"What the *hell* was that about?" Ginny hissed, staring urgently at Harry. He pursed his lips. That hadn't been nearly as enlightening as he'd hoped.

"Dumbledore asked him back for a reason. I'm trying to find out what it is."

"And you think it has something to do with this Riddle bloke?" Daphne asked, frowning. "Who is he, anyway?"

"It's You-Know-Who's real name," Neville piped up, surprising Harry. "Ginny told me," he added, seeing his friend's confusion. "About the diary and stuff."

Of course, that made sense.

"Slughorn taught the Dark Lord as a child?" Blaise realised, eyes following the tipsy professor across the room. Harry nodded.

"Yeah, and I think he taught him something he perhaps shouldn't have, but I can't figure out how to get him to tell me." He sighed, leaning against Draco. "Bugger, that was the closest I've gotten in ages."

"There's plenty of time after Yule," Draco pointed out. He brushed a kiss over Harry's cheek. "I doubt you'll get anything more out of him tonight, though."

"Yeah, you're right." Harry frowned, but cheered up at the sight of Ron glaring at him. "Well, at least the night wasn't a total waste. Ron's been so busy trying to kill Draco with his eyes, he's ignored Hermione all night. And she doesn't look happy about it." She was tugging on her boyfriend's arm, trying to get him to dance with her; a few couples were drifting around the small dance floor space.

"That's a win if I've ever seen one," Ginny agreed, amused. "Count yourselves lucky — I have to spend all bloody Christmas with him. I can't even floo to Neville's, with the network under watch." She pouted, and Neville dropped a kiss on her hair.

"I'm sure one of your older brothers will apparate you," he pointed out.

"Yes, be glad you're not staying under apparition wards," Blaise added, distinctly unimpressed. He was staying at the castle for the holidays, and while Harry knew George had plans to sneak in at least once, it couldn't be easy for them.

"Do you think we've stayed long enough?" Harry asked, surveying the room critically. No one else had left yet — but that didn't mean they couldn't be the first.

"I think if you stay long enough for Weasley to have one more glass of wine, you'll regret it," Daphne replied, nodding in Ron's direction. Harry grimaced.

"Yeah, okay, we're leaving."

"We can't all leave at once, Slughorn will notice," Neville said, then sighed. "Go on; you two get out of here, we'll cover for you."