

It was too late for that, Harry wanted to say, but it was no good telling Slughorn how many people already knew about horcruxes.

Besides, they could all keep a secret.

“My lips are sealed,” he promised, watching the professor slump visibly.

“Good. Good lad.” Slughorn was shaking, eyes darting around nervously, desperate to get out of the conversation. “Merlin, is it too early for a drink?” he muttered to himself, turning towards his desk.

“Thank you, sir, for your honesty,” Harry said, shouldering his satchel. Slughorn scoffed.

“It’s far too late to be thanking me, Harry. Not after what I’ve done.” He smiled a thin, fragile smile. “But I appreciate your compassion. Now, off you go, before that young man of yours sends out a search party.” His eyes bulged, like he was worried he’d offended the Gryffindor, but Harry just laughed.

“Yeah, you’re probably right. I’ll see you later, Professor.”

Then he left the classroom, hardly daring to breathe until he was at least a corridor away. Only then did he lean against the wall, letting out a long sigh of relief.

That was the big reason Dumbledore had brought Slughorn back. Just horcruxes — conclusions Harry had already come to himself, though it was reassuring to have that confirmation.

He hadn’t realised until Slughorn had spoken just how afraid he was that there was something more, some other aspect to Voldemort’s immortality that he hadn’t known about, something Slughorn knew that Dumbledore wanted that would change everything for Harry.

He shouldn’t have worried. As always, he was several steps ahead of Dumbledore.

A breathless, slightly giddy laugh escaped him, head tipping back to hit stone.

Six horcruxes. Seven, including his scar. Only the snake remained.

They might actually be able to win this war, after all.

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He didn’t tell Draco what he’d spoken to Slughorn about, promising his boyfriend it was nothing urgent. He would tell Snape later, assure him that it was just confirmation of what they already knew. Something Dumbledore didn’t know, evidently.

The Slytherin part of Harry took a great deal of amusement in imagining Dumbledore hiding out there, trying frantically to find horcruxes that no longer existed, with no idea how many there might even be.