

“Antagonising Dumbledore is a dangerous game,” Draco warned. “He’s more manipulative than any Slytherin, and sneaky about it. If you go against him outwardly without the proper precautions, you could end up expelled, or worse. Being the Boy-Who-Lived won’t protect you from everything.”

“I know,” Harry said with a groan. “I know I can’t. I just... it feels like I’m letting him win.”

“If you were letting him win, you wouldn’t be sat here talking to me,” Draco pointed out. “Not every battle is a big Gryffindor confrontation, y’know. You keep telling me you have a Slytherin side; let that out to play for a while. Work in the shadows. Be sneaky.” He smirked. “Beat him at his own game.”

Harry let the idea roll around in his head for a minute. He’d have to start slowly. “I think I need to send some letters,” he said eventually. “I’m going to need allies outside of the castle as well as in it.” It was time to start letting some of his secrets out; time to find out who he could really trust. He couldn’t dismantle Dumbledore’s grasp on the wizarding world without some help, after all. He’d been toeing around the edge of it, afraid Dumbledore would find out and he’d be done for, but Draco was right. He had a Slytherin side, it was time to use it.

“Right now?” Draco asked, tensing. Harry shook his head.

“Later.” He was far too comfortable to leave just yet. “For now I just need a bit more peace and quiet.”

“Oh. I can go, if you’d...”

Harry rolled his eyes, tugging on Draco’s hand before the blond could go anywhere. “You don’t count, you daft git,” he said with a roll of his eyes, his cheeks pink. It was definitely just because of the cold.

Draco settled back down, his hand still in Harry’s. Boldly, Harry leaned in closer, letting his head fall onto Draco’s shoulder. “I hate Halloween,” he muttered under his breath. Draco’s cheek tilted to press against his hair, his body a warm line against Harry’s.

“I’m sorry about your parents,” he said softly.

The pair sat there under the tree for almost half an hour, Harry’s head on Draco’s shoulder, breathing quietly in the cold October morning. By the time they parted — Draco worried Pansy would be looking for him, and Harry thinking the same of Ron and Hermione — Harry still had the bad feeling in his gut, but he felt calmer. More ready to face the day.

It wasn’t quite the hug Sirius had ordered, but it was good enough.

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True to his word, he went up to the Owlery after parting ways with Draco, calling Hedwig down. “Hello, girl,” he greeted fondly, stroking her head. “Won’t be a minute.” There was a writing desk in the corner of the Owlery, and Harry dug a quill and some parchment out of his bag, sitting down with a thoughtful frown.