

Misdirected Mail

by septentrion

There's an owl post for Remus Lupin, who left Hogwarts the previous day. Severus insists on opening Lupin's mail.

One-shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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Written to answer prompts and ideas from anonymous_plume and mrs_helensnape.

Thanks to Melusin for the beta.

I'm making no money with this.

Stiff would be a mild description of the atmosphere in the staff room of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. It was the last day of the school year, and the students had just boarded the Hogwarts Express, which would take them back to London and their families. Usually, it was a relaxing time for the teachers. They could loosen up a bit, or a lot depending on one's temperament, laugh aloud, joke and look forward to the next student-free two months. Not this year.

An invisible line wound its way through the little groups cluttering the cosy room, dividing the teachers in two distinct coteries of unequal importance. The bigger one more or less surrounded the Headmaster. Its members sported desolate faces, deep scowls and looked, overall, displeased. Some of them were whispering, or trying to in Hagrid's case, among themselves like mad, punctuating their words with broad gestures of the arms and angry looks at a black-clad man. The smaller one, made up of three persons, was obviously led by said black-clad man, who was smirking as if he had been given the bigger part of the cake.

The explosion was imminent.

It never happened.

A brown owl flew through the opened window, a roll of parchment in its clutches. The bird's arrival brought a palpable wave of relief over the assembly; perhaps there would be no fight, after all. The owl circled the staff room in search of the mail's recipient. And circled. And circled. Nobody spoke until the Headmaster raised a wrinkled hand and beckoned the animal.

"You seem to be in something of a quandary," he said with a light chuckle to the owl that was clutching his arm. The bird answered with a soft hoot. The old man read the recipient's name on the parchment.

"Alas, little friend, you were misdirected. Remus Lupin left the castle yesterday." Albus Dumbledore sounded sad, whereas Severus Snape's face erupted in a gleeful, ugly smile.

"Perhaps," Severus started, "we ought to open the scroll to establish its urgency since Lupin did not provide a forwarding address." He said the former teacher's name as if it were the filthiest insult.

"That would be a breach of privacy," McGonagall protested.

"It might be of high importance for the school," Severus countered.

"Thank you both for your concern," Dumbledore interjected firmly. "I think I'll take the parchment to my office and send it to Remus as soon as I know where he is."

But the owl wouldn't have any of it. Its professional pride dictated that the mail it carried be delivered to its recipient only, and so it fluttered its wings to escape the humans' curiosity. However, before it could reach the window and escape, Severus had *Accio'ed* the parchment. He deftly caught the letter in his outstretched hand and tore the seal open with haste, ignoring the indignant exclamations of his colleagues.

"Professor Lupin," he read aloud, "I'm writing this letter to express my deepest gratitude for my son, Heimrich Badace's, results in Defence Against the Dark Arts this year. His mother and I are very proud of his Outstanding result.

"When I met you during the last Christmas holiday in Diagon Alley, I promised I would be thankful if my son's results in your class significantly improved. Therefore, you will find enclosed in this scroll a voucher for a meal at the Leaky Cauldron.

"Deepest regards,

"Hans Badace."

A heavy silence blanketed the small crowd of teachers.

Severus raised an eyebrow. In a soft, velvety voice that everyone heard clearly, he said, "Why am I not surprised that Remus Lupin was not quite the honest man he posed to be?"

"Severus!" There was no mistaking the fierce anger in the Headmaster's voice. "That's enough! I will see you in my office at five!" No one doubted the encounter would be most unpleasant for the Potions master.

Said Potions master chose to remain silent but only out of self-preservation. Dumbledore flicked his wand, and the parchment burst into flames. "I don't think it would serve any purpose to spread rumours about the school staff, whether they're currently employed or not." It was an order.

"As you wish, Headmaster," Severus hissed between gritted teeth. Then, he stormed out of the staff room, a billow of black robes in his wake. As he strode furiously through the castle's corridors, bitter thoughts invaded his mind. *The mongrel can't even accept a bribe properly. A meal at the Leaky Cauldron? I bet everhe can afford that much. I always knew a werewolf could not be trusted, but no, Dumbledore has to trust him, even when evidence of his duplicity is thrown in his face!*

He headed out of the ancient walls to quiet his fury with a healthy walk in the school grounds. After an hour of stomping, hiking and blasting vegetation, he was calm enough to sit on the lake's shore. He let the sun bathe the sallow skin of his face and soothe his temper. He had had at least one satisfaction: he had ensured that the werewolf would not be in the school in any capacity next year. They did not need the worry the year the Tri-Wizard Tournament was going to be resurrected.