

## My Brown-Eyed Girl

“Get out of here!” snapped a boy’s voice angrily.

“Ron, don’t!” cried a girl.

Remus Lupin stirred. Somewhere deep in his mind, one of those voices had raised echoes. He turned his head, let his mouth droop open, and continued to breathe deeply and evenly.

“Hermione, maybe you’d better keep Crookshanks over with you,” suggested a third voice, another boy. “Ron, just keep good hold on Scabbers, and don’t let him go running off again.”

“Easy for you to say, Harry. Have you ever tried keeping hold of a rat that doesn’t want to be kept held of?”

*Harry? As in Potter?*

Cautiously, Remus cracked one eye open.

*No mistaking that hair. Or those eyes.* Harry Potter sat across from him, the image of James at thirteen, except for the eyes and the expression. James had never looked conciliatory in quite that way—it had usually been Remus himself trying to patch things up within the group.

*Grand job I did of it, of course.*

The other boy must be Ron, and he was a Weasley if Remus had ever seen one. *Wonder how many of them I’ll have to teach? At least two besides this one, I’m sure, unless he’s the oldest and the rest aren’t at school yet...*

The girl Remus couldn’t see; she must be sitting beside him. *Was she the one I thought I knew? It wasn’t Harry, he didn’t speak until afterwards. And I never knew any Weasleys well enough that they’d start me remembering things.*

“Why don’t we talk about something nice?” the girl suggested—

*Hermione. Her name is Hermione.*

“What classes are you two taking this year?”

Harry and Ron groaned in unison. “Only you think classes are nice to talk about, Hermione,” Ron said.

“Just because you don’t like to study—”

Remus allowed himself a small smile. *They sound just like Sirius and Aletha.* The smile slipped away as he remembered how that set of his friends had ended up. *One dead, one worse than dead and a traitor as well...*

“...really galls Malfoy,” Harry was saying now. “He can’t understand why you keep doing so much better than he does at everything. After all, you’re *Muggle-born*.” He drawled the words insultingly, making Ron and Hermione laugh.

*He must be imitating someone. Probably this Malfoy boy. Lucius’ son, I wouldn’t wonder. He’ll be fun to have in class, won’t he?*

“Something I don’t think you’ve ever told us, Hermione,” Ron said. “How did your parents take the news? I’ve heard of all sorts—some of them cheer, some of them cry, there are even cases where kids get kicked out of the house. Obviously that didn’t happen to you, but what did?”

“It was odd,” Hermione said slowly, as though thinking back. “They were surprised, of course, but I remember thinking that they didn’t seem quite as surprised as they could have. It was almost as if they’d been expecting it, and they were just acting surprised for me. But how could they have known about Hogwarts? They’re not magical, not at all.” She laughed a little. “You can’t get much more Muggle than being dentists.”

Remus shifted a little more in his seat, his heart now beating painfully fast. *A Muggle-born girl. Bookish, and her parents are dentists. And I thought I recognized her voice.*

He opened his other eye, then closed them both, turning his head back towards the window. One glance had been enough.

*Hermione. Another Shakespearean queen. I suppose they’re looking for a happier ending this time...*

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Back in his Hogwarts days, when James had eagerly pursued Lily and Sirius had bickered endlessly with Aletha, Remus had fallen deeply (and, he

thought, hopefully) in love with Gertrude Granger, a Muggle-born witch two years younger than he was. Known to everyone as "Danger," she charmed people into liking her, then kept her friends with her steadfast nature and earnest frankness. She loved to read and study, was less adept with her wand than many of her year, and treated everyone equally until they showed her they deserved something else.

Remus never dared to do anything about his love. What girl would take him as he was, "furry little problem" and all? But unknown to him, Danger reasoned out what was the matter with him and decided it didn't matter. The day after the incident with Snape in his seventh year, he awakened to her sitting beside his bed, arms folded and the no-nonsense look she'd borrowed from McGonagall on her face. They'd become an official couple that very day, and Remus had never been happier.

That June, he left school and entered the Order of the Phoenix, traveling widely to small villages and camps of werewolves, trying to convince them Voldemort would give them nothing. Some listened, others laughed, still others drove him away by force. He'd returned to Headquarters after the first time this had happened, battered and dispirited, ready to give up, until he noticed exactly who was holding the door open for him to limp in.

"Well, someone has to take care of you," was all the comment Danger was able to make before he silenced her.

Somehow, after that, she was always there whenever he returned from a mission. Middle of the day or middle of the night, summer or winter, he knew she would be waiting, ready with something for him to drink, with a hug and a kiss, with just the right thing to say, whether that was soothing or scolding or nothing at all.

At his urging, she began to study for an Animagus transformation near the end of her sixth year; though with her slow wanded magic it took her longer than it had the Marauders, and she had to put it on hold during her last few months of studying for N.E.W.T.s, he had no doubt she'd achieve it. She always achieved anything she put her mind to.

And when she achieved it, he'd marry her.

He believed that until the full moon night after she'd left school.

As usual, he'd spent the night in the barred cell in the basement of Headquarters, romping with Wormtail and Padfoot, with Prongs sticking his nose in from outside occasionally (his antlers wouldn't fit inside the cage). The others had left before moonrise, so he was alone when Aletha came downstairs to tend to his usual morning injuries. Her face was tear-stained, and she carried herself like a woman in pain.

"Letha, what's wrong?" he asked.

Aletha swallowed once. "Danger," she said painfully, then stopped and shook her head. "Remus, no—you don't want to hear this now—"

"Tell me," Remus demanded, sitting up. "What's wrong, what is it? What's happened to her?"

Aletha backed away from him. "No. No, no, I can't tell you, not here, not like this—"

"Tell me!"

"She's dead!" Aletha screamed. "There, are you happy now?" Her face contorted, and she sank to the ground, sobbing.

Remus left her there and went to find someone who would give him answers.

Dumbledore was waiting for him at the top of the stairs, his eyes grave. He took Remus into a room alone and answered all his questions. No, there was no mistake. Danger had been outside her home, walking alone in the moonlight, when she had been attacked. A werewolf, by the signs. She had fought back—tufts of fur were still clutched in her hands when she was found. Remus took the fur, and lifted it to his nose, and learned the scent of the one who had attacked his beloved.

"I will kill him," he said in an undertone that was almost a growl.

"You will do nothing rash," Dumbledore said sharply. "She was dear to all of us, and I will not lose you too."

His voice cracked on the last word, and Remus looked up to see his Headmaster weeping.

Peter found where the werewolf laired, Sirius helped to plan the attack, James went along as backup, but Remus needed none. Silent as a shadow he crept into the lair, and with his own hand stabbed Danger's murderer to the heart, leaving the silver-bladed dagger there for all to see. The only scent the other werewolves would find on it would be delicate and feminine and lead them nowhere, for Remus had protected himself from the poisonous metal with one of Danger's robes.

He cut off contact with her family after the funeral. All of them had agreed it would be better. Seeing one another brought back too many painful memories, and Danger's mother's pregnancy only made things worse, for Remus knew how much Danger had longed to have a sister or brother. He and Aletha comforted one another instead, for they had known her best, Remus from his love and Aletha from a childhood friendship.

And so their story had ended...

*No, not quite. There's one more piece.*

It was something Remus didn't think much about. A dream, that was all, a dream he'd had the night after her death, when he'd cried himself to sleep thinking of all they'd never have. He'd closed his eyes, then opened them, and she'd been there, as beautiful as ever, as warm and as soft and as perfect in his arms.

I couldn't leave you," she'd told him. "But I didn't want to be a ghost, either. So I found another way." Her fingertip on his lips cut off any questions. "We'll find each other again, don't worry. Just watch for me. I'll be along one of these days..."

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"Oh, for heaven's sake," said the voice that had caught his ear in the first place. "Just pretend you're girls and go at the same time. We always do it that way."

A boy's snort of laughter, poorly suppressed. Two sets of footsteps, and the sound of a compartment door opening, then closing.

"Remus?"

He didn't answer, but his breath caught. No longer did this voice remind him of one long-lost; now it *was* her voice, unmistakable though a million should call his name...

"I know you're faking," Danger said. "I always know. Come on, look at me."

"What will I see?" he whispered.

"You tell me."

Slowly, he opened his eyes, then turned his head until he was looking straight at her. Nothing spectacular. Just a young teenage girl in a Hogwarts uniform, with a Gryffindor tie and the look about her that said *I'll be a prefect when I'm old enough*.

Her eyes were a warm shade of brown he'd never seen on any person but one.

She smiled shyly. "Hello, Professor," she said.

Remus suppressed an urge to pull her into his arms and kiss her. "Who are you?" he asked instead.

She looked thoughtful. "I'm actually two people," she said. "Or rather, I'm just one person, but there are two people in this body. There have been for a very long time."

"Who are they?" His chest was tightening, but he was not going to cry in front of this girl.

"One of them is Hermione Granger. She's the one who's always been here, the one the body really belongs to. But she's not the one you're talking to." The smile grew mischievous. "And you know it, too."

"Don't tease me," Remus said roughly.

"All right, I won't. My name was Gertrude Granger. Everyone called me Danger. I loved you, and you loved me. You had given me a ring of your mother's to wear around my neck. It was silver. I burned the werewolf with it when he attacked me, before he bit it out of my hands." She regarded her fingers dispassionately, then looked up at Remus. "Even with the way he hurt me, I couldn't leave you. Not without saying goodbye. So I found a place to hide, a place to stay until we could come face to face again."

Remus shook his head weakly. "This isn't possible," he said, hearing the plaintive sound in his own voice. "It can't be happening."

"Nothing's possible until it's happened." The girl drew her wand and made the window in the compartment door opaque. "That's what you always used to tell me, when I was frustrated with the Animagus transformation."

"And what did you always say back to me?" Remus asked, bracing himself for a disappointment—whatever source this girl used, it wouldn't have this in it..

She looked puzzled. "There wasn't one thing I said all the time. Sometimes I'd hit you, sometimes I'd kiss you, and once I remember shouting at you that it was easy for you, you couldn't help transforming." Her gaze slid to the floor. "I shouldn't have said that. I'm sorry."

Remus had no memory of moving, or of consciously deciding to move, but he must have moved—she was in his arms, her head against his chest, the scent of her drifting up to him, both the same and tantalizingly different.

*Of course it's different. This isn't her, not really. She's stolen her sister's body, taken it over, cheated death—and the body you're holding is thirteen years old, no matter how old the spirit is inside!*

He opened his arms, tried to move away, but she wasn't having any. "No," she murmured into his robes, "stay, stay...we don't have long, they'll be back soon, we can't let them find us like this..."

"Does your sister know about this?" Remus asked, relenting enough to hold her with one arm. "Did she allow you to enter?"

"She was not quite six months gestation when I asked, but she allowed me," Danger said, resting her head against his shoulder. "She knew me, or knew of me, and she was willing to let me enter into her body. I've always been there for her, someone to ask advice of, someone to help her understand. She's known for being very bright, with a wonderful memory—a lot of that is her own, but some of it is me."

Remus relaxed a little. "I've always loved you," he murmured. "But you knew that."

Of course. Just as you know I've always loved you." Danger chuckled. "Hermione claimed to her friends she knew you because of the name on your luggage, but she knew who you were before she ever looked up from your face. She actually scolded me for yelling when I saw you." Her voice took on an apologetic tone. "You see, I knew we'd meet again someday, but I didn't know when. And I'd almost given up hope."

Remus started to shake with laughter. "*You'd* almost given up hope?" he managed to get out. "I had no idea you were even alive!" Abruptly his laughter stopped. "But you're not. Not really. Are you?"

"No," Danger said regretfully. "Not really. Hermione's a wonderful sister, she's never begrudged me housework, but she's getting older, and she deserves to have her mind to herself." She sighed. "I would have liked to be around to see her discover how she really feels about Ron, though. Will you watch her for me?"

Remus tried a smile. "Ron, is it? Not Harry?"

"No, not Harry at all. She loves him very much, but not that way. It's Ron for certain." A smile appeared. "They get along, you may have noticed, very like some other couples we used to know."

"Yes." Even the remnant of a smile Remus had been able to hold onto disappeared at the thought of those other couples, and their fates. *And now Danger's leaving me again, so soon, so soon...*

"It's better this way," Danger said softly. "We've seen each other, we've held each other, we've said our goodbyes. Better not to linger too long over what can't be."

"Yes," said Remus, praying his true feelings wouldn't escape. *You can't go now—I've been alone so long—stay with me, please stay with me—*

A head tilted back, and girlish lips sought and found his.

*Don't go—don't go—please, Danger, please, don't go—*

A shudder ran through Hermione Granger's body, and she went limp in Remus' arms.

*"I love you,"* a ghostly voice whispered in his ear. *"I always will."*

Remus Lupin lowered his beloved's sister gently to the seat, turned his face to the window, covered his head with the hood of his cloak, and began silently to weep.

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"Hermione," said Ron suddenly during a game of Go Fish, "were your eyes always hazel?"

"What?" Hermione frowned. "Of course they were. What are you talking about?"

"Nothing. I just thought they were brown before."

"Does it matter?" Harry interjected.

"Not really. I was just wondering. Have any threes, Hermione?"

"Go fish."

The train rattled on.