

He steadied his shoulders, squeezed Draco's arm, and stepped forward.

Slughorn's office had been magically expanded for the occasion, the walls draped in jewel-toned fabrics to give the illusion of some sort of huge tent. It was vaguely smoky within, but not nearly as crowded as it might have been if Slughorn had been able to invite his *friends* along.

As such, every single person in the room could see Harry and Draco walk in together.

"Harry, my boy!" Slughorn was right there, wearing a velvet hat and matching smoking jacket, and he almost dropped his glass of port as he looked at Draco. "Well, well — Slytherins and Gryffindors getting along, indeed!" He laughed, wiggling his bushy brows salaciously. "You have been keeping a tight lid on this one, haven't you, my lad."

Harry flushed. Luckily, Draco was a pro at these kinds of situations. "Harry has so little of his private life kept truly private, Professor," he said earnestly, "I'm sure you can understand his want to let our relationship grow without prying eyes."

"Quite right, Mr Malfoy! My, my — I had, of course, heard the rumours of the Black family reuniting after the death of Lord Malfoy. My condolences, Mr Malfoy," he added hastily, but Draco shook his head.

"Thank you, Professor, but there was little love lost between myself and my father — or, indeed, him and my mother. We are much happier without him forcing us both to stand at his side." The insinuation was clear; neither remaining Malfoys agreed with Lucius' beliefs. "Mother was delighted to get back in touch with her cousin Sirius, and that certainly made things easier for Harry and I — but we had eyes for each other long before then." Draco winked, and Slughorn chuckled.

"Say no more, lad," he teased, winking exaggeratedly. "Well, wonderful to have you both; please, enjoy the party! Ah, Miss Granger, good to see you!"

The only thing stopping Harry from whirling around on the spot to see Ron and Hermione's faces when they saw him with Draco was Draco himself, pointedly escorting him away from Slughorn and over to the side. "Don't stare yet," Draco warned in an undertone, expertly moving them to stand in a place they could easily see the door from without looking too obvious. Everyone was still staring at them — including Ron, now, who was blatantly ignoring Slughorn's attempts to talk to him as he gaped at the two of them.

"You're far too good at this," Harry accused, making Draco smirk.

"This was what I was raised with, darling. Lord Malfoy is always a master of the art of conversation." He brushed a stray curl off Harry's forehead. "Slughorn is an easy target to win over. Let him think he's privy to some great secret and you have him — I daresay we've made him the envy of his entire social circle, giving him such juicy inside knowledge before the gossip rags."

"Then I should've done this ages ago, if it'll win him over," Harry muttered. "Maybe now I'll be able to get him to talk." Though about what, he still wasn't sure.