

“I’m so sorry, Hagrid,” Harry murmured — he couldn’t feel any grief himself at the idea of the giant spider who had tried to eat him finally passing on, but he knew Hagrid had had Aragog for most of his life. It was never easy, losing a pet, no matter how bloodthirsty.

Hagrid took a big sniff, wiping at his eyes. “Circle o’ life, innit?” he said morosely. “Not much I can do but just... keep him comfortable.”

“I’m sure he appreciates it.”

The foil-covered tin in Hagrid’s grill began to smoke lightly, and Hagrid cursed, getting up to deal with it. Under the foil were a dozen blackened rock cakes. “Oh, bugger it,” Hagrid muttered, scowling. “Lost track o’ time.” He tossed the tin in the sink, cakes and all.

“Is there, ah, anything I can do?” Harry offered a little helplessly. Hagrid sighed, shaking his head.

“Nah, I’ll be fine. Is what it is.” He tugged at his beard. “You can tell me one thing, though, ‘Arry.” Hagrid sat back down, watching him with an unusually serious gaze. “What’s goin’ on with you an’ Professor Dumbledore? I been readin’ the *Prophet* all summer, and... sounds like he’s more than a bit worried about you, kid.”

Harry scowled despite himself. “Dumbledore... he had a plan, for how things were going to go,” he said slowly, not sure how much to give away. Hagrid idolised Dumbledore so much, Harry couldn’t risk the half-giant taking his words back to the headmaster even if it was out of concern. “He thought he had it all figured out, but his plan involved... well you know how at the end of almost every school year I’ve had some sort of confrontation with Voldemort in one way or another?” Hagrid flinched, but nodded. “That was him *training me up* for my final sacrifice. As I’ve gotten older, I’ve decided I really don’t want to be a pawn in his game, Hagrid. I’ve got other people who care about me; *actually* care, are willing to protect me and to teach me how to protect myself, so that when I do have to fight Voldemort — because we all know it’s going to be me eventually — I might actually stand a chance at winning. Dumbledore never gave me that. And now he’s acting like my refusal to play his games is due to me secretly going Dark. He thinks I’ve got Voldemort in my head, controlling me, making me into a younger version of him.”

“That’s bollocks!” Hagrid roared. “I knew You-Know-Who when he was your age, and you’re nothin’ like him!”

Harry smiled fleetingly. “Thanks, Hagrid. *I* know I don’t have him in my head, but Dumbledore just seems so convinced that me not being friends with Ron and Hermione, and doing well in my classes, are all signs of me going evil. I... I’m worried what he’ll do if he thinks I have more Voldemort than me in there. What lengths he’ll go to get him out.”

He was putting it on, just a little bit, but he couldn’t help himself; he wanted to give Hagrid something to think about, without telling him the full truth about the compulsions.

He wanted Hagrid to have the other side of the story if Dumbledore tried to get Hagrid to do something to Harry for him.