

## Chapter 56

Now that the enormous basilisk corpse had been reduced to an expanded chest full of potion ingredients, a huge pile of snakeskin, and a mound of ash, Harry was keen to get down to Salazar Slytherin's office once more. He made his escape from the common room and hurried down the secret staircase, hissing at the office's snake guardian.

*"Oh, good, you're back,"* Salazar hissed in greeting. Harry waved.

*"I've been quite busy, sorry. School is hectic."*

The painted founder chuckled. *"That's what all students say. Come, sit; we have much to discuss, I think."*

Harry did as asked, making himself comfortable on the sofa opposite the portrait. *"Where do I even start?"* He ran a hand through his already messy hair. He'd tried to think, over the last couple of weeks, what he might ask Slytherin now he had the chance. But there were so many questions, he couldn't prioritise any of them.

*"Tell me about this Riddle fellow,"* Salazar requested, face hinting at a scowl. *"It seems he has done quite a bit to mar the reputation of my line."*

Harry wasn't sure Voldemort was the one entirely behind that, and he said as much, explaining what the current common view of Slytherin house was. That made Salazar's eyes darken, his hands clenched around the arms of the chair he was painted in.

*"It seems you will have much work ahead of you, young heir — once you have destroyed this Dark Lord of yours, it is your family duty to bring the truth of the Slytherin name to light. I will tell you everything, in time, and together we shall repair my house's reputation."*

That was a deal Harry was perfectly willing to make. Slytherin house deserved better. *"Do the other founders have portraits hidden somewhere?"* he hissed. *"Or their own secret chambers?"*

Salazar shook his head. *"I was the paranoid one; I was put in charge of the subtle defences. The other three focused on their wards and traps. As for portraits... I was always telling them to sit for a painting. Godric kept insisting they would all have time later in life, and the girls didn't care enough to argue. They all died before they could be painted."* He gave a sad, rueful smile. *"I am the only one left."*

His tone made Harry's heart clench. *"I'm sorry."* To be stuck in portrait form, entirely alone in a locked, hidden office... that was no way to exist.

*"It is no matter,"* Salazar waved him off. *"You have questions, lad. Ask away."*

A million and one things jostled for space in Harry's mind, but there was one that rose to the forefront, far more important than any of the rest.