

“Am I all good, sir?”

“Yes, you’re in top shape, my boy,” Dumbledore assured. “Thank you for indulging an old man’s fears.”

“Can I go to dinner now, sir?” Harry asked, glancing at the clock on the desk.

“Of course, of course. But are you *sure* there’s nothing you wish to tell me about, Harry?”

There was a strange moment when the unfamiliar magic choking Harry’s squeezed down, urging him to blurt out all his secrets. Harry raised his Occlumency shields to push the urge away, managing a relaxed shrug. “I can’t think of anything, sir, but I’ll come to you if that changes.”

That seemed to satisfy the headmaster, and he let Harry go with a cheerful wave. As soon as Harry was away from the gargoyle, he squeezed his eyes shut and sucked in a deep breath, shuddering as the magic wrapped tighter around him. It was suffocating. How had he gone years with Dumbledore’s magic on him and never noticed before? Now he was aware of his own magical core, the foreign intrusion felt awful. He’d had some practice with it over the summer — Snape or Remus or Sirius putting curses and charms on him, so he could feel what it was like. None of them had been like *this*.

He didn’t want to draw attention, so he forced himself to straighten up and head down to the Great Hall for dinner, sitting between Ron and Hermione even though there was an empty seat next to Neville. “What did Dumbledore want?” Ron asked around a mouthful of chicken, and Harry shrugged.

“Just to see how I was holding up with the tournament and everything,” he replied nonchalantly.

“That was nice of him,” Hermione said with a smile. Harry could hardly eat he felt so sick — did Ron and Hermione know what Dumbledore had planned? Had they been warned he was going to be a little different, and it was because of a spell?

“We should play exploding snap after dinner,” Ron suggested. “It’s been ages since we’ve done that.”

“Can’t — detention with Snape, remember?” Harry’s grimace hid his near-palpable relief at having the perfect excuse to go see Snape as soon as possible.

Ron made a face. “Can’t believe the greasy git gave you detention for taking what you needed for the task,” he grumbled. “You’re a Triwizard champion! He should be happy to help you beat those other schools.”

“As if Snape has ever missed out on a chance to give me detention,” Harry pointed out. He forced himself to eat the last bite of his shepherd’s pie, pushing his plate away. “I should get going before I’m late and he gives me even more detention for it. I’ll see you later.” The crush of the magic was getting worse, seeping into his pores until all he wanted to do was run to Dumbledore and spill his secrets. Harry pushed it away, shouldering his bag and hurrying