

eaten something very, very sour. It was surprisingly reminiscent of his Aunt Petunia, and Harry had to swallow the laugh that threatened to burst out. Beside her, Ron was as red as his hair with fury, thankfully wearing a less hideous set of dress robes than he had to the Yule Ball. He was glaring daggers at Harry and Draco, and Harry wondered if the pair would be brave enough to confront him over his choice in boyfriend while surrounded by all these people.

It wasn't just students in attendance; some of the other professors were floating about, too, with glasses of something alcoholic in hand. Harry's brows shot up at the sight of Professor Sinistra stood with her hand low on Professor Babbling's back, the two women chatting with their heads close together in a way that could only be described as *intimate*.

Was that new? Did everyone know about that, and Harry had missed it?

He turned to Draco. "Did you know about Sinistra and Babbling?" he asked, and Draco hummed, following his gaze.

"What? Oh, yes, those two have been together for ages now. Theo swears he once caught them snogging in the Astronomy Tower back in second year."

"Theo's a filthy liar," Blaise cut in. "It was a brief peck at best."

"Maybe he didn't know the difference at the time," Ginny suggested. "I'm sure he does, now."

"Susan's made sure of that," Neville agreed ruefully, making Ginny giggle.

Slughorn didn't seem to quite know what to do with himself, now they had all arrived — it was clear he'd hoped for this party to be a much bigger event, with lots of impressive people to introduce them to.

Harry was inordinately glad it wasn't.

This was bearable — stood with his friends, drinking champagne offered to them by a house elf carrying a silver tray, pretending the rest of the room didn't exist. It wasn't quite what he'd call a *party*, but it was bearable. Certainly, with Draco's arm around his waist, he would've put up with much worse.

At one point, Slughorn did drift towards their little cluster, looking just as surprised by the pairing of Neville and Ginny as he was by Harry and Draco. Harry wondered if he was starting to reconsider Neville, as he drew the Gryffindor boy into a conversation about Herbology. Not that Neville *wanted* to be reconsidered.

"What about you, then, Harry? Grand plans for Christmas, or kicking about the castle?" the professor asked, once Neville had told him about the work he planned to do in his greenhouse over the break.

"Sirius and I are spending Yule with Draco and his mother," Harry replied, watching Slughorn's moustache twitch at his pointed use of the wizarding holiday.