

Severus tensed, letting the shock show on his face — not shock at the knowledge, but shock that Albus was sharing this with him. “I... how is that possible?”

“I believe that due to the number of horcruxes Voldemort created, his soul was unstable enough to splinter off a fragment when he was hit with the rebounded Killing curse. In search of a host, that fragment attached itself to the only living thing in the proximity — young Harry himself.” Albus sighed, leaning back in his chair. “I became aware of the fragment as I was performing some medical scans on Mr Potter before I placed him with his relatives. That, too, is how I knew the Dark Lord was not as deceased as everyone had hoped. I took some precautions — I had hoped, as small as that fragment of soul was, it would dislodge itself as Harry grew older, and not be a problem in later life. Sadly, I fear that is not the case.”

Severus bit back a sneer; *took precautions* indeed. The kind of *precautions* that involved binding the family magics of an infant, leaving him with people who would beat every ounce of self worth out of him.

“This fragment still resides within Potter, then?”

“It is stronger than ever, I believe,” Albus confirmed, so much feigned dismay in his voice that Severus almost laughed. “I have watched Harry closely, over the years — at first, I thought he had overpowered the fragment. When he arrived here, so much like his father, and sorted into Gryffindor...”

Because of course, no one evil could ever go into the house of the lion.

“I am telling you this, Severus, because you are the only person who knows I am dying. And the only person I can trust with the absolute truth.” Albus looked him dead in the eye, and Severus instinctively raised his Occlumency shields. “In order for Voldemort to truly be gone, Harry Potter must die.”

A long, poignant silence. “I thought you liked the boy, Albus.”

“I do. Despite our recent... differences, I care for him very much.” It amazed Severus, then, how the headmaster could say that with such a straight face, like Harry hadn’t been a pawn in his game since the moment the life left Lily Potter’s body. “I wish there were an alternate solution. But I have come to the conclusion that all of my precautions were for naught, and the soul fragment within Harry is strong enough to influence him — perhaps, given time, strong enough to overtake him entirely. Turn him into a host for the Dark Lord’s remaining soul. That cannot be allowed to happen; both for the sake of the world, and for Harry’s own sake. The boy I knew would never be able to live with himself should his body be used for evil.”

The boy Albus knew was a lie and always had been, but Severus schooled his face into a grave frown. “Must he die in any particular way?”

“I had once thought that his death must occur at Voldemort’s hand, to truly destroy the soul fragment within him. A tragic event, but a necessary one. Now, however, I don’t believe it matters as much. But he must die before anyone can attempt to destroy Voldemort’s current mortal form. I am working on discovering the rest of his horcruxes — I am confident that by