

squeeze into the passageway. “Keep going, all the way to the end. The twins and Ginny are down there already.”

The whole group looked relieved to hear they would be welcomed at the end, lighting up their wand tips and heading down. Already, the next group was approaching from the end of the aisle, and Harry was glad to see the Hufflepuff seventh-years removing Dissilusionment charms from themselves. While it was not suspect for so many students to be in the library, it would be *very* odd for them all to disappear into the same row and not return for hours.

He trusted in the HA’s discretion, by now.

A steady trickle of students continued, and by quarter-past Harry was fairly sure everyone was in. Anyone else clearly wasn’t coming; Harry wouldn’t wait around for them forever. He stepped into the passage, closed it with a hiss, and hurried to catch up with his friends.

He couldn’t help but grin at the sight of the whole group spread around the Chamber, looking around in a mix of awe and horror.

“So, what do you think?” he asked with a mischievous grin, spreading his arms wide.

“Is this what I think it is, Harry?” Blaise asked, his dark eyes incredulous. Harry laughed.

“If you’re thinking it’s Salazar Slytherin’s Chamber of Secrets, then yes, it is. Did all the snakes give it away?”

A few squeaks of terror sounded.

“The Chamber of Secrets is *real*?” Zacharias Smith blurted, face pale as he looked up at the statue. “I— but what about the monster?”

“Harry killed that, didn’t he?” Fred pointed out. “With that big old sword in Dumbledore’s office.”

“I thought I’d told you guys what happened in my second year?” Harry asked, confused. Several people shrugged, and more than a few glanced at Ginny Weasley.

“Not really,” Justin piped up. “Just something about a big snake and saving Ginny from being possessed by You-Know-Who.”

Ah, of course; Harry had given the bare minimum, not wanting any information to slip out that might lead anyone on the Dark side to realise what the diary was. Likely Voldemort already knew one of his horcruxes had been destroyed — Lucius Malfoy would have had to own up to it eventually — but the fewer other people who knew, the better.

“Well, it’s real. There was a basilisk but it’s dead now. So we’re good to practice in here. Though I’ll warn you now,” he added, and hissed the command to lock down the Chamber. All over the walls, huge snakes wriggled in place, barring the exits. Several people jumped. “I’m the only one who can command the passageways in here. I’ll let us all out in the same place we came in from, but if anyone was thinking about going *exploring*, I would strongly