

He reluctantly ended the call, taking a minute to compose himself before tucking the mirror back in his bag and heading out to the garden with his broom in hand, plastering a smile on his face when he saw the Weasley siblings already airborne, Hermione reading a book on the grass below. “There you are, mate! We’ve been waiting for you!” Ron called, waving him over. Harry kicked off into the sky, trying to leave his worries on the ground. There was nothing he could do about it all now.

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Severus returned home just in time for dinner, and the first thing Remus said was that they’d heard from Potter. “He’s fine, they’re all fine,” he assured. Severus felt the dread inside him build with every word as Remus relayed what had happened in the woods.

“Narcissa is well,” he informed his partner and Black when Remus mentioned Harry’s worries. He’d been to see her and Draco earlier, while Lucius was at the Ministry. “Shaken, but well. She was indeed part of the group involved in the muggle-baiting. She believes the whole thing was Lucius’ idea — or at least, he was involved in the planning. She said he didn’t tell her a thing beforehand, but he knew exactly where to go when it started.” It was exactly the sort of thing Lucius Malfoy would do, wanting to cause chaos and horror at such a public event. If he and the other loyal Death Eaters were getting the same signs he was, they would of course get braver and bolder in their hateful acts. If they believed the Dark Lord was on his way to returning, they would want to drum up as much fear as possible before that day arrived. “This is only the beginning, you realise.”

The two Gryffindors looked grim, hardly touching their dinner. “Snape,” Black said eventually. “I know we have a difficult history.” Severus snorted; that was the biggest understatement he’d heard in a while. “And I know we still have our differences, despite the things that bring us together.” Here he glanced at Remus, who bumped his knee against Severus’ under the table. “But please, for Remus if not for me, *please* look after Harry when he’s back at school. He can’t defend himself properly, not with Dumbledore lurking over his shoulder. If anything were to happen to him...” He didn’t need to finish; it would devastate both men if something were to befall Potter. “Just, please. He needs all the allies he can get. I can’t be there for him, but you can.”

Severus pursed his lips. Were they really going to make him say it? “I’ll admit, I have come to... tolerate the boy,” he said, as if the very confession pained him. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Remus try to hide a fond smile. Damnable wolf. “This summer has made me realise he’s not as arrogant as I initially believed. When he’s not being antagonised, he’s... not terrible.” There, that was as good as they were getting. Truthfully, Severus actually quite liked the Potter boy now; he was unexpectedly witty, and his Slytherin tendencies showed through in interesting — and sometimes amusing — ways. He now saw what Remus said when he said Potter — *Harry* — was so much like Lily. Sometimes his words, those green eyes staring back at him... it was like having her back.

“I’ll watch over him, as faithfully as you would,” he vowed to the pair of Gryffindors. Not only because he knew his life would not be worth living should Remus hear he’d let something happen to the boy on his watch. He didn’t want any harm to come to Harry either.