

Harry snorted quietly. “And they say romance is dead.” Reluctantly, he let Draco go, watching him head towards Slytherin for a few moments before Neville and Ginny nudged him towards the stairs.

Only six months left of term. They could handle it.

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They were only a week into the new term, and already Severus was being summoned to the headmaster’s office.

Wondering what the latest problem could be — privately, guiltily hoping it was the progression of the dark curse on the old man’s arm — Severus swept up the revolving stairs, stepping inside the office. Albus didn’t look in pain, more than usual anyway. He looked as weary as he always did, showing his age in a way he never had.

“Ah, Severus,” he greeted, smiling. “Glad you could make it so promptly. Please, sit.”

Severus did so, ignoring the usual offers of tea and lemon drops. “Did you have need of me for something, headmaster?” He couldn’t help but notice Fawkes’ perch was empty — when was the last time he’d seen the phoenix? It had certainly been a while...

“Of a sort,” Albus replied, clasping his hands together on the desk. “It is in regards to Mr Potter.”

Severus raised an uncaring eyebrow. “Indeed? What had the brat done now?” How much damage control was he about to have to undertake?

Albus chuckled, though his heart wasn’t in it. “It is nothing he has done. More something that was done to him, many years ago, now.” His gaze grew serious. “Have you ever heard of horcruxes, Severus?”

The Potions Master’s blood turned to ice. “The term is familiar, though I’m not sure where from,” he replied, keeping his voice even, trying not to react outwardly. Had Albus realised Harry had hunted down several horcruxes?

He put on an appropriately disgusted face as Albus explained horcruxes to him, eventually revealing that the Dark Lord had created a number of his own. “The ring I so hastily put on over the summer was one of them,” Albus told him, shaking his head. “I admit, my foolishness got the better of me with that one.”

Severus resisted the urge to snort — that was an understatement. “I appreciate this information, Albus, but I will admit I am not sure why you’re sharing it with me. Should the Dark Lord learn that you know...”

“I have faith that you can continue to keep my secrets from Voldemort, Severus,” Albus assured, smiling slightly. “This one in particular. There is, in fact, one horcrux even Voldemort himself is unaware of.” His smile faded, his eyes meeting Severus’. “It resides within Mr Potter’s curse scar, and has done since the night his parents died.”