

Harry set off at a brisk pace.

He donned his invisibility cloak before he reached the library, carefully sneaking through the doors when a Gryffindor second year sped through them. He dodged the students hard at work, not making even a whisper of sound, until he found the trio of Slytherins. They were all reading silently, and Harry crept up, placing an invisible hand on Draco's arm. He felt the blond tense.

"*Come with me,*" he breathed, hardly louder than a whisper, his lips right next to Draco's ear. The Slytherin immediately relaxed, then leaned forward and shut his book.

"I'm going to head back. I'll see you two later."

Neither of his companions offered to go with him, which Harry was grateful for. He walked close behind the blond on the way out of the library, then reached out to grab the sleeve of his robe.

They didn't go far; there was a hidden room behind a tapestry that they had used for heirs meetings in the past, and Harry ducked into it, pulling Draco along and warding the entrance. Then he dropped the cloak. "Hey."

Draco, who had been wearing a sultry smile, immediately frowned in concern. "Harry? What's the matter?" He stepped forward, cupping Harry's face with both hands. "Have you been crying?"

"I love you," Harry blurted, watching the blond's face go slack. "I— I was just talking with Cho, about Cedric, and something she said— I love you," he repeated, slower this time, words full of emotion. His heart pounded hard against his ribs, blood rushing in his ears. "I need you to know that. In case— I just need you to know."

The words that had been filling his heart for so long still felt *small* when said aloud, like such a simple thing as *love* could not describe the depth of his feelings for this beautiful boy, but it would have to do for now.

"You daft Gryffindor," Draco said eventually, his face lighting up with the most incredibly *fond* look, his arms moving to wrap loosely around Harry. "Nothing's going to happen to me. I'll be right here in the castle all Christmas," he promised. "But I love you too, of *course* I do, surely you've guessed by now. I'm not exactly subtle."

Harry's rabbiting heart suddenly felt lighter than air and huge inside his chest, his thoughts all vanishing in favour of hearing those words in Draco's voice directed at him, echoing in every corner of his mind.

"I'd hoped," he admitted sheepishly, and Draco chuckled, kissing him, achingly tender.

"I love you, Harry Potter," he declared, grey eyes bright. "Merlin help me, but I love you."

Had every dementor in Azkaban appeared right then, Harry was sure he could have powered a patronus strong enough to send them all right back where they belonged.