

“Well, that’s marvellous — I’ve not been to Malfoy Manor in many a year, now; your grandfather Abraxas used to throw quite the soiree, back in the day!” he added to Draco, chuckling. Then his gaze grew sad. “I never quite approved of the company, you know, but they were still excellent parties all the same. Such a shame about Abraxas; he was such a bright lad, one of my best students! Then he fell in with young Riddle, and... well,” he shook his head, as if trying to banish the thoughts. “No use thinking about what once was.”

Harry’s eyes widened, and he sent a discreet look at Draco, urging him to keep the conversation going.

“I didn’t spend much time with Grandfather — he passed when I was quite young, as I’m sure you remember — but I do seem to remember he spoke highly of you. You were the Slytherin housemaster at the time, were you not?”

“Indeed I was!” Slughorn confirmed, brightening up. “Back when I had a little more energy to spare!”

“Yes, he always spoke so fondly of his time as a Slytherin. I don’t believe he ever mentioned anyone named Riddle, though. A classmate of his?”

“Yes, yes — but I suppose he wouldn’t have called him that, now, would he?” Slughorn reached for a new glass of wine off a nearby tray, his rosy cheeks only getting redder the more he drank. “Now, there’s a story of wasted potential if I’ve ever seen it. A young man who could’ve had everything, if he’d only been a bit more polite about asking for it. I tried my best, so I did, but there’s only so much you can do with one as determined as Tom Riddle!”

Across from him, Harry saw Ginny’s face turn chalky, her hand gripping tightly to Neville’s.

“Did this Riddle boy come to you for advice, then?” Harry asked tentatively, heart hammering against his ribs. “I’d imagine you had plenty of it, for someone with as much... potential as you say he had.”

“Oh, I tried, but he wanted advice on the kind of thing it’s not polite to speak of!” Slughorn ran his fingers over his moustache, sipping at his wine. “No, no — I thought I could help him when he was young, but by the time he was set to graduate he’d already gone too far down the wrong path. Terrible, terrible shame.” He peered up at Harry, eyes a touch unfocused. “I think old Albus is jumping at shadows when it comes to you, my lad — telling me to watch out for the past repeating itself. Bah! He’s looking for trouble where there isn’t any. You’ve a good head on your shoulders, Harry, my boy — don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.”

He blinked, then shook his head, straightening up suddenly. “Good lord, how much have I had to drink? Listen to me, getting maudlin — it’s being back in this castle, does funny things to an old man’s head!” He chuckled, the sound a touch strained. “I think I’d best grab something to eat; line the stomach and all that. I’ll see you all later!” He gave that awkward chuckle once more and retreated quickly, and all six of them let out a collective breath when he was gone.