

wanted to keep it secret, though the group was as much of a safe space as they were likely to get.

“We may as well own up to it,” Theo sighed, and the whole room stared at him in shock. “Potter will be *insufferable* otherwise.”

“I— Susan!” Ernie stuttered, looking between the Hufflepuff and the Slytherin. “You and Theo?”

Susan nodded, not a hint of embarrassment on her face. “We spent a lot of time together over Christmas,” she admitted, fighting down her blush. “There’s certainly something to be said for — what was it, Harry? Ah, yes — *shedding those cold outer shells*,” she teased, making Theo duck his head bashfully.

“Ah, Slytherins in love,” Harry cooed playfully. “See how much wider your options yet when you look outside the snake pit?”

He wiggled his eyebrows pointedly at both Pansy and Millicent, who looked distinctly unimpressed.

“No, thank you,” Pansy said flatly.

“I’m good,” Millicent agreed.

“Are you done acting like a third year now, Potter?” Draco drawled, sounding bored.

“Because the rest of us came here to work, so if all you want to do is gossip I suggest you seek out Weasley and Lovegood.”

“I’ll do that later,” Harry replied breezily. “And don’t act as if Slytherins aren’t the biggest gossip-hounds in the school. You all just call it blackmail instead.”

“Knowledge is power,” Draco retorted. “Something your tiny little Gryffindor mind might struggle to comprehend.”

The bickering was almost instinctual, Harry fighting against a smile as he argued with Draco, riling the Slytherin up.

Suddenly, a loud thud cut them off as Parvati dropped a stack of heavy books on the tabletop. “For the love of *Merlin*, just kiss already!” she said, glaring at them. “I need to finish this essay before dinner.” Both boys froze. Draco let out a slightly strained laugh.

“I beg your pardon, I—“

“Oh, come off it, guys,” Hannah cut in. “We figured it out ages ago. You’re not subtle, either of you.”

Harry looked around the room; none of them seemed surprised by the accusation. Even Theo, the newest member of the group, just looked quietly amused.

“When you say *ages*,” Harry started nervously.