

“Severus, I understand this is a difficult time for everybody; you especially. However, the side of the light will need as much information as possible should the worst happen.” His voice was apologetic, but Severus could read between the lines. ‘Don’t forget you’re still my spy, even if Voldemort isn’t around yet. You’ll be back at it as soon as he pops his head up’. Typical.

“I am keeping an ear to the ground and my usual channels open,” Severus drawled in assurance. “There is simply little information to share.” That was true; no one from the old crowd seemed to know where the Dark Lord was, or how he was regaining strength. Severus was both glad and wary that there hadn’t yet been a whisper of the name Peter Pettigrew. Severus could only imagine how much information the little rat had taken with him, after living in Potter’s dorm for three years, and spending the whole twelve with a prominent light family. The Dark Lord would know far too much by now.

“I’m glad to hear it,” Dumbledore replied. “I feared with the tournament going on, especially with Mr Potter’s recent circumstances, it would be too much of a cover for Voldemort to gather his followers.”

“Surely you don’t believe Mr Potter’s... circumstances are anything but an attempt by the Dark Lord’s followers to kill the boy? Just because I wasn’t involved in the plot doesn’t mean there wasn’t one.” If Dumbledore truly thought Potter’s involvement in the tournament was just a prank gone wrong, or a fourteen year-old boy’s quest for glory, he had finally cracked. Unless the old coot had done it himself, to give Potter another chance to *prove himself*.

“I think whoever tampered with the Goblet of Fire will reveal themselves in due course, and there is little we can do but support Harry until that time comes,” Dumbledore said, sounding entirely uncaring that his precious Golden Boy was in such dangerous circumstances. Sometimes it baffled Severus how this man had ended up in charge of wizarding Britain’s children, and no one seemed to notice he didn’t give a damn about their welfare. How were people so blind?

“If I may be excused, I have a potion brewing,” Severus lied easily, getting to his feet.

“Of course, of course. I trust you’ll come to me if you get any further information.” Dumbledore stood as well, offering Severus a look that was supposed to be fatherly. “Dark times are coming, my dear boy, and I believe we will need you now more than ever. I am sorry to have to ask you to make this sacrifice once more, but... it is for the greater good.”

Severus bit back a snarl. How many lives had this man ruined in the name of the ‘greater good’? Instead he merely nodded, face impassive. “Some things are necessary,” he said, turning to leave the office. It wasn’t until he was back in the privacy of his own quarters that he let his shoulders slump a little, a sigh escaping his lips. And so it began, again.

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There was a Hogsmeade weekend in mid-January, and Harry found himself trudging down the slushy pathway beside Neville and Ginny, who had insisted he couldn’t spend it locked inside, and that Rita Skeeter couldn’t make a scandal of him *going to Hogsmeade*, especially when she wasn’t even legally supposed to write about him. Harry was pretty sure Skeeter