

Harry snorted. “Anyone else worth rescuing in here?” If they all stood together, maybe Slughorn would think they were networking and leave them alone.

Taking a mouthful of some rather excellent chocolate mousse, Harry surveyed the room. Belby had not made the cut, it seemed, nor had Neville — which Harry was surprised by, considering Potions Masters were always looking for good deals with Herbologists. Perhaps Slughorn hadn’t spoken to Sprout about her best student. There was a Hufflepuff girl in the year below Ginny whose name Harry didn’t know, and a pair of Ravenclaw boys Harry thought might be brothers. And over talking to Slughorn was Hermione — not a surprise at all, with how enthusiastic she was in his classes. Hermione seemed to be taking advantage of having a teacher who hadn’t had five years to become weary of her need for academic approval.

Slughorn extricated himself from the conversation with her as soon as he spotted Harry, beaming at the green-eyed boy. “Harry! Wonderful, wonderful, glad you could make it — ah, Mr Zabini, I didn’t know you and Miss Weasley knew each other! How marvellous.”

“He’s dating one of my older brothers,” Ginny volunteered, almost daring Slughorn to react poorly. On the contrary, his bushy eyebrows rose, and he grinned.

“Ah, one of the infamous Weasley Twins, I assume? Yes, I’ve heard all about those boys — visited their shop, too! Some excellent products they’ve got there, very inventive indeed. Why, I’m quite disappointed to have missed teaching them by only a year! I’m sure they were a delight to have in class.”

Harry wasn’t sure Snape would have used such a description, and by Blaise’s smirk, he agreed.

“Have you tried the tiramisu, Harry? It’s simply divine — I had missed the Hogwarts elves’ cooking!” Slughorn grinned, patting his rotund belly. “Though perhaps not as much as I ought to,” he added with a chuckle. “Anyway, Harry, my lad; now you’re here, I have a book I’d quite like to show you — a young Potions prodigy such as yourself will find it very interesting, I’m sure!” With surprising strength for a man his age, he steered Harry away from his friends, chatting away quite happily about some friend of his who was the author of the book he wanted to show Harry. Harry glanced over his shoulder, gaze begging Ginny and Blaise for help. Blaise just smirked, while Ginny waved coyly at him, and turned to select a large portion of tiramisu.

Whatever Slughorn might know about Tom Riddle, Harry desperately hoped he figured it out soon so he could decide how to go about asking. He wasn’t sure how much more brown-nosing he could stand.