

He hadn't anticipated spending his evening relaying recent history to the thousand-year-old painting of Salazar Slytherin, and yet.

He was Harry Potter, after all.

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It took over an hour, explaining to Slytherin what he knew — which, admittedly, wasn't much. He knew nothing of the original Slytherin line, just that it culminated in Tom Riddle, who was childless. That led to an explanation of how Harry had ended up the conquering heir of the Slytherin line, and everything that came after.

He'd never spoken so much continuous Parseltongue in his life before, and his lips and tongue felt weird by the time he finished. Slytherin's heavy brow was furrowed. *"Well,"* he hissed eventually, stroking at the short black beard on his chin. He looked to be in his fifties or so; painted long before his death, evidently. *"That is quite the tale. I can assure you, this Tom Riddle never found his way into my private office as you have."*

Harry let out a breath of relief, then a startled laugh.

How arrogant of Riddle, to find this Chamber, and the basilisk, and think he had discovered everything.

*"I, uh, I'm sorry I killed your snake,"* he said sheepishly. Slytherin's lips pursed.

*"A tragic event, but necessary. It is a shame my poor girl ended up so lonely she could not recognise a true heir; but I do not blame you, child."* Then he smiled, expression warm and entirely unlike anything Harry expected to see from the famed dark wizard.

He remembered what the goblins had told him before his third year, about how Salazar's father was the one who did the terrible magic, but history had confused the two. *"I have so many questions,"* he admitted, running a hand through his hair.

*"I would be happy to answer them for you, lad,"* Slytherin assured. *"But perhaps another time. You have given me a lot to think about."*

Harry looked at his watch, and winced at the late hour. *"Yes, I should get back to Gryffindor Tower. But I will come back, when I can."*

Slytherin chuckled. *"To think, my heir, in Gryffindor!"* He shook his head, amused. *"Perhaps you making your home there is the most Slytherin act of all — a cunning man disguises himself in plain sight."*

That was definitely a compliment, and Harry preened slightly.

*"Speak to the snake on the wall three columns to the left of my office,"* Slytherin advised, *"Behind it is a passage that will take you up towards Gryffindor Tower."*

*"There are multiple entrances?"* Harry asked, surprised. *"Other than the bathroom?"*