

“Boot had only a few names to share,” Amelia said. “Severus Snape was the first. But we knew that,” she added, giving a pointed glare at several people who turned dark gazes on the Potions Master. Snape, to his credit, did not flinch under their accusations. “He named three more students — two seventh years and his dorm mate Kevin Entwhistle. Along with four of the adults supposedly seeking refuge here. They have all been apprehended, and are under guard in the Potions classroom.”

Eight people. Out of the hundred and fifty odd staying in the castle — about half of whom were either underage students or non-combatant adults — it was more than Harry would have liked to hear, but honestly less than he had expected.

“What if there are more he doesn’t know about?” Bill piped up, brow furrowed. “We know from Severus’ reports that You-Know-Who isn’t sharing all his plans with all his followers. There could be even more.”

“How much Veritaserum have we got?” Fred added. “We’ll just question everyone, weed them out!”

Several people nodded in agreement around the table, but Kingsley shook his head.

“Something like that would need to be public, and we all know who everyone would want to be the first under questioning.” His eyes landed on Severus, who again remained straight-backed and unflinching. “We cannot risk it.”

“Why not?” Emmeline Vance pressed. She was one of the few Order members who had broken away from Dumbledore without hearing the truth of things from Harry. “If we question Snape under Veritaserum, all he’ll do is admit to being a spy for the Light. It breaks his cover, but we can keep him protected here.” Her face twisted in an ugly sneer. “Unless you think he’ll say what we all suspect and admit he’s only ever been the Dark Lord’s man. Then good fucking riddance to him.”

Harry wished he could jump to the man’s defence, but they still had to maintain cover, even in this group of *trusted* individuals. There were Order members Harry didn’t trust as far as he could throw them.

Luckily, McGonagall wasn’t having any of it. “Severus Snape is not the one under suspicion here,” she snapped. “He is a valued member of this group, and I daresay he’s done more for the Light than *you* have lately, Miss Vance.” Turning back to the rest of the group, she clasped her hands together. “Kingsley is right — we cannot afford to have Severus questioned in front of witnesses. They may misconstrue things.”

“Surely the point is moot?” George said, looking askance at Snape. “Unless we plan on keeping Boot and his buddies locked in the castle until things are over — which I am entirely in favour of, by the way — they’ll run back to their Master and tell him that they were forced to reveal Snape’s supposed loyalty. He’ll have to go back regardless, won’t he?”

Fear gripped Harry’s chest at the idea of Snape having to return to Voldemort’s side so close to the end.