

He could barely feel his *own* magic.

That, more than anything else, set his heart racing in terror. He closed his eyes, trying to steady his breathing, to look inwards at his own magical core. It was like trying to swim through cement. The very attempt made him exhausted, slumping back against the mattress. It wasn't *gone*, he could feel at least that much. It was just... blocked. Restrained, much like he himself was.

When the door opened, Harry wasn't surprised at who greeted him.

"Ah, Harry, my boy. You're awake." The headmaster swept into the room, face the epitome of a kindly old grandfather — except for the threat in his eyes, of course.

"Where am I?" Harry asked, glaring at the man. Dumbledore smiled, conjuring a chair to take a seat beside the bed.

It wasn't the *room* that blocked magic, then. That was good to know.

"Somewhere safe," Dumbledore assured, making him scoff. "I'm sorry for the somewhat... unorthodox method of getting you here, but I did not think you'd be willing to come quietly."

"*Unorthodox*," Harry repeated cynically. "Kidnapping, you mean."

The old man's beard twitched as he frowned. "It is for your own good, my boy. You will come to understand that, soon." Then, he smiled, a somewhat *unhinged* light in his eyes. "I must say, you gave me far more than I expected, bringing you here like this."

Harry's stomach turned. "What do you mean?" Fear gripped him. "What did you do to me while I was unconscious?" Had he stolen Harry's magic? Linked himself to it, like a parasite, like he once had the castle wards?

"Oh, nothing sinister," Dumbledore said with a chuckle. He reached into an inside pocket of his robe, pulling out a folded pile of silky fabric — Harry's invisibility cloak. "Merely, I did not expect you to be carrying this little marvel. My, if only I had known what it truly was, when it was last in my possession. I should never have given it back to you — no matter how necessary it was for my plans. Letting you sneak about the castle, hidden even from *me*. I should have known then what it was..."

Harry stared at him, utterly bewildered. It was an invisibility cloak — of course Harry was hidden beneath it? That was the whole point!

"Now that I know the *truth*, now I have the knowledge of the Peverell family secret. I have all three artefacts." He smiled, the expression sending a shiver of unease down Harry's spine. "I have become the Master of Death, my dear boy," he declared in a reverent tone. "A lifetime of searching, and you held the final piece all along. So you understand why I had to claim it back."

He'd gone mad. Dumbledore had truly lost it — *Master of Death*, what did that even *mean*? What did it have to do with the Peverells? And Harry's cloak?