

“She can’t see the door, obviously, but she’s been told where it is, and that you’re doing something secret behind it. She wants to catch as many of you as she can when you leave.” He grimaced. “I can’t stay long, I’m supposed to be getting ready to join them.”

More murmurs from the crowd, which Harry ignored.

“Why don’t we just use the other doors?” Susan suggested, gesturing to the four house doors hiding the secret passageways. “Leave her waiting all night.”

It was tempting, but Harry knew that was only going to delay the inevitable. “If she doesn’t get anything she’ll just keep trying harder,” he pointed out. “The rest of you can leave through those doors — be careful at the other ends, just in case she’s waiting. Hide yourselves if you can.”

“So we’re just going to believe Malfoy, then?” Angelina said archly.

“Yes,” Harry replied, not rising to the bait. “I told you, I trust him.”

“Draco isn’t loyal to the Dark Lord,” Blaise piped up. “But it’s too dangerous for his father to catch wind of that.”

A ripple of unease flickered through the group; all of them knew what Lucius Malfoy was like.

Draco’s jaw clenched, and he tugged on Harry’s sleeve. “I need to go. If she catches me leaving here...” He didn’t need to finish that sentence.

“Go with Blaise and Daphne,” Harry urged. “All of you, get going, quickly!”

“Don’t do anything stupid, Potter,” Draco hissed, the look in his eye saying he knew exactly what Harry was thinking and he didn’t approve in the slightest. Harry winked at him, wishing he could kiss the blond the same way George had just kissed Blaise, a worried expression on his face. Instead he squeezed Draco’s shoulder, and urged him towards the pair of Slytherins.

In a quick and orderly fashion, the group began to disperse through the four doors, and Harry hoped they all had the sense not to just run in terror back to their common rooms. If they went to the library, or pretended to have been enjoying the balmy April evening in one of the courtyards, or literally *anything* less suspicious than walking back from seemingly nowhere in particular.

The room began to empty, and Harry pushed away the sour anxiety in his stomach, thinking about what he had to do next. He would have to play it very carefully, or he could ruin everything.

At last, there were only two people in the room; himself, and Neville. “Nev, you should go,” Harry urged, but the blond shook his head.

“It’s gonna look really suspicious if you walk out of here by yourself, mate,” he insisted. “Umbridge knows you’re up to something, she’d expect you to have at least one accomplice. I’m coming with you.”