

Damage Control

by Vorona

Snape has compromised his position as a spy by alerting the Order to Harry's mission to save his godfather. Dumbledore has a solution to Snape's problem. Set directly after the argument between Harry and Dumbledore at the end of Order of the Phoenix.

(one shot)

Chapter 1 of 1

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"You'll need to do some damage control, Severus."

Dumbledore's voice is heavy with severity and his eyes do not twinkle, as they haven't in several months now. I glance about the room, surprised at its haphazard appearance. It looks like a windstorm has blown the place down. The bird alone seems unruffled, gazing at me as intently as his companion.

I cannot pretend I do not know to what he refers. I feel a surge of anger at Potter and his incessant need to interfere in matters he does not comprehend, just so he can play savior again. I'd thought his father was bad, but at least Potter Sr. had restrained himself to the school grounds. The boy could literally be the death of me. I take a breath, wondering who it is I will have to betray this time in order to stay in the Dark Lord's good graces.

"Get to the point," I bark. "Who is it?"

He doesn't meet my eyes. It must be bad. Minerva? I pray not. As much as we are rivals, we share a certain companionship. And though she is far less likely to say so in public, we share a contempt for dunderheads. It could be a Weasley. I don't much care for most of them, but Mrs. Weasley can make anyone feel welcome, even a heartless bastard such as I am reputed to be. The possibility of hurting one of hers is something I've long dreaded.

"You know he's going to be suspicious. Half the Order arrived before he got the prophecy? And how did that happen? Who alerted them? No, no —" Dumbledore anticipated my justification. "Of course they had to be alerted. We could not risk Harry being taken by the enemy, and we also could not risk the prophecy."

That prophecy. Another thing that will be the death of me. I wish I had never heard it.

"No, as I say, you did what was necessary, although I think you are still being overly hard on Harry. But let's not discuss your grudge right now, Severus. We must not dwell on the past, but prepare for the future. We need someone who can influence the Death Eaters from the inside. The only person more valuable than you in this war is Harry. Even if you cannot spy, you can sabotage his efforts."

Even if I cannot...?

Finally, he meets my gaze. "Severus, I need your word that you will do everything in your power to dispel allegations of your disloyalty, with the only exceptions being to keep Lord Voldemort from hearing the entire prophecy and to protect Harry."

"And yourself."

"No." He continues to look me full in the eye. His eyes are suddenly an intense, compassionate blue, but he cannot mean what I think he said. This time, it is I who break eye contact.

He speaks. "I think my days are coming to an end. I am older than I was in the battle against Grindelwald. It is time for me to step aside for the next generation. I am expendable, Severus. Harry isn't." His voice, when it comes again, is filled with emotion. "You aren't."

Silence fills the room.

"No," I say in answer to his request. He knows what I mean.

"Severus, tell me truly, where are your loyalties? In the end, do you wish Lord Voldemort to win?"

"I will not be manipulated into this. You know where I stand." *I stand with you.*

"Indeed I thought so. And yet, you say you are not willing to do what is necessary to prevent his victory. If it comes to choosing between me and Harry or yourself, I want your word that you will not choose me. And I want your word that you will do what is needed to appease Death Eater suspicions. We need you, Severus. We need you on the inside. I'll say it again: I am expendable. You are not. Do I have your word?"

"No." I force myself to look again. It is a mistake. His eyes are lowered in disappointment. My breath hitches in my throat. "No, I..."

"So, what is your plan?" he asks, conversationally. "How do you plan to stay in Lord Voldemort's good graces?"

"I —" I pause and swallow. "I suppose, as usual, I will have to betray someone. And Draco will probably pay for his father's mistake. I may have to be involved in that." A part of me knows that saying these things should not be so second nature.

"Draco." His eyes are sad again. "So young." He looks up at me, remembering, no doubt, the age I was when I began seriously exploring the Dark Arts.

He continues on in that conversational tone that belies the power of his words. "I wonder what the world will be like if Voldemort wins. What will happen to Hogwarts? What will happen to the Muggle-borns?"

I know what he is doing, and though I stated the contrary, I find my resolve faltering.

"Is that really the world you want to see? Do you think that would be my choice?"

I refuse to answer, refuse to think about the implications of what he is saying.

"Severus," he pleads. I turn aside, trying not to let the words penetrate. "Severus, please... I know I have never asked anything easy of you, but this is the most important thing I've ever asked of anyone. Please don't let me down. Give me your word."

No. My silence speaks for itself.

"Severus..."

I can't speak. I nod once in capitulation, and he closes his eyes in relief.

"Thank you, Severus. You cannot imagine what this means to me."

I open my mouth, then close it. I turn and walk out of his office, hating him for what he has asked of me.

Fin.

Author's Note: Although this is a part of the series having to do with The Secret Papers of Regulus Black, careful readers may have noted that in that story, Snape tells Harry (under Veritaserum) that he did not know what "the plan" was, nor that he would have to kill Dumbledore. I much prefer this version than that one. It is up to you to decide whether this is an inconsistency of the author or simply the ability of Snape to use Occlumency to counteract the potion.

Also, many, many wonderful thanks to my beta, Laura/Insecurity! It wouldn't be nearly so good without you.