

charms while Snape brewed more potions for the Hospital Wing. Harry would have his final detention after dinner.

Dumbledore chuckled. “Professor Snape is often possessive of his store rooms. Sometimes, these things are necessary.” The headmaster’s gaze flicked to Harry’s teacup, and Harry wondered what sort of potion was in it that he was supposed to be reacting to. Dumbledore would notice if the level in his cup didn’t get any lower. Pretending to take another sip, Harry screwed up his nose in concentration, trying to vanish the contents of the cup. He hadn’t tried a Vanishing charm wandlessly before, but with a little nudge of his magical core, the tea disappeared. When he set down the empty cup, Dumbledore looked approving behind his smile.

He didn’t seem to be expecting Harry to pass out or some such, so Harry just continued on as always, still not looking the man in the eye. “How are you feeling about the third task, Harry?”

“It’s a little way off yet, so I’m not too worried about it,” Harry replied. “Maybe in a couple of months I’ll start freaking out. I’m not used to getting so much advanced warning before I end up in a life or death situation, it’s really quite disconcerting.” That made Dumbledore chuckle.

“I can only imagine. You seem to be getting along well with the other champions — no worries about facing them one last time?”

“No, they’re all really nice. I don’t think they expected me to be much competition.” Harry wasn’t sure how he was supposed to be answering when he didn’t know what the potion was supposed to do, so he just kept smiling and hoped for the best.

“You are a young man of many surprises,” Dumbledore complimented. “Have you anything else to tell me? Noticed anything... unusual, lately?”

“Not that I can think of,” Harry said with a shrug, wondering what Dumbledore thought he was mixed up in. “Why, should I have?”

“I was merely concerned; with all the unfamiliar people walking these halls, there’s always the possibility that one of them may wish to do you harm. Would you mind if I just gave you a quick check over? There may be a hex on you going unnoticed.”

Harry’s heart dropped, but he tried not to let it show on his face. His pulse picked up, and he gave a false grin. “Sure!” he chirped, betting anything the tea was supposed to make him compliant. “Madam Pomfrey checked me over after the task, but if you think it’s necessary, sir.”

Dumbledore smiled, raising his wand. Harry had to force himself not to flinch. “Excellent. One moment, please.” He murmured a quiet spell, and immediately Harry felt as if something slimy was crawling over him, stuck to his magical core — the sensation the books said he would feel when someone placed a charm or curse on him. In the back of his mind he vaguely felt his inhibitions lower, but he was mostly concerned about the wrong-feeling magic. He kept up his smile, keeping his panic locked down.