

The Dark Lord paced in front of his loyal followers — a diminished group, now, thanks to Potter and his ilk. Severus felt a swell of pride in his chest whenever he thought about it. But this was not the place for such things.

“Severus,” the steel-silk voice called, and Severus locked up that pride along with all his other positive emotions in a tight box in the deepest part of his mind, where the Dark Lord would never find it.

“How may I serve you, My Lord?” he asked, moving straight to kneel where Greyback once had. His heart pounded in his throat as he hoped he would not suffer the same fate.

“Tell me of the school,” Voldemort urged. “What more is being done to put that Potter brat in his place?”

“I humiliate him in classes as much as I am able with the headmistress breathing down my neck,” Severus reported. “There are whispers that Dumbledore tried to kill him because he is a threat to the Light. I believe your loyal few within the school are perpetuating their own work in the student rumour mill. He is getting cocky, My Lord — he is well guarded, but he believes himself to be above the need for it, now he has drawn blood in battle. He will slip, My Lord, and you will get him.”

“You had best hope so, Severus,” Voldemort warned. “And still no word of Dumbledore?”

“None, My Lord. It seems whatever his plan is, it does not involve others.” And that was a whole other worry in itself.

The Dark Lord frowned, and Severus wondered if he was about to be screaming on the floor. Or worse. He braced himself, keeping his head bowed.

“Stay vigilant, Severus. You may not know who my loyal followers are within the student body, but they may call for your assistance soon. I shall task them with capturing the Potter boy; if he is as cocky as you say, they should not fail. You are dismissed, for now.”

Severus got straight to his feet, offering one last bow. “You are gracious, My Lord. I will await their word.” *Why* wouldn’t his master tell him which students to look out for? Was it a matter of trust? Surely he would have killed Severus by now, as unhinged as he had become, if he believed him to be suspect.

Or did he value a Potions Master more than he valued loyalty, these days?

It was difficult for Severus to tell, and he could not test his boundaries. Luckily, his allies in the Light had little need of information from him these days — they weren’t like Albus, expecting him to recount every second of his summons in case something useful popped up. But they understood how precarious Severus’ position was, and didn’t ask him to reveal information that might cost him his life.

He would have to tell them about this, though. He would have to tell Harry to stay vigilant.