

“I haff never met a sane seeker,” Viktor declared wisely. “And I haff met a lot of seekers.”

“Sounds about right,” Cedric agreed, snickering. Even Fleur laughed.

“I do not think a sane person would enter zis tournament, non?” she agreed ruefully.

“Ve should all fly together sometime,” Viktor said, looking out over the lake. The snow was making a vague attempt at coming down harder, settling on the railings of the Durmstrang ship. “A four-vay seeker match.”

Harry imagined it, grinning. “That would be brilliant. Where, though?” The quidditch pitch was out of bounds for the year; something to do with the tournament. Harry was pretty sure he didn’t want to know a thing about it until he absolutely had to.

“We do not need goals for seeking,” Fleur pointed out. “Anywhere on ze grounds will do.”

“First Wednesday of winter break?” Cedric suggested. “Just keep it between us, a little friendly game. Nothing crazy.”

“You’re on,” Harry agreed, grinning. He was going to go against the seeker who caught the snitch in the World Cup final. It was going to be *epic*.

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Worrying the edge of his cardigan between his fingers, Remus sat down opposite Sirius, whose expression was grave. “Severus has news, doesn’t he?” the animagus presumed. He could read Remus easily, after all these years. Remus nodded.

“The Mark is dark enough to make out properly, now,” he admitted, stomach churning. He hated looking at that stain on his love’s skin — it felt like they were nineteen and terrified all over again. “He’s had letters from most of the old crowd. They’re confused, but hopeful. They’re all just... waiting.” Severus could feel it coming, he said they could all feel it coming. One day soon, their lord would call them, and they would answer. “He said Karkaroff’s been even shiftier than usual,” he added with a grimace. A growl came from Sirius before he could stop himself. They both hated the idea of that scumbag being around Harry, but there was nothing any of them could do.

“Any word from the Ministry yet?”

“Nothing official,” Remus said with a shake of his head. “There are rumours, of course. Fudge is in complete denial, won’t hear a whisper of it. No one has even seen Barty Crouch since the first task; he’s sick, apparently. Still no word on Bertha.”

“We all know she’s dead,” Sirius murmured, grimacing. “Especially if Harry’s dream is anything to go by. Poor Bertha was probably just in the wrong place at the wrong time. She was always good at that.”

Remus didn’t remember much about Bertha Jorkins from school — she was three years older than them — but he remembered her always managing to stumble across things she