the truth...."

" And they didn't desert me at all. Instead, they did something for me that would make my transformations not only bearable, but the best times of my life. They became Animagi."

" My dad too?" said Harry, astounded.

" Yes, indeed," said Lupin. " It took them the best part of three years to work out how to do it. Your father and Sirius here were the cleverest students in the school, and lucky they were, because the Animagus transformation can go horribly wrong -- one reason the Ministry keeps a close watch on those attempting to do it. Peter needed all the help he could get from James and

Sirius. Finally, in our fifth year, they managed it. They could each turn into a different animal at will."

" But how did that help you?" said Hermione, sounding puzzled.

" They couldn't keep me company as humans, so they kept me company as animals," said Lupin. " A werewolf is only a danger to people. They sneaked out of the castle every month under James's Invisibility Cloak. They transformed... Peter, as the smallest, could slip beneath the Willow's attacking branches and touch the knot that freezes it. They would then slip down the tunnel and join me. Under their influence, I became less dangerous. My body was still wolfish, but my mind seemed to become less so while I was with them."

" Hurry up, Remus," snarled Black, who was still watching Scabbers with a horrible sort of hunger on his face.

" I'm getting there, Sirius, I'm getting there... well, highly exciting possibilities were open to us now that we could all transform. Soon we were leaving the Shrieking Shack and roaming the school grounds and the village by night. Sirius and James transformed into such large animals, they were able to keep a werewolf in check. I doubt whether any Hogwarts students ever found out more about the Hogwarts grounds and Hogsmeade than we did... And that's how we came to write the Marauder's Map, and sign it with our nicknames. Sirius is Padfoot. Peter is Wormtail. James was Prongs."

" What sort of animal --?" Harry began, but Hermione cut him off. " That was still really dangerous! Running around in the dark with a werewolf! What if you'd given the others the slip, and bitten somebody?"

" A thought that still haunts me," said Lupin heavily. " And there were near misses, many of them. We laughed about them afterwards. We were young, thoughtless -- carried away with our own cleverness."

" I sometimes felt guilty about betraying Dumbledore's trust, of course... he had admitted me to Hogwarts when no other headmaster would have done so, and he had no idea I was breaking the rules he had set down for my own and others' safety. He never knew I had led three fellow students into becoming Animagi illegally. But I always managed to forget my guilty feelings every time we sat down to plan our next month's adventure. And I haven't changed..."

Lupin's face had hardened, and there was self-disgust in his voice. " All this year, I have been battling with myself, wondering whether I should tell Dumbledore that Sirius was an Animagus. But I didn't do it. Why? Because I was too cowardly. It would have meant admitting that I'd betrayed his trust while I was at school, admitting that I'd led others along with me... and Dumbledore's trust has meant everything to me. He let me into Hogwarts as a boy, and he gave me a job when I have been shunned all my adult life, unable to find paid work because of what I am. And so I convinced myself that Sirius was getting into the school using dark arts he learned from Voldemort, that being an Animagus had nothing to do with it... so, in a way, Snape's been right about me all along."

"Snape?" said Black harshly, taking his eyes off Scabbers; for the first time in minutes and looking up at Lupin. "What's Snape got to do with it?"

"He's here, Sirius," said Lupin heavily. "He's teaching here as well." He looked up at Harry, Ron, and Hermione.

"Professor Snape was at school with us. He fought very hard against my appointment to the Defense Against the Dark Arts job. He has been telling Dumbledore all year that I am not to be trusted. He has his reasons... you see, Sirius here played a trick on him which nearly killed him, a trick which involved me --"

Black made a derisive noise.

"It served him right," he sneered. "Sneaking around, trying to find out what we were up to... hoping he could get us expelled...."

"Severus was very interested in where I went every month." Lupin told Harry, Ron, and Hermione. "We were in the same year, you know, and we -- er -- didn't like each other very much. He especially disliked James. Jealous, I think, of James's talent on the Quidditch field... anyway Snape had seen me crossing the grounds with Madam Pomfrey one evening as she led me toward the Whomping Willow to transform. Sirius thought it would be -- er -- amusing, to tell Snape all he had to do was prod the knot on the tree trunk with a long stick, and he'd be able to get in after me. Well, of course, Snape tried it -- if he'd got as far as this house, he'd have met a fully grown werewolf -- but your father, who'd heard what Sirius had done, went after Snape and pulled him back, at great risk to his life... Snape glimpsed me,

though, at the end of the tunnel. He was forbidden by Dumbledore to tell anybody, but from that time on he knew what I was...."

" So that's why Snape doesn't like you," said Harry slowly, " because he thought you were in on the joke?"

" That's right," sneered a cold voice from the wall behind Lupin.

Severus Snape was pulling off the Invisibility Cloak, his wand pointing directly at Lupin.