

secret with every day that passed. People gossiped enough about him as it was; why not add one more thing to the list?

Luckily, while Zonko's was closed, Honeyduke's was open; the pair hurried over to take refuge from the cold, as even Warming charms couldn't do much about the wind. Harry let out a quiet sigh as they squeezed into the already crowded shop, getting hit with an immediate blast of warmth. Beside him, he felt Draco relax ever so slightly.

"Maybe we should've stayed in the castle," Harry joked under his breath — it seemed that half the students who were visiting the village had sequestered away inside the warm, delicious-smelling shop. There was hardly room to move, let alone browse the shelves for treats.

"Harry, my boy!" The jovial call made his heart sink; it was Slughorn, wrapped up tight in a furry hat and coat, clutching a box of crystallised pineapple. "Good to see you out and about! I was starting to think you spent all your time on the quidditch pitch, these days. Or in detention!" Slughorn chuckled at his own joke. "You keep missing my little suppers; I'll have to have a word with Severus if he keeps it up. I'm sure you don't deserve half the detentions he gives you. Or do you only behave in my classes?" he chuckled again, and Harry echoed the sound, forcing a smile.

"Some classes are easier to behave in than others," he joked, and Slughorn winked at him.

"Quite right, quite right. Not to worry, I'll get you eventually — how about Monday night? You can't possibly be out playing quidditch in this weather!"

Harry, who had mostly been scheduling quidditch practices specifically to clash with Slughorn's little parties, knew he wouldn't be able to get out of this one. He couldn't even use the HA as an excuse, as Slughorn didn't know it existed and he'd rather like to keep it that way. "Monday night it is, sir," he confirmed, trying to sound more enthusiastic than he felt.

"Excellent!" Slughorn beamed, clapping him on the shoulder. "Good to hear it, lad. Now, I suppose I'd best let you get on with your day, I'm sure you'd rather chat to your friends than your old Potions Professor!" He peered around, as if expecting Harry to be hiding a gaggle of adoring fans behind a shelf somewhere, and blinked at Draco as if he'd only just noticed him. "Mr Malfoy! My, I had no idea the two of you were, ah, friends outside the classroom!"

Harry stifled a snicker; if only he knew. "Draco and I have been friends for ages, sir," he replied, smiling. "Slytherins and Gryffindors do get along on occasion. I'm sure you'll agree that their reputation isn't always deserved — you were a Slytherin, weren't you, sir?" He remembered Snape mentioning Slughorn had been his head of house, back in the day. "Indeed I was," Slughorn confirmed with a slightly awkward chuckle. "Many years ago, mind. The inter-house rivalry wasn't quite what it is now, back in my day. Still, a little friendly competition never hurt anyone, eh?"

Harry would argue that the current view of Slytherin house was more than 'friendly competition', but he was still trying to get on Slughorn's good side, so he just laughed. "As long as we don't start talking about quidditch, we'll be fine," he remarked, slinging a