

Harry let out a breathless laugh, meeting Hermione's equally incredulous gaze. They crept back to their beds, just in time for Madam Pomfrey to emerge from her office. "Did I hear the headmaster leave? Am I allowed to look after my own patients, now?" She had a sour expression on her face as she shoved enormous blocks of chocolate at both Harry and Hermione. Harry settled down in his bed, taking a bite out of the sweet confection. He could relax now. Sirius was safe.

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Severus ran gentle fingers over the lump on the back of his head, hissing as the flesh stung. It was too much to hope that the evening's events had been some bizarre, concussion-induced dream.

He'd woken up to the Minister raging in the middle of the hospital wing — Black had somehow escaped, right under his nose. Weasley was still unconscious, but when Severus dared look at Potter and Granger, they seemed entirely too innocent for their own good. Feigning sleep still, Severus managed to piece together what had happened after he'd been knocked out.

He never thought he'd see the day where he was actually *pleased* Sirius Black got off scot-free. He snorted to himself quietly; how things had changed. To learn that Pettigrew was the traitor after all... a few things certainly made sense, in hindsight. He wondered how Lupin was taking the whole affair, then glanced towards the window. The sun was only just rising over the tops of the trees. Lupin would have no clue about anything that had happened after his transformation.

Pulling himself into a standing position made Severus wince, but he was no stranger to pain. He bent down to buckle his boots, then straightened up, looking around the hospital wing. The three Gryffindors were fast asleep, and Poppy was nowhere to be found.

His wand was on the side table, and he grabbed it, tucking it back into his pocket as he walked somewhat gingerly from the ward. After a brief detour to get clothes for the man, he was striding across the lawn in the early dawn light, and stopped at the edge of the Forbidden Forest. "Point me Remus Lupin." His clear, curt tones had his wand spinning in his hand, and he walked on once it settled on a direction.

As he searched the dark woods, he couldn't stop his thoughts returning to what had happened the night before. The werewolf in front of him, rearing up with a howl, definitely bigger than it had been when he was sixteen. He could hardly believe he'd been so foolish as to *stand in front of it*, even if it had been to protect students. To protect Lily's boy. He'd stared a werewolf in the face, for the second time in his life, and lived to tell the tale. Hopefully, it would be the last time. But with some of his recent life choices, he found he couldn't promise himself that.

"Daft wolf," he muttered when he finally came across the man, wishing he didn't sound so fond. The greying man was sprawled awkwardly across the forest floor, entirely naked and covered in scratches. He groaned softly when Severus knelt down and placed a hand on his shoulder. "Come on, up you get. You need to get inside."