

“Can I help you, lad?” Slughorn asked when it was just the two of them. Harry perched on the edge of one of the worktables, thinking over his next words carefully. He’d only get one shot at this.

“I... I had a question, sir,” he started tentatively. “About— well. About something Dumbledore said when he...”

Slughorn paled behind his moustache. “Indeed? Something you think I can help you with? Not, say, Professor McGonagall?”

Harry shook his head. “He said... he was going to kill me and blame it on the Death Eaters. And then he said something about that prompting you to ‘finally tell him the truth about what you know’.”

“Oh.” Slughorn inhaled sharply, one hand flying out to brace himself on his desk. “He, ah, said that, did he?”

Harry fixed his features in a politely bewildered expression. “Do you know what he means, sir? He said that we were running out of time... what does he think you know?” He turned the full force of his plaintive green eyes on the man. “Is it something important?”

He tried not to fidget, as the silence stretched between them. This was the tipping point. This was where Slughorn either dismissed it as the ramblings of an insane old man — or Harry finally got some answers.

Slughorn sighed, running a hand over his balding head. “I never wanted it to come out like this,” he confessed. “A mistake of a much younger man, drawn in by a startlingly bright student of mine.”

“Tom Riddle,” Harry guessed, and Slughorn’s lips quirked.

“Indeed. You know who he became, I suspect?” Harry nodded. “Yes, well. These awful truths have a way of catching up to a person — remember that, Harry, when you get to my age.”

Harry was patient, watching Slughorn as the man’s eyes filled with the haze of nostalgia. “Tom was such an incredible young lad. Top of every class, liked by most students, absolutely adored by his teachers. Except Albus — he managed to see what the rest of us couldn’t.”

A sneer fought to take over Harry’s mouth, but he forced it away; how much of that was Dumbledore’s *insight*, and how much was him pushing young Tom Riddle away due to his dislike of Slytherins, and his distrust of those who could become more powerful than he was.

How much of Voldemort was Dumbledore’s creation, after all?

“The standard Hogwarts curriculum was child’s play for Tom, you understand. Much like I’m sure it is for you, eh, my boy?” Slughorn added with a chuckle, which faded with an awkward croak as he realised who he was comparing Harry to. “What I mean is, he often did