

He said all this to Remus as the werewolf helped him out of his teaching robes, getting more and more irate with every thought that spilled from his lips. He was so used to having to keep such things bottled up tightly, locked in his own mind, his own burden to bear. Even after more than two years, he was still remembering how to share that burden.

“I *know* he’s going to summon me soon — he’ll want to know the truth about what happened with Harry. I’m surprised he hasn’t already. Surprised I didn’t get the Call the second he got wind of Harry being Slytherin’s true heir.” It still gave him a glimmer of smug pride to think about, remembering the moment the hall had draped itself in green and silver at Harry’s command, the absolute shock on his Slytherins’ faces.

“He probably just wants to make sure you get your loyalty cemented with Minerva, while the school adjusts,” Remus pointed out, sending Severus’ robe to hang on the wardrobe door with a wave of his wand. “Albus was always the one who vouched for you, after all. He may worry the headmaster being discredited has also put suspicion on you.”

Severus snorted. “The Dark Lord has not worried about *me* for even a moment of his hideous life,” he said firmly. “More likely he is occupied with trying to find Albus himself, now the old fool doesn’t have the castle keeping him safe. He’ll Call me when he’s good and ready — and want to know *why* I did not give him all this information sooner. My job is to know things about Hogwarts that others do not, and I have been slacking as of late.” He could already feel the Cruciatus burning through his veins, the punishment he would face for not letting his Lord know of Potter’s family status, of Albus’ machinations. He would not accept ‘I did not know’ as an answer.

A growl rumbled through Remus, his eyes flashing gold. “Have you considered it might be time to give up your spying, soon?” the greying man suggested tentatively. A spike of guilt drove its way through Severus’ heart.

“I cannot, until the Dark Lord is dead.” He shoved up the sleeve of his shirt, baring his greatest shame to the eyes of his love. The Dark Mark, black as night on his pale forearm. “I am bound to him, and he to me, tighter than most of his followers — he could kill me through this Mark, if he so chose. Until he is truly destroyed, I must pretend to be loyal — for him to doubt me is for my life to be forfeit.” His dark eyes met Remus’ intently. “And I find I have too many plans to allow that.”

Remus’ nostrils flared. “Damn right you do,” he agreed roughly. “Merlin, I hate this. The only claim on you should be *mine*.” That was said with a hint of a growl and another flash of gold.

“Soon, it shall be,” Severus vowed. “Yours and no other.” Harry’s seventeenth birthday was creeping ever closer.

He ran a hand through his hair, grimacing at the feel of the fine strands clumped together with the greasy residue of hours worth of potion-steam. “I need a shower,” he declared, then let his gaze trail slowly over Remus’ supine form. “Care to join me?”

Remus perked up, book falling forgotten to the mattress as he scrambled to his feet. His eagerness had Severus’ blood pounding, rushing southwards, following the broad line of the