

Harry and Severus were downstairs somewhere practicing Harry's Occlumency, so Remus officially had nothing to do until dinner. He could get used to being a man of leisure; after having to scrape whatever job he could find just to survive, he still couldn't quite get used to doing nothing. He missed teaching — more than he expected to, honestly — but tutoring Harry gave him so much joy, and it was nice to take a break as well.

He cocked his head when he heard familiar footsteps heading his way; was that the time already?

Severus appeared in the doorway, his fairly neutral expression turning into a scowl when he saw the way Padfoot was stretched out over Remus. Remus bit back a sigh. "I can see I'm interrupting," Severus said sharply. "I'll come back later."

"Severus," Remus called, but the man turned away. Remus sighed, dragging himself out from under the dog and off the sofa. "Go back to sleep, Padfoot," he muttered, rubbing the dog's head as he looked up in drowsy confusion.

He caught up to Severus halfway down the corridor, grabbing him gently by the elbow. "Severus, what did you need?"

"I was going to ask if you wanted company reading before dinner, but I see you already found it," the Slytherin retorted. He was unable to hide the hurt in his tone from Remus' practiced ear, and the werewolf frowned.

"I always want your company," he murmured, leaning in close to the man. "Sirius snores."

That was apparently the wrong thing to say, as Severus wrenched his arm from Remus' grip, stalking off towards the stairs. Remus hurried after him. "Severus, please," he urged. "Tell me what I'm doing wrong."

"If you can't figure it out yourself, that should be proof enough," Severus snapped.

Remus felt like they were sixteen again, navigating the minefield of Slytherin versus Gryffindor, werewolf versus future Death Eater, two teenage boys desperate for connection but so scared of getting hurt.

He'd hated being sixteen.

"*Severus*," he said again, sliding a hand to the back of the man's neck. Moony whined in the back of his head, asking why their mate was sad. Remus wished he had an answer. He looked deep into the near-black eyes he loved, trying to figure it out.

"Go back to your mutt, Lupin," Severus urged. "I have other places to be."

Slowly the matter dawned on Remus, and he almost groaned. *Again?* He thought he'd put this to rest over a decade ago. "Severus," he murmured, gently pushing the man up against the wall. Not hard enough that he couldn't fight it; never hard enough to hurt. Severus' back hit the dark blue wallpaper. "There is nothing between Sirius and I. There never has been and never will be anything but a very deep, utterly *platonic* love between Sirius and I. You know