

*Perhaps we could have a drink when I'm feeling better. I'm going to need help working through the bottle of Glenfiddich Minerva will undoubtedly gift me.*

*I'm not asking for things to be how they were. I'm just asking for us to move forward.*

*Merry Christmas,*

*Remus*

Severus almost tossed the whole thing in the fire without opening it, but he couldn't bring himself to do so. Carefully undoing the Spellotape holding it together, he peeled off the paper, expecting some potions book or perhaps something Dark Arts related. It was nothing of the sort.

It was a wooden puzzle box. Muggle in origin, by the looks of it. Interlocking pieces of dark stained wood, intricately carved and fit together in a way that Severus could tell the solution would take time.

He thought about a shelf, in a bedroom in a muggle house he hadn't visited in years, where a small collection of similar puzzle boxes resided, no doubt covered in dust by now. A collection that had begun when a nine year-old redheaded girl eagerly gifted him one for his birthday, gushing about the trip to Turkey she'd taken with her family, and how she'd seen the box and just *had* to get it for him.

Long fingers brushed carefully over the wood, his brain already beginning to look for next possible moves, keen to see if there was anything inside the box. From Lupin, it could be anything. Severus didn't know what he was hoping for.

Perhaps the box would be better off empty.

Cursing under his breath, Severus screwed the paper up into a ball, throwing it into the fire, note and all. The puzzle box remained in his lap, taunting him.

*Move forward.* He scoffed. That was easier said than done. They'd barely been able to figure things out the first time around, when they were young and naive and so bloody *hopeful* — at least, Remus was hopeful. Thinking about the werewolf back then made a sharp ache pierce Severus' ribcage.

Remus was right. They certainly couldn't go back to how things were. Everything had changed far, far too much for that.

He shook his head, tearing his gaze away from the puzzle box and staring into the flames as they turned the wrapping paper to ash. He'd been well on his way to fucking things up for good, before. Merlin only knew why the idiot wolf was still trying.

Moving forward. Severus wondered what that would look like.

He cursed the corner of his shrivelled up heart that was desperate to find out.

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