

Chapter 1

Harry tossed and turned in his bed the night before his trial. Despite his best efforts to relax or even distract himself, his mind kept asking him, 'what if?'

What if he lost? What if they snapped his wand? What if he was expelled? What if he was kicked out of the Wizarding world, never to return?

Would he be forced to go back to the Dursleys? Would they Oblivate him? Would he even be able to remember his friends?

Rolling over onto his side, Harry punched his pillow three times and then tossed himself back down onto it. He managed to lie still for a second and a half before he rolled back the other way.

Maybe Fleur could help him get into Beauxbatons, he thought.

Huffing, Harry sat up and brought his legs up to rest his forehead on his knees. Suddenly, he heard a loud tap. Head snapping up, he looked over at the window and squinted, trying to see through the dark room. He reached over to the nightstand and, grabbing his glass, pushed them onto his face. As he climbed out of bed, he saw a brown barn owl blinking at him from the plant box on the window sill.

Brow furrowed, Harry wondered who would be sending him a letter as he walked over and pushed open the window. With a grateful bark, the owl flew in and landed on his dresser. From her perch in the corner, Hedwig glared at the intruder and ruffled her feathers before turning her back.

"Don't be rude, Hedwig," Harry said. "He's just the messenger."

Hooting, the barn owl held out its leg. Harry took the thick roll of parchment. Relieved of its burden, the owl took to the air and flew out the window.

“That was odd,” Harry said.

Turning her head to look at him, Hedwig flew over and landed on his shoulder. Smiling, he reached up and scratched her feathers while sitting down on the edge of the bed. With a tug, he pulled the ribbon holding the roll of parchment together loose and set it aside. Unrolling it, his brow furrowed as he read.

What they're doing isn't right. I hope this helps. Good luck.

There was no signature at the bottom or anything on the back when Harry turned it over. Seeing there was another page underneath, he set the top page aside and looked at the second. It took a few seconds of reading before he realized what he held in his hand. Eyes widening, he grinned and stood up.

“We’ve got it, Hedwig,” Harry said excitedly. “I need to go to the library.”

Hooting bemusedly, Hedwig gripped his shoulder tightly with her claws as he rushed out of the room.

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“I can’t go in with you, I’m afraid. I’m not allowed,” Mr. Weasley said apologetically.

Harry nodded, worried his breakfast might come up if he spoke. Mr. Weasley patted him on the back as he walked forward and pushed open the door. The large, dark room felt oppressive as he stepped inside, and the sudden gaze of the entire Wizengamot made him want to turn around and run.

“You’re late,” Fudge barked, seated behind a raised dais in the center of the semi-circle of benches.

Seeing the man that had called him a liar, maligned him in the press, and now wanted to bring him up on false charges, Harry gritted his teeth angrily and squared his shoulders.

“I didn’t know the time had changed,” Harry said, his voice echoing in the room.

Every head turned back to the Minister to see his response.

“That’s not the Wizengamot’s fault,” Fudge blustered. “Now that we can begin – finally – disciplinary hearing of twelfth of July into offenses committed by Harry James Potter of Number Four Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surrey. Chief Interrogators, Cornelius Oswald Fudge, Minister for Magic, and Amelia Susan Bones, Head of the Department of Magical Law enforcement-”

Harry only half listened as Fudge read out the expected charges. Reaching into his pocket, he rubbed his fingers along the rolled piece of parchment and Glanced at Amelia Bones. He knew she was Susan’s aunt, and everyone in the Order spoke highly of her.

“- how do you plead?” Fudge asked, pulling Harry out of his thoughts.

“Not guilty,” Harry replied, his tone firm.

“Did you not cast a Patronus Charm in a Muggle residence, knowing full well the illegality of your actions.?” Fudge asked.

“I did,” Harry said.

“There we have it!” he exclaimed, thrusting a finger into the air with a triumphant look. “Witches and Wizards of the Wizengamot-”

"I only did it because of the Dementors!" Harry yelled.

The whole room froze for just a moment before hushed whispers broke out around him.

"Dementors?" Bones asked, a raised hand quieting the room.

"Yes, ma'am," Harry said. "My cousin and I were coming back from the park when we were attacked by two Dementors."

"And you drove them off with a Patronus?" she asked.

"Yes, I -"

"A fully corporeal Patronus?" Bones pressed.

"Yes, I -"

"Impressive," she said with a nod.

"And it is still against the law!" Fudge barked angrily. "The Dementors are under the control of the Ministry, and they were not in Surrey. I say we take a vote -"

"I have proof!" Harry yelled, pulling the roll of parchment out of his pocket and thrusting it into the air.

Around him, the Wizengamot broke into loud whispers once more. Fudge banged his gavel loudly several times.

“Order! Order!” he shouted, sweat beading on his forehead. “What is this nonsense?”

“Yes, please explain,” Bones said, eyeing Fudge out of the corner of her monocle.

“Someone sent this to me last night,” Harry said. “It’s an order from the Ministry to send two Dementors to Little Whinging to Kiss a dangerous criminal.”

“Let me see that,” Bones said at the same time Fudge shouted, “Give that here!”

Staring at Fudge’s quickly paling face, Harry marched up to Bones and handed her the parchment. She read it over quickly, a frown forming on her face, before taking out her wand. Waving it in an intricate pattern, the parchment glowed bright gold.

“It’s authentic,” she announced.

“Let me see,” Fudge barked, his hand held outwards expectantly.

Bones pinned him with a stony glare for several seconds before Fudge swallowed thickly and leaned back in his seat.

“Delores Umbridge,” Bones said loudly. “It says here you were the one to order the Dementors while Fudge was the one to sign off on it. Explain.”

“Hem, hem.” A squat witch cleared her throat with a sickly smile. “It must have slipped my mind.”

“Let me get this straight,” Bones said, eyeing Umbridge intently. “You signed for two Dementors to look for a wanted criminal – who isn’t named in this order, by the way – in a

Muggle neighborhood, without requesting Auror support to ensure there were no mishaps? What the hell were you thinking?"

"This criminal has killed over a dozen people, and I wanted to ensure one of our venerable Aurors wasn't his next victim," Umbridge said, her sickly sweet smile fading quickly.

"And just who was this unnamed criminal?" Bones asked.

"Sirius Black," Umbridge replied.

Harry snorted a bit too loudly and looked abashed when everyone turned to him.

"Sirius Black," Bones said. "Why wasn't I told of this, and where exactly did you get this information?"

"The information I received was from a highly trusted source and time sensitive. There simply wasn't time to let you know," Umbridge said.

"We will be talking about this source of yours later," Bones told Umbridge firmly. "Why wasn't I informed after the fact?"

"There was nothing to tell," Umbridge replied with a simpering laugh. "The Dementors returned empty handed."

"So, you sent two Dementors into a Muggle neighborhood – without supervision – and conveniently forgot about it hours later when you came storming into my office to tell me Mr. Potter would be subjected to a full criminal trial for the use of the Patronus Charm," Bones said with a glare.

"How was I to know where Mr. Potter lived," Umbridge asked innocently.

“You had the notification of underage magic with his address on it in your hand,” Bones barked before turning her glare on the pale and sweaty Minister. “And you, Minister? Did the fact that you sent out two Dementors slip your mind as well?”

“Come now, Amelia,” Fudge said with a nervous smile. “You can’t think this was done intentionally. You know how many papers I have to sign in a day. This is just an unfortunate mishap.”

“A mishap?” Bones asked incredulously. “You call this – this stupidity a mishap? It shouldn’t have happened in the first place! We have policies in place to protect against just this sort of thing.”

“Certainly, you’re not saying we shouldn’t go after escaped murders,” Umbridge asked with an insufferable giggle.

“Not at the cost of innocent lives, Muggle or magical,” Bones said firmly. “It was only luck that Mr. Potter could cast a Patronus and save himself from a fate worse than death!”

The room went silent as the two witches glared at each other while Harry balled his hands into fists. He knew this would happen, but he couldn’t believe they were going to get away with trying to kill him. They’d claim it was just an accident and then go back to calling him a liar and insulting him in the press.

“As heir to the House of Potter and the House of Black, I invoke the Founding Family Protection Agreement, section eight, clause four,” Harry announced loudly.

There was a loud gasp from the benches as the thick tome in front of Percy filled open on its own. As if blown by a gust of wind, the page flipped rapidly for a few seconds until they came to a sudden stop.

“Are you sure you wish to do this, Mr. Potter?” A wrinkled, bald wizard asked. “You are aware of the consequences?”

“Yes, sir,” Harry said.

“Weasley, for those that don’t know the law Mr. Potter has just invoked, could you read it from the book?” Bones asked, eyeing Harry speculatively.

Leaning over the book, Percy traced his finger along the words as he read them out.

“Clause four; Should the Ministry, or Minister, make a concerted effort to end the line of one of the twenty-eight original Founding Families – or fail to take sufficient action should a member of the Ministry attempt to do so - this clause may be invoked. Should a family invoke this clause, the eldest member – or otherwise chosen member – of the offended family shall be given thirty days in the position of the offender to make his or her case.

“To ensure equality, only magic shall judge the parties involved. If, at the end of thirty days, the offender is proven guilty, they shall be stripped of all titles, monies, and properties to be given to the offended. Should the accusations prove false, the invoking family shall be stripped of all titles, monies, and properties and henceforth banished from the magical world.”

“This is preposterous!” Fudge blustered. “You can’t actually expect me to agree to this – this farce!”

“You accepted it when you took the oath of office,” Bones told him. “Your only other option is to resign.”

“I will not!” Fudge blustered.

At those words, the book in front of Percy began to glow bright gold. It rapidly built to a blinding flash that forced Harry and everyone in the room to shield their eyes. When it died,

Harry blinked the spots out of his eyes and found himself wearing the same plum robes as everyone else in the room. Over his right breast sat the Potter crest. Looking up, a snort escaped his lips before he could cover his mouth. Fudge was too busy rubbing his eyes to realize he was now seated in nothing but his boxers. Umbridge took off her outer robe and threw it over his shoulders with a menacing glare at Harry.

“Congratulations, Minister Potter,” Bones said with a respectful nod.

Harry nodded back, his mirth fading abruptly. Just as he opened his mouth, the door to the courtroom burst open.

“Witness for the defense!” Dumbledore announced loudly as he strode in, his plum robes covered in sparkling moons.

He was halfway to Harry before he seemed to realize something was off and slowed his walk, his head tilted curiously.

“Right,” Harry said, taking a deep breath. “Here’s what we’re going to do. Madam Bones, I want the DMLE to fully investigate this Dementor incident.”

“Of course,” Bones said with a nod.

“Second, Fudge and the Prophet have been spreading a lot of lies about me lately, and I think it’s well past time to set things straight,” Harry said.

“Absolutely not!” Fudge barked, jumping to his feet and nearly knocking over Umbridge. “I’ve already told the Wizengamot everything they need to know.”

“Really?” Harry asked scornfully. “Did you bother to tell them Barty Crouch Jr. is the one that put my name in the Goblet? Did you tell them he impersonated Moody for the entire school year, that you had him in custody, and instead of questioning him, you had him Kissed?”

“What?” Bones hissed as murmurs filled the room, her eyes narrowing as she glared at Fudge.

“Well, I – That’s classified,” he stammered, beads of sweat gathering on his forehead.

“Wait, you mean it’s true?” a witch asked incredulously.

Fudge paled as he realized his mistake, and the murmurs grew louder.

“Well, I’m declassifying it,” Harry growled. “Professor, can I borrow your Pensieve?”

“Certainly,” Dumbledore said.

“Pensieve memories are not allowed as evidence,” Umbridge said, her tone growing shrill.

“Then it’s a good thing no one is on trial,” Bones said, glaring at the squat woman. “Memories cannot be presented at a trial, but they have regularly been used to present evidence to the Wizengamot. Unless, of course, you believe the members of this august body incapable of determining whether a memory is false or not.”

Umbridge glared at Bones furiously as the members of the Wizengamot muttered in agreement. It was only when she threw herself into her chair petulantly that Harry realized she’d been standing in the first place.

He was jerked out of that amusing thought and startled when there was a flash of fire above his head. Fawkes sang as he circled around and dropped Dumbledore’s Pensieve lightly into his hands. Making a sharp turn, he lighted on Harry’s shoulder.

“Did you have to scare the hell out of me?” Harry asked, reaching up to stroke his crest.

Fawkes could only give what could be described as an amused thrill. Preening Harry's messy hair, he took back to the air and vanished in a ball of fire.

"So, how do I put my memory in there?" Harry asked quietly, nodding towards the swirling silver mist.

"Just close your eyes and focus on the memory you want to show them," Dumbledore replied. "And we'll need to talk about why you felt this was necessary later."

Harry rolled his eyes, "Maybe if you hadn't ignored me all Summer, I wouldn't have had to. Anyways, can you take out more than one memory at a time?"

"It is possible, but it requires practice. For now, just focus on one memory at a time," Dumbledore said.

Nodding, Harry closed his eyes and focused on the nightmare he'd been forced to relive in his nightmares nearly every night. He felt the tip of Dumbledore's wand touch his temple for a moment before the feeling disappeared. When he opened his eyes, Harry saw a long silvery strand hanging from the tip. With a light flick, Dumbledore dropped it into the swirling mass of memories.

They repeated the process twice more before turning back to the whispering, curious Wizengamot.

"If everyone is ready?" Dumbledore asked.

Fudge shifted nervously as everyone else murmured in agreement.

"Amos, are you sure you want to stay for this?" Dumbledore asked.

Harry felt the bottom of his stomach drop out as he looked over at Cedric's father.

"I need to know what really happened to my son," he replied stonily.

Dumbledore looked at him intently for a moment before nodding and turning back to the Pensieve. Tapping three runes on the side of the Pensieve, the pool of memories glowed silver and produced a life-size projection of the Triwizard maze just above it.

The courtroom was silent as they watched Harry and Cedric argue over who should take the Cup before agreeing to take it together. In a swirl of color, they were Portketed to the graveyard in Little Haggelton. Harry had to look away when he screamed out and grabbed his scar in the memory, knowing what would happen next.

"Avada Kedavra!"

The room gasped as one.

"That's Pettigrew!" someone shouted.

Harry looked over at Fudge and glared daggers at the man. Not that he noticed; he was too busy staring in horror at the memory playing in front of him. Gathering his courage, Harry looked back and watched as he was tied to the statue and Pettigrew completed the Ritual.

Gasps, screams, and shouts echoed around the room when Voldemort stepped out of the cauldron.

"Quiet!" Bones barked.

The room quieted down while Voldemort talked as he waited for his Death Eaters to return. When they Apparated in minutes later, there were more shouts from the benches. Some were

angry, others scared. Dumbledore had to pause the memory and let loose a canon blast from his wand. After everyone had quieted down, he started the memory back up again.

Harry watched himself closely as he fought against Voldemort and frowned when he saw just how outmatched he was. By the time their wands connected, he was determined to improve. When he finally reached Cedric's body and summoned the Cup, he was surprised when numerous people stood and applauded.

Flushing slightly, Harry ducked his head and looked at Dumbledore. Smiling under his beard, the headmaster tapped the Pensieve and brought up the second memory. With the second memory playing, everyone sat back down to watch. Again, there were exclamations of outrage, this time when a supposed dead man was found to have taught at Hogwarts for a year. There was quite a bit of murmuring when Dumbledore fed him the Veritaserum, and Harry belatedly realized that, perhaps, that might not be entirely legal.

Looking over at Dumbledore, he was relieved to see him wink. Any anger at the Hogwarts headmaster for using truth serum vanished when they learned the truth about Barty and what both he and his father had done.

This time, the memory had barely collapsed before Dumbledore started the third and final memory. Since he already knew what was going to happen, Harry took pleasure in watching Fudge's face lose what little blood it had left as he was forced to watch himself. There was a rumble of muttering when the Wizengamot saw how little thought and investigation had gone into the death of a student and the possible return of a terrifying Dark Lord. That turned into outrage when they saw McGonagall announce Barty had been Kissed before even being questioned by the Ministry.

Fudge pulled Umbridge's plum colored robes tighter around his body and slouched in his chair as the Wizengamot members got to their feet and began bombarding him with furious questions. Bones stood and let out a stream of sparks from her wand. Immediately, most people calmed down and retook their seats, but a few continued to yell.

"Why weren't we informed of this?"

“This is outrageous! I will not stand for members of my houses being slandered by this boy!”

“How did that bastard escape!”

The last shout came from Augusta Longbottom, Neville’s grandmother, who looked ready to throttle Fudge where he sat.

“Enough!” Bones shouted, silencing the room. “Minister, how would you like to handle this situation?”

Harry blinked, his mind taking a moment to realize she was talking to him.

“Oh, right,” he said, grateful Hermione had given him a crash course on how the Wizengamot worked. “The first thing we need to do is elect a Chief Warlock. It’s ridiculous that Fudge took the position himself.”

“I agree,” Bones nodded. “Do we have any nominations?”

Amos Diggory stood immediately.

“I nominate Albus Dumbledore,” he said.

“I nominate Tiberius Ogden,” a middle-aged witch with dark hair said.

As a couple of other names were called out, Harry spotted Fudge whispering furiously to Umbridge. Frowning, he decided to put a stop to whatever they were trying to do. Walking up to the bench, he stopped next to Fudge, who glared up at him.

“I need my seat,” Harry said.

Fudge's face went red as he stood up and jabbed his finger at Harry.

"If you think –"

"Is there a problem, *mister* Fudge?" Bones asked sharply.

Looking around and seeing the vast majority of the room glaring at him, including two Aurors, Fudge dropped his hand and stepped back. With one last glower, he turned on his heel, stumbling slightly down the steps, and walked over to the gallery. As Harry took his seat, Umbridge sniffed imperiously before getting up and moving several seats down.

He was immensely grateful Bones took charge of calling out the nominees and counting the votes. There was a bit of pomp and circumstance to their words that he didn't quite understand yet. In short order, Dumbledore was back in his old position.

"I would like to thank this august body for once again seeing fit to elect me as its leader," he said. "I'm sure that all of you are also as disturbed by what you've seen here today as I am. Fortunately, I'm certain our new Minister will be up to the task of handling this troubling situation. Make no mistake, while Mr. Potter may be young, he has yet to find a challenge he could not meet. And as you may have noticed, Mr. Potter has faced some daunting challenges in his short life."

Harry nodded gratefully as Dumbledore took his seat, and Harry took the podium.

"I'm sure all of you have a lot of questions," he said. "So, I'm going to try and explain everything as best I can before taking questions. So, this all started two years ago..."

For the next half an hour, Harry gave a condensed version of everything that led up to Voldemort's return. During his speech, he watched as the faces staring at him gradually grew more troubled, none more so than Fudge, who looked horribly constipated.

"Any questions?" Harry asked.

"You said that Minister Fudge *knew* Pettigrew was alive?" Amos asked, his face stormy.

"My friend and I told him, but he refused to listen to us," Harry said.

"How much of this were you aware of, Amelia?" Augusta asked.

"Far less than I should have," Bones replied. "I knew nothing about Pettigrew surviving and Black's possible innocence or Barty Crouch Jr's survival and subsequent execution. I was not even notified that Black had been captured until after he escaped from the school. I can assure you, I would not have taken just two Aurors and a Dementor to bring him into custody, nor would I have allowed him to be Kissed before interrogating him."

Augusta nodded before retaking her seat while a bald, wrinkled wizard with a pipe a few seats down stood.

"I have a question for Fudge," he said in a deep, gravelly voice. "Why weren't the Wizengamot or DMLE notified about such important information."

Fudge cleared his throat as he stood, his hands fiddling with his robe nervously.

"You see, Mr. Potter's claims about Black and Pettigrew, at the time, sounded outrageous. Surely, none of you here have ever suspected Black to be innocent," he said.

"We never had a reason to," a witch with short grey hair and a scar over her eye said. "What about Crouch? Why was he Kissed before being questioned?"

“Ah, well, yes. As I’m sure you can understand, he presented a danger to society. He successfully impersonated Alastor Moody for nearly a year without getting caught. After Black’s escape, I didn’t want to risk another, especially inside of a school.” Fudge said nervously.

“And why weren’t we told about him?” Augusta demanded.

“Well – ah hem - we didn’t know if he had an accomplice-”

“Something you could have easily found out if you had bothered to question him!” Augusta bit back.

“What about my son!?” Amos yelled. “You convinced me his death was an accident! You told me you investigated!”

“What about You-Know-Who?” a witch asked frightenedly. “What are you going to do about him?”

“Now, now. We still don’t know that he’s really back,” Fudge said with a nervous smile. “This could all be some kind of trick. That could’ve been someone under a Glamour Charm, for all we know.”

“I’d rather not take my chances,” Ogden said. “And, frankly, I find it disturbing that you would take such a risk.”

“Mr. Potter,” a tall, square jawed man with short blonde hair said as he stood. “I’d be interested in hearing your plan to combat You-Know-Who and his followers.”

“I’ll be working with the DMLE to find out exactly what our options are, as well as raising their budget. I wish I had a better answer for you, but I kind of threw myself into the deep end,” Harry admitted.

“Do you know when you’ll be able to present us with a plan?” he asked.

“As soon as possible,” Harry said. “I hope to have things moving by the end of the day, if not sooner, and a more detailed plan within a few days.”

“I can assure you, Mr. Greengrass, the DMLE will be making this our highest priority,” Bones said.

Harry blinked at the name and wondered for a moment if he was related to Daphne Greengrass, a Slytherin in his year.

“I look forward to hearing your update,” Greengrass nodded before retaking his seat.

“If there are no other pressing questions, perhaps it would be best to let our new Minister get to work,” Dumbledore said. “Is there any other business? Then meeting adjourned.”

“Fudge, Umbridge, my office, now,” Bones barked.

“Oh, you’re fired, by the way,” Harry told Umbridge.

The squat witch puffed up like a frog, her entire face turning red as she glared at him.

“You have no right to fire me,” she hissed.

“Actually, he does,” Bones said.

“On what grounds!?” Umbridge demanded.

“How about sending two Dementors after me and then trying to have me expelled for defending myself?” Harry asked.

Umbridge fumed silently, her face turning a puce he had only even believed Vernon was capable of.

“Dawlish, Jones, please escort Mr. Fudge and Ms. Umbridge to my office,” Bones said.

“You’ll pay for this, you disgusting little Half-blood,” Umbridge snarled.

When Hestia tried to grab her arm, Umbridge pulled away roughly and thrust her chin in the air as she stalked off.

“Minister, I need your permission to search their office,” Bones told him quietly.

“Anything you need,” Harry said.

“I’ll send you a note as soon as I’m done so we can have a meeting,” Bones said before turning away.

Sighing, Harry began to walk towards the door. He made it only a few steps before Amos stopped him.

“Mr. Potter – Minister – I just wanted to thank you for bringing my son back,” he said emotionally.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t save him,” Harry said.

“It wasn’t your fault,” Amos said. “Even if Cedric knew what was going to happen, he still would’ve gone with you.”

With teary eyes, Amos patted him on the shoulder before walking away hurriedly.

“It’s going to be a long day,” Harry sighed.

Chapter 2

“Did you really feel this was necessary?” Dumbledore asked as they rode the elevator up to the Minister's office.

“What else was I supposed to do?” Harry asked frustratedly. “I didn’t even know if you’d be here today. They were going to get away with trying to kill me.”

Dumbledore sighed, his shoulder sagging as he seemed to age years in front of his eyes.

“I owe you an apology,” he admitted. “I wished to spare you from this war for as long as I could.”

Harry scoffed, “It’s a bit late for that. I’ve been involved since I was a baby.”

Just then, the elevator dinged, and the doors opened.

“Level one, Minister for magic offices,” A disembodied female voice announced.

Walking out of the elevator, half a dozen witches and wizards marched past them, glaring and carrying loaded boxes in their arms. Percy was the last one onto the elevator and gave an imperious sniff as the doors closed.

“Professor, how many people work directly under the Minister?” Harry asked.

“Roughly half a dozen,” he replied.

Harry sighed, “I was afraid you were going to say that.”

Continuing past a small waiting room and into the outer office, he found all but one desk empty. Spotting a familiar face looking at him nervously, Harry smiled.

“Hi, Harry,” Penelope Clearwater said as he approached her desk.

“Hey, Penny,” Harry said. “It’s good to see you again. I take it you’re staying?”

“If you want me to,” Penny said with a small smile.

“Congratulations, you’re the new Senior Undersecretary,” Harry grinned.

Penny’s eyes went wide, and her jaw dropped.

“What?” she gasped. “But – but I’m just the mail-witch.”

Harry shrugged as he continued to smile.

“It’s not like I have a lot of people to choose from,” he said, gazing around the empty office.

“Well, if you’re sure,” Penny said, still looking a bit overwhelmed.

“This isn’t going to cause problems between you and Percy, is it?” Harry asked.

“What? Oh! No, we broke up a while ago,” Penny said. “Percy was too obsessed with his career to make time for me.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Harry said. “Though, to be honest, I always thought you could do better.”

“Excuse me, Minister,”

Again, it took a moment for Harry to realize someone was referring to him. Turning around, he found Hestia Jones and three other Aurors waiting next to Dumbledore.

“Yes?” he asked.

“We’re here to search yours and the Senior Undersecretary’s offices,” Hestia told him. “Madam Bones said you authorized it.”

“Sure. Help yourselves,” Harry said.

Smiling, Hestia nodded to the other Auror who made for the large office at the back of the room. When they weren’t looking, Hestia turned to Harry and gave him a wink before following.

“Well, looks like we’re gonna need new offices for a bit,” Harry sighed.

“It shouldn’t take long for them to search everything,” Dumbledore said. “I expect you’ll have your offices back by tomorrow.”

“Alright,” Harry said. “In the meantime, it looks like we have some new people to hire.”

“Umbridge did all the hiring,” Penny said. “The files for applicants would be in her office.”

“Which we won’t be able to get to until tomorrow. Hopefully,” Harry sighed.

“I remember a few of the summer applicants,” Penny said. “I could Floo them and see if they still want the position.”

“Summer applicants?” Harry asked.

“Some of the older students will work at the Ministry over the Summer to get some experience,” Dumbledore answered.

“That would work,” Harry said. “They’d probably only have a job for a month anyways.”

“Do you think Fudge will get his job back?” Penny asked.

“Even if he doesn’t, someone else will still be Minister,” Harry shrugged. “It’s not like I’m going to be able to keep the job.”

“Oh, well, should I still Floo them?” Penny asked.

“Sure,” Harry said.

“I can refer you to some people with a bit more experience if you wish,” Dumbledore said.

“That would be great,” Penny smiled, then looked at Harry and bit her lip. “Are you sure you want me to be your Senior Undersecretary?”

“I’m sure,” Harry smiled. “You were a great Head Girl, Penny. I know you’ll do a great job. If you don’t want it, though...”

“No,” Penny said quickly. “I’ll take the job. I’m just surprised you don’t want someone more experienced.”

“I want someone I can trust,” Harry said.

Blushing, Penny smiled and ducked her head.

Suddenly, a paper airplane began circling around Harry’s head. Snatching it out of the air, he unfolded the parchment.

Minister Potter,

I would appreciate a meeting in my office at your earliest convenience.

Madam Amelia Bones

Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement

“Bones wants to see me,” Harry said.

“Would you like me to accompany you?” Dumbledore asked.

“Probably a good idea,” Harry sighed.

"I'll work on hiring a couple of people while you're gone," Penny said.

"Thanks," Harry smiled.

"I'll give you a list of names to contact when we get back from our meeting," Dumbledore told her.

Penny nodded and headed for one of the other offices while Harry and Dumbledore headed to the Floo. It was a short ride down one level to the offices of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Unlike when Harry had passed by earlier with Mr. Weasley, the Auror Department was now buzzing with activity.

Tonks spotted him from across the room and waved with a bright smile before tripping on the corner of a desk and disappearing out of view. Covering a smile, Harry waved back as she got to her feet and brushed herself off, her hair now bright red.

He followed Dumbledore past a maze of cubicles, ignoring the stares of the Aurors, and to the back of the room. The headmaster waited to the side as Harry raised his hand and knocked.

"Enter!" Bones barked.

"You wanted to see me?" Harry asked.

Looking into the office and seeing the hardbacked chairs on the other side of the desk, he couldn't help but feel like he was reporting to McGonagall for detention.

"Yes," she said, "Please, come in. You too, Dumbledore."

Dumbledore transfigured the chairs into comfortable wingbacks before both of them took a seat.

"I've sent Fudge and Umbridge home for the time being," Bones said. "Right now, I don't have enough evidence to hold them."

"Figures," Harry muttered.

"I understand your frustration," she sighed. "But we still have plenty of time to gather evidence. I'm certain the search of their offices will turn up something, and I'm very interested in finding out who sent you that order."

"Only a few people would have access to that document," Dumbledore said.

Bones nodded.

"I have my suspicions," she said. "I plan on conducting interviews soon, but right now, I have bigger concerns. McNair tried to kill one of my Aurors when they went to bring him in for questioning."

"Are they alright?" Harry asked.

"Shacklebolt managed to stop him in time," Bones said, sliding a piece of parchment across the desk towards Harry. "I need your approval to question him under Veritaserum."

Grabbing the quill off of her desk, he read over it quickly and then signed at the bottom.

"Thank you," Bones said, then slid over another piece of parchment. "I'd also like permission to begin patrolling Knockturn Alley."

“Wait, you’re not allowed to patrol there?” Harry asked incredulously.

Bones pursed her lips.

“No. And that’s something I’ve been fighting against for years,” she said. “The *former* Minister and his *associates* have business interests there. He didn’t want the Auror patrols interfering with business.”

Shaking his head in disgust, Harry signed the parchment.

“So, what’s being done about the other Death Eaters?” Harry asked.

“Right now, I can’t use your memory alone to arrest them,” Bones sighed. “All I can do is bring them in for questioning. However, since McNair was stupid enough to try and kill one of my Aurors, I can interrogate him. Once he confirms You-Know-Who is indeed back, and he was there as a witness, I can use that to start making arrests.”

“Okay,” Harry nodded. “Can we start checking Ministry employees for the Dark Mark?”

“Unfortunately, It’s not actually illegal to be a Death Eater,” Bones said.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” Harry sighed.

“I know it may seem foolish, but there’s actually a very good reason for that,” Dumbledore said, to which Bones scoffed. “While I’m unaware of any Wizengamot members that are marked Death Eaters, many of them have family who are. As you can imagine, they would not want their family to be brought up on charges simply for making a mistake.”

“Taking that monster’s mark is not a mistake,” Bones hissed, glaring at Dumbledore.

“Not all of them have committed crimes, Amelia, or were given a choice,” Dumbledore said calmly.

“And we can weed those cases out through questioning and investigation,” Bones argued.

“It’s a moot point,” Dumbledore said. “You’ll never get the Wizengamot to agree.”

Privately, Harry agreed with Bones. Not all Death Eaters might be as evil as someone like Malfoy, but that didn’t mean they should just let them go. He decided to change the subject for now and bring it back up with her later, when Dumbledore wasn’t around.

“Let’s come back to that later,” Harry said. “What about the Imperious Curse? Do we have a way to detect if someone is under it?”

“Unfortunately, no,” Bones said, still visibly miffed. “The Goblins reportedly have a way to dispel it, but they aren’t sharing secrets with us.”

“Can we get someone to look into it?” Harry asked. “Even if we just have a way to tell if someone is under it, that could make a huge difference.”

“That would be something you need to bring up with the Department of Mysteries,” Bones said. “They’re the ones that do research for the Ministry.”

“Who’s the head of that?” Harry asked.

“Saul Croaker,” Dumbledore replied.

Harry nodded, the name seeming familiar.

“Well, unfortunately, it looks like we’re not going to be able to get any more done today,” Bones sighed. “I’ll send a note along to Janice when McNair’s interrogation is done.”

“Who?” Harry asked.

“Janice Hartford, she’s your personal secretary,” Bones replied.

“Oh, well, everyone quit except for Penelope Clearwater. You’ll have to send it to her,” he told her.

“They all quit?” she asked incredulously.

Harry shrugged.

“Despicable,” Bones said in disgust. “I’ll see if I can spare a couple of people to send up to you until you can rebuild your staff.”

“Thanks,” Harry said gratefully. “When do you want to meet again?”

“Unless something comes up, let’s plan on tomorrow morning,” Bones said.

“Sounds good,” Harry said.

Standing, he reached over the desk and shook her hand before he and Dumbledore left the office.

“I’ll help you as much as I can, but I’m afraid I need to get back to Hogwarts,” Dumbledore said. “I still have a lot of work to do to get ready for next year.”

“Alright,” Harry said. “Thanks, professor.”

“You’re quite welcome,” Dumbledore said as Harry exited the elevator.

Watching the doors close, Harry sighed and rubbed his eyes.

What the hell have I gotten myself into, he wondered.

Walking back into the main office, Harry was surprised to see Penny talking to Daphne Greengrass.

“Hey, Harry,” Penny said. “This is Daphne. I hired her to take over my old job. I contacted a few others, but they all had other jobs already.”

“Alright,” Harry sighed. “I talked to Madam Bones, and she said she’ll try and send up a couple of people to help.”

“Oh, good,” Penny said, looking relieved. “Did you get that list of names from Professor Dumbledore?”

“No, I didn’t. If you don’t get it by the end of the day, send him an owl,” Harry said, then turned to Daphne. “Sorry, but things are a little chaotic at the moment.”

“That’s fine. I enjoy a good challenge,” Daphne smirked.

“I’m sure you’ll get plenty of that working for me,” Harry smiled.

Checking his watch, he noticed that it was getting close to lunch time.

“Tell you what, how about I take you both out to lunch in London?” Harry asked.

“Muggle London?” Daphne asked.

“Yeah, is that alright?” Harry asked, wondering if she had a problem with Muggles.

“No, it’s fine,” she said quickly. “I’ve just never been there.”

“You’ve never been to Muggle London?” Penny asked incredulously.

Daphne looked a little embarrassed, so Harry decided to jump in.

“To be fair, neither have I,” he admitted.

“Wait, I thought you grew up with Muggles,” Penny said.

“I did, but they never took me anywhere,” he told her.

“Right, then you two are in for a treat,” Penny grinned. “There’s this great Italian place a couple blocks away.”

Following Penny to the elevator, they ascended to the Atrium. As they stepped out, Harry noticed a line of Aurors blocking a crowd of people from getting past the security desk. When they spotted Harry, all of them started yelling at once. Flashbulbs from cameras went off in rapid succession, nearly blinding him and the girls.

“Mr. Potter, is it true you’ve taken over the government?”

“Did you really fire your entire staff?”

“Is it true you want to disband the Wizengamot?”

“Did you find proof Fudge was part of the Rotfang conspiracy?”

Reaching behind himself, Harry hammered the button for the elevator as the Aurors struggled to keep back the surging crowd. As soon as the doors opened, he grabbed Penny and Daphne by the arms and pulled them inside. Hitting the button for the first floor, the golden door slid closed, blocking out the sound.

“Bloody hell,” Harry said, rubbing his eyes to get rid of the floating blots in his vision.

“You know you’re going to have to talk to the press eventually,” Daphne said.

“I know,” Harry sighed.

“I can talk to my mother if you want,” she said. “She’s a reporter for the Prophet.”

“As long as she’s nothing like Skeeter, that’s fine,” Harry said, then grinned. “Looks like I have a new press secretary.”

“What?”

~

Using the Floo in the Minister’s office, Harry, Penny, and Daphne Flooed to the Leaky Cauldron before making their way straight out into London before anyone could recognize him. Daphne was surprisingly fascinated by almost everything as they walked passed the shops. Penny was

happy to explain everything she asked about, telling her about everything from computers and tellies to cell phones and cars.

“Why didn’t we learn about any of this in Muggle Studies?” Daphne asked, staring at a red Ferrari in wonder.

“Hermione said Muggle Studies is about a hundred years behind,” Harry said.

“It is,” Penny agreed. “They haven’t updated the book since the late eighteen hundreds. Muggles have advanced leaps and bounds since then.”

“I never thought they’d be able to come this far without magic,” Daphne said, looking at a display of televisions playing a video of spaceships flying around and shooting lasers at each other.

“That’s not real,” Penny said, stifling a giggle. “That’s from a movie. It’s made up to tell a story.”

“I know what a movie is,” Daphne said, rolling her eyes. “Even Muggle can’t go to space.”

Harry and Penny shared a look before they both broke into laughter.

“What?” Daphne asked.

“Daphne, Muggles landed on the moon in nineteen sixty-nine,” Harry said.

“Really?” she asked, eyes wide as she looked over at Penny.

“Really,” Penny said. “If you want to come over to my flat sometime, I can show you the video.”

"I'd like that," Daphne smiled. "My parents hate anything to do with Muggles."

After a moment, she looked at Harry and Penny nervously.

"I didn't mean that like it sounded. They don't hate Muggles. They just don't understand them," she said.

"It's alright," Penny smiled. "Tell you what. How about you and Harry come over this weekend, and we can have a movie night."

"That'd be great," Daphne said, smiling excitedly. "I've never seen a movie before."

"Sure, that sounds like fun," Harry said. "I didn't get to watch the telly that much at the Dursleys."

"Why's that?" Daphne asked.

Harry shrugged, "They don't like anything to do with magic, and unfortunately, that includes me."

"Then why do you stay with them?" she asked curiously. "There are a ton of families that would love to take you in."

"Dumbledore put up wards there that protect me from Voldemort," Harry said. "I'm not really sure how they work, but I have to stay there at least a month every Summer."

"That sucks," Penny said. "But at least you don't have to stay there long."

"You know, as Minister, you could have them investigated," Daphne grinned.

Harry paused in his walking and smiled as he imagined the looks on their faces if Aurors showed up at their door.

“That would be a great idea,” Harry said, “if I was going to be Minister for more than a month.”

“You’re of age,” Penny said. “You could always run in the next election.”

“I doubt anyone would actually vote for me,” Harry said.

“I would,” she smiled. “You’re loads better than Fudge already. He spent the entire last month figuring out how to discredit you and Dumbledore. And don’t get me started on Umbridge. She’s made my job miserable ever since she found out I’m Muggleborn. I was already thinking about looking for a new job.”

“That woman is disgusting,” Daphne said. “Mother has her over for tea on occasion just because she’s so close to the Minister. She goes on about how Muggleborns and Half-bloods are ruining magical Britain, and she’s not even a Pureblood herself. Her mother was a Muggle.”

“You’re kidding!” Penny gasped.

“Nope,” Daphne said, shaking her head. “My father got her records from the Ministry. Her mother was a Muggle but died when she was a baby, and then her father remarried into a Pureblood family a couple of years later. Umbridge tries to hide it, but the records are there if you look for them.”

“Huh,” Harry said. “That sounds a lot like Voldemort.”

“What do you mean?” Daphne asked.

“Well, Voldemort’s not a Pureblood either,” Harry said. “His father was a Muggle.”

“That’s crazy!” Penny exclaimed. “Then why does he hate Muggles and Muggleborns so much?”

“I don’t think he hates Muggleborns as much as he says he does,” Harry told her. “I think he just uses that to get Purebloods on his side since they have all of the real power.”

“Make sure you tell my mother about that when she interviews you,” Daphne said.

“Look, there’s the restaurant,” Penny smiled. “Trust me, you’re going to love the food here.”

~

After a delicious lunch, Harry and the girls made their way back to the Ministry. Shortly after they got there, two witches and a wizard sent by Bones showed up to help. There was also a mountain of letters from people and the press sitting next to Penny’s old desk.

The letters were a mix of people attacking him and telling him to get out of office, while others commended him for standing up to a corrupt Minister. A handful of letters had curses or hexes on them and were sent to the DMLE.

“Daphne, how soon can your mum get here?” Harry asked. “Some of these people have no idea what actually happened.”

“I’ll Floo her,” Daphne said.

Standing up, she walked into one of the offices while Harry took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes with a sigh.

“What’s wrong?” Penny asked.

“I don’t know where most of these people are getting their information from,” Harry said. “They’re accusing me of taking over the government and having half the Ministry thrown in Azkaban.”

“It’s just rumors,” Penny said, patting him on the back consolingly. “I bet Fudge is making things up to try and make you look bad. It certainly wouldn’t be the first time.”

“This is a nightmare,” Harry sighed. “Why did I think this was a good idea?”

“You never have been able to sit by while someone was doing something wrong,” Penny smiled.

Harry looked at Penny and smiled as she rubbed his shoulder.

“She’ll be here in an hour,” Daphne said, coming out of the office.

“Well, that should be fun,” Harry said.

Chapter 3

Daphne’s mother was an absolutely stunning witch. Her pure white robe wrapped tightly around her body, accentuating her sinful curves. Her demeanor was surprisingly warm and friendly, considering the impression he got from Daphne earlier.

“Good evening, Minister,” she smiled, holding out her hand. “I’m Evangeline Greengrass.”

“Just Harry is fine,” Harry said, shaking her small, soft hand gently.

“Very well, Harry,” Evangeline said, smiling widely.

Harry showed her over to the side of the office, where there were two comfortable leather chairs and a low table near the fireplace. As they took their seats, she pulled out a notepad and a quill. He was happy to note that the quill was a standard, black Dicta-Quill and the Quick Quotes Quill Rita was so fond of.

“Now, let’s get started,” Evangeline smiled.

~

An hour later, Harry walked Evangeline out of his temporary office with a smile still on his face.

“I have to say, that went a lot better than the last interview I gave,” Harry said.

“It was a pleasure working with you,” Evangeline said. “I hope you remember to call me first the next time you have need of the press.”

“I definitely will,” Harry said.

Smiling, she glanced over at Daphne before looking back at him.

“Would you mind if my daughter walked me down to the Atrium? I’d like to have a quick word with her,” she asked.

“Not at all,” Harry said.

Nodding in thanks, Daphne stood up and followed her mother to the elevator.

"I take it that went well?" Penny asked, coming to stand beside him.

"I think so," Harry said, his smile dropping.

"Is something wrong?" Penny asked.

"I thought it went great. Evangeline seemed nice enough," Harry shrugged. "I just – after what Daphne told us about her parents at lunch, it's not what I was expecting. I'm wondering if she only acted that way so I would keep working with her."

"Well, I guess we'll find out tomorrow when the article comes out," Penny said.

"Tonight," Harry corrected her. "Evangeline seemed pretty certain the Prophet would want to run a special edition for this."

"I guess it *is* pretty big news," Penny grinned. "I wonder what the heading will be. 'Harry Potter takes over Ministry.'"

"Merlin, I hope not," Harry said, shaking his head with a smile.

"'Boy-Who-Lived becomes Man-Who-Leads,'" Penny said, waving her arm dramatically.

"Oh, please, no," Harry groaned.

Penny giggled at the pleading look on his face. A couple of minutes later, Daphne returned alone.

"Mother said the interview went well?" she asked.

“I think it did,” Harry said. “She was a lot nicer than I was expecting.”

“That really didn’t come out the way I wanted it to earlier,” Daphne sighed. “My father is a staunch traditionalist, and my mother just goes along with it, but neither of them are Pureblood fanatics like the Malfoys. They just want to keep our worlds separate.”

“I think I get it,” Penny said.

Daphne nodded before her pale cheek turned a light pink.

“I should warn you now, Potter. My mother – recommended – that I try and get close to you,” Daphne said. “Don’t get any ideas, though. You’re not my type, and I’m not marrying for political reasons like my parents did.”

“I – You – What?” Harry stammered.

Penny burst out in laughter, breaking the tension.

“Minister?”

Harry turned around and smiled at Hestia.

“Yes?” he asked.

“We’re finished searching the offices,” Hestia told him, holding out a scroll. “Here’s a list of everything we’re taking as evidence.”

As Harry took the scroll, the other Aurors left the two offices, each levitating a stack of boxes behind them. He blinked as the elevator enlarged itself to accommodate everyone.

“Is there anything left?” Harry asked.

“We left most of the furniture,” Hestia joked.

Smiling and giving him a jaunty salute, she joined the other Aurors in the elevator.

“Come on, I’ll help you move into your office,” Penny said.

With Penny and Daphne helping, it only took Harry a few minutes to gather the few things he had in his temporary office. The Minister’s office was huge in comparison and decorated with ornate, gold gilded furniture. Even the molding on the walls was gilded, making Harry feel like he was sitting in a palace instead of an office.

Once everything was settled, he sat down at the desk and started making a list of everything he wanted to accomplish in his thirty days as Minister. It was a long list, and he didn’t know if he could do all of it, but he would certainly try.

Harry spent a couple of hours working out what he needed to focus on first before Mr. Weasley came to tell him it was time to head home. To avoid running into the crowd that was likely still waiting for him in the Atrium, they used the Floo in his office to go to the Leaky Cauldron. From there, Mr. Weasley Apparated them to the park just outside Grimmauld Place.

There was a mix of reactions when he stepped into the kitchen. Sirius, the twins, Tonks, Ron, and Ginny, thought kicking Fudge out of office and taking his job was the greatest prank ever devised. Mrs. Weasley and some of the older members of the Order thought he should’ve left them to handle things. Hermione alternated between scolding him and praising him in the same breath, leaving him with a bemused smile.

“I can’t believe you’re the youngest Minister in history,” Hermione said, practically bouncing in her chair. “Oh, I hope this doesn’t cause problems for Professor Dumbledore.”

“Well, I got him his job back as Chief Warlock,” Harry said.

“Really?” Hermione asked, surprised. “Well, maybe you can let him take over as Minister for you.”

“I can’t,” Harry said, shaking his head. “I’m stuck with the job for twenty-nine more days.”

“What happens if you can’t prove Fudge was behind the Dementor attack?” Tonks asked.

“Fudge gets everything I own, and I’ll be banished from the Wizarding World,” Harry said.

Sitting back in her chair, Tonks whistled.

“Don’t worry,” Harry said at the concerned looks directed at him. “Amelia already has evidence that he knew about it, and she’s looking through a lot more.”

“It’s true,” Hestia said. “We took about two dozen boxes of documents from Fudge’s old office today. I didn’t see everything, but what I did see makes me wish someone had done this years ago.”

“Let’s change the conversation, shall we?” Mrs. Weasley asked.

At that moment, half a dozen owls swooped in through the enchanted window and dropped copies of the Evening Prophet on the table. Looking over at Hermione’s copy, Harry saw a big picture of himself standing in the Atrium from earlier in the day on the front page under the title ‘Potter Takes A Stand.’

Mrs. Weasley huffed and walked back over to the stove, stirring the pot vigorously.

Hermione held her paper slightly to the side so both of them could read it together. Harry was immensely relieved to see that Evangeline hadn't twisted any of his words. She detailed everything that happened in the courtroom and immediately afterwards, expressing concern over how Fudge had tried to railroad an innocent young wizard from a prominent family. Somehow, she even managed to get a picture of the parchment ordering Dementors to Little Whinging.

While Evangeline took a wait and see attitude towards Harry's ability as Minister, she was optimistic. All in all, Harry was happy with the article. The chatter around the table picked up as people finished reading and began discussing it. Harry noticed that a few of the disapproving looks he'd been getting were gone now, replaced with sympathy and grudging acceptance.

After dinner, Hermione dragged Harry off to the library so they could read up on exactly what powers the Minister for Magic had.

"This is so fascinating," Hermione said, gathering an armful of books. "Imagine all the good you could do."

"I'm focused on staying in the Wizarding World and fighting Voldemort right now," Harry reminded her. "I'm only Minister for thirty days."

"I know," Hermione said, biting her lip. "But, if you have time, maybe you can change a few laws. Did you know Half-bloods and Muggleborns pay almost twice as much in taxes as Purebloods? It gets worse with businesses. It's almost a third more in taxes to run a shop compared to Purebloods."

"I'll see what I can do," Harry nodded.

"I could do it," Hermione offered. "You'd still have to present it to the Wizengamot, but I could write it up for you."

“You know, I could get you a job in the Minister’s office for the Summer if you want,” Harry told her, smiling.

“Really?” Hermione asked excitedly.

“Sure,” Harry shrugged. “Daphne is working there for the Summer.”

“Daphne Greengrass works in your office?” she asked.

“Yeah, Penny hired her today,” Harry said.

“I get along with her pretty well in Arithmancy and Runes, and Penny was always nice to me,” Hermione said thoughtfully. “What would my job be?”

Harry shrugged, “You can be my research assistant.”

“So, just like at school,” Hermione teased.

They both chuckled before Harry straightened up and smoothed out his clothes.

“So, will you take the job, Ms. Granger?” Harry asked.

Smiling brightly, Hermione threw herself forward and hugged him tightly.

~

The next day, Harry and Hermione Flooed directly from the Leaky Cauldron to the Minister's office. Stepping into the outer office, Penny and a couple of other secretaries had arrived early. Already, there was a three foot tall pile of mail sitting on one of the desks.

"Morning, Penny," Harry said.

"Morning," Penny smiled. "Hi, Hermione. I'm guessing you're here to help?"

"If that's alright," Hermione said, looking around nervously.

"Of course," Penny said. "Right now, we can use all the help we can get."

She pointed to the pile of mail with a grimace as two more letters flew in and landed on top.

"What is that?" Hermione asked.

"Mail for Harry," Penny sighed. "I hoped there would be less after that article came out."

Someone scoffed behind them.

"Not likely," Daphne said. "Morning, Potter, Granger."

"Morning, Daphne," Hermione said.

"What job did Potter give you?" Daphne asked.

"I'm his research assistant," Hermione said. "How did you know I was working here?"

“You two have been attached at the hip since he saved you from that Troll back in first year. I would’ve been more surprised if you weren’t here,” Daphne said, then turned to Penny. “Why aren’t you in your office?”

“Have you seen it?” Penny asked, to which Daphne shook her head. “Umbridge painted the walls bright pink, and there are kittens on plates all over the walls. It gave me nightmares last night. I’d rather work on the floor than sit in there all day.”

Daphne snorted while Harry shook his head.

“I’ll call Magical Maintenance and have them redecorate it,” Harry said.

“You can ask them in person,” Penny told him. “Madam Bones sent a message just before you got here. You have a meeting with the department Heads in an hour.”

“Alright,” Harry sighed.

“I spoke with my mother last night,” Daphne added. “We think it might be a good idea for you to send her a kind of daily progress report so she can write a running article about what you’re doing at the Ministry. This way, people know that you’re not sitting in your office having parties or something.”

“Fine,” Harry nodded. “Anything else?”

“Oh! How could I forget!” Hermione exclaimed.

“What?” Harry asked.

“House Elves!” Hermione said. “Harry, I could free the House Elves!”

“Hermione...,” Harry said softly, only to trail off when she glared at him.

“Free the House Elves?” Daphne asked. “Granger, what do you actually know about House Elves?”

“I know they shouldn’t be slaves!” Hermione huffed indignantly.

“If you go in front of the Wizengamot with that sort of willful ignorance, they will tear you apart,” Daphne said, rolling her eyes. “If you want to get anything done in this government, you need to understand our world before you try and change it. Anything else, and people will vote against you on principle. Would you want some Magical showing up in your government and telling you how to run things when they don’t even know what a car is?”

Hermione blushed, her mouth opening and closing several times soundlessly before she looked down, chagrined.

“But slavery isn’t right,” she muttered.

“And what happens to those House Elves when they’re suddenly thrown out on the streets after centuries of living as slaves?” Daphne asked. “Merlin, Granger, you’re supposed to be smart. You go in front of the Wizengamot like this, and anyone opposing you will make you look so bad it’ll be years before anyone takes you seriously.”

“I agree with you, Hermione, but Daphne’s right,” Penny told her gently. “There’s a lot of issues you need to think about before trying to free House Elves. You also have to consider that most of the Wizengamot own House Elves and they’re not going to want to get rid of them.”

“Alright,” Hermione said, holding her hands up in surrender. “What do I need to do?”

“Right now, the biggest thing is keeping the government running,” Daphne said. “If you want to work on freeing House Elves, you’re going to have to do it on your own time. Potter’s going to need all the help he can get if he wants to actually make some serious changes around here.”

“I suppose you’re right,” Hermione said contritely, then looked up at Harry. “Sorry.”

“It’s alright,” Harry said.

“Can we get to work now?” Daphne asked. “We’ve got a small mountain of letters to get through, not to mention whatever Potter has for us after his meeting.”

“Speaking of which, I should go get ready for that,” Harry said.

Harry was only in his office for a couple of minutes when there was a knock at the door.

“Come in,” Harry called.

“Minister,” Tonks smirked as she poked her head in the door.

“You’re enjoying this far too much,” Harry smiled, shaking his head.

“Hey, this is the most exciting thing to happen since I started working here,” Tonks said as she walked into the office. “Madam Bones wants to know if you’re free to meet with her before the meeting.”

“Do you know what she wants to talk about?” Harry asked.

“I think it’s about the evidence we got yesterday, but I’m not sure,” Tonks replied.

Harry sighed and stood from his chair, "Alright."

Harry and Tonks walked back into the outer office just as one of the envelopes from the pile leapt up. Folding itself into a mouth with pointed teeth, it growled and chomped at the air as it chased after one of the secretaries Amelia had sent over. As the witch shrieked and ran, Tonks whipped out her wand and cast a spell that caused it to burst into a shower of confetti.

"This is ridiculous!" Daphne huffed. "That's the third one."

"Leave them for now," Tonks said. "I'll let Bones know and see if she can spare a couple of Curse Breakers to go over them."

"Thank you," Penny said, sighing in relief.

Giving her a smile, Tonks grabbed an empty envelope from a nearby desk and used her wand to send the scraps of parchment into it.

"You might want to put a shield over that pile in case something in there is set to explode," Tonks said.

Penny's eyes widened, and she quickly threw a shield over the pile as Harry and Tonks made their way to the elevator.

"Do you know where Bones' office is?" Tonks asked.

"No," Harry said.

"Alright, I need to drop this off first, and I'll show you," Tonks said, holding up the envelope.

“What are you going to do with it?” Harry asked.

“Give it to one of our investigators,” Tonks said as the doors opened. “Hopefully, we can find out who sent it.”

Following Tonks through the maze of cubicles, they made their way to one of the smaller office in the back.

“Hey, Sara?” Tonks called.

“Yeah?” a tall, broad shouldered witch with a shapely figure asked.

“I’ve got another one for you,” Tonks said.

“You’re kidding,” Sara sighed. “Just put it in the box.”

Sara pointed to a box in the corner of her office that was over flowing with letters.

“Are all of those from my office?” Harry asked.

Sara looked up from her desk, her eyes widening before she jumped to her feet.

“Er, yes, Minister,” Sara stammered. “I’m getting through them as fast as I can, but it’s a slow process.”

“That’s alright,” Harry said, a little overwhelmed by her reaction. “And it’s just Harry.”

“Yes, sir,” Sara said.

Snickering, Tonks dropped the envelope onto the pile.

“Well, I better get wonder boy here over to see Bones,” Tonks said. “Thanks, Sara.”

Harry gave the witch a smile and waved as he followed Tonks further into the Auror office.

“Is she always like that?” Harry asked.

“Nope,” Tonks said, a smirk growing on her face. “Maybe she fancies you?”

Harry rolled his eyes as she laughed. A moment later, she knocked on the door to another office.

“Enter!” Amelia yelled.

“The Minister’s here to see you, ma’am,” Tonks said, poking her head through the door.

“Oh, good. Send him in,” Amelia said.

As Tonks held the door open, she winked at Harry as he passed and then closed the door behind him.

“Have a seat,” Amelia said.

Harry sat across from her, noticing that her office was much smaller and far more utilitarian than his.

"I heard you've had some trouble with your mail?" she asked.

"Yeah," Harry sighed. "We're getting quite a few cursed items in. Tonks mentioned you might be able to send over a couple of Curse Breakers?"

"I'll send all four over," Amelia said. "I don't have much use for them at the moment."

"Thanks," Harry said.

Nodding, Amelia made a quick note and then tapped it with her wand to turn it into a paper airplane. It took off from the desk and zipped out through the mail slot in the middle of the door.

"We've been going through the evidence we found in Fudge and Umbridge's office and found some very interesting things," Amelia said. "Umbridge had a list of names and information she used to blackmail people in the Ministry. One of them happens to be John McClintock, the current Warden of Azkaban."

Harry sat forward and rested his elbows on his knees.

"Do you think he was the one that sent me that order?" Harry asked.

"I suspect he did," Amelia nodded. "He's one of the few people that would've had access to it."

"Have you talked to him?" Harry asked.

"Not yet," Amelia said slowly. "If I were to investigate, it would have to be official. Despite his intentions - if he was behind it - he still broke the law. John's a good Auror and a good man. I always wondered why he volunteered for the job as Warden. Usually, that job is given out as a sort of punishment."

“What did Umbridge have on him?” Harry asked.

Amelia paused for a moment before she sighed.

“Five years ago, his youngest son was bitten by a Werewolf that he’d arrested previously,” she explained. “He paid off the Healers that treated him to keep it secret, but Umbridge knows someone in records that was sending her information. Something else I need to take care of. Without a court order, no one should send patient information to anyone outside of immediate family.”

“Bloody hell,” Harry said, rubbing his face. “How did she get so many connections?”

“Blackmail and bribes, mostly,” Amelia said. “I need to know how you want to handle this.”

Harry sat back in his chair and crossed his arms, wishing for the umpteenth time he hadn’t taken the job.

“Is there any solid evidence he was involved in sending that order to me?” Harry asked.

“No,” Amelia said.

“Then I think we have bigger issues to focus on at the moment,” Harry said.

Amelia’s face remained passive, but her shoulder sagged visibly.

“Very well,” she said, making a note.

“Just as a precaution, we should probably have him reassigned,” Harry smiled.

"I'll see to it," Amelia said, her lips twitching. "Moving on, the evidence against Fudge is less clear. We know from his bank records he's making a lot more than he should, but we can't prove where the money came from."

Harry sighed and nodded, "Have you found anything more about the Dementor attack?"

"We know he signed the order, but we don't have evidence that he knew you were living at the address listed," Amelia said. "Of course, we still have a lot of evidence to go through. I just wanted to give you an update before the department Head meeting."

"Thanks," Harry nodded. "Where are Fudge and Umbridge now?"

"Umbridge is still in a holding cell and will remain there until all of the evidence is collected, and she can be tried. Fudge, we didn't have enough to hold for the moment, but he's on a court order not to leave the country. We still have enough to try him for gross negligence, but I can't hold him unless we can prove it was intentional."

Harry nodded. He was fairly certain Fudge signing the order alone was enough to satisfy the magic of the law he invoked, but it would be nice to have more on him. It would certainly make him feel safer from being kicked out of Magical Britain.

There was still time, though. It wasn't time to panic - yet, he thought.

"Is there anything--"

Harry broke off when the door to the office was flung open, and an Auror rushed inside.

"Ma'am, one of our patrols was attacked in Knockturn Alley," he panted. "Gorga is on his way to St. Mungo's."

“Send in all but one of the on-call teams,” Amelia said briskly. “I want that alley shut down until we have control of it.”

“Yes, ma’am,” the wizard nodded.

“I’m sorry, I have to go,” Amelia said.

“It’s fine,” Harry said.

Amelia nodded, “I’ll see you at the meeting.”

Sighing as she left, Harry left the office and made his way back to the elevator, dodging Aurors as they rushed about the room. Just as the elevator doors closed, he saw Tonks and Hestia with a Portkey.

Back on his floor, Harry exited the elevator thoughtfully.

“Hey, Penny?”

“Yes?” she asked, looking away from the Curse Breakers going over the mail.

“What does it take to get a license to make Portkeys?” Harry asked.

“It’s just a few forms to fill out, but they have to be approved,” she replied.

“Can I approve them if I’m applying?” Harry asked.

"I think so," Penny said, furrowing her brow. "Why?"

"I just want to get as much out of this as I can," Harry said. "I should get my Apparition license too, now that I think about it."

"I'll check with legal and let you know," Penny told him.

"Thanks," Harry said. "How's the mail coming?"

Penny sighed, "They've found over a dozen so far. Two of them were really nasty."

"You should schedule the wards to be checked, Minister," a blonde wizard with a prominent scar along his cheek said. "These really shouldn't have made it into the office."

"How much you wanna bet Fudge lowered the wards before he left?" Daphne asked.

Closing his eyes, Harry reached out to the wards with his magic. What he found was disturbing. They felt old and weak. Like they'd been left to rot for decades.

"I don't think so," Harry said, rubbing his forehead. "I don't think Fudge ever had the wards checked."

"They're supposed to be checked once a year," the Curse Breaker said with a frown.

"Brenda," Harry said, turning to one of the older secretaries. "Can you schedule a time for someone to come in and check the wards?"

"Yes, sir," Brenda, a kindly, middle aged witch, smiled. "Is there a specific time you'd like them to come?"

“As soon as possible,” Harry said.

Nodding, Brenda made a note in her planner.

“Where’s Hermione?” he asked, turning back to Penny.

“I sent her down to records for some documents,” Penny said.

Harry nodded, “Alright, I’m going to my office for a bit.”

“Don’t forget your meeting,” Penny said.

“I won’t,” Harry said.

After relaxing in his office for a little while, Harry got back up and headed to the third floor with Penny. She would be taking notes for him while he dealt with the meeting. Finding the conference room, they were greeted by a smiling Mr. Weasley.

“Good morning,” he said brightly.

“Morning,” Harry said.

“I thought I’d get here early and introduce you to a few people,” Mr. Weasley smiled. “You know Amos and Amelia already. Amos took over for Ludo a few months ago. The older witch is Mofilda Hopkirk, Head of the Department of Magical Education. The man with the brown hair is Gethsemane Prickle, the new Head of the Department for the Control and Regulation of Magical Creatures. The blonde wizard is Greg Goreman, Head of International Magical Cooperation. The balding wizard is Dirk Cresswell, Head of the Liaison for Goblin Relations. And

finally, the red haired witch is Julia Edgecomb, Head of the Department of Magical Transportation.”

Mr. Weasley paused and looked around for a moment.

“It looks like Amelia is running a bit late, and we’re still missing one more,” he said.

“Sorry we’re late,” Amelia said, striding into the room just as Harry opened his mouth to explain why she was late.

Behind her was a slim, elderly wizard in a plain black robe. His eyes were light blue and sharp as he looked around the room, his gaze landing on Harry for a long moment.

“Minister, this is Saul Croaker, Head of the Department of Mysteries,” Amelia said.

“Croaker?” Harry asked, shaking the man’s hand. “Are you the one that threw Neville out of a window to see if he had magic?”

Amelia startled and looked at Saul accusingly while the man himself smiled.

“That was my brother, Algeron,” Saul said. “I assure you, my sister, Augusta, made her displeasure over that quite clear. Poor Algie spent three nights in St. Mungo’s and couldn’t sit for a week.”

“Oh, sorry,” Harry said.

“Quite alright,” Saul told him.

“So, what does the Department of Mysteries actually do?” Harry asked.

“That’s the question, isn’t it?” Saul asked, smiling. “Perhaps we can discuss it later this week, over lunch?”

“Sure,” Harry said.

“Minister, perhaps we should get started?” Amelia suggested.

“Right,” Harry nodded. “Are your Aurors alright?”

“Two injured, but nothing serious,” Amelia said as they took their seats. “Both of them will be back to work tomorrow.”

“Did something happen?” Mr. Weasley asked.

“Just a bit of trouble in Knockturn Alley,” Amelia said.

“I’ve said for years that place needs to be cleaned up,” Amos said. “It’s about time our Aurors were allowed to do their job.”

There was a rumble of agreement among the others, except for Julia, who huffed and folded her arms over her chest.

“Let’s get started, shall we?” Amelia asked.

The first hour of the meeting was fairly boring, with each Head talking about the problems they had in their department. Harry made a few notes on what he thought he could improve easily, but there wasn’t a lot that really concerned him. Most of what they needed was more funding, which had to come from the Wizengamot.

Amelia talked a bit about what she was working on but didn't go much into the details. There was predictable outrage when she mentioned the charges against Umbridge from all but one. Again, Julia huffed, though she kept her quiet. Frowning, Harry decided to push her buttons a bit to see how she reacted.

"Amelia," Harry said. "I was doing some research into the last war with Voldemort--"

Harry rolled his eyes when Dirk nearly fell out of his chair and Julia gasped dramatically.

"Voldemort," he repeated, "was able to shut down the Floo to the homes he was attacking so they couldn't escape. Do we know how he did that?"

"No," Amelia frowned. "It was suspected that he had someone on the inside, possibly under the Imperious, but we never found out who."

"Can we come up with a way to make sure that doesn't happen again?" Harry asked. "Increase the guards in that department? Put policies in place so no one works alone? Maybe put up wards that can detect someone under the Imperious."

Predictably, Julia narrowed his eyes and sat up straighter.

"Unfortunately, no such ward exists," Saul said.

"Putting new policies in place would certainly help," Amelia added. "We don't currently have a guard outside the ones in the Atrium, but I'd be happy to assign one once I have the budget."

"I'll work on getting that as soon as possible," Harry told her.

"You can't be taking this seriously!" Julia burst out. "Are you really going to listen to this *boy*?"

Harry bristled at the word his uncle used throughout his childhood.

“Excuse me?” Harry asked, narrowing his eyes.

“Madam Edgecombe, whether you like it or not, Mr. Potter is the Minister,” Amelia said firmly. “If it bothers you that much, I’m sure we can find a replacement for you.”

Huffing, Julia looked around for support but found none. Folding her arms, she sulked back into her seat with a baleful glare.

It’s going to be a long month, Harry thought.

Chapter 4

Harry had just sat down at his desk groggily, a cup of coffee in his hand, when the door opened.

“Harry,” Penny said. “Madam Bones is here to see you.”

“Send her in,” Harry sighed.

Penny moved out of the way and Amelia walked in.

“Good morning, Minister,” she said.

“Morning,” Harry murmured, raising his cup to his lip.

Sitting down in the chair across from him, Amelia pulled a thin folder out of the pocket of her robes and set it on the desk.

“I looked into the Black case like you asked,” she said, pursing her lips. “What I found is - troubling – to say the least.”

Harry sighed and rubbed his temple.

“What happened?” he asked tiredly.

“There was practically no investigation. This is the entire file of the incident,” Amelia said, nodding to the folder.

Harry looked at it closer and was dismayed by just how thin it was. It couldn't have held more than a few pieces of parchment.

“All it contains is the report of what happened at Godric's Hollow, the incident report for the confrontation between Black and Pettigrew, and the arrest record for Black,” Amelia explained. “There was no further investigation than talking to a few witnesses, and even more concerning, no charges filed against Black, no trial, not even a transfer order to take him to Azkaban.”

“That's good, though, isn't it?” Harry asked, flipping through the file. “For Sirius, I mean.”

“In a way,” Amelia nodded. “However, it also complicates matters. This will also affect the Ministry negatively when it gets out to the public.”

Harry snorted. Minister or not, he really didn't care how the Ministry looked.

“So, if Sirius wasn't charged, does that mean he's free?” he asked hopefully.

Amelia pursed her lips thoughtfully and adjusted her monocle.

“Technically, yes,” she said. “However, I would recommend still putting him on trial.”

“What!? Why?” Harry asked incredulously.

“If you simply release him, people will still be suspicious,” Amelia told him. “Some may even believe he’s controlling you and try to attack him. A trial bringing the truth to light will quell most people’s worries. I would much rather put Pettigrew on trial, but until he’s been captured, Black is our only option.”

Harry groaned quietly and rubbed the bridge of his nose.

“Alright,” he sighed.

“I’ll schedule a trial before the full Wizengamot for Monday,” Amelia said. “I trust you can get a message to Black?”

“Yeah,” Harry nodded. “What about the Kiss on sight order?”

“It’s already been rescinded,” Amelia told him. “My Aurors are under strict instructions to bring him in unharmed unless attacked.”

“Good,” Harry nodded. “Was there anything else?”

“Just a word of advice, if I may?” she asked.

“Of course,” Harry said.

“You should try to make some public appearances,” Amelia said.

Harry grimaced at the thought, and she gave him a small smile.

“I’ve never seen a Minister so adverse to publicity,” she said. “You couldn’t make Fudge stop strutting around, even if it was just to Diagon Alley. Oh, that reminds me. I need to assign your security detail.”

“Do you have to?” Harry whined.

“Yes,” Amelia said, her lips twitching in a smirk. “Just a couple of Aurors to look out for you. You’ll hardly notice them.”

“They’re not going to follow me everywhere, are they?” Harry asked warily.

“No,” Amelia replied. “Only your office and in public.”

“Alright,” Harry sighed.

Nodding, Amelia stood and collected the file from the desk.

“Good day, Minister,” she said as she left.

“It’s Harry!” he yelled after her.

When the door clicked shut, Harry sighed and turned back to his paperwork.

~

An hour later, Harry was interrupted again when the Warders showed up. To say the Wards were in bad shape was a severe understatement. Fudge had neglected them for nearly a decade, leaving the delicate layers riddled with holes and on the verge of total collapse.

The Warders told Harry they would need to repair most and completely re-cast others. It was an expensive process that would take at least a week to complete.

As the Warders left to get to work, Harry had a suspicion he wanted to check out.

“Hey, Penny,” he called.

“Yes?” Penny asked.

“Can you check the records and see when they last checked the wards?” Harry asked.

“Okay,” Penny said. “It might take me a little while to find them.”

“That’s fine,” Harry said. “Just let me know what you find.”

Before he could retreat back to his office, the doors to the elevator opened, and two Aurors stepped out. One was an older wizard with salt and pepper hair, a crooked nose, and a goatee. Following him was a witch around Penny’s age. She was small and thin, with a sharp nose, bright blue eyes, and dark hair tied back in a ponytail.

“Minister,” the wizard greeted him respectfully with a thick Scottish accent. “I’m Marcus Dresden, and this is Kimberly Hargrave. We’re your new guards.”

“Nice to meet you,” Harry said, shaking their hands.

“Guards?” Hermione asked.

“Amelia recommended it,” Harry said. “In fact, she thinks I should make some public appearances.”

“That’s not a bad idea,” Daphne said. “It would make you feel more like a person and less like a character from a story.”

Harry sighed but recognized she had a point.

“Well, do you girls feel like going to Hogsmeade for lunch?”

~

Twenty minutes later, Harry followed his guards through the Floo to the Three Broomsticks. The stares and whispering started instantly.

“Well, I certainly didn’t expect to see you this time of year,” Rosmerta smiled. “Would you like a private room?”

“Out here is fine,” Harry said, smiling back.

“Of course, have a seat, and I’ll be with you in a moment,” she said.

“Thanks, Rosmerta,” Harry said.

Turning, he started to make his way to the back of the pub, where the larger booth seats were.

“Thank you so much, Mr. Potter,” a witch called out suddenly.

“It’s about time someone dealt with the corruption at the Ministry,” a wizard added.

Harry blinked in surprise when everyone in the pub stood up and began clapping. Feeling his cheeks heating up, he smiled and waved while making his way to his seat.

“Wow, Potter. You’re famous,” Daphne smirked.

“Really? I hadn’t noticed,” Harry snarked, rolling his eyes.

“Oh, it’s not that bad,” Hermione said, slapping his arm lightly.

“Easy for you to say,” Harry scoffed.

Harry’s guards took a seat at a table nearby, but far enough away that he didn’t feel like they were intruding.

“Hello, dears. What can I get for you?” Rosmerta asked.

“I’ll have the fish and chips and a Butterbeer, and their bill is on me,” Harry said, nodding towards the Aurors.

Rosmerta smiled and took the girls’ orders. While they were eating, a woman came in with a young girl. When the girl spotted Harry, her eyes went wide, and her jaw dropped open. Smiling, he gave her a small wave before turning back to his conversation with Penny.

“Are you still coming over this weekend?” she asked.

“Yeah,” Harry said. “I’ll need your address, though.”

“I’ll give it to you when we get back to the office,” Penny smiled, then looked over at Hermione. “You can come, too, if you’d like.”

“Sure,” Hermione smiled. “It’ll be nice to spend time with other girls for a change.”

“Hey,” Harry said indignantly.

“Think you can survive that much estrogen, Potter?” Daphne smirked.

“Spending the day with three pretty girls? I’m sure I’ll make it,” Harry grinned.

As the girls laughed, he spotted the woman and little girl from earlier approaching him.

“Hi. I’m sorry to bother you, but my daughter is a big fan of yours,” the woman said. “Could she get your autograph?”

Harry blushed and looked at the girls for help. Seeing the smirks on their faces and the barely concealed giggles, he knew he would get any. Looking back at the little girl, she held up a piece of parchment, gazing at him hopefully.

“Sure,” Harry smiled, taking the parchment. “What’s your name?”

“Melissa,” the girl replied softly.

Writing a small note, he signed under it and handed it back to the girl with a smile.

“That’s my first autograph, you know,” Harry said.

“Really?” Melissa asked, her eyes going wide.

“Thank you so much,” the woman said. “Sorry for interrupting.”

“It’s fine,” Harry smiled.

“Aw, that was so cute,” Penny said.

“Just promise to hex me if I ever start turning into Lockhart,” Harry said.

“Whatever happened to him, anyway?” Daphne asked, looking between him and Hermione.

“There’s a lot of rumors going around about your little adventures, but no one seems to know anything for sure.”

Harry shared a glance with Hermione, who shrugged at his questioning look.

“Well, it’s a bit of a long story...”

~

As Harry got ready to go over to Penny’s flat, he was glad to finally have a day away from the chaos of the Ministry. Of course, being Minister, he didn’t truly have the day off. If something came up, he could be called at any time, but at least he wasn’t expected to be in the office until Monday.

Checking his hair in the mirror, he tried to get it to sit the way he wanted but gave up after a couple of minutes. Leaving his room, he ran into Hermione just as he passed the room she shared with Ginny.

“Ready to go?” Hermione asked, standing on her toes and fiddling with his hair.

“Don’t bother. It never does what I want,” he told her.

“You should try Sleekeazy’s,” Hermione suggested.

“I’m not that bothered by it,” Harry said as they descended the stairs.

Entering the sitting room, he spotted Sirius on the couch and smiled.

“Hey, Sirius,” he said.

“Hey, kid,” Sirius smirked. “You and Hermione off on your date?”

“It’s not a date,” Hermione huffed, rolling her eyes.

Harry smiled, knowing his Godfather was just trying to rile her up.

“Sure,” Sirius said, drawing out the word. “Better get going before Molly sees you and starts to fuss.”

Glancing at the fireplace, he gave it a wistful look.

“Don’t worry, Sirius. You’ll be free to go anywhere you want after your trial Monday,” Harry said.

Looking over, Sirius smiled, his grey eyes looking more full of life than Harry had seen in weeks.

“It’ll be good to finally get outside and feel the sun again,” Sirius said softly.

Harry smiled and grabbed a handful of Floo powder.

“Just try to stay out of trouble until then,” he said.

“I make no promises,” Sirius smirked.

Snorting, Harry threw the powder into the flames.

“Clearwater Gardens!” he yelled as he stepped into the flickering emerald flames.

Spinning past the grates, Harry took the advice Mr. Weasley had given him and stepped forward just as he started to slow down. He still stumbled a bit as he landed, but he didn’t fall flat on his face like he usually did.

“Hey, Harry,” Penny greeted him warmly.

Wearing a tight, white t-shirt over her large bust and a pair of hip-hugging jeans, she walked over to him with a wide smile. Harry’s eyes were unconsciously drawn to her breasts as they bounced under her shirt, even with her visibly wearing a bra. As Penny gave him a quick hug, her breasts mashed against his chest, Daphne smirked at him knowingly.

Daphne wore a black Muggle t-shirt and a loose pair of jeans. It was the first time Harry had ever seen her in something other than robes, and he had to admit she had quite the figure. Looking away before he got caught staring, he pulled away from Penny and stepped out of the way just as Hermione came through the Floo.

While the girls greeted each other, Harry looked around the flat. It was small, with just a single bedroom, bathroom, a small kitchen, and a living room with a couch and a chair. A big blue bowl full of popcorn sat on a low coffee table in front of a large, flat telly.

“Make yourselves at home,” Penny smiled. “There’s drinks and food in the fridge if you need anything.”

“Ooh, you have coke,” Hermione said excitedly. “I haven’t had that in years. My parents don’t keep soda in the house.”

“What that?” Daphne asked curiously as Hermione picked up the red and white can.

“It’s a Muggle fizzy drink,” Hermione said. “There’s a lot of sugar in it, but it tastes really good. Do you want to try one?”

“Sure,” Daphne said.

Hermione handed her a can and then showed her how to open the tab.

“That’s an odd way to open a drink,” Daphne said, raising it to her lips. “Oh!”

Her eyes went wide, and she pulled the can away quickly, licking her lips.

“That is fizzy,” Daphne said.

Harry smiled while Hermione and Penny giggled. Bringing the can back to her lips, Daphne took a bigger sip.

"You're right. This is good," Daphne said. "I wish we could get this at Hogwarts."

"Me too," Hermione agreed. "Pumpkin Juice is good, but I get tired of it after a while."

"It definitely tastes better than it sounds," Harry said. "I thought it would be gross."

"I thought the same thing," Penny giggled.

"Do Muggles not have Pumpkin Juice?" Daphne asked.

"No," Hermione said, shaking her head. "We have a lot of other drinks, though."

"More like this?" Daphne asked, holding up her can.

"The store I went to this morning probably had forty or fifty different kinds of soda," Penny said. "Next time you come over, I'll get a whole bunch for you to try."

"You don't have to," Daphne protested.

"Don't worry about it," Penny smiled. "It's fun seeing you try new things for the first time."

"So, what are we watching?" Hermione asked as they all moved into the living room.

"Star Wars," Penny grinned.

As Harry sat down in the middle of the couch, with Hermione on his left and Daphne taking the chair, Penny bent over at the waist to put a disc into the player. Glancing at her round bum filling out her tight jeans quite nicely, he looked away quickly. Catching Daphne's eye, she smirked at him again, causing him to flush.

Straightening up, Penny turned down the lights and then sat down on Harry's left. Picking up the remote, she hit play.

"It's really impressive that Muggles can do all this without magic," Daphne said as the yellow text crawled up the screen.

"Muggles are more advanced than Magicals in a lot of ways," Hermione said. "It's a pity so many witches and wizards look down on them. Imagine how much more we could do if we had Muggle technology and magic."

"I thought electrics didn't work around magic," Daphne said, her eyes glued to the screen.

"They go haywire when there's a lot of magic, but I bet we could find a way to shield them," Hermione said, turning thoughtful. "I wonder if there's a material that can block magic."

As she fell quiet, two ships moved across the screen over a planet, green blaster bolts shooting from the big one to the smaller one.

"Are those killing curses?" Daphne asked.

"They're called blasters," Penny said. "They work kind of like a Confringo but more powerful."

"Do Muggles really have those?" Daphne asked curiously.

"No, those are fiction," Hermione said. "Most of the stuff in this movie is."

“Next time, I’ll show you a movie that shows you what Muggles can really do,” Penny said.
“Maybe Apollo 13?”

“Are those metal people alive?” Daphne asked, her brow furrowed and head tilted cutely.

“They’re robots,” Hermione explained. “They’re not alive. They’re mechanical.”

The talking died down as they all settled in to watch the movie. Penny still asked questions once in a while, but they became much more infrequent as she was drawn into the story. When they got to the scene in the cantina, Penny shifted and leaned against Harry, her head resting on his shoulder.

Glancing down at her, he swallowed thickly and tried not to move. The position was awkward, though, and his arm started to go numb over the next few minutes. Harry tried to ignore it, but eventually, he had to do something.

Nervously, he shrugged his shoulder, lifted his arm, and placed it around Penny’s shoulders. He didn’t dare look away from the screen, even as he noticed her looking up at him from the corner of his eye. A moment later, Penny tucked her legs under herself and leaned back against him.

As she got comfortable, Harry stayed unnaturally still, not sure what to do with his hand. At first, he hung it over her shoulder, but realizing that put it dangerously close to her chest, he moved it to her upper arm. When he did, Penny snuggled into him, her hand coming up to rest on his chest. The smell of her shampoo filled every breath he took as her head rested near his chin.

Harry had trouble paying attention to the movie as she started rubbing her thumb back and forth gently. Over the next couple of minutes, he relaxed and rubbed his thumb along the bare

skin of her arm. When she didn't react, he settled in to enjoy the rest of the movie and the company of the pretty blonde leaning into him.

Over an hour later, the film came to an end, and Penny, regrettably, moved.

"What did you think?" she asked Daphne with a smile.

"That was really good," Daphne replied. "I like how there was a bit of magic in there, even though they called it the Force."

"It is kind of like magic," Hermione admitted.

"Honestly, I kind of want to learn how to move things around wandlessly now," Harry grinned.

Holding out his hand to mock using the Force, everyone gasped when several pieces of popcorn leapt from the bowl towards his hand.

"Sorry," Harry said sheepishly, picking up his mess.

"Harry, that was brilliant!" Penny exclaimed. "I didn't know you could do that."

"Neither did I," he admitted.

Grinning, Penny picked up a cushion from the couch.

"Try it again," she said excitedly.

Focusing, Harry held out his hand and thought Accio. The cushion trembled slightly in her hand. Again, he screamed the incantation in his mind and felt a slight tug on his palm. The cushion jumped from and flew towards Harry, where he caught it with a grin.

“Harry, that’s incredible,” Hermione gushed. “It’s supposed to be really hard to learn wandless magic.”

“It’s not as hard as some books make it sound,” Daphne said. “Anyone can learn it. I’ll admit, though, it’s rare for someone to pick it up like that without practice.”

“I probably just got lucky,” Harry shrugged.

“At the risk of giving you an ego, I doubt it,” Daphne said.

Pursing her lips, Daphne held out her hand towards the cushion. It wiggled a little, and she furrowed her brow. Slowly, her face turned red from effort until the pillow flopped onto the floor. Blowing out a breath, she looked up at Harry and glared.

“That’s annoying,” she said flatly.

Penny giggled and patted Daphne consolingly on the shoulder.

~

“I think Penny fancies you,” Hermione said as she and Harry climbed the stairs of Grimmauld Place.

“Really?” Harry asked.

Hermione rolled her eyes at him.

“Harry, you don’t just lean against a guy like for two hours if you don’t like him,” she said.

“Oh,” Harry said. “So, what should I do?”

“How should I know?” Hermione shrugged. “It’s not like I have any more dating experience than you. Do you like her?”

“Well, yeah,” Harry admitted. “But what happens when I go back to Hogwarts?”

“Just focus on this Summer and worry about that later,” Hermione said.

“Do you think I should ask her out on a date?” Harry asked thoughtfully.

“If you want to,” Hermione said. “You deserve a little fun with all the stress you’re under.”

Smiling, Harry slung his arm over her shoulder and gave her a sideways hug.

“Thanks, Hermione,” he said.

~

After a slow, lazy weekend, Harry arrived at the Ministry bright and early Monday morning for Sirius’ trial. As planned, they Floo directly to the Atrium, where they met Amelia and four of her Aurors.

"Amy!" Sirius greeted her loudly, heedless of the attention he was receiving. "Long time no see."

"Mr. Black," Amelia nodded. "You're not under arrest. However, for your protection, we'll be escorting you to the courtroom."

"If you insist," Sirius smiled.

"I'll see you in the courtroom," Harry said, then turned to Amelia. "Please make sure he makes it there safe."

"We will," Amelia nodded.

As the Aurors surrounded Sirius, she turned and marched towards the elevator. The crowd in the Atrium hastily parted as the Aurors marched forward. One distracted witch looked up and screamed in fright when she spotted Sirius. Grinning, he gave her a crooked grin and a cheery wave.

"Morning!"

Shaking his head, Harry made his way to another elevator. It was only when his guards stepped inside that he realized they were there.

"I have to admit, I didn't expect to see Black just waltz in here and surrender," Marcus said.

"It's a long story," Harry sighed. "You'll get to hear it at the trial."

"Suppose I'll just have to wait, then," Marcus said.

A few moments later, the elevator opened, and Harry blinked at the crowd of people trying to get into the courtroom.

“I guess word got out,” Kim sighed. “Out of the way! Coming through!”

For such a short, thin woman, she sure has a set of lungs, Harry thought.

Unfortunately, Kim’s shouting also drew the attention of the press. A rapid series of flashbulbs went off, nearly blinding him and leaving spots in his vision, all while they hurled questions at him.

“Minister! Is it true you’ve been living with Sirius Black?”

“Mr. Potter! Are you under the Imperius Curse?”

“Seriously?” Harry asked incredulously. “What kind of question is that?”

Ignoring the rest of the questions being shouted at him, Harry followed Kim into the packed courtroom. The visitor stands were packed to capacity. The front row was taken up almost completely by the press, who were snapping pictures as fast as they could.

Harry turned back once he was inside to see two Aurors struggling to hold back the crowd as they tried to push their way in.

“I’ll be safe in here. Why don’t you go help them,” Harry told Marcus.

Nodding, Marcus and Kim help to push back the crowd, much to the relief of the other two Aurors.

“Excuse me, I need to get through!” Harry heard from a familiar voice.

“I can’t let you through,” one of the Aurors said.

Standing on his toes, Harry spotted a head of blond hair bobbing up and down as Penny tried to force her way through.

“It’s okay. Let her in. She’s with me,” Harry said.

Sighing, the Auror reached through the crowd, grabbed Penny’s arm, and pulled her through.

“Out of the way, you lot, or I’m going to start throwing hexes!” Kim yelled threateningly.

Penny squeezed through a gap and stumbled into the courtroom, looking harried.

“Merlin, this is crazy,” she said. “I thought I was going to get crushed.”

“You alright?” Harry asked.

“I’m fine,” Penny smiled. “Though my toes are going to be a bit sore.”

“Sorry,” Harry said. “I guess we should’ve come a bit earlier.”

“Nothing we can do about it now,” Penny shrugged. “Come on, let’s go take our seats.”

Walking up to the section reserved for the Minister, Harry waved at Dumbledore. The headmaster nodded, his eyes twinkling brightly.

"It seems you've caused quite the stir," he noted.

"You know how it goes, professor," Harry said. "These things just happen."

"Only for you, Harry," Penny teased.

"Ah, Ms. Clearwater," Dumbledore smiled. "Congratulations on your promotion. I believe you're not only the youngest Senior Undersecretary this Ministry has ever had but also the first Muggleborn. Quite an achievement, and one long overdue."

Harry smiled as Penny blushed.

"Thank you, sir," Penny said. "But it was Harry's doing. I don't really feel like I earned it."

"What one does with power matters far more than how they attained it," Dumbledore said before turning away.

As he banged his gavel, Penny smiled and perked up a bit at those words.

"Order! This is the criminal trial for Sirius Orion Black, seventeenth of July. The charges are as follows. That he did knowingly, deliberately, and of his own volition, aid and abet the dark wizard known as Lord Voldemort in the murder of James and Lily Potter, as well as the attempted murder of Harry Potter, and that he murdered twelve innocent Muggles along with the wizard Peter Pettigrew. As I understand it, the Ministry has chosen to drop the charge of escaping from Azkaban. Madam Bones, would you care to explain?" Dumbledore asked.

Amelia stood and smoothed out her robes.

“Thank you, Chief Warlock,” she said. “During our investigation, we discovered that Mr. Black had never been formally charged or convicted of a crime. Without a conviction, he cannot be charged with escape.”

There were loud gasps around the room, followed by several shouted questions, both from the Wizengamot and the press.

“Order!” Dumbledore barked, letting loose a cannon blast from his wand.

“Are you telling us that the head of an Ancient and Noble family was thrown into prison without a trial?” Amos asked incredulously.

Harry felt like there was more going on than he was aware of when Dumbledore and Amos shared a brief look.

“Indeed, that is the case,” Amelia admitted.

“This cannot be allowed to stand!” Amos yelled. “I expect a full investigation and charges filed against the persons responsible. If that could happen to Sirius Black, what’s to stop it from happening to any one of us?”

“We’re already aware of who was responsible,” Amelia replied. “Unfortunately, Bartimus Crouch has already passed. Our investigation is ongoing, and we will press charges against anyone else that was responsible or aware of this injustice.”

Gazing around the room, Harry could see that all but the darkest of families were nodding in agreement.

“Perhaps we can finish this discussion during tomorrow night’s session,” Dumbledore suggested. “For now, Aurors, please bring in the accused.”

A door off to the side opened, and the same four Aurors they met in the Atrium escorted Sirius into the courtroom. Whispers broke out as Sirius walked unrestrained to the stone chair in the middle of the room and sat with a cheeky smile on his face.

“Mr. Black, you are aware of the charges against you?” Dumbledore asked.

Sirius’s smile dropped, and he straightened in his chair.

“I am,” he said.

“And how do you plead?” Dumbledore asked.

“Not guilty,” Sirius replied firmly.

“Very well,” the headmaster nodded. “The Ministry may present its case.”

Amelia stood again and walked down to the floor.

“Sirius Black, do you agree to the use of Veritaserum?” she asked, her voice echoing around the silent room.

“I do,” Sirius nodded.

People started whispering again as an Auror brought forward a sealed vial. Uncorking it, Amelia placed three drops on Sirius’ tongue. His grey eyes lost their focus, turning glassy as his face went slack. Taking out her wand, Amelia waved it over him.

“The potion has taken effect,” she announced. “Mr. Black, what happened on the night of October thirty-first, nineteen eighty-one?”

Harry listened anxiously as Sirius described the night his parents died. Hearing about him showing up at Godric's hollow to find the house in near ruins, he blinked rapidly as his eyes burned.

Reaching out, Penny took his hand in hers. Harry gave her a grateful squeeze and continued holding her hand for the next half an hour as Sirius told his tale. By the time the questioning was done, and the antidote was given, the entire room sat in shocked silence for a long moment.

"Minister, Chief Warlock, given the total lack of evidence against the accused and the testimony given by both Mr. Potter and Mr. Black, I recommend all charges be dropped immediately," Amelia said.

"I concur," Dumbledore nodded.

"Yes," Harry said, his voice cracking before he cleared his throat. "I agree."

"Are there any here that are opposed?" Dumbledore asked loudly.

Harry looked around and was surprised when not a single wand was raised.

"Very well, then. Mr. Black, you're free to go with the sincere apologies of the Ministry," he continued.

"Yes!" Sirius cheered, jumping up from his chair.

Harry snorted and shook his head as his Godfather did a little jig to nervous laughter. Harry stayed behind as the room emptied. It wasn't until he went to stand that Penny finally let go of his hand. Glancing at her, he gave her a grateful smile, which she returned.

“We did it!” Sirius crowed, sweeping Harry up in a bear hug when he approached.

“Sirius!” Harry laughed.

“I’m going straight to the Three Broomsticks, getting a shot of Firewhiskey, and chatting up the first pretty witch I find,” Sirius grinned, rubbing his hands together.

“Don’t overdo it, Sirius,” Harry said. “I really don’t want to see you get caught by Death Eaters or something.”

“I’ll be fine, kiddo,” Sirius said.

“Look, I know you want to get out. I understand. But please let me send an Auror with you,” Harry begged.

“How am I supposed to have fun with one of those sticklers looking over my shoulder?” Sirius asked.

“Mr. Black, he has a point,” Amelia said. “You would make a great target for anyone looking to get at Harry.”

“I’ll keep an eye on him,”

Harry looked over and smiled as Hestia stepped forward.

“You’re going to babysit me, Hestia?” Sirius asked with a grin.

Harry snorted. Give him a witch with a pretty face, and his entire attitude changes.

“Someone has to,” Hestia smirked. “Knowing your reputation, you’d end up back in a cell in less than a day.”

“Thanks, Hestia,” Harry smiled.

“Don’t mention it,” she told him.

Just then, the door to the courtroom opened. Daphne and Hermione walked in and headed for Harry. Seeing Sirius, Hermione smiled and waved.

“I take it everything went well?” she asked.

“It went brilliantly!” Sirius said. “You’re looking at a free man.”

“Oh, I’m so happy for you,” Hermione said, hugging him tightly.

“Careful, your boyfriend might get jealous,” Sirius smirked.

Pulling back, Hermione swatted his arm.

“He’s not my boyfriend,” she said.

“He just says that to get a rise out of you, Hermione,” Harry said.

“Do you have to ruin all my fun?” Sirius asked.

"If you're finished," Daphne said, rolling her eyes. "The press are waiting in the Atrium. You really need to go up and answer some questions, and My mother will be coming in half an hour to get an in-depth interview for the Prophet."

Harry groaned.

"Don't worry, Harry," Penny said, patting his shoulder. "You'll do fine."

"Are you coming with me?" he asked hopefully.

"I'd be happy to," Penny smiled.

"Thank you," Harry said gratefully.

"Can you two stop flirting? We have work to do," Daphne said impatiently.

Harry and Penny blushed and looked away from each other, prompting a bark of laughter from Sirius.

"Right," Harry said. "Let's get this over with."

Chapter 5

As soon as Harry stepped out of the elevator, Penny met him with a pretty smile and a cup of coffee.

"You're the best," Harry smiled.

“Just trying to help,” Penny said, her cheeks flushing lightly. “You’ve got a really busy day today. Madam Bones wants to see you as soon as possible. You have a Wizengamot meeting at two. Saul Croaker wants you to stop by the Department of Mysteries when you get a chance.”

“Alright,” Harry sighed. “Anything else.”

“My mother wants another interview,” Daphne said as she and Hermione followed him to his office. “This time, she wants to do more of a fluff piece, telling people about your life. There’s really not a lot of information about you available to the public, and it should really help with your image.”

“Great,” Harry grumbled.

“You know, I wasn’t sure working for you was a good idea at first,” Daphne smirked. “Now, I’m really glad I took the job. I’ll turn you into one of the most popular Ministers for Magic ever to hold office, and my career is going to be set before I even leave Hogwarts.”

“Glad I could help,” Harry said with a wry smile.

“Penny and I have been working on a new law,” Hermione said eagerly. “It’s called the Muggleborn Equality Act. I finished the first draft last night. It lowers taxes for Muggleborn and Halfblood businesses, makes it illegal for an employer to discriminate based on blood status, including at the Ministry, and establishes fines for doing so.”

“What do you need me to do with it?” Harry asked, taking a massive pile of parchment from Hermione.

“We just need you to look it over and familiarize yourself with it,” Penny replied. “I plan to present it to the Wizengamot at next week’s meeting. We just need you to know what it says so you can support it. If you want to, of course.”

“Is there a... condensed version,” Harry asked, eyeing the foot-thick pile of parchment with distaste.

“I could go over it with you at lunch,” Penny offered.

“I’d appreciate that,” Harry smiled. “I’m sorry, but I just don’t have the time to read through all of this. Was that everything?”

“I think so,” Penny said, looking to Hermione and Daphne for confirmation.

When they shook their heads, she smiled and turned back to Harry.

“Okay, can you send a note to Amelia and tell her I’m available whenever she needs me?” Harry asked.

Getting a nod, he turned to Daphne as Penny left the office.

“Set up a time with your mum, and we’ll do that interview,” he told her.

“Will do,” Daphne nodded. “You know, it might help your public image if you did something for charity. Maybe you could make a donation or visit the children’s wing at St. Mungo’s.”

“Is that really necessary?” Harry asked.

“Only if you want public support for any changes you might make over the next three weeks,” Daphne smirked.

Harry sighed, “Fine. Set something up, and then let me know when I need to be there.”

“Gladly,” Daphne smiled.

As she turned to leave, Hermione smiled and gave him a cheery wave before following after her.

~

Harry only had to wait a few minutes before Amelia came to his office.

“I hope you have some time free,” she said, closing the door behind her. “We have a lot to go through.”

“I don’t have anything pressing until the Wizengamot meeting at two,” Harry said.

Nodding, Amelia sat across from him at the desk and pulled a stack of folders out of her pocket.

“First of all, I have the results of McNair’s interrogation,” Amelia began.

“I forgot about that,” Harry frowned. “Wasn’t that almost a week ago?”

“It was,” Amelia nodded. “But it took time to corroborate everything he told us. I wanted to make sure I had all the bases covered before the Wizengamot meeting.”

Nodding, Harry leaned forward to look at the file as she laid it out on the desk.

“McNair confirmed everything you told us about You-Know-Who’s return and quite a bit more,” Amelia continued. “From what he told us, after you escaped, they fled to Malfoy Manor to regroup. He gave us the names of everyone who was there, and quite honestly, it was shocking. These witches and wizards are some of the most powerful people in our society.”

“Anyone unexpected or from the Wizengamot?” Harry asked, glancing over the names.

“Form the Wizengamot, no,” Amelia replied. “However, many members have direct relatives that are on this list. As for unexpected, yes. There are far more Ministry staff involved than I expected, including a handful of Aurors that I never thought would’ve joined You-Know-Who.”

“Shit,” Harry said, rubbing the bridge of his nose. “Do they know anything?”

“Fortunately, no,” Amelia said. “Nothing that isn’t public knowledge anyways. But it does leave us with a problem. I can’t make a move on any of the names McNair gave me until I’ve cleaned house.”

Picking up another folder, Amelia passed it across the desk.

“I’ve been talking with two of my most trusted Aurors, Kingsley Shacklebolt and Connie Hammer,” she told him. “The problem we have is that even if we manage to deal with the Aurors and other Ministry staff that follow You-Know-Who, word of the arrests is bound to get out, and the Death Eaters we really want to arrest will go into hiding.”

“What if you made a small team of people you trust and go after them before they can be warned?” Harry asked.

“We thought about that, and it is an option,” Amelia nodded. “The problem with that plan is we’d only get three or four of them before the rest start to wise up.”

Harry set down the folder, took off his glasses, and rubbed his face.

“It’s a difficult situation, Minister,” Amelia said. “It’s a choice between cleaning up the Ministry and risking word getting out, or we go for the most dangerous, possibly sending our Aurors into

an ambush. I don't need to remind you that we're severely low on personnel at the moment. Losing even a few Aurors could drastically hinder our ability to respond to a crisis."

Putting his glasses back on, Harry sat back in his chair thoughtfully.

"The biggest problem is keeping information from leaving the Ministry once you start making arrests, right?" Harry asked.

"Yes," Amelia nodded, her brow furrowed.

"Then, what if we shut down the Ministry?" Harry asked, sitting forward again. "We close the Apparition points, the Floo, seal the wards, everything. Then you can make all the arrests you need."

"That would buy us some time," Amelia acknowledged with a slow nod. "We could hold people here for more than a few hours."

"We'd just have to pick our targets carefully," Harry said. "Like you said, we go after the most dangerous and influential people first."

"I'd have to talk to Connie and Kingsley to see how many teams we can field," Amelia said. "This is ambitious, but it could work. You know that this will look bad. The press could easily make it look like you're trying to take over the Ministry. Certain members of the Wizengamot will certainly try to use this against you."

"I'll deal with that when it happens," Harry said. "This is too important to ignore because of stupid politics."

"I'll talk with Connie and Kingsley – see what we can come up with," Amelia nodded, her eyes hardening with determination.

“What about Voldemort?” Harry asked.

“According to McNair, he’s currently on the continent recruiting while his Death Eaters do the same here,” Amelia said. “He believes You-Know-Who is preparing for some sort of attack in the future, but we don’t have any conclusive evidence to support that.”

“Any idea where he would attack first?” Harry asked.

“My money would be on Azkaban,” Amelia said.

“Fucking Dementors,” Harry murmured.

“And again, guarding it all comes down to a bigger budget,” Amelia said.

“Can we use the information you got from McNair to help convince the Wizengamot?” Harry asked.

“We could, but it may cause some of the smart Death Eaters to go into hiding,” Amelia replied. “I’ll leave it up to you whether we should bring it up at today’s meeting or not.”

“Bloody hell,” Harry grumbled, then shook his head. “It’s not worth it. For now, just confirm what you can without giving too much away.”

“Very well,” Amelia nodded. “It’s probably for the best. Even if the budget is raised, it will take months to train the new recruits.”

“Can’t we try to bring back some retired Aurors like Moody or get help from other countries?” Harry asked.

Amelia smirked, "I'm starting to think you come up with these ideas just to piss off the Wizengamot."

"It's certainly not hard to do," Harry smiled.

"I can try and contact some of the retired Aurors, but I don't think it will do much good," Amelia said. "Fudge released most of them before they could earn their full pension."

"You've got to be fucking kidding me," Harry groaned. "What the hell was he thinking!?"

"Saving costs," Amelia said. "He'd send Umbridge to find any excuse to have them relieved of duty. Sometimes just months or weeks before they earned full retirement."

Harry dropped his head to the desk non too gently and tightened his hands in his hair. Taking a deep, calming breath, he sat back up.

"As for asking for foreign assistance, it's possible, but you'll need to offer concessions," Amelia said.

"Like what?" Harry asked.

Amelia shrugged, "It depends. Some may want lower tariffs, debt forgiveness, or they may want you to commit to giving them aid in the future. You'd be better off asking Greg Goreman about this. He'd be able to give you a better idea about what to expect."

"Alright," Harry nodded.

"I should warn you, talks for that sort of thing can last for months," Amelia said. "You might be better off focusing on what we can do with what we have for now."

Harry sighed, "I suppose you're right. Let me know when you and your Aurors come up with a plan."

"Of course," Amelia nodded. "If there's anything you need in the meantime, you know how to reach me."

Smiling, Harry stood and walked her to the door. Nervously, Hermione bit her lip and walked over to them, a copy of her new law clutched to her chest.

"Excuse me, Madam Bones?" she said.

"Yes, Ms. Granger, wasn't it?" Amelia said.

"Yes, ma'am," Hermione said. "I was wondering – if you have the time, of course – if you could look over this law Penny and I drafted. It's called the Muggleborn Equality Act. It introduces new laws for fairer taxes and hiring practices."

"That's quite admirable," Amelia said, "If I can find the time, I'll take a look at it. I'm afraid I'm quite busy at the moment."

"Oh, of course," Hermione said. "I was just hoping you might have some feedback about the proposal. I've never written a law before, obviously. And I want to make sure I got it right."

"Have you thought of asking Arthur Weasley?" Amelia asked. "He has some experience with writing laws."

"Oh! How could I forget!" Hermione gasped. "I'll make him a copy and stop by his office at lunch. Thank you so much, Madam Bones."

"You're welcome," Amelia said as Hermione rushed back to her desk.

“Sorry,” Harry said quietly. “She gets like that.”

“Well, if I’m going by weight, I think she’s off to a good start,” Amelia smiled, hefting the heavy document. “Just remind her that most laws fail numerous times before passing. Everyone in the Wizengamot is going to want to give their input before they agree.”

“I’ll let her know,” Harry said.

Nodding, Amelia made her way to the elevator.

“Everything okay, Harry?” Penny asked, her hand sliding across his shoulders as she walked up behind him. “You look troubled.”

“Just...,” Harry sighed.

Thinking for a moment, he decided it wouldn’t hurt to tell her and Hermione about what he’d learned.

“Hermione! Can you come here for a second?” Harry called.

He debated with himself for a moment whether to invite Daphne as well, but in the end, he decided he didn’t quite know her well enough yet.

“What’s up, Harry?” Hermione asked.

“I need to see you two in my office for a few minutes,” Harry said.

The girls looked at him curiously but followed him back to his office, where he closed the door. Instead of sitting at his desk, he led them over to the couch and chairs near the fireplace. Over the next few minutes, he explained everything Amelia had told him.

“That is tricky,” Hermione frowned. “Have you thought about talking to Professor Dumbledore?”

Harry sighed, “I suppose I should. I’ll talk to him after the Wizengamot meeting.”

“He’ll know what to do,” Hermione said confidently.

Harry nodded, but he wasn’t as convinced. Dumbledore was only human, and it wasn’t like the Order could help.

“I think your idea sounds the best,” Penny said. “It’s risky, but if it works...”

“Thanks,” Harry smiled. “I just hope we can pull it off. I wish we could get some of those retired Aurors to come back.”

“Maybe if you explained the situation, they might be willing to give you a chance?” Penny asked hopefully.

“But what if one of them is a Death Eater or decides to go to Voldemort?” Hermione asked. “It’s not like their fans of the Ministry.”

“Maybe I don’t have to give them all the details,” Harry said thoughtfully, then sighed. “Still, I don’t know if they’d be willing to come back just to help me for a couple of weeks.”

“It’s worth asking, though, isn’t it?” Penny asked.

"I suppose you're right," Harry said, giving her a small smile. "I'll talk to Dumbledore about it. Maybe he'll have some advice."

Smiling, Penny ran her fingers lightly over his back. Harry closed his eyes and exhaled deeply, luxuriating in the pleasant feeling of her nails running lightly up and down his back. When he opened his eyes again, Hermione looked at him with a teasing smirk.

"Is everything ready for the Wizengamot meeting?" Harry asked.

"All set," Penny grinned.

"Well, if you don't need me for anything else, I should get back to work," Hermione said.

"Me too," Penny agreed.

Harry had to bite back a groan of disappointment when she removed her hand from his back.

"Actually, there's one other thing I wanted to talk to you about, Penny," Harry said.

Giving Hermione a pointed look, she gave him a knowing smile and left. Nervously Harry cleared his throat and wiped his sweaty palms on his trousers.

"What did you need, Harry?" Penny asked.

"Er, well, I – I was wondering..." swallowing thickly, Harry took a deep breath. "Would you like to have dinner with me, like as a date."

Smiling softly, Penny tilted her head to the side in a way that looked like pity. Immediately, Harry felt his stomach drop.

“I’d love to,” Penny said.

“That’s alright, I underst – wait! You said yes?” Harry asked.

Penny giggled, “Yes.”

“Brilliant,” Harry grinned.

“Any particular day?” Penny asked.

“How about Friday night?” Harry asked.

“That sounds perfect,” Penny smiled.

Leaning forward, she kissed his cheek.

“I look forward to it,” she whispered.

Harry watched in a daze as she walked out of the office, her hips swaying attractively.

“Yes!” Harry cheered, throwing his fist into the air.

Grinning, he walked back to his desk and sat down with a smile on his face.

~

When lunch rolled around, Penny, Hermione, and Daphne joined him in his office to talk about their new law. Throughout their meal, Harry and Penny smiled every time they caught each other's eye.

"Alright, what's going on?" Daphne asked, glancing between them. "You two are way more flirty than usual."

"Harry asked me on a date," Penny grinned.

"That's great," Hermione smiled while Daphne rolled her eyes.

"Great," Daphne groused. "More lovey dovey bullshit."

Harry and Penny shared a look before they both burst out laughing.

~

Two hours later, Harry and Penny made their way down to the courtrooms for the Wizengamot meeting.

"Ah, Hello, Harry," Dumbledore smiled as they sat.

"Hello, Professor," Penny replied.

"Sir, could I talk to you in my office after the meeting?" Harry asked. "There's something I could use your help with."

"Certainly," Dumbledore nodded. "Would I be correct in assuming this has something to do with the discussion you had with Amelia this morning?"

Harry blinked in surprise, then furrowed his brow curiously. Just as he opened his mouth to ask how he knew that, he remembered Kingsley was in the Order.

“Er, right,” Harry said.

“I’ll assist you all I can, but I’m afraid there may not be much I can do,” Dumbledore told him.

Harry had been hoping for better news, but it wasn’t unexpected. Seeing the troubled look on his face, Penny reached over and caressed his arm. Smiling, he sat back in his chair and waited for the room to fill.

Again, the first half of the meeting was mind-numbingly boring. It consisted mainly of members bickering back and forth about making small changes to old laws. A small hike in taxes here, a change in restrictions there, nothing anything major. It wasn’t until the second half of the meeting that they got into new business.

“Now, does anyone have anything they’d like to bring before the Wizengamot?” Dumbledore asked.

Before Amelia could get her wand in the air, Damien Greengrass beat her to it.

“Yes, Mr. Greengrass? The floor is yours,” Dumbledore said.

“Thank you, Chief Warlock,” Greengrass nodded. “Minister, just after you took office, you said you’d have a plan in place with regards to dealing with He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. I was hoping you could provide the Wizengamot with an update.”

Nervously, Harry cleared his throat and stood while Penny reached out and gave his hand a comforting squeeze.

“Yes,” Harry said. “Right, well, Madam Bones and I have been working closely together for the last week. As I’m sure most of you are aware, we uncovered a substantial amount of corruption within the Minister’s office. Specifically, we discovered the former Senior Undersecretary, Delores Umbridge, committing several acts of blackmail and bribery. I believe her trial is scheduled for Wednesday?”

Looking back at Madam Bones, she nodded. There was a light murmuring amongst the members of the Wizengamot while Harry tried to think of what to say next.

“Perhaps it would be best if Madam Bones were to present her evidence before I continue,” Harry said.

Amelia stood gracefully and made her way to the podium while Harry stepped back to his seat.

“Thank you, Minister,” Amelia said. “As Minister Potter just stated, we have uncovered some quite disturbing corruption within the Ministry. Not only with Delores Umbridge but with former Minister Fudge as well. Upon Minister Potter’s discovery of the poor state of the Ministry wards, our investigation has discovered that they haven’t been maintained at all for the last fifteen years.”

There was more murmuring from the Wizengamot, this time louder.

“We’ve also learned that payments were still being made every year,” Amelia continued. “The DMLE is working with the Goblins to determine who owns the vault the payments were being made to. As it is, the repair of the wards has cost the Ministry greatly.”

“While this is all certainly interesting,” Greengrass interjected, “I was rather hoping to hear more about how you intend to deal with the threat of You-Know-Who and if you’ve discovered any more evidence of his return.”

“Certainly,” Amelia nodded. “As you may be aware, Walden McNair was recently arrested for the attempted murder of Auror John Wainwright. Due to an ongoing investigation, I cannot currently get into specifics. However, I can state that Mr. McNair confirmed, under Veritaserum, that You-Know-Who is, indeed, back.”

Amelia paused as people began talking loudly. While they may have known before, having it confirmed by someone as trusted and respected as Amelia Bones made it that much more real.

“Now,” Amelia said loudly, quieting the crowd. “Minister Potter and I have been working closely over the last week. For security reasons, I cannot reveal what has been discussed in detail, but I can tell you that I am very satisfied with the progress we have made.”

“That being said, we could be doing more,” Harry added, stepping up to stand next to Amelia. When she started to take a step back, Harry grabbed her arm lightly and pulled her back to stand next to him. “Right now, the DMLE is understaffed and underfunded for peacetime, let alone for a war. Honestly, it’s incredible Madam Bones is able to do her job as well as she is. The DMLE needs more funding. If we don’t start recruiting more Aurors now, then by the time Voldemort makes a move, we won’t stand a chance.”

That certainly got people’s attention. Several people stood up and began shouting questions until Dumbledore let off a canon blast with his wand.

“Is that your assessment, Madam Bones,” Greengrass asked loudly.

“Unfortunately, it is,” Amelia said. “I have said for years that the Aurors are ill-equipped to do their job.”

“And how much of an increase would you be requesting?” A bald, aged wizard with a large, curled mustache asked shrewdly.

“No less than double the current budget,” Harry replied.

Amelia looked at Harry with a surprised expression before showing her reaction.

“What are you doing?” she whispered over the uproar his statement caused.

“Asking for more than we need,” Harry answered softly. “Compared to that, fifty percent sounds like a bargain.”

“Or they could give us nothing,” Amelia countered.

“Not without looking like idiots in the press,” Harry said.

As the discussion turned to the budget, Harry was surprised to find a staunch ally in Damien Greengrass. He fought almost as hard as Amos, Harry, and Amelia to get the DMLE a bigger budget. In the end, Harry was more than happy when they voted to give them a sixty percent increase. It was more than either Harry or Amelia had dared to hope for.

“Penny,” Harry said as the meeting moved on to another subject. “Can you find those retired Aurors and call them in for a meeting?”

“All of them?” Penny asked.

“Yeah,” Harry said. “Bring them all in at once, if you can.”

“What do you plan to do?” Amelia asked as she leaned forward in her seat.

“Beg,” Harry replied.

Smiling, Amelia snorted and patted him on the shoulder.

~

Dumbledore was about as helpful as Harry expected him to be. The Order was useless for fighting outside of the Aurors he already had access to, and Dumbledore himself didn't have any better ideas. The only good thing that came from the conversation was that Harry was able to get a message to Moody, asking him to attend the meeting of retired Aurors he had Penny arrange.

Surprisingly, the vast majority of them agreed to show up the next night. Harry assumed he had Moody to thank for that. Even if someone didn't like the grizzled old Auror personally, he was still well-respected.

While having lunch in London with the girls, Harry invited Marcus and Kim to eat with them.

"I know you spend most of your time with me, but how do the Aurors feel about me being Minister?" he asked as they waited for their Indian food to be brought to the table.

"Most of them are really glad you took over," Kim told him. "They especially like that you managed to get the whole department a raise."

"Not everyone is happy, obviously," Marcus added. "I've heard some Aurors trying to find a way to press charges for sedition."

Harry blinked in surprise, and Hermione gasped while Kim snorted.

"The only ones that think that are the ones that got into the Aurors because of Fudge and Umbridge," she said. "It was an open secret that anyone could get a job there for enough money or if they had the right connection. Fortunately, most of them left when they realized how difficult the job can be."

“I’d say a good three-quarters of the Aurors are happy with what you’ve been doing,” Marcus said. “The rest are either undecided, or they have ties back to the previous administration.”

“And some of them are just tired of Tonks telling everyone how great you are,” Kim smirked.

Harry rolled his eyes, “What’s she been saying about me?”

“Is it true the girls from Beauxbatons all threw a sex party for you for saving their Champions hostage?” she asked with a grin.

Harry gaped at her before dropping his head to the table with a resounding *thud*.

“Please tell me you’re joking,” he said, his voice coming out muffled.

“Honestly, the things she comes up with are so outrageous they can’t be real,” Kim giggled. “I mean, there’s no way you singlehandedly killed a thousand-year-old Basilisk when you were eleven.”

“He was twelve, actually,” Daphne smirked.

Kim and Marcus’ laughter started strong and then slowly died.

“Wait, you’re not serious, are you?” Kim asked.

“It’s a long story,” Harry said, raising his head.

“This, I need to hear,” Marcus said just as their food arrived.

As Harry began to explain with the help of Hermione, Penny took his hand under the table.

“That’s incredible,” Kim breathed when he had finished. “Honestly, if anyone else had told me that story, I wouldn’t believe it, but…”

“We see a lot of liars in our line of work,” Marcus said. “And you are no liar.”

“You really need to make sure to tell my mother that story when she interviews you tomorrow,” Daphne said. “The public will go nuts for that story.”

“I hate talking about that kind of stuff,” Harry grumbled. “It wasn’t nearly as heroic as everyone seems to think, and it feels too much like bragging. There are so many times I would’ve been dead if it wasn’t for Fawkes of the Sorting Hat.”

“It’s not about bragging. It’s about accepting your accomplishments,” Daphne said. “Telling that story could be the difference between having the support you need to get things done or not.”

“I hate to admit it, but the lass is right,” Marcus acknowledged with a tilt of his head.

Sighing, Harry leaned back in his chair. With a reassuring smile, Penny rested her hand on his bicep and leaned against his side.

“I know you hate using your fame for anything, but I think Daphne is right, Harry,” Hermione said. “Besides, you should be proud of what you accomplished. Sure, you had some help, but none of that would’ve ever happened if it wasn’t for you.”

“And You-Know-Who would’ve been back two years sooner,” Penny added.

“Alright,” Harry said, raising his free hand in surrender. Sighing, he ran a hand through his hair. “Do you have any advice for when I meet with the retired Aurors?”

“Don’t beat around the bush,” Marcus said. “Be as upfront and as honest as you can.”

“And bring pastries,” Kim said. “Aurors love pastries.”

~

Harry watched nervously as the retired Aurors milled around the snack table he’d set up in the conference room, eating pastries and drinking coffee. Greeting each other like old friends, they talked and laughed while Harry waited for Moody and Amelia to show up. The Aurors had glanced his way several times, but none of them had tried to talk with him.

Fortunately, it was long before he heard the repeated *clunk* of Moody’s wooden leg on the hard stone floor. A few moments later, he limped into the room with Amelia right behind him.

“Potter,” Moody grunted, holding out a gnarled hand.

“Moody,” Harry replied. “Good to see you again.”

“How’s Ministry life treatin’ yeh?” he asked with a raspy laugh.

“Is it too early to retire?” Harry asked.

Moody laughed and clapped him on the shoulder.

“Moody!” one of the Aurors yelled. “Haven’t lost anything else since I last saw you, have you?”

“Nothin’ important,” Moody said,

Hobbling over to the group of Aurors, Moody started shaking hands while Amelia stopped next to Harry.

“You ready to get started?” she asked quietly.

“As I’ll ever be,” Harry said nervously.

Smiling, she patted him on the shoulder.

“Everyone,” Amelia called out. “If you’re finished with the reunion, perhaps we could get started?”

“Always straight to business, ey Amy?” A grey-haired witch asked with a smile.

“Some of us still have work to do, Matilda,” Amelia replied with a smile of her own.

“So, what’s got you pulling decrepit old witches and wizards like us out of retirement?” a wizard asked as they took a seat.

In a conference room designed to hold twenty, some people still had to conjure chairs to sit on.

“Minister Potter has an offer he would like to make you,” Amelia said.

Clearing his throat, Harry stood at the head of the table.

“As I’m sure most of you have heard, today, the DMLE got a much needed raise in its budget,” Harry said. “First of all, each of you will be getting your full retirement from this point onwards. I wish I could backdate it so you got everything you deserve, but that just wasn’t possible.”

A rumble of excitement ran through the room.

“And this is contingent on us agreeing to whatever you need us for?” a greying wizard asked with a scowl.

“No,” Harry said. “That goes for everyone, even the Aurors that refused to come.”

Furrowing his brow, the wizard levered himself out of his chair.

“Then I’ll take my leave,” he said.

“Oh, come on, Shaw,” A heavily scarred wizard with said in a deep voice. “At least hear the lad out.”

“I don’t give a damn what the Ministry’s got to say,” Shaw growled. “No matter who’s runnin’ it.”

Harry waited with bated breath to see if anyone else would follow Shaw as he left the room. Thankfully, everyone else stayed in their seats.

“So, what’s this really about, Potter?” Moody asked.

“We need help,” Harry said. “With Voldemort back, the Ministry just doesn’t have the Aurors to protect everyone. It’s going to take us months or years to get the new recruits trained.”

“Not all of us are still up for chasing after Dark Wizards, lad,” A witch said.

“We don’t need you to be,” Harry said. “We need teachers. We need leaders. You fought in the last war. You know what to expect and how to get the new Aurors through what’s coming.”

“And what’s to guarantee we’ll still have a job after you leave?” a wizard asked.

Harry shared a look with Amelia.

“I can’t,” he admitted. “Unfortunately, there’s nothing I can do to stop a new Minister from getting rid of all of you as soon as they take office.”

“What do you think about all of this, Amelia?” Matilda asked.

“Minister Potter is the best Minister I’ve had the pleasure of working with,” Amelia said. “Everything he’s told you is true. The Aurors really do need your help, and I’ll do my best to keep you on once we have a new Minister.”

“Why do I get the feeling there’s more to this?” a wizard in the back asked.

Amelia looked over at Harry and quirked an eyebrow. After a moment of thought, he nodded.

“We’re currently working on an operation,” Amelia said. “Perhaps the largest single operation ever conducted on home soil. I’m sorry, but I can’t tell you more than that right now.”

“Well, that sounds exciting,” a wizard grinned. “Doesn’t sound like we have much to lose. I’m in.”

“What say you, Moody?” Matilda asked.

“I never did like retirement,” he replied gruffly.

Pulling out his flask, he drew deeply from it.

“Did anyone check that for Polyjuice?” Harry whispered to Amelia.

“I’ll let you be the one to ask,” Amelia smirked.

“I’ll take my chance,” Harry grinned.

“Can we have some time to think about this?” a wizard in the back asked.

“Sure,” Harry nodded. “Just keep in mind that this offer is only good so long as I’m in office.”

The wizard nodded, and Harry sat back in his chair as the Aurors started to talk.

“What do you think?” Harry asked Amelia softly.

“We’ll know in a few days,” she said. “You earned a lot of respect by letting Shaw leave the way you did.”

“It was the right thing to do,” Harry said. “What Fudge and Umbridge did was bullshit. I don’t blame him one bit for not staying.”

“And that’s why I like having you as Minister,” Amelia smiled. “Are you sure I can’t convince you to run for office when your term is up?”

“Come on, Amelia,” Harry said, his cheeks flush. “I don’t have the first clue what I’m actually doing.”

“You could’ve fooled me,” Amelia said.

Patting his knee, she stood and walked over to talk with the other Aurors.

“Potter!” Moody barked. “Get over here. There’s some people I’d like you to meet.”

~

Eight Aurors had agreed to return by the time Harry left the conference room. Frankly, it was more than he had expected with how the Ministry had treated them.

Sitting in his office near the fire, Harry took a sip of his Firewhiskey just as someone knocked on the door.

“Come in,” he called.

Opening the door, Hermione slipped inside with a smile.

“How’d it go?” she asked.

“It went alright,” Harry said. “A handful agreed to come back, but the rest wanted some time to think about it.”

“I’m sure more will come back over the next few days,” Hermione said reassuringly.

Harry smiled, “That’s what Amelia said.”

“See,” Hermione smiled. “Well, I’m going to head home for the night. Are you coming?”

“I’ll be along in a little bit,” Harry told her. “I’ve got some paperwork I still need to finish.”

“Do you want some help?” Hermione asked.

“No,” Harry said, shaking his head with a smile. “You go home and get some rest. It’s really not that much.”

“If you’re sure,” Hermione said. “And don’t drink too much of that stuff.”

“Yes, mum,” Harry smirked.

Slapping his shoulder lightly on the way to the Floo, Hermione smiled before disappearing in a burst of emerald flames. After she left, Harry stared into the crackling flames, lost in thought.

“Still at it?”

Harry jerked in his seat and turned towards the door. Seeing Penny in the doorway, he smiled and waved her in.

“Just thinking,” he said.

“Oh?” Penny asked, walking around the couch to sit next to him. “About what?”

“The Aurors, the Death Eaters, Voldemort, the Wizengamot...” Harry said, trailing off. “Take your pick.”

“But things really went well today, didn’t they?” Penny asked, taking his hand in hers. “You got more than the budget you were hoping for; at least some of those Aurors agreed to come back, and you have a plan to deal with the Death Eaters.”

“Yeah,” Harry said softly.

“So, what’s bothering you?” Penny asked.

“It’s all just – going too well,” Harry sighed. “I’m waiting for something to go wrong.”

“And if it doesn’t?” Penny asked, smiling and leaning into his side.

“Then, I’ll be really worried,” Harry said, his lips twitching. “It means something *really* bad is going to happen.”

“Well, aren’t you just a little ray of sunshine,” Penny chuckled.

Harry shrugged with the shoulder she wasn’t leaning on.

“That’s just the way my luck goes,” Harry said. “The longer it takes for something bad to happen, the worse it’ll be when it does.”

“Have you ever thought that maybe bad things happen because you expect them to?” Penny asked.

“Not really,” Harry smiled. “But, you did forget one other really good thing that happened today.”

“What’s that?” Penny asked, her brow furrowed cutely.

Turning to her, Harry grinned. "I got a date with a really pretty girl."

Penny smiled and blushed cutely while shaking her head.

"Smooth, Potter," she said.

Slowly, their faces drifted closer together. Harry paused and swallowed nervously when their lips were just a hair's breadth apart. Staring at him with her bright blue eyes, Penny's twitched into a smile right before she closed her eyes and closed the distance.

Harry marveled at just how full and soft her lips were. The smell of her perfume filled his nose as he nervously wrapped his arm around her.

Far too soon, Penny pulled back. Giggling prettily, she settled against his side and rested her hand on his chest. With a smile, Harry relaxed back against the couch and caressed her arm.

"You know, you should try thinking that if good things keep happening, something really good might happen next," Penny told him.

"It already did," Harry grinned.

Giggling, Penny tilted her head up and kissed his cheek.

"Good answer," she said.

The next morning, Harry stepped off the elevator and froze as he looked around the DMLE office. The place was buzzing with activity. Most, if not all, of the retired Aurors he had spoken to the night before were now getting situated around the office.

Moody and Matilda were barking orders, forcing the younger Aurors to move around several desks. Meanwhile, others were looking at the filing system, unimpressed.

“You call this organized?” an older witch asked derisively. “It’s a wonder you get anything accomplished. It needs to be sorted by case number, *then* by date. Not the other way around.”

“Wow,” Kim said softly from behind him. “I can’t believe you got this many to come back.”

“Me neither,” Harry blinked.

“That’s a hell of a thing you’ve done,” Marcus said. “Getting them to trust the Ministry again.”

“They don’t,” Amelia said as she joined them in watching over the office. “They trust the current Minister.”

“What do you mean?” Harry asked, his brow furrowed.

“Letting Shaw leave and still giving the ones that didn’t show up their full pension had a bigger impact than I thought,” Amelia said. “All but one of the retired Aurors we talked to last night was here waiting for me this morning.”

“Bloody hell,” Harry said.

“Amelia!” Matilda yelled before walking over. “Who in Merlin’s name did you have teaching these kids?”

“Since Moody left, Dawlish and Scrimgeour,” Amelia said.

Matilda snorted, “Figures. This place is a mess. The filing system is all wrong, and there’s no discipline. The only one here with their head on straight so far is that Tonks girl. Don’t worry, though. We’ll have this place running ship shape in no time.”

“It’s good to have you back,” Amelia smiled.

“I did miss the old place,” Matilda said, gazing around the office. “It’s hard to go from hunting Dark Wizards to sewing quilts.”

“Quilts?” Amelia asked with a twitch of her lips.

“Eh, my daughter put me up to it,” Matilda said. “Said it’d help me relax. Load of bollocks. Anyways, Moody and Wellington want to get everyone under Master Auror in the training room this week so they can put them through their paces.”

“I’ll set up a schedule,” Amelia nodded.

“Any chance I could join?” Harry asked. “I know you’re going to be busy, and I’m not as good as the Aurors, but I’d appreciate some advice on my dueling. Besides, I hate being stuck in an office all day.”

“A Minister that’s willing to get his robes dirty?” Matilda asked with a smirk. “I never thought I’d see the day. What year are you in, lad? Sixth?”

“Er, I’m going into fifth,” Harry said.

“Fifth, eh? Well, I’m sure we can squeeze you in,” Matilda said.

"If it's not any trouble," Harry said.

"Oh, it's no trouble at all," Matilda grinned. "Trust me, most of this lot have been waiting for years to get their hands on a Minister."

Harry paled as the older witch gave him a predatory smile. A moment later, she and Amelia laughed while Marcus patted him on the shoulder. Letting out a breath, Harry smiled when he realized she was joking.

"Don't worry, lad," Matilda said. "Moody seems pretty fond of you for pulling him out of his trunk. I'm sure he'll be happy to make time to teach you a thing or two."

"Thanks," Harry smiled.

The elevator opened, and the group stepped out of the way. Surprisingly, Shaw stepped out with an older witch and wizard behind him.

"Well, look what the Kneazle dragging in," Matilda said.

"Bennet," Shaw said, nodding to Matilda before turning to Harry and Amelia. "I just want to make it clear, I'm only staying as long as I feel it's worth my time. The second this department gets political, I'm out. I'm not risking my neck from some snot-nosed bureaucrat."

"Fair enough," Harry said, holding out his hand. "Welcome back."

Shaw stared at him intently for a long moment before nodding and shaking his hand.

"Where do you need me?" he asked, looking at Amelia.

"I think Moody could use some help getting the training room organized," Amelia told him.

Nodding, Shaw walked off without another word.

"Sorry David and I missed the meeting," the witch that had come with Shaw said with a kind smile. "It was our grandson's birthday."

"Not a problem," Harry smiled, shaking her hand. "We're glad to have you."

"Minister, this is Agatha Greene and her husband, David," Amelia said.

"Pleasure," Harry said, shaking David's hand.

David was a thin wizard with white hair and a round, youthful face. Agatha was quite short, with grey hair and a cane in her right hand.

"Likewise," David said. "What can we do to help?"

"Can you two help Melissa with the organization for now?" Amelia asked. "We've got a lot of rearranging to do to fit everyone in."

"Of course," Agatha smiled.

"I can ask Magical Maintenance to enlarge the room," Harry offered.

"Probably not a bad idea. A few new offices wouldn't hurt either," Amelia said, checking her watch.

"I'll see to it," Harry told her.

"Thank you," Amelia said. "I'm sorry, but I have a meeting with Kingsley and Connie in a few minutes. Once we have a handle on our numbers, I'll bring you in so we can go over our options."

"Sounds good," Harry said.

Shaking Amelia's hand, he got back into the elevator with Marcus and Kim. For the first time since he'd taken office, Harry felt like he was really accomplishing something.

Chapter 6

Harry grunted as the air was knocked from his lungs and he was tossed across the room. His back hit the hard stone wall before he fell. Sharp pain shock through his right knee and elbow as he impacted the floor. Seeing another red Stunning Hex coming his way, he scrambled out of the way.

Raising his wand, Harry turned to Tonks just as she lazily fired a Disarming Hex.

"Protego!" he shouted.

The spell splashed against his shield in a flash of sparks. Dropping his shield, he twisted out of the way of another hex and brought his wand to bear.

"Stupify!"

Tonks knocked his spell aside with a negligent flick of her wand. Harry heard a round of chuckles behind her and looked over to see a dozen trainees waiting against the back wall.

Great, Harry thought sarcastically. Now everyone gets to see me get my ass kicked.

He dodged a couple of more spells from Tonks before she suddenly jerked her wand backwards. Prepared for a visible spell, he was completely caught off guard when his foot was yanked forward. When the force pulling him stopped abruptly, he landed heavily on his back.

“Oof,” Harry grunted.

He tried to get to his feet but only managed to get to one knee before Tonks shot off another Disarming Hex. Helplessly, he watched as his wand was torn from his grip. Reaching out instinctively, both he and Tonks watched in surprise as his wand stopped between them before shooting back into Harry’s hand.

“Expelliarmus!” he shouted.

Busy gaping at him, Tonks barely parried his hex in time. Gritting his teeth, Harry pushed himself to his feet painfully.

“That’s enough,” Moody called.

Sagging in relief, Harry panted heavily and slumped in exhaustion.

“That was brilliant!” Tonks grinned.

“That was shite,” Moody said, hobbling his way over.

“He did very well for a fifth year,” Matilda argued.

“Well, he isn’t going to be fighting fifth years,” Moody grumbled, coming to a stop in front of Harry and eyeing him closely. “Your spell knowledge is pathetic, you can’t cast silently, and you spent more time throwing yourself around the room than on your feet.”

Harry flushed at the painfully honest description as Moody leaned on his staff.

“The first thing you need to do is learn nonverbal casting,” Moody continued. “You not going to get anywhere shouting out everything you’re going to do before you do it. While you’re working on that, learn as many spells as you can. Even if you don’t use them, you need to know what a spell does to know how to react. The spells you do use, you need to master. Got it?”

“Got it,” Harry said, blushing as the trainee laughed quietly.

“That said, you showed a hell of a lot of heart,” Moody said. “You got you’re arse kicked around this room for over an hour, and you never complained or gave up. Which is more than I can say for this lot.”

The trainees stopped laughing when Moody jerked his thumb at them.

“Even with the lack of knowledge, he still put up a better fight than most of our trainees,” Matilda smirked.

“Aye,” Moody agreed. “Speaking of which, we need to get to work with this useless lot.”

“Right,” Harry said. “Thanks, Moody. I appreciate the advice.”

“Anytime, lad,” Moody replied, patting his shoulder.

Nodding gratefully, Harry waved to Matilda and made his way gingerly toward the door.

“You did great,” Tonks grinned, swinging her arm over his shoulders as they walked past the trainees.

“Yeah, great,” Harry snorted.

“Listen up, you lot!” Moody shouted. “You work half as hard as Potter just did, and you might actually learn something today.”

“See, even Moody thinks so,” Tonks smiled. “Look, for a fifth year, you did amazing. Sure, you might not know a lot of spells, and you can’t cast silently, but you never lost.”

Harry scoffed, “We both know you were taking it easy on me.”

“Maybe a little,” Tonks smirked. “You still did that really cool wandless summoning. When did you learn to do that anyway?”

“A few days ago,” Harry said, wincing as his ribs ached. “It just sort of happened.”

“It was still impressive,” Tonks told him as they entered the Auror offices. “Well, I guess we should get back to work. If you need help with anything, let me know. Learning nonverbal casting can be pretty frustrating until you get the hang of it.”

“Thanks, Tonks,” Harry said.

“You’re welcome,” Tonks grinned.

Reaching up, she ruffled his hair before disappearing amongst the cubicles. Running a hand through his hair in an attempt to straighten it, Marcus and Kim fell in behind him as he made his way to the elevator. After pushing the button for his floor, Harry rolled his shoulder with a wince.

“Do you want me to call a healer?” Kim asked.

“No. I’m fine,” Harry said.

Kim sighed, “Why do men have to be all macho when they get hurt?”

“It’s just a few bruises,” Harry said.

“Yeah, and they make a balm for that,” she smirked.

Harry rolled his eyes as the elevator door opened. Penny looked up with a smile when she saw him, then frowned when she noticed him walking gingerly.

“You okay?” she asked when he reached her desk.

“I’m fine,” Harry said. “Just a bit sore.”

“You were gone for a while. How did it go?” Penny asked.

“Not great,” Harry admitted. “Tonks looked like she had fun tossing me around the room, though.”

Smiling, Penny shook her head and took his hand.

“Are you going to keep training with her?” Penny asked.

“When I have time,” Harry replied. “Unfortunately, I don’t have a lot of that at the moment.”

As he finished speaking, the elevator opened. Looking over his shoulder, Harry saw Amelia, Kingsley, and a thin, blonde witch with short, spiky blonde hair and a scar over her right, pale blue eye.

“Minister, you remember Kingsley Shacklebolt, and this is Connie Hammer,” Amelia said. “We’ve finished that report I told you about. Can we have a few moments of your time?”

“Of course,” Harry nodded before turning to Penny. “Can you make sure we’re not disturbed unless it’s an emergency?”

“Sure,” Penny nodded.

Smiling gratefully at her, he led them to his office. Shutting the door, he brought up the newly restored wards around the room.

“After discussing your plan with Kingsley and Connie and coming up with a plan, we’ve determined that we have sufficient numbers for it to work. Barely,” Amelia said. “Connie.”

Pulling a folder out of her pocket, she opened it up and spread several pieces of paper across his desk.

“I’ve reviewed our number of active Aurors, and we have two choices,” Connie said. “If we use three man teams to execute arrests, we have a chance to catch everyone on the list of names we got from your memory and McNair’s interrogation. However, that’s smaller than what we normally recommend. If we sent four man teams and let a few of the smaller names go, I feel it gives us a better chance of successful arrests.”

Sitting back in his chair, Harry rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

“What do you two think?” Harry asked.

"I agree with Connie," Amelia said. "It would also keep our Aurors safer if they encounter resistance."

"I would even go further," Kingsley said. "Some of the people we're arresting, like Malfoy and Nott, should have even more Aurors."

Picking up three pieces of parchment, Connie handed them to him.

"These are the three arrangements we've come up with," she said.

Glancing over them, he set aside the one listing three man teams and concentrated on the other two. As much as he wanted to arrest as many Death Eaters as possible, Kingsley made a good point. Catching someone like Malfoy was far more important than catching so low ranking, petty criminal.

"Let's go with this one," Harry said, handing back Kingsley's arrangement.

Nodding, Connie took the parchment and made a note.

"Now we need to work out the timing," Amelia said. "I suggest we do it in two days, during the next Wizengamot meeting."

"That soon?" Harry asked, surprised.

"The faster we move, the better," Connie said. "Outside of the three of us, no one else will know about this plan until just before it's executed. It will give the Death Eaters less time to get word of what we're doing."

“Even with the larger teams, surprise is still our best weapon,” Amelia added. “If the Death Eaters catch on before our Aurors arrive, they’ll be walking into a death trap.”

Sighing, Harry rubbed a hand over his face.

“What’s the plan?” he asked.

“At four PM we lock down the Ministry with the story that someone was attacked,” Connie said. “We know the names of the Death Eaters within the ranks of the Aurors, and they’ll be the first to be arrested. Once every Auror has been checked for the Dark Mark, the remaining Aurors will arrest any Ministry employee on our list, including the three Wizengamot members we discovered. We expect this to be done within an hour. From there, the Aurors will regroup, and each team will be given their target in private. Amelia, Matilda, and you will coordinate everything from Auror Headquarters.”

“What happens if a team gets into trouble?” Harry asked.

“We have three backup teams that can assist anyone who needs help,” Amelia replied. “It’s not ideal, but it’s the best we can do under the circumstances.”

“And what about Voldemort?” Harry asked.

“Our intelligence says he’s currently out of the country,” Kingsley said, his dark eyes catching Harry’s meaningfully.

Nodding, Harry looked over the details of the plan thoughtfully.

“How do you three feel about this?” he asked after a moment.

“It’s a risk, but I think it’s our best option,” Amelia replied.

"I agree," Connie added. "This could be our only chance to deal a significant blow to the Death Eaters."

Kingsley nodded, and they all looked at Harry expectantly. Taking a deep breath and feeling an almost unbearable weight settle on his shoulder, he nodded.

"Let's do it," Harry said.

~

Hours later, Harry sat in front of the fire with a glass of Firewhiskey in his hand.

"Harry," Penny called.

Looking back towards the door, he gave a small smile and turned back to the fire.

"Hey," he said softly.

"Everything okay?" she asked, approaching the couch.

"You remember that plan I told you about?" he asked, then continued when she nodded. "It starts in two days."

Giving him a sympathetic look, Penny sat down and took his hand.

"For what it's worth, I think you're doing the right thing," she told him.

"I hope so," Harry sighed. "A lot of people could die if I get things wrong."

"And if you get things right, you'll save even more," Penny argued.

Smiling, Harry gave her hand a squeeze.

"Oh, I almost forgot," Penny said suddenly. "I ran out and picked you up some Bruise Balm while I was at lunch."

Reaching into her pocket, she pulled out a small metal tin.

"You didn't have to do that," Harry said softly.

"I know," Penny smiled. "Now, where are your bruises?"

"On my back and arms, mostly," Harry said.

"Then take off your shirt," Penny said, popping open the tin.

A bit nervously, Harry shucked off his robe and unbuttoned his shirt. Glancing over at Penny, his confidence was boosted when he saw her lick her lips while staring at his chest. Then, she winced when she saw the large bruises on his shoulder.

"Oh, ow," she said, gently pushing his arm with her finger to turn him to the side. "Harry, your entire back is one big bruise. Here, lay down."

When Penny stood, Harry kicked off his shoes and laid face down on the couch. A moment later, she straddled his hips and sat down on his legs. Scooping out a large dollop of thick, yellowish cream, she rubbed it between her hands. Harry inhaled sharply when she began

rubbing it into his back. His skin tingled sharply, almost painfully, where it contacted a bruise before gradually fading to a soothing warmth.

“That feels good,” Harry groaned.

“Good,” Penny said, her hands working their way up to his shoulders.

Harry closed his eyes and relaxed as she went from rubbing Bruise Balm into his bruise to massaging his entire back and arms.

“Feel better?” Penny asked.

“Much,” Harry said.

Smiling, he spun around underneath her and rested his hands on her hips. Penny smiled back and leaned down, kissing him softly. Quickly, that kiss turned into a full blown snog as Harry ran his hands over her back and enjoyed the feeling of her large breasts pressed against his bare chest.

“Am I interrupting?”

Penny sat up quickly and looked over the couch before sighing. Sitting up, Harry saw Daphne standing in the doorway with her arms crossed and a smirk on her lips.

“I was just helping Harry put balm on his bruises,” Penny said, climbing off of him.

“With your lips?” Daphne asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Did you need something?” Harry asked as Penny blushed.

“I thought you might like to see this,” Daphne said, holding up a folded newspaper. “It’s an advanced copy of tomorrow’s issue. My mother sent it for you.”

Quickly putting his shirt back on, Harry took the paper and sighed. He’d spent four hours giving an interview to Evangeline. She was frighteningly good at getting him to relax and open up about his life. Harry had told her more than he’d planned to, and he was honestly worried about what she’d write about him.

“Well, are you going to read it?” Daphne asked as Hermione walked into the office.

Harry sighed and opened the paper while Penny and Hermione both pressed in close on either side of him so they could read over his shoulder.

The True Story of Harry Potter

By Evangeline Greengrass

Yesterday, I had the privilege of sitting down and talking one on one with Harry Potter, 18, the Boy-Who-Lived. While Harry has been known the world over for his miraculous survival at the age of 2, not much is known about his life until he reentered the Wizarding World for his first year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Since then, rumors and stories abound, but we’ve had little confirmation from the man himself.

Given how the sensationalist lies spread about him during the Triwizard Tournament by former Daily Prophet reporter Rita Skeeter, that’s understandable. (More on page 3.)

I have already documented the extraordinary circumstances that led to Harry becoming the youngest Minister for Magic in history, but I was interested in getting to know the real Harry Potter. What kind of man is our current Minister for magic? Finding those answers has left me shocked, astounded, but most importantly, hopeful for the future.

Our story begins in Harry's first year, when he met his best friend, Hermione Granger, 19, in an improbable way...

Reading on, Harry was relieved she kept to the truth. There were a few things he wished he hadn't talked about so openly, but Evangeline never lied or even exaggerated what she wrote about him.

"That's really good," Hermione said when she'd finished reading.

"This is all true?" Penny asked.

Harry nodded.

"I had no idea school was like that for you," she said softly.

"No one did," Daphne said.

Harry shrugged while Penny wrapped an arm around his waist.

"It's not something I like to talk about," he said.

"Potter, do you have any idea what this will do?" Daphne asked, pointing to the paper.

When Harry looked at her curiously, she sighed and shook her head.

"This is going to be the biggest public relations success in history," Daphne said.

~

It turned out Daphne wasn't exaggerating. Harry's office was filled with letters from people thanking him for protecting Hogwarts and apologizing for not believing him sooner. Marcus even told him that they had to station Aurors in the Atrium to keep the well wishers and photographers away.

Harry didn't have much time to dwell on that, however. He was too busy working with Amelia to plan the biggest raid ever executed in British magical history on home soil. It did give him an idea, though. Which was why he invited Evangeline to the next Wizengamot meeting.

"Hello, Harry," Evangeline smiled, her tight robes once again displaying her incredible figure.

"Eva," Harry said, shaking her hand. "Thank you for coming."

"I don't suppose you could tell me why you asked me to come today?" she asked.

"I'm afraid I can't, but you'll find out soon enough," Harry told her before gesturing to the courtroom. "Shall we."

With a dazzling smile, she walked into the courtroom with Harry close behind. When he took his seat, he had trouble focusing on the meeting. Fortunately, he wasn't required to say much. Finally, after a long, agonizing wait, he got the message he'd been waiting for.

"The Floo is disabled. Bring up the wards," Connie's voice said through the Communications Charm she'd put on him that morning.

Closing his eyes, Harry took a deep breath and reached out to the wards. An instant later, the visitors' entrance stopped working, and the door to the courtroom latched with an audible click.

“What’s going on?” Someone demanded loudly.

Before Amelia could answer, Kingsley lynx Patronus flew through the doors.

“There’s been an attack within the Ministry. We’re locking everything down until the culprit has been caught,” came Kingsley’s soothing baritone.

“How long is this going to take?” An older with asked impatiently. “I have a meeting to get to.”

“I’m afraid I don’t know,” Amelia said. “Perhaps we should continue with the meeting. If we don’t have an answer by then, I’ll check with my Aurors.”

“Minister?” Dumbledore asked.

Opening his eyes, Harry caught Evangeline watching him intently.

“Let’s continue the meeting,” he replied.

Watching him for a moment, Dumbledore nodded and continued as he normally would. Harry had to fight the urge to bounce his leg nervously as he waited. Everything had to go right, or the whole plan could be ruined. If one Death Eater managed to get a message out, dozens of Aurors could be slaughtered.

Just as the meeting was coming to an end, the door to the courtroom opened. All talking stopped as Kingsley strode in with nearly two dozen Aurors behind him. As the Aurors spread out around the room, he walked up to Harry and bent down to his ear.

“We got them,” Kingsley whispered.

Letting out a breath, Harry nodded while he walked over to Amelia.

“Thank you, Kingsley,” she said, climbing to her feet.

Anxious to move, Harry did the same, even though he didn’t need to.

“If I can have everyone’s attention,” she said, though it wasn’t really necessary. “Due to the evidence given to us by Minister Potter, as well as corroborating evidence provided by Walden McNair while under the influence of Veritasserum, the Ministry has issued arrest warrants for every Death Eater present at You-Know-Who’s rebirth. Until all of the arrests have been made, no one is allowed in or out of the Ministry.”

“This is preposterous!”

“You can’t do this!”

“Those men are well respected members of the community! You can’t just arrest them!”

“Enough!” Amelia yelled, firing a canon blast from her wand. “I assure you, all of them will be given the opportunity to prove their innocence - under Veritaserum.”

“You can’t do this!” Selwyn screamed.

“But I can,” Harry said, a hard edge to his tone.

“You’ll pay for this, boy,” Selwyn growled.

“What is going on here, Madam Bones?” Damien Greengrass asked. “I think we all deserve an answer.”

“You do, but not now,” Harry said. “I’ll explain everything tomorrow. For now, settle in. No one leaves the Ministry until we’re finished.”

“And how long will that take?” the same witch from before demanded.

“A few hours, at least. Possibly longer,” Amelia replied.

“What!?”

“You can’t keep us here!”

“Quiet!” Harry shouted. “We can, and we are. I apologize for the inconvenience, but it’s necessary. The Ministry is officially on lockdown. I suggest you get comfortable.”

Leaving his seat, Harry headed for the door. As he passed Evangeline, he motioned for her to follow. Raising an eyebrow, she caught up with him and Amelia as they headed toward the elevator.

“Can I know what this is about now?” she asked excitedly.

“In a moment,” Harry said, nodding to Marcus, who summoned the elevator.

“Minister, are you sure...?” Amelia asked.

“Yes,” Harry said. “I want an honest documentation of everything that happens.”

“And if something goes wrong?” she asked.

“Then everyone will know what not to do the next time something like this happens,” Harry said.

Amelia stared at him for a long moment.

“As you wish, Minister,” she said respectfully.

The elevator opened, and everyone walked inside, Kingsley being the last one in. They rode up to the second floor, where every Auror was waiting for them. Even Hermione, Penny, and Daphne were already there waiting for him. Harry fought not to fidget nervously under all of their stares. Moving over to Connie at the front of the room, where a map of Britain was pinned to the wall, she greeted him with a nod.

“The Ministry is secure,” she told him. “All known Death Eaters have been detained, and the Aurors are awaiting your orders.”

“Thank you,” Harry said.

Looking over at Amelia and Kingsley, they nodded to indicate they were ready. It was only then that he realized Dumbledore had followed them. Despite his differences with the headmaster, Harry felt better knowing he was there.

“Alright, everyone,” Harry said. “I’m sure you’re all wondering what’s happening. For the last week, Amelia, Kingsley, Connie, and I have been preparing a plan to arrest every Death Eater we know of. The only way we could do that without them going into hiding is to arrest all of them in one night.”

A loud murmur ran through the assembled Aurors, and Harry stepped back with a nod to Amelia. Clearing her throat, she stepped forward.

“The senior Aurors have already been briefed,” she began. “When your name is called, come forward to receive your assignment, and do not share the name of your suspect with anyone outside of your team until all arrests have been made. This is a security precaution, and breaching it will see you immediately suspended.”

Harry took a deep breath as Amelia finished giving out instructions, and the senior Aurors started calling out names.

“When you asked me to come to a Wizengmot meeting, I certainly didn’t expect this,” Evangeline said.

“That was kind of the point,” Harry said. “Without the element of surprise, too many of them would’ve run or gone into hiding.”

“So, you need to arrest them all at once,” Evangeline nodded, then smiled and practically purred. “My, how ambitious.”

“Just doing what I need to,” Harry said with a light blush.

Smiling, Evangeline patted his arm gently and then walked over to Daphne. Watching her go, Harry jumped when he felt an arm snake around his waist.

“Sorry,” Penny said.

“It’s alright,” Harry said, wrapping his arm around her. “I’m just nervous.”

“You’ll do fine,” Penny said firmly.

Harry wished he had her confidence. For now, he just took comfort in her presence as the Aurors finished getting their assignments.

“Minister, we’re ready,” Amelia said quietly. “If you want to change your mind, now is the time.”

Harry took a deep breath and looked around at the sea of Aurors he was about to send into danger.

“Can I get all of the Senior Aurors over here,” Harry called, then waited until they were all there before continuing. “Does anyone have a good reason we shouldn’t do this?”

The older Aurors looked at each other, but none of them spoke.

“Right,” Harry said, his adrenaline running.

“It’s our job, lad,” Moody reminded him quietly.

Harry nodded, “Send them.”

With grim, focused expressions, the senior Aurors leading the teams grabbed their Portkeys. The rest of the senior Aurors - mostly the ones Harry had brought back out of retirement – gathered around the map to coordinate.

“Remember your training!” Moody barked. “This needs to be quick and clean. Portkeys on my mark.”

Glancing around at the Aurors one last time, Harry caught Tonks’ eye. He gave her a stiff nod, which she returned with a smile and a wink.

“Three... two... one... Go!” Moody yelled.

In a swirl of color, they all vanished. Harry felt like he might vomit as he turned back to the map and watched Matilda and Connie move pieces around like they were playing a board game.

“Teams one through six are in position,” Connie said as a cascade of voices came from a specially enchanted Wireless in front of her.

“Teams seven and ten are breaching now,” Matilda said.

“Any resistance so far?” Amelia asked.

“Nothing yet,” Connie replied.

“Teams twelve and sixteen are clear. The suspects weren’t home,” Agatha Greene said.

“Same with eight and twelve,” Matilda added. “Seven and nine have four in custody.”

“We knew we might miss some of them,” Amelia said.

Despite her calm tone, Harry couldn’t shake the feeling something was off. Stepping closer, he looked over the map. His eyes were drawn to Moody’s name just as his floating banner turned red, indicating their wards were in place. It wasn’t so much Moody’s name that drew his eye but the house they were at. Malfoy Manor.

“Team ten has a barricaded suspect,” Matilda said, drawing his attention away from the map.

“Heavy fighting at the Nott residence,” Connie said, then paused. “Goyle is in custody. More fighting at the Crabbe and Carrow residences.”

“Send team six to the Crabbes and team twelve to the Carrows,” Amelia said briskly.
“Scrimgeour, take your team, and get over to the Notts.”

Nodding, Scrimgeour grabbed a Portkey and walked over to his team.

“Anything from Moody?” Harry asked.

“They’re getting in position now,” Connie replied.

“Team seven has two in custody and one injured Auror,” Matilda said. “He’s being sent to St. Mungo’s, but it’s nothing severe.”

Harry let out a slow breath and wiped his sweaty palms on his trousers. Stepping behind him, Penny rubbed his back soothingly while Hermione bit her lip nervously.

“Team fourteen just reported use of the Killing Curse,” Agatha called out urgently. “Peterson is down.”

Harry’s heart dropped into his stomach like a lead weight.

“Dawlish, go!” Amelia barked.

“Ma’am, Moody says he’s got over a dozen Death Eaters at Malfoy Manor,” Connie said.
“They’re holding position just outside.”

“Shit,” Amelia cursed.

“Tell them to get out,” Harry said.

“They know they’re there,” Connie said, listening to her Wireless closely. “A Death Eater tried to Disapparate and found the wards. Moody’s team is hiding by the shed, but they’re searching.”

“Shaw, you’re up!” Amelia barked. “Get them out of there.”

“Marcus, Kim, go with them,” Harry said.

“Yes, sir,” Kim said eagerly.

“Minister, perhaps I could be of assistance?” Dumbledore asked.

“Please,” Harry said.

“Do we have any other teams free?” Amelia asked.

“Three is just finishing up,” Connie replied.

“Same with thirteen,” Agatha said.

“Tell them to hurry up,” Amelia said.

“They’ve been spotted,” Connie called out, sounding surprisingly calm. “They’re pinned down behind the shed. Jensen is injured but still fighting.”

Harry looked over anxiously at Shaw’s group just as they vanished. His hand itched to grab one of the Portkeys on the table. He hated standing by when he could be out there, helping.

“What’s going on at Nott’s?” Harry asked.

“They’re clearing the house,” Connie replied after a moment. “Nott is secure.”

“See if you can send Scrimgeour over to help Moody,” he told her. “I don’t want to lose any more Aurors tonight.”

“Yes, sir,” Connie said.

“Shaw is on scene with Moody, and they’re pushing the Death Eaters back,” Connie reported.

“If we get control of the situation, do you still want Moody’s to retreat?” Amelia asked quietly.

Harry took a deep breath as he glanced at the map.

“Tell Moody it’s his call,” Harry said.

Nodding, Amelia walked up to Connie and told her to relay the message.

“Scrimgeour just arrived,” Connie said a moment later. “Moody’s requesting to stay.”

“Very well,” Amelia said.

“Ma’am, another report of the Killing Curse,” Matilda said. “Brooks is down. It was Runcorn. He turned on them as they were securing their suspects.”

“Piece of shit,” Harry growled.

“Did they catch him?” Amelia asked, his hands tightened into fists.

“He’s in custody,” Matilda told him. “They want to know if they should search the residence.”

“No, tell them to get back here,” Amelia said. “We can search it later.”

“Malfoy manor is secure,” Connie announced. “Twenty-two in custody, including Lucius Malfoy.”

Harry nodded grimly, unable to feel any joy despite the success. Gradually, all of the teams began to finish up and return with the Death Eaters they’d arrested.

“Minister,” Scrimgeour called when he returned. “I’d like to take the six teams that are back and go after the rest of the Death Eaters on the list.”

Harry furrowed his brow thoughtfully before shaking his head.

“No,” he said. “There’s a good chance they know what’s happening, and we’ve already lost two Aurors tonight.”

“There’s a good chance they don’t know or don’t think we’re coming,” Scrimgeour argued.

“It’s not worth the risk for a handful of petty criminals,” Harry said, shaking his head.

Scrimgeour scowled and then glanced over Harry’s shoulder.

“Amelia, surely you understand,” he said.

"I agree with Minister Potter," she told him. "Despite our losses, we've dealt You-Know-Who a serious blow tonight. There's no reason to push our luck."

"But —"

"No, Scrimgeour," Harry said firmly. "And that's final."

Glaring at him, Scrimgeour spun on his heel and limped away. Sighing, Harry took off his glasses and rubbed his face.

"Good on you, lad," Matilda said. "Going after a few nobodies isn't worth risking an ambush."

"Scrimgeour's a decent Auror, but he's far too interested in politics," Amelia said. "I'm almost certain he's just trying to make a name for himself before the next election."

"He'd throw away the lives of his fellow Aurors for a bit of positive press?" Harry asked disgustedly.

"I'm sure he thinks there's little risk," Amelia said. "Scrimgeour might be a bastard at times, but he's not malicious."

"Just selfish," Matilda scoffed. "I hope he doesn't get elected. I'd hate to have to leave so soon. It feels good to be back, making a difference."

"And tonight, we made a big difference," Amelia said. "Unfortunately, now I need to go inform two wives that their husbands aren't coming home. Minister, if you wouldn't mind lifting the lockdown?"

"Sure," Harry said, reaching out to the wards. "In fact, I'll come with you."

“Are you sure?” Amelia asked, surprised.

“This was my idea, so it’s my responsibility,” Harry said, his throat tightening.

“Very well,” she nodded.

As they started towards the elevator, Marcus and Kim joined them. Kim had a cut on her forehead, and Marcus’ robes were singed around the shoulder.

“You two alright?” Harry asked.

“A little banged up, but we’re fine,” Kim said.

“Why don’t you and Marcus take the rest of the night off?” Harry suggested.

“You have your responsibilities, Minister. We have ours,” Marcus said.

“Besides, I’d rather not have to go visit Tonks when she’s in hospital,” Kim said.

“What happened to Tonks?” Harry asked worriedly.

Surprisingly, Kim smirked.

“She stepped in a hole when we were leaving and broke her ankle.”

Despite himself, Harry smiled.

~

As hundreds of owls winged their way across England, carrying a special edition of the Evening Prophet, Harry sat in his office signing paperwork. It had been a long, arduous day, but in all, they'd managed to arrest forty-seven Death Eaters, including six of Voldemort's inner circle.

Perhaps the worst part of his day, however, had been informing two women that they were now widows. Neither of them blamed Harry, but he couldn't help blaming himself. It had been his idea and his decisions that had sent them to their deaths.

Harry was so lost in his thoughts that he gave a start when there was a knock at his door.

"Come in," he said after a moment.

The door opened, and Amelia stepped inside, holding up a bottle of amber liquid.

"Care for a drink?" she asked.

"I could definitely use one," Harry smiled.

Standing from his desk, he motioned Amelia over to the sitting area. He started a fire with a flick of his wand before sitting on the couch while Amelia took the chair across from him. Pouring two glasses, she slid one over to him. Both of them took a large sip, and Harry licked his lips at the unfamiliar, though pleasant, taste.

"What is this?" he asked.

"Congiac," Amelia said.

Nodding, Harry took another sip and leaned back with a sigh.

“So, how are you holding up?” Amelia asked.

“Alright,” he shrugged.

Amelia gave a nod, and they both fell into a companionable silence.

“You know,” she said after a long moment, “during the first war with You-Know-Who, Alastor was my first partner. My first big assignment, we were tasked with raiding a suspected Death Eater safe house in Kent. Of course, we didn’t know that the tip came from a Death Eater working inside the Ministry. Sixteen of us went in, and only four of us made it out.”

Harry didn’t know what to say as she fell silent and took a large sip from her glass.

“I remember how little Crouch seemed to care,” she continued. “There were no plans for backup if something went wrong. He never asked for our thoughts on the plan or let us make decisions in the field. His only concern was making headlines before Bagnold left office. Things could’ve gone a lot worse today than they did. You really looked out for our Aurors, and I appreciate that. Far too many Ministers consider them expendable.”

“We still lost too many,” Harry sighed.

“It’s still a dangerous job,” Amelia said. “And Runcorn... I’ve worked with him for fifteen years and never once thought he might be a Death Eater. What I’m trying to say is I’m really impressed with the job you’ve done so far. To be honest, I was just hoping to get some things done when you weren’t looking. I never expected things to go this well.”

“Thanks, I think,” Harry said, smiling as he brought his glass to his lips.

“We actually have a lot in common, you know,” Amelia said. “When Crouch was disgraced, I was given the job because I was expected to fail. Fudge didn’t like me because I was competent, and I didn’t kiss his ass. So, he gave me the job, thinking I’d screw up and he could replace me with one of his lackeys who was less qualified. It’s part of the reason our budget was so low. When he realized I could do the job, and do it well, he kept cutting it to make my job harder. In hindsight, I probably should’ve complained a bit louder back then, but I was too determined to prove him wrong.”

“And that is why I hate politics,” Harry said.

“That makes two of us,” Amelia smiled.

Just then, there was a knock at the door. Turning, Harry looked over the back of the couch as Penny stuck her head in.

“Hey. Oh! Sorry, I didn’t realize you were busy,” she said.

“That’s alright,” Amelia told her. “I was just leaving.”

Downing the rest of her drink, she set the glass down on the table and stood. As she walked past Harry, she patted him on the shoulder.

“Keep your chin up,” she said. “Without you, this country would be a lot worse off.”

“Have a good night,” Penny smiled as Amelia passed her.

“You too,” Amelia said.

When she closed the door behind her, Penny walked over to the couch and sat next to Harry.

“You okay?” she asked softly.

“Yeah, I’m alright,” Harry smiled.

“It’s not your fault, you know,” Penny said.

“I know,” Harry sighed. “It’s just...”

“Is there anything I can do?” Penny asked, taking his hand.

“Could you just sit with me for a bit?” Harry asked shyly.

Smiling, Penny kissed his cheek.

“I’d be happy to,” she said.

Her smile turned playful as she stood up and then sat down on his lap. Chuckling, Harry wrapped his arms around her as she leaned against his chest and stared into the fire, his hands caressing her back.

Chapter 7

“Remember, Keep your answers short and to the point,” Daphne said, straightening Harry’s lapel of his purple robes. “Don’t give them a chance to take you out of context.”

Harry nodded nervously.

"You'll do fine," Penny whispered, caressing his back.

"Yesterday was a huge victory for the Ministry. Keep pressing that point," Amelia told him.
"And remember, you're not alone."

Glancing at her out of the corner of his eyes, he smiled just as the elevator came to a stop. The door opened to the sound of shouting voices. A line of Aurors stood, holding back a sea of reporters and people.

"How the hell are we going to get through this?" Kim shouted over the din.

"Make a hole!" one of the Aurors shouted.

He tried to push his way through but was nearly swallowed up by the crowd as they all pushed forward, yelling questions. Annoyed, Harry raised his wand to his throat.

"Quite!" he barked.

Everyone fell quiet until a blonde witch with garish makeup and an acid-green quill floating next to her shoved her way forward.

"Harry! So good to see you," Rita simpered. "You have to tell us—"

Her mouth continued to move, but not a sound left her lips. Harry smirked as Daphne discretely tucked away her wand.

"I know you all have questions," Harry said. "I'll be happy to answer them, in the Atrium, after the Wizengamot meeting. Now, if you could please let us through?"

The reporter at the front grumbled but moved out of the way as the Aurors made a path. Behind the reporter were a combination of well-wishers and critics. Some thanked him, while others hurled insults. In the case of one angry young man, he tried to hurl more than that. Fortunately, the Aurors were on him before his wand had even cleared his robes.

“You’ll pay for what you’ve done to my family, Potter! You’ll pay!” he shouted as the Aurors cuffed him.

“Let me know what that was about when you find out,” Harry whispered to Amelia.

She nodded as they pushed open the doors to the courtroom. All conversation stopped, eyes following their every move as they walked to the front and took their seats. The viewing gallery was packed to the brim, some even standing due to the lack of seats.

“Minister,” Dumbledore greeted him with a smile. “Would you like to hold normal proceedings first?”

“No,” Harry said, shaking his head. “Let’s get this over with.”

“Very well,” Dumbledore nodded, stepping back from the podium.

Clearing his throat, Harry stepped up with Amelia at his side.

“Right, first things first, let’s go over what happened,” Harry said. “Last night, the Auror department successfully executed the largest raid on British magical soil. Using the information obtained from my own testimony and that of convicted Death Eater Walden McNair, we identified the locations of over a dozen safe houses and residences harboring Death Eaters. Troublingly, a number of Death Eaters that were identified worked for the Ministry, including four in the Auror Department. After speaking extensively with Madam Bones, we devised a plan that would allow us to clean up the Ministry and arrest the majority of the Death Eaters we were after, all in one night.

“During yesterday’s meeting, while the Ministry was on lockdown, we arrested all known Death Eaters within the Ministry. Once the Ministry was safe, we executed the arrests of forty-seven Death Eaters. Four more were regrettably killed while resisting arrest. Sadly, two Aurors also lost their lives. Auror Marcus Peterson was killed while attempting to get non-combatants away from the fighting at the Nott residence. Auror Augustus Brooks was cursed in the back by fellow Auror turned traitor, Albert Runcorn. I will be petitioning this body during today’s meeting to see that both of these wizards receive the Order of Merlin, third class, for their heroic sacrifices.”

Taking a deep breath, Harry looked around the room, meeting the eyes of as many as he could.

“Despite those tragic losses, we achieved our goal of crippling Voldemort-” he broke off, hands clenched into fists at the fearful gasps and shouts around the room. “Voldemort’s forces. This is not the end, but it is an important first step in combating his forces. Now, I’m sure many of you have questions, and I’ll be happy to take them now.”

“Why weren’t we informed of this!?” a wizard shouted furiously, jumping to his feet.

“Thadeus Nott,” Amelia whispered helpfully.

“Security,” Harry replied shortly. “Information was given out on a need to know basis.”

“This is outrageous!” Nott shouted. “You can’t just go around arresting members of some of our most important families!”

“I can when they break the law,” Harry said forcefully. “We are in this war because the Ministry failed to act after the last one. Over half of the Death Eaters we arrested claimed the Imperius Curse last time, and the Ministry let them go. That will not be happening under my watch.”

“I can assure you,” Amelia said, placing a calming hand on his shoulder, “the DMLE will be doing a thorough investigation. All suspects will be questioned under Veritaserum and be given fair trials. The Minister was insistent that we not have another Sirius Black incident.”

That calmed several in the audience, but Nott fumed silently. After a moment, he sat down with a huff, knowing he couldn't push any further without looking suspicious himself.

"I have a question for Madame Bones," Marcus Greengrass, who Harry now knew was Daphne's grandfather, said as he stood. "What is your take on all of this."

"Minister Potter had my full support," Amelia said. "We spoke extensively in the week leading up to the operation, and this was the best option. Anything else would've left the Ministry vulnerable or allowed the Death Eaters time to flee."

Nodding, Greengrass sat back down. Harry and Amelia answered a few more questions before Dumbledore finally started the meeting properly. Thankfully, as they'd gotten through all the old business the day before, they started with new business.

"Madma Clearwater, the floor is yours," Dumbledore said.

Nervously, Penny stood and took the podium.

"Thank you, Chief Warlock," she began, licking her lips. "Witches and Wizards of the Wizengamot, as many of you may be unaware, I am a Muggleborn. As a Muggleborn, I've been met with many challenges. At Hogwarts, I had not only my lessons but an entire culture to learn. When I graduated, I found that, despite being Head Girl and having perfect grades, there were still some that judged me not by my character but by where I came from. Starting at the Ministry, I found myself sorting and delivering mail, while those with worse grades but from better families were given higher positions.

"In speaking with other Muggleborns, I found my situation was not unique. Some Muggleborns, despite their love for magic, are forced to go back to the Muggle world to work. These are wonderful, talented being our community is losing simply because of who their parents are. Which is why I'm introducing the Muggleborn Equality Act. This bill will ensure that Muggleborns pay equal taxes, that employers can no longer discriminate based on blood status,

and establishes fines for doing so. I believe it's far past time for us to forget about such petty differences and focus on the person, not their blood. Thank you."

There was a smattering of applause as Penny walked back to her seat. Taking her hand, Harry gave it a squeeze and smiled."

"You did great," he whispered.

Penny smiled prettily.

"Thank you, Ms. Clearwater," he said. "I'll now open the floor to questions. Madam Brown, the floor is yours."

"Thank you, Chief Warlock," Brown said. "Ms. Clearwater, I've always supported integrating Muggleborns into our society instead of ostracizing them. However, given the state of things, do you really think this is the best time to be introducing this kind of legislation?"

"Absolutely," Harry said, unable to stop himself from defending Penny. "In fact, this is exactly what we should be doing. This war started because a group of people think they're better than everyone else – that they have the right to take people's lives - just because of their ancestry. It's time the Ministry decides. Does it stand for only the old families, or does it stand for all witches and wizards, no matter who they are and where they come from?"

"Exactly," Penny agreed, squeezing his hand gratefully. "That is precisely the sort of attitude that put us in the position."

"If I may?" A wizard with long, gray hair and a fez on his head asked.

"Yes, Mr. Fawley?" Dumbledore gestured.

“While I don’t have a problem with the laws ensuring fair hiring practices, I do take issue with the tax changes,” he said. “Decreasing taxes for Muggleborns would increase taxes for everyone. I know the lower tax rate for the ancient families may seem like discrimination, but it was actually done as a reward for the many centuries we have provided our services.”

“I know,” Penny said. “But that doesn’t change the fact that higher taxes are driving Muggleborns away. The increased business taxes, especially, hinder new businesses. I know of at least twenty businesses that moved to the continent in the last twenty years because of it, including the Firebolt broom company. The innovations that once made us the greatest magical nation in the world are moving away and taking their money with them.”

“I see,” Fawley said thoughtfully. “Thank you for bringing that to my attention.”

The questions went on for quite a bit longer. Harry was impressed with how Penny answered them calmly and rationally. Thankfully, the meeting ended after that, though Harry knew he still had quite the task in front of him. With Penny and Amelia at his side and Hermione and Daphne bringing up the rear, they all took the elevator up to the Atrium.

A small platform had been set up, with Aurors guarding the stage. Of course, Harry was bombarded with questions. Holding his hands up for quiet, he stepped up and waited for silence.

“Is it true you’re arresting the opposition to take over the Ministry?” Rita asked the moment she could be heard.

“What?” Harry asked.

“It was in the prophet this morning,” Daphne whispered. “She thinks you’re trying to get elected Minister by arresting everyone that could run against you.”

“Oh, for Merlin’s sake,” Harry grumbled softly before addressing the crowd of reporters. “Look, I’m only going to say this once. I have never wanted to be Minister. I took the job because I had

no other choice. As soon as my thirty days are up, I'm going back to school. I have no intention of running for a full term."

"So you have evidence Fudge tried to kill you?" a woman asked eagerly.

"We have compelling evidence that former Minister Fudge knew there had been an attempt and did nothing to stop it," Amelia replied. "However, it will be up to magic itself to decide if he is guilty."

"Minister, do you have a girlfriend?" a witch shouted from the back.

"Witch Weekly, give them an answer, or they'll make something up," Daphne murmured.

"I do, but I'm not saying who it is," Harry said. "Can we get back to the reason we're holding this press conference?"

"Have you learned anything from the Death Eaters you arrested?" Evangeline asked.

"Not yet, but we've only just started," Amelia told her.

"Will the trials be made public?" A wizard with a French accent next to her asked.

"That's still something we need to discuss," Harry said. "However, even if the trials are not public, the results will be."

"How are you determining if someone was under the Imperius or not?" A Swedish witch asked.

“Everyone arrested was given a full medical examination where we looked for signs of the curse, and they will be questioned under Veritaserum,” Amelia replied. “If this sort of thing had been done at the end of the last war, we may not be in this position.”

“Have you decided on who you want to take over as Minister?” A wizard in the back asked.

Harry thought for a moment before answering.

“I’d like to see Amelia take over,” he said. “I think she’s exactly who we need in charge right now. Unfortunately, I don’t get to make that decision.”

Next to him, Amelia pursed her lips unhappily.

“Minister Fudge seems to think he’ll be back in office by the end of the month. Any comment?” Rita asked, a smirk on her lips.

“Nope,” Harry shrugged. “Next question.”

Harry spent another half an hour answering questions until they started to get ridiculous. Calling an end, he headed back to the elevator.

“I told you I don’t want to be Minister,” Amelia said the moment the doors were closed.

“Neither do I,” Harry retorted. “But how useful is the DMLE going to be with someone like Fudge or Scrimgeour in charge?”

Amelia pursed her lips and crossed her arms over her chest.

“Look, I know you don’t want to be Minister, but we need you there,” Harry said.

Amelia sighed and stared blankly at the wall in thought.

“I’m not making any promises, but we’ll see who runs,” she said after a long moment.

Harry nodded. It wasn’t the answer he was hoping for, but it would have to do. Hopefully, Amelia would come around before he left office. Wizarding Britain needed someone like her right now.

Getting off the elevator, Harry checked his watch. It was only early afternoon, but he already felt exhausted. It probably didn’t help he had trouble sleeping the night before.

“You okay?” Penny asked, rubbing his back.

“Yeah,” Harry smiled. “Just tired.”

“Why don’t you take the rest of the day off?” she asked softly. “You’ve been working hard the last two weeks. You need to take some time for yourself.”

“What about everyone else?” Harry asked.

Penny smiled.

“They’re working because you are,” she told him. “How about instead of going out tonight, we go back to my place, have a nice quiet dinner, and watch a movie?”

Harry smiled, taking her hand in his.

“I’d like that,” he said, turning to the room. “Everyone! I’m going to take the rest of the night off, and I want you to do the same. Thanks for all your hard work this week. I really appreciate it.”

There was a murmur of excitement as everyone began to pack up. Smiling prettily, Penny kissed him on the cheek.

“See you at my place in an hour?” she asked.

“I’ll see you then,” Harry smiled.

Harry only made it a few steps towards his office before Daphne caught up with him.

“You did well with the press today,” she told him.

“Thanks,” Harry said. “What was with all the foreign reporters today?”

“This was international news,” Daphne said. “This is the first time since Grindlewald that something like this has happened. Other countries are starting to take notice.”

“Too bad they’re not willing to help,” Harry grumbled, throwing his purple robes over the back of his chair.

“Have you asked?” Daphne asked.

“Yeah, not one of them is willing to send help without some pretty big concessions,” Harry sighed. “It’s all so stupid. The ICW was made to prevent another Grindlewald, and even they won’t do anything.”

“That’s bureaucracy for you,” Daphne said. “Useless at everything except making your life worse.”

Harry snorted and rifled through the papers on his desk, making sure he hadn’t missed anything important.

“Did you need anything else?” he asked curiously.

“Actually, there’s something I want to ask you,” Daphne said, flicking her wand to close the door.

Harry raised an eyebrow.

“Something wrong?” he asked.

“No, not wrong,” she said, fidgeting uncharacteristically. “Do you know if Granger is interested in witches?”

Harry blinked at the unexpected question.

“She’s never mentioned it,” he said. “So, you’re interested in dating Hermione?”

“Is there a problem with that?” Daphne asked defensively.

“Of course not,” Harry said. “I’m just surprised, that’s all.”

“Right,” Daphne nodded. “Sorry. My parents aren’t happy with my choice of partners. They expected me to get married, have a child or two... live out the typical Pureblood life. It’s why my

mother's been trying to talk me into pursuing a relationship with you, but like I said, you're not my type."

"I'll try not to take it personally," Harry smiled.

Daphne smirked, "If it makes you feel any better, if my parents forced me into a marriage contract, I would've made sure it was with you. And trust me, I can be very persuasive."

Ignoring her bravado, Harry smiled, genuinely touched.

"So, are you going to ask her out?" he asked.

Daphne sighed, "Well, I was hoping you knew if she liked witches. But since you don't, I'll probably flirt with her a bit and see how she reacts. I'd rather avoid making a fool of myself if at all possible."

"I could try and find out," Harry offered.

"No offense Potter, but you're about as subtle as a Hippogriff in heat," Daphne smiled. "Thanks, but I'll deal with this myself."

"Alright," Harry grinned. "Good luck."

"Have fun on your date," Daphne smirked.

Opening the door, she slipped back out into the main office.

“Hey, Sirius, Mrs. Weasley,” Harry called, entering the kitchen.

“Oh, hello, Harry, dear,” Mrs. Weasley smiled. “You’re home early. Dinner won’t be for a couple of hours yet. I could make you a snack.”

“No thanks, Mrs. Weasley,” Harry smiled. “I actually came to tell you I’m going out tonight. I have a date with Penny.”

“Way to go, kiddo,” Sirius grinned. “She a pretty witch.”

“Harry, I really don’t think that’s a good idea,” Mrs. Weasley frowned. “It’s awfully dangerous for you to be out and about right now.”

“I know,” Harry said. “We’re having dinner in at her place. It’ll be fine, Mrs. Weasley. I had the Ministry put up wards around her apartment building.”

“He’ll be fine, Molly,” Sirius said, rolling his eyes. “The kid deserves to have some fun after all the hard work he’s put in this week. Just let us know if you’ll be spending the night.”

Harry blushed at Sirius’ smirk.

“Oh, before I forget,” Sirius continued, snapping his fingers. “Do you think Amelia would let me have my job back as an Auror?”

“I don’t know,” Harry said, looking at his Godfather nervously. “Sirius, I know you want to be useful, but are you sure that’s a good idea?”

“I know the risks, Harry, but I can’t spend my life cooped up in this place,” Sirius said, looking at him pointedly.

Harry nodded. He didn't like it, but it wasn't so long ago he'd been in that exact same position.

"I'll talk to her about it tomorrow," he said. "Just promise me you'll be safe."

"Funny, I was just going to tell you the same thing," Sirius smirked.

Blushing, Harry threw his hands up and left the kitchen, Sirius barking in laughter behind him.

"Hey, Hermione?" he called, walking past the sitting room where Hermione was looking over Ginny's Summer homework.

"Yeah?" she asked.

"Could you help me pick out an outfit?" Harry asked.

"Outfit?" Ron asked as Hermione stood.

"He has a date with Penny tonight," Hermione grinned.

"Bloody hell," Ron said. "She's got really nice--"

"Ronald!" Hermione exclaimed as Ron held his hands over his chest.

"What?" he asked. "S'true innit?"

"Urgh," Hermione grunted exasperatedly.

Grabbing Harry's sleeve, she dragged him up the stairs and into his room.

"Alright, the first thing I need to know is what kind of restaurant are you going to?" she asked.

"We're not," Harry told her. "We're having dinner at her place."

"I thought you were going out," Hermione said, looking at him curiously.

Harry shrugged, "It was her idea. Honestly, after this week, I think we both just want to relax."

"Okay," Hermione said, looking through his wardrobe thoughtfully. "So, something nice but casual."

"Could I ask you a personal question?" Harry asked as she started pulling out a couple of shirts.

"Sure," she said distractedly.

"Are you attracted to witches?" he asked.

Hermione looked at him sharply and blinked. Harry knew he probably shouldn't have asked, but his curiosity was getting the better of him. Hopefully, Daphne wouldn't find out... or be too mad at him if she did.

"Why would you ask that?" she asked, looking at him intently.

"I was just curious," Harry said.

Maybe this wasn't such a good idea, Harry thought as Hermione narrowed her eyes.

“Well, I prefer men, but I’m not opposed to dating a witch,” she said slowly. “So, someone asked you if I was interested in witches.”

“I didn’t say that,” Harry said. “like I said, I was just curious.”

Hermione ignored him.

“It would have to be someone you saw today,” she said, talking more to herself than to him. “And she was in your office before we left. It’s Daphne, isn’t it?”

“Please don’t tell her I said anything,” Harry begged. “I told her I wouldn’t.”

“So, it is Daphne,” Hermione said, biting her lips as she started to pace. “If she didn’t want you to say anything, then why did you?”

“I was curious,” he shrugged.

Hermione rolled her eyes, “You know, that’s really going to get you in trouble one day.”

“I think you’re about four years too late for that, Hermione,” Harry grinned.

Smiling, Hermione shook her head and went back to picking out his clothes.

“Well?” Harry asked impatiently.

“This shirt with these pants,” Hermione said, pushing a pair of black slacks and a dark green dress shirt towards him.

“No, I meant about Daphne,” Harry said, rolling his eyes.

“Oh,” Hermione said. “Well, I’m not really sure. Like I said, I’m generally more attracted to men than women. Do you know when she plans on telling me?”

“She said she wanted to flirt with you a bit, see how you reacted,” Harry told her.

“That’s perfect,” Hermione smiled. “That should give me a few days to think about it and see how I feel. Thanks, Harry.”

“You can thank me by not telling Daphne,” Harry said.

“Are you really that scared of her?” Hermione asked with a smirk.

“Did you hear what she did to Johnson?” he asked. “You know, big burly Slytherin in the year above us? Well, rumor is he tried to cop a feel while we were waiting for the other schools last year. Apparently, Daphne froze his bits – like in a literal block of ice.”

“Really?” she asked excitedly. “Interesting. I’ll have to ask her about that. I wonder what book she found it in.”

Harry rolled his eyes.

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Stumbling out of the Floo into Penny’s apartment, Harry brushed the soot off his clothes.

“Hey, Harry,” Penny said from the kitchen, smiling.

Smiling, he joined her in the kitchen. She'd changed into a form fitting, dark red dress and had her hair tied back in a ponytail. As she turned back to the stove, Harry let his eyes rake over her curvaceous figure.

"Ooh, curry," Harry smiled. "Need any help?"

"Can you cook?" Penny asked.

"It was the only chore at the Dursleys I liked," he said.

Smiling, Penny nodded to the cutting board.

"Could you cut the lamb?" she asked.

"Sure," Harry said.

Grabbing a knife, he started cutting the lamb into cubes while Penny stirred the curry.

"It's nice getting out," he told her. "For the last week, it's felt like even when I'm home, I'm still working."

"I know what you mean," Penny said. "I swear I bring half the office home with me at night. It's been worth it, though. I was talking to my mum a couple of days ago, and I realized it was the first time I was actually proud to tell her about my work."

"You should be," Harry smiled, setting the cut lamb next to the stove. "You did brilliantly introducing that bill today. The next Minister would be a fool not to keep you on."

“Actually, that’s something I wanted to talk to you about,” Penny said, adding the lamb to the curry. “Do you remember how I told you I was thinking about leaving before you took office? Well, I’d already sent out a few letters, and I just got one back this morning. Professor Flitwick offered to take me on as his apprentice.”

“Really?” Harry grinned. “That’s great!”

“Thanks,” Penny smiled. “I’m just not sure what I should do. I mean, if I keep my job at the Ministry, I could help make a real difference. On the other hand, an apprenticeship for a Charms mastery is hard to come by. If I pass this up, I might never get another chance. Plus, it would mean I’d be at Hogwarts for the next three to four years.”

Sharing a glance, they smiled shyly.

“What do you think?” Penny asked.

“Well, what would make you happy?” Harry asked.

“Honestly? I really want to get my mastery,” Penny said. “I’ve always wanted to work with Charms, maybe open up my own enchanting shop. I know it’s kind of selfish-”

“No, it’s not,” Harry told her. “You have every right to do what you want with your life.”

Smiling, Penny brushed a stray lock of hair out of her eyes.

“You know, you should really listen to your own advice sometimes,” she said.

Turning back to the stove, she focused on it more than necessary.

"I also wanted to talk to you about us," Penny continued. "Are you just looking for a fling or something more serious? I mean, it's fine if you aren't. I know I kind of sprang this on you, and this is our first date..."

Penny trailed off as Harry hugged her from behind, his cheek resting against her ear.

"I was already thinking of ways to see you when I went back to school," he admitted.

Smiling brightly, Penny spun around and wrapped her arms around his neck. Threading her fingers through his hair, she kissed him softly. His hands caressed her back, stopping just short of her bum as their tongues entwined. Hearing a loud sizzle, Penny pulled back and gasped before spinning around to tend the stove. Harry grinned as he hugged her back, her round bum pressing against him.

"Can you take care of this while I go set the table?" Penny asked.

"Sure," Harry said.

With a smile, she turned and pecked him on the lips before spinning out of his arms. Harry let the curry simmer, stirring it occasionally while Penny set the table and popped open a bottle of wine.

"How do you like your meat done?" Harry asked.

"Medium rare," Penny replied.

Harry smiled, glad they could agree on that. A few minutes later, he shut off the stove and ladled it out onto two plates Penny handed him.

"So, what kind of enchanting do you want to do?" he asked as they sat down at the table.

“I’ve been thinking about trying to replicate a Muggle cell phone with magic,” Penny said. “Maybe I could do more stuff like that. Bringing Muggle conveniences to the magical world.”

“That’s brilliant,” Harry grinned. “My Godfather gave me a set of two-way mirrors, and I wished I had more of them. It would be great to talk to you or Amelia when I need to instead of waiting on a letter.”

“That’s a great idea,” Penny smiled enthusiastically. “I was thinking about enchanting necklaces or something. A mirror would be much better.”

“Maybe you could even find a way to travel like that, so I don’t have to fall out of the Floo,” Harry joked.

Penny laughed, and they both dug into their food. They talked and laughed throughout the meal before moving into the living room. She put on a movie before snuggling up with him on the couch. Legs tucked under her, she leaned against his side while Harry had his arm wrapped around her shoulders.

During an intense love scene, they turned to look at each other. Slowly, their faces drifted closer together until their lips met in a passionate kiss. As the kiss deepened, Penny moved his hand from her hip up to her breast. Nervously, Harry caressed it slowly, the large, soft globe giving way under her thin dress and bra. She moaned into his mouth when he squeezed it firmly, her fingers tightening in his hair.

Placing her hands on his chest, Penny pushed him back until he was flat on his back with her on top of him. She pressed her thigh against his straining erection and swallowed his groan as she ground against it. Sliding his hands down her back, Harry cupped her bum and squeezed, pulling her into him.

Eventually, Penny pulled back, leaving them both flushed and breathless. Kissing his chin, she smiled and laid her head on his chest. Harry didn’t catch much of the rest of the movie. He was

far more entertained by the beautiful woman in his arms. After it finished, neither of them was in much of a hurry to move.

“Are you having fun playing with my bum?” Penny asked.

Harry hadn’t realized his hands were still there and blushed as he moved them higher up her back.

“Sorry,” he murmured.

Penny giggled and gave him a lingering kiss.

“I wasn’t complaining,” she whispered.

Feeling bold, Harry held her gaze as he slid his hands slowly back down. As they rested on her cheeks, she smiled and kissed him again before laying her head back down on his chest.

“I think we should invite Hermione and Daphne for another movie night tomorrow,” Penny said after a moment.

“We could make it a double date,” Harry smiled. “Daphne fancies Hermione.”

“Really?” she asked, surprised. “What makes you think that?”

“Daphne told me?” he admitted. “Hermione might’ve figured it out when I said too much, but she’s not sure how she feels about it.”

“Hmm,” Penny hummed thoughtfully. “Well, it would give them a chance to feel each other out.”

“I think Daphne’s more interested in feeling her up,” Harry smirked.

“That was horrible,” Penny giggled. “So, movie night tomorrow?”

“Brilliant,” Harry grinned.

Chapter 8

Harry stumbled out of the Floo to a round of giggles from the girls. Rolling his eyes, he dusted off his clothes. When he looked up, he couldn’t help but stare at Penny for a moment. She wore a pair of tight jeans and a red halter top. A flush heated up his cheek as his gaze darted to her face. Smirking, Penny walked forward, kissing his cheek and hugging him tightly.

“Come on, I ordered pizza,” she smiled.

Walking over to the small kitchen, Harry raised his eyebrow at the number of drinks and snacks littering the counter, with just enough space cleared for two pizza boxes.

“I didn’t know what everyone would like, so I got one sausage and pepperoni and one Margherita,” Penny said.

“Margarita?” Daphne asked. “I thought that was a Muggle drink.”

“It’s pronounced the same but spelled differently,” Penny smiled. “But on a pizza, it just means tomato sauce, mozzarella, and basil. I also got a whole bunch of soda, crisps, and candy bars for you to try.”

“You really didn’t have to do all this,” Daphne said, looking overwhelmed by the selection in front of her.

"I know," Penny shrugged with a smile. "I may have gone a bit overboard, but I've never gotten to show a magical the Muggle world before."

"Here, try this," Hermione said, handing Daphne a can of Sprite.

"So, what are we watching?" Harry asked as they all moved into the living room.

"I thought we could watch Apollo thirteen," Penny replied before turning to Daphne. "It's based on a true story about American astronauts. They were going to the moon when their ship was damaged, and they had to come back to Earth."

"It's a really good movie," Hermione added.

"Sure," Daphne shrugged. "Did they make a movie about the people that actually landed on the moon?"

Harry sat down on the loveseat while Daphne and Hermione took the couch.

"I'm not sure," Penny admitted. "But I can show you the real footage they recorded on my laptop later if you want."

"Okay. You know, it honestly amazes me what Muggles can do without magic," Daphne said thoughtfully.

Penny smiled as she walked over and put the movie into the DVD player. Walking back over to the couch, she folded her leg under her bum and leaned against Harry's side. With a smile, he wrapped his arm around her, his arm resting on the bare skin of her upper back. Without a bra, he could feel her soft breasts pressing against his ribs. Harry had to focus his mind on other thoughts to quell his growing excitement.

On the couch across from them, Daphne sat so close to Hermione that their shoulders were touching. Neither of them looked at each other, but he could see both of them shifting occasionally, their hands and thighs briefly brushing against each other. Daphne caught him watching them out of the corner of her eye and glared as if daring him to say something. With a smirk, he turned back to the movie.

As he got caught up in the story, Harry didn't notice that his hand had trailed dangerously low as he trailed his fingers lightly up and down Penny's side. It wasn't until his fingers pressed against something surprisingly soft compared to her ribs that he realized he was touching the side of her breast. Blushing, he quickly moved his hand up and hoped she hadn't noticed.

Penny started shaking next to him. Glancing at her nervously, he blushed even harder when he realized she was laughing at him silently. Blue eyes sparkling, she leaned over and kissed him on the lips. When she turned back to the telly, she winced suddenly and rubbed her neck. Since the loveseat wasn't facing the telly, they both had to look sideways to see it.

"Can you sit back against the arm of the sofa?" Penny whispered.

Harry looked at her curiously but did as she asked. Grabbing his leg, she pushed it to the back of the loveseat and then settled herself between his legs, her back resting against his chest. Once she was comfortable, she took his hand and pulled his arms around her. Smiling, Harry kissed the top of her head.

He and the girls were so invested in the movie that they all jumped when a silver beaver swam through the wall and stopped right in front of the telly.

"There's been an attempted breakout at the Ministry," came Amelia's voice. "Come as soon as you can."

"Bugger," Harry grunted. "I need to go."

"I'll be right behind you. I need to change my shirt," Penny said.

Without waiting for a reply, she dashed into the bedroom and slammed the door.

"Do you want us to come with you?" Hermione asked.

"Yeah," Harry said. "I might need your help."

Grabbing an unopened can of Fanta off the coffee table, he tapped it with his wand.

"Portus," Harry muttered, briefly causing the can to glow blue.

Just as Hermione and Daphne gathered around him, Penny came racing out of the bedroom wearing a loose black T-shirt. Harry held up the can, and the girls all placed a finger on it. With another tap of his wand and a yank behind the navel, they were sucked into a swirl of color and wind. A few seconds later, they landed in Harry's office at the Ministry.

Being a Sunday, the office was empty of the normal hustle and bustle. Racing across the office, they got in the elevator and made their way down a floor to the DMLE. Where the Minister's office had been silent and empty, the DMLE was buzzing with activity. Amelia was barking out orders to a group of Aurors when she spotted them. Sending them off, she waved him over.

"What happened?" Harry asked.

"Follow me," Amelia replied.

Leading him to the back of the office, they walked down a long, plain hall leading to the interview rooms.

“A few minutes ago, we caught two Aurors on guard duty trying to sneak several Death Eaters – including Lucius Malfoy and Thadeus Nott – out of their holding cells,” Amelia said.

“Are they Death Eaters?” Harry asked.

“They don’t have the mark, and they claim they were threatened into it,” Amelia told him. “I’m waiting on a reply from Judge Pennington for permission to administer Veritaserum.”

Stopping at a door, she yanked it open, and Harry followed her inside.

“I told you I don’t know!”

Looking through the wall, charmed with a one-way viewing Charm, he saw an Auror sitting in a hard wooden chair, his hands bound to the heavy, sturdy table in front of him. Scrimgeour stood across from him and slapped his fists onto the table. Behind him, Tonks and Kingsley stood guard silently.

“How am I supposed to believe you when you can’t tell me anything!?” Scrimgeour shouted. “So, someone took your family, you can’t tell me who they are or what they look like – and then, instead of going to one of your superiors, you try to help known Death Eaters escape? This isn’t looking good for you, Jackson.”

“I didn’t have a choice!” Jackson pleaded. “They said they’d kill them!”

“Tell me who, damn it!” Scrimgeour shouted.

“I don’t know!” Jackson screamed back, tears falling from his eyes.

“What the hell is he doing?” Amelia grumbled, touching her wand to the wall. “Rufus!”

Looking up, his lion's mane-like hair looking wilder than usual, Scrimgeour glared at Jackson before hobbling to the door. Walking into the room Harry and Amelia were in, he closed the door behind him.

"What the hell are you doing!?" Amelia asked. "I told you to find out everything you could, not treat them like criminals!"

"They both have the exact same story," Scrimgeour said. "It's too convenient. There's something they're not telling us."

Harry closed his eyes and rubbed the bridge of his nose. Tuning out the dressing down Amelia was giving him, he slipped into the interview room and closed the door softly. With a wave of his wand, he released the manacles holding Jackson to the table. Rubbing his wrists, the Auror looked up at Harry and swallowed nervously. As he walked around and took a seat, Harry conjured two glasses of water and pushed one across the table.

"What happened?" he asked.

Jackson's hand shook as he took a drink of water and let out a heavy breath.

"When I got home from work last night, three masked men were waiting for me. Death Eater masks, you know?" he started nervously. "They disarmed me and tortured me for a bit. Then they told me that they had my family, and if I wanted to see them alive, I needed to break Malfoy, Nott, Crabbe, Goyle, and the Carrow twins out of the Ministry. My daughter's only eight, and the things they threatened to do to her if I didn't..."

"I understand," Harry said calmly. "I need to know exactly what they said to you."

"They told me to break them out of the Ministry and take them to an abandoned mill in Tamworth by seven tonight," Jackson said.

“Did they tell you about Richards?” Harry asked curiously.

“Yeah,” Jackson said, blinking like he hadn’t considered that before. “Yeah, they did.”

“How would they have known you were on guard duty?” Harry questioned.

“I – I don’t know,” Jackson stammered, staring down at his glass. “I mean, I might’ve complained about it after a couple of pints at the pub.”

“We all make mistakes,” Harry reassured him. “Is there anything else you can tell me? Did you recognize any of their voices, maybe a distinct accent?”

“No,” Jackson said, shaking his head.

Sighing, Harry stood, walked around the table, and patted him on the shoulder.

“I’ll do everything I can to get your families back,” Harry promised.

“Thank you, Minister,” Jackson said gratefully, blinking back tears.

Giving his shoulder a squeeze, Harry looked back at Tonks and Kingsley and nodded for them to follow him. Walking back into the observation room, Tonks entered last and closed the door.

“What are our options?” Harry asked.

“Short of giving in to their demands, I can’t think of another option,” Amelia admitted.

“You can’t seriously be considering letting them go,” Scrimgeour growled angrily. “The Ministry doesn’t give in to terrorists’ demands!”

“So, what, you want to just leave them to a fate worse than death?” Harry asked just as angrily.

“All we need to do is send a few Aurors, catch whoever is waiting for the Death Eaters, and interrogate them. We’ll have their families back in a few hours,” Scrimgeour said.

“And if they get away?” Amelia asked, raising an eyebrow. “I don’t like this any more than you do, but it’s too risky. If we send the prisoners with an escort of Aurors, we can make sure they make the trade.”

“This is ridiculous!” Scrimgeour yelled. “We can’t just hand them over after all the work it took to catch them. You mark my words; if we let Malfoy go free, we’ll never see him again!”

“Uh, I have an idea,” Tonks said hesitantly.

“Not now!” Scrimgeour barked.

“Oh, shut up,” Harry said.

Scrimgeour’s face turned red as he glared at Harry, but he ignored him and turned to Tonks.

“What is it, Tonks?” he asked.

“Well, we confiscated a whole bunch of Polyjuice potion from a brothel in Knockturn Alley a couple of days ago,” Tonks said. “What if we Polyjuiced a bunch of Aurors to look like the prisoners? The Death Eaters will think they’re getting the trade they want, and once the families are safe, we can arrest them.”

“Tonks, that’s brilliant!” Harry grinned.

“Indeed,” Amelia nodded, checking her watch. “We have just under three hours. We’ll need to check the Polyjuice potion to make sure it works.”

“Alright, we’ve got a plan. Let’s get to work,” Harry said.

“Yes, sir,” Amelia smiled.

Harry rolled his eyes as they made their way back to the Auror office. It only took a few minutes to discover that the Polyjuice worked just fine. Quickly, Amelia gathered together a few Aurors and told them who they were going to impersonate. Seeing that Tonks wasn’t even in the lineup, he pulled her aside.

“Why didn’t you pick Tonks?” Harry asked quietly.

“Tonks is a good Auror, but I wanted our best for this,” Amelia replied.

“But this isn’t just about looking the part. They need to act the part, too,” Harry told her. “Any small mistake could give them away. Tonks has more experience impersonating people than anyone else. Besides, she doesn’t need the Polyjuice potion. I don’t know if there’s a way to check for that-”

“There is,” Amelia said thoughtfully. “You’re right. Auror Tonks!”

Tonks jumped and looked surprised when she spotted Amelia waving her over. Making her way over, she stopped next to Harry.

“Yes, ma’am?” she asked.

"I was just speaking with the Minister, and he made a very good point," Amelia said. "Can you transform into Lucius Malfoy without the use of Polyjuice?"

Tonks' eyes widened as she looked between Harry and Amelia.

"Uh, I'd need to get a good look at him, but yes, I could," Tonks replied.

"And would you be confident you could act like him?" Amelia asked, pinning the young Auror with a penetrating gaze. "There can be no mistakes with this."

"Yes, ma'am. I'm sure," Tonks said, squaring her shoulders.

"Good, you'll be taking Dresden's place," Amelia told her. "You'll go in as Malfoy with Kingsley. The plan is we'll show them Malfoy, then release the rest when they produce Jackson and Richard's families. Hopefully, as Malfoy, you'll be able to convince them to do it. If you don't feel ready for this, tell me now."

"No, I can do it," Tonks said confidently.

"Then go see Malfoy and do what you need to do to make this work," Amelia said. "I'll tell Matilda you're coming."

Turning away, she left to go tell the other Aurors about the change. Suddenly, Tonks spun towards Harry and threw her arms around him.

"Thank you," she said, bouncing on the balls of her feet excitedly.

"You're welcome," Harry smiled.

"I've been trying to talk Scrimgeour into letting me do undercover work for months, and he keeps turning me down. Says I'm too clumsy," Tonks said, rolling her eyes. "Maybe after this, he'll listen to me."

"I'll talk to Amelia about it," Harry said. "Scrimgeour is really starting to piss me off."

"You know he's been talking about running for Minister after you leave?" Tonks asked.

"Oh, Merlin," Harry groaned. "That's the last thing we need. I'd much rather have someone like Amelia in office."

Tonks snorted, "Good luck with that. Anyways, I should get going. Thanks, mate. I won't let you down."

Giving Harry another hug, she headed for the holding cells. Before making it to the door, she stubbed her toe on one of the desks and stumbled, though she managed to stay on her feet. Harry smiled and shook his head as she hobbled to the door, cursing under her breath. Walking back over to Amelia, he leaned against the desk next to her.

"Have you heard back from Judge Pennington yet?" Harry asked.

"No. Why?" Amelia asked. "Do you think they're lying?"

"It would be nice to know for sure," Harry sighed. "I've been thinking about what we can do if something goes wrong. I'd like to have permission to use Veritaserum on them if we have to."

Amelia checked her watch and pursed her lips.

"We've got an hour left. I could send someone to find him," she offered.

“That would probably be best,” Harry said.

Nodding in agreement, Amelia called over an Auror. She gave her a small stack of parchment and told her to find Judge Pennington as quickly as possible. As she left, Matilda joined them and leaned heavily on the table.

“Amelia, Minister, I’m concerned about sending Kingsley and Hartford with the Polyjuiced Aurors,” she said softly.

“Why?” Amelia asked, her brow furrowed.

“I’ve seen kidnapers react badly when they don’t see who they expect,” Matilda said. “I think it would be better to send Richards and Jackson.”

Amelia pursed her lips unhappily.

“I don’t think they can remain objective,” she said, shaking her head. “They’re too emotionally involved.”

“Of course they are,” Matilda said. “It’s their families on the line. Are you really worried they can’t handle it, or are you made they didn’t come to you first?”

Amelia narrowed her eyes and glared at Matilda.

“They should’ve come to me instead of breaking the law,” she hissed.

“Oh, come on, Amy. What would you have done if it was Susan’s life at stake?” Matilda asked, which earned her an even worse glare. “You know damn well you would’ve done whatever it took to get her back safe, and to hell with any laws you had to break to do it.”

Amelia continued glaring at her for a long moment before she let out a sigh and removed her monocle.

“Do you really think they can be trusted not to act emotionally if something unexpected happens?” she asked softly.

“I think we’re far better off sending in who the kidnappers are expecting than someone they aren’t,” Matilda said. “Jackson and Richards will do whatever it takes to get their families home safe.”

Amelia sighed again and turned to Harry.

“What are your thoughts, Minister?” she asked.

Harry thought for a long moment before he replied.

“Look, I’m not going to pretend I know anything about how to deal with kidnappers or ransom demands, but if I was in their shoes, I’d want to go,” Harry said.

Amelia stared down at the table, tapping her finger rhythmically. Harry could see how much the decision weighed on her, and he felt a wave of sympathy for her. A single mistake could leave several innocent people dead.

“If we get approval to use Veritaserum, they pass the questioning, *and* I think they can handle it... I’ll send them,” Amelia said.

“Fair enough,” Matilda nodded.

As if summoned by the conversation, the Auror Amelia had sent to find Judge Pennington returned with a wizard in tow. He was tall, thin, and quite old. The long white hair flowing over

his shoulders was only equaled in length by his mustache, braided to hand down on either side of his slightly shorter beard.

“Madam Bones, Minister,” he greeted. “Your Auror said you needed a few warrants signed, but I’d like to hear a bit more before I approve them.”

Nodding, Amelia gave him a brief overview of the situation.

“I see,” Pennington frowned, curling his braided mustache around his finger. “And the one for Mr. Malfoy. I was under the impression Judge Fernsby already signed off on that.”

“He did, but I’d like to question him again to see if he knows anything about the kidnapping,” Amelia replied. “Obviously, we couldn’t have known to ask him about it the last time we questioned him.”

“Do you have evidence suggesting he would be aware of any pertinent information?” Pennington asked.

“He was specifically named by the kidnappers, along with a few other suspects. However, given his connections, we believe Malfoy to be the most likely to know anything,” Amelia said. “I’d like to question them all, with your permission. I was just concerned we wouldn’t be able to reach you in time.”

“My apologies, I was bowling with Albus,” Pennington said. “I’ll allow them to be questioned under Veritaserum, but only the suspects that were directly named and only about this crime. As for the Aurors, do you have reason to believe they were *not* coerced into this?”

“No,” Amelia answered.

“Then I’ll only agree to allow the use of Veritaserum with their written consent,” Pennington replied. “Was there anything else?”

“What about the possibility we may need to question suspects in the field?” Amelia asked.

“You know I can’t sign off on that without more information, Amelia,” Pennington said with a frown. “However, I understand this is a delicate situation. As a compromise, I’ll remain present to sign any further warrants we might require.”

“Thank you,” Amelia said gratefully before turning to Matilda. “Matilda, get the consent forms for Jackson and Richards and see if they’ll sign them. I’ll be along after I question Malfoy.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Matilda smiled.

Harry followed Amelia back to the interview room holding Malfoy. When they opened the door, they found Malfoy standing against the wall in nothing but a pair of black silk boxers while Tonks stared at him a few feet away. The blonde glared at them, his cheeks tinged red from anger and embarrassment. His skin was lily white, and his body had virtually no definition to it. He reminded Harry of one of those featureless action figures Dudley used to play with as a child.

“Oh, hey, boss,” Tonks said.

“Auror Tonks, can you come back in a few minutes? We need to question Mr. Malfoy,” Amelia said.

“That’s alright. I think I’m done,” Tonks told her.

Scrunching up her face, she morphed into an exact duplicate of Lucius Malfoy. Tonks winced slightly and tugged at her robes, which were now far too tight. A quick wave of her wand loosened them up considerably.

“What do you think?” she asked, her voice matching Malfoy’s.

“That’s creepy,” Harry muttered while Amelia looked her over critically.

Tonks grinned, which looked disturbing on Lucius’ face.

“Excellent work, Auror Tonks,” Amelia said. “And you won’t have a problem holding this?”

“Nope,” Tonks said. “As long as I’m conscious, I can hold it as long as I need to.”

“And is everything accurate?” Amelia asked, looking her over closely.

“Everything but the bits,” Tonks replied. “I can do them if you want, but I didn’t think it was necessary.”

“Disgusting,” Malfoy sneered, his hands moving to cover himself.

“No, I don’t think they’ll look that closely,” Amelia said, her lips twitching.

“I hope not,” Tonks snorted.

Shifting back to her normal look, she picked up Malfoy’s clothes off the floor and headed for the door.

“Where are you going with my robes!?” Malfoy shouted.

“Shut up and sit down, Mr. Malfoy. You have much bigger concerns to worry about,” Amelia told him firmly.

Harry stayed in the room as she force-fed him Veritaserum and questioned him thoroughly. Unfortunately, he didn't know anything about the kidnapping or who was behind it. They questioned the others as well but got the same result. Not one of the Death Eaters that were supposed to be rescued knew anything useful.

When they were finished with the Death Eaters, Amelia and Harry moved on to questioning Jackson and Richards, who both eagerly agreed to be questioned under Veritaserum. They didn't give them any new information, but they now knew that neither of the men was working with Voldemort, and their families had genuinely been kidnapped.

"Alright, listen up, both of you," Amelia said, pacing in front of the table Jackson and Richards sat at. "Auror Bennet thinks it would be best to send the two of you to the exchange."

Jackson and Richards sat up eagerly.

"We'll do it," Jackson said quickly.

"However," Amelia continued, with a glare, "I have my concerns. Understandably, both of you are very emotionally involved. *If* I let you go, you need to swear to me right now you'll follow orders."

"We will," Richards, a short, bald man with extremely dark skin, said. "We know we let you down by not coming to you first. It won't happen again."

Jackson nodded quickly in agreement.

"Do not make me regret this," Amelia said, jabbing a finger at them aggressively. "And if something like this ever happens again, you come to me first. Understood?"

"Yes, ma'am," they replied in unison.

Reaching into her pocket, Amelia took out a pair of wands and silver badges and tossed them onto the table.

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The last half an hour seemed to crawl by. Harry paced back and forth across the office while Aurors ran around, doing busy work. As he passed Penny for the dozenth time, she sighed and wrapped her arms around him from behind.

“Relax,” she whispered softly. “You’re making everyone else nervous.”

“Sorry,” Harry muttered.

“Think positive,” Penny said, kissing the side of his neck.

Closing his eyes, Harry relaxed back against her and let out a deep breath.

“Alright, time to go!” Amelia yelled a few minutes later.

Straightening up, he gave Penny’s hand a squeeze before making his way over to Amelia.

“Remember, you’ll be Portkeying in here,” Amelia said, pointing to a dirt roading leading to the abandoned mill on the map. “We have two teams ready to Portkey in if anything goes wrong. Richards, Jackson, you go in, make the exchange, and get out with the hostages. As soon as they’re safe, we make the arrests. Any questions?”

The Aurors remained silent, their faces set with determined looks.

“Alright, take your Polyjuice now,” Amelia said, starting a timer.

The Aurors downed the potion and grimaced as they changed. Tonks morphed into Malfoy, filling out the robes she'd taken from him earlier.

"Go!" Amelia barked.

Grabbing the Portkey, they all disappeared in a swirl of color. The moment they were gone, Matilda pulled down a projector screen attached to the ceiling near the back wall. As it came down, and an image of what one of the Aurors was seeing flickered to life.

"Where is that coming from?" Harry asked.

"A Surveillance Charm on Auror Tonks," Amelia told him.

"Isn't that dangerous?" Harry asked.

"It's undetectable," Matilda assured him. "As is the Communication Charm she's using."

Harry nodded and relaxed as Penny rubbed his back. While Jackson walked Tonks up the road to the mill, Richards stayed behind with the rest of the Polyjuiced Aurors. It took a couple of minutes for them to walk up to the run down mill. It was empty when they got there. A knot grew in his stomach as they waited for something to happen.

Suddenly, a series of *pops* echoed through the countryside. Six cloaked and masked Death Eaters appeared in front of them, wands drawn.

"Where are the others?" the lead Death Eater growled.

"Where are our families?" Jackson countered.

“You’re not in a position to be plain’ games,” the Death Eater spat.

“My partner is waiting down with the others for my signal. Show me our families are safe, and he’ll bring them here,” Jackson said, his voice remarkably calm.

The Death Eater stared at him for a long moment before turning and nodding to one of the others. Walking over to the mill, he tapped his wand on the wall in a complex pattern. When he finished, the bricks folded back to reveal a door, much like the entrance to Diagon Alley. Yanking the door open roughly, the Death Eater reached in and started pulling people out. Two older women, their hands bound with rope, came out first, followed by three small children between the ages of four and eight.

“Daniel!” the blonde woman yelled.

“Shut up!” the Death Eater barked, shoving her roughly.

“It’s okay, Mary,” Jackson said, his voice trembling.

“Show me the others, or they die,” the lead Death Eater growled.

Taking a trembling breath, Jackson raised his wand and sent up red sparks. A moment later, Richards came around the corner, leading the other Polyjuiced Aurors at wand point.

“They’re here, not let our families go,” Jackson said.

“After our people are gone,” the Death Eater replied coldly.

“Tonks, you can’t let them take you anywhere. It’s too risky,” Amelia said, her wand pressed to the base of an old microphone.

“Let them go,” Tonks said, matching Malfoy’s drawl perfectly. “These Aurors won’t cause any trouble, will you?”

Harry couldn’t see her face, but he could hear the superior smirk in her voice.

“Sorry, Malfoy, but we have orders,” the Death Eater replied.

The image swung to the side as Tonks looked at him sharply.

“From who?” she asked.

“The Dark Lord,” the Death Eater answered.

“Shit,” Harry cursed.

“Go along with it for now,” Amelia told Tonks. “But do *not* leave with them. Everyone pick a target. Wait for Tonks’ signal and then hit them hard.”

The atmosphere in the Auror office turned tense as they watched the Polyjuiced Aurors gather around the Portkey one of the Death Eaters produced. As Tonks looked around, Harry noticed that Richards had edged closer to the Death Eater holding the hostages at wand point.

Suddenly, Tonks’ wand appeared in her hand, and there was a bright red flash. There was complete chaos as the Death Eaters fired back instinctively. Outnumbered and surprised, they fell quickly. Tonks turned back, and Harry sighed in relief when he noticed the hostages were safe. While the Aurors in the room clapped and celebrated, he noticed movement in the corner of the screen.

One of the Death Eaters was down but not out. Yanking up his sleeve to reveal the writhing black tattoo on his forearm, he pressed the tip of his wand to it. Harry's veins flooded with adrenaline as he rushed forward and pressed his wand to the microphone.

"One of them summoned Voldemort! Get out of there! Now!" he shouted.

"What!?" Amelia asked, the rest of the room falling deathly silent.

Tonks noticed the moving Death Eater and stunned him quickly.

"We need to go! Move!" she yelled.

The Aurors rushed to Portkey the stunned Death Eaters back to the Ministry while Jackson and Richards checked on their families.

"There's no time. Get out of there now!" Harry yelled frustratedly.

"Leave the rest. Go!" Tonks yelled.

The Aurors left the two remaining Death Eaters and started getting out their own Portkeys just as more Death Eaters began Apparating in. They began dueling as they walked backward toward Jackson, Richards, and their families.

"Grab hold!" Jackson yelled.

Voldemort appeared silently as if he had simply stepped out of the air. His red eyes flashed angrily as he took in the scene.

"Stop them!" he screamed furiously.

Tonks turned to grab the Portkey just as he brandished his wand. At the same moment they were whisked away, she let out a scream that made Harry's heart stop. The Aurors appeared in the Auror Office an instant later. All Harry could focus on was the river of crimson pouring down from a large tear in Tonks' robes. It seemed to take forever for her to fall to the ground, her skin deathly pale and her eyes staring unfocused into the distance.

For a second, she didn't move, and a single thought ran through his mind.

She's dead.

Then, she took a weak, rasping breath. Harry felt like his feet were stuck to the floor, unable to command his body to move as Matilda raced to her side.

"She's hurt bad. We need to get her to St. Mungos quickly," she said, waving her wand frantically as she tried to stem the loss of blood.

Amelia made a Portkey and handed it to her. Harry blinked, and they were gone. The room was painfully silent except for the soft sniffing of the small children clinging to their fathers. Slowly, everyone started moving again while Harry remained in place, his eyes stinging as he stared at the pool of red gradually soaking into the carpet.

"Harry?" Penny asked softly, her hand sliding across his shoulders.

"It's my fault," Harry whispered.

"What?" Penny asked.

"It's my fault," he said louder. "It was my idea for her to go. If I hadn't-"

“Then someone else would’ve gotten hurt,” Penny interrupted. “Or maybe they wouldn’t have made it out at all. This isn’t your fault, Harry. Tonks is an Auror. She knew what she was getting into. You can’t blame yourself for things outside of your control.”

Harry knew she was right, but it did nothing to ease the guilt he felt.

“I’m going to go to the hospital to check on her,” he said after a moment.

“Do you want me to go with you?” Penny asked softly.

Harry hesitated for a moment before nodding. Pulling his gaze away from the pool of blood, he took Penny’s hand in his and walked over to Amelia.

“Amelia, I’m going over to St. Mungos to check on Tonks,” he said.

She looked at him, her hardened gaze softening, and nodded.

“Alright, I’ll send you a Patronus if anything comes up,” Amelia said. “Let me know when you find out how she is.”

Harry nodded stiffly and turned, only to find Hermione and Daphne waiting for him.

“Oh, Harry,” Hermione said, lunging forward to hug him tightly. “It’s not your fault.”

Swallowing thickly, he patted her back.

“I know,” he said, even though he didn’t believe the words as they left his mouth.

“Do you want us to come with you?” Hermione asked, pulling back and wiping tears from her eyes.

Harry thought for a moment before shaking his head.

“No, stay here and help Amelia,” he said.

Biting her lip, Hermione nodded. As he moved to leave, Daphne reached out and placed her hand on his arm.

“You did the best you could, Potter,” she told him. “This is You-Know-Who’s fault, not yours. Put the blame where it belongs. Whether you like it or not, people are going to get hurt, and there’s nothing you can do to stop it.”

“Daphne,” Hermione hissed.

“It’s alright,” Harry said, feeling oddly lighter at her words. “Thanks, Daphne.”

Nodding, she stared at him with her bright blue eyes and let go of his arm. Hand in hand, Harry and Penny took the elevator up to his office and Flooed to St. Mungos.

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For two hours, Harry sat in the waiting room as half a dozen healers came and went from Tonks’ room, tending to her wounds. He managed to ask a couple of them how she was doing, but all they would tell him was they were doing their best. The whole time they waited, Penny talked about anything she could think of, the steady stream of words calming his nerves and giving him a distraction from watching the clock.

It was another half an hour before they were approached by a nurse.

“Minister, you can see her now,” the young brunette witch told him.

“How is she?” Harry asked, jumping to his feet.

“She’s stable, but I was just given the case, so I don’t know any more than that,” the nurse told him. “I can ask one of the healers to talk to you if you’d like.”

“Please,” he nodded.

Smiling prettily, she led them to Tonks’ room and pushed open the door. For a moment, he thought she might have shown him to the wrong room when he saw the head of mousy brown hair. As he got closer to the bed, he got a good look at her face. Tonks was resting on her stomach without a shirt. Thick white bandages were wrapped around her torso, covering her modesty. Despite how fresh the bandages looked, streaks of red had already soaked through. While she wasn’t as pale as before, she still lacked her normal color.

Sitting in the chair next to the bed, he spent a minute watching her slow, steady, even breaths. The sound soothed him as Penny took his hand and leaned against his side. Occasionally, Tonks’ brow would scrunch, and her nose would twitch. It was so quintessentially Tonks that it nearly brought a smile to his face.

They’d been sitting in silence for a few minutes when they heard the sound of heels clicking rapidly on the floor. There was a sound of a brief, murmured conversation before a tall woman with long, curly brown hair appeared in the doorway. Gasping, she covered her mouth as she looked at Tonks. Behind her, a man with the same mousy brown hair as Tonks, though much thinner on the top, peeked around her shoulder.

Realizing they must be Tonks’ parents, Harry stood and wiped his sweaty palm on his jeans.

“Er, hi,” he said, wincing internally at how lame he sounded. “I’m Harry.”

“What happened?” the woman asked, taking Tonks hand and sitting in the chair on the other side of the bed.

Swallowing thickly, Harry told her everything. The woman – Tonks’ mother, Andromeda, as he came to learn – kept her eyes on her daughter’s face throughout his explanation. When he’d finished, they sat in silence before it became too much for Harry.

“I’m sorry,” he blurted. “It’s my fault she got hurt. I’m the one that thought she should go.”

Andromeda looked at him sharply, her brown eyes boring into him.

“Why?” she asked. “Why did you send her?”

“I thought she was the best person for the job,” Harry said, looking down at his feet. “Tonks is a great Auror, and being a Metamorphmagus made her perfect for something like this. But if I’d known she was going to get hurt like this....”

Looking up, he held Andromeda’s gaze for a long moment before she turned to Tonks and ran a hand softly through her hair.

“I never wanted Nymphadora to become an Auror,” she said softly. “I’ve dreaded getting an owl telling me she’d been hurt like I did today. But... not once, ever, have I questioned her ability. I know my daughter, Minister, and she wouldn’t blame you for what happened. And neither do I.”

Harry let out a breath he hadn’t realized he was holding.

“Thanks,” he said softly. “And you can just call me Harry.”

Andromeda looked up and gave him a small smile a moment before someone knocked on the door.

“Hello,” said a tall, thin Indian wizard with a bald head and a large, bushy mustache. “I’m healer Banerjee.”

“How bad is it?” Andromeda asked, squaring her shoulders.

“Your daughter was hurt quite badly,” the healer said, looking down at his clipboard. “The spell cut deep enough to nick one of her vertebrae but, fortunately, didn’t do any permanent damage. It was quite a dark curse. She’ll be sore for quite a while, but I expect her to make a full recovery.”

Everyone in the room sighed in relief.

“We have two possible treatment options for her,” he continued. “This first is a regimen of potions and creams she’ll need to use for a month. The other includes two extra potions and will help her heal in half the time. However, I’m afraid they’re both quite expensive. Approximately a hundred Galleons each.”

Andromeda and Ted shared a startled look.

“The Ministry will cover the cost,” Harry said firmly. “I want her given the best treatment possible.”

Healer Banerjee raised an eyebrow in surprise before making a note on his clipboard.

“Very well,” he said. “Auror Tonks will have to stay here for a couple of days to make sure the wound closes properly, but she should be able to go home after that. After a couple of weeks, she should be good enough to go back to work.”

“Thank you, Healer,” Andromeda said.

“You’re quite welcome,” Banerjee smiled. “If you need anything, just call for the nurse.”

“So, this is what it’s like Having a good Minister for once,” Ted smiled. “I quite like it. I don’t suppose I could talk you into staying on for a full term, could I?”

Harry snorted, “After the number of people I’ve hacked off, I’d never get elected.”

“Urgh.”

Everyone turned to look at the bed as Tonks stirred.

“Don’t move, Nymphadora,” Andromeda said softly.

“Anyone get the name of that Hippogryff?” Tonks asked, squinting as she opened her eyes.

“Do you remember what happened?” Andromeda asked.

Tonks went silent for a moment, her brow furrowed until they suddenly widened.

“Shit,” she cursed.

“Language,” Andromeda scolded. “And stop trying to move. You’re hurt.”

“What happened after I got hit?” Tonks asked worriedly before settling back on the bed.

“Everyone else made it out fine,” Harry assured her.

“Harry?” Tonks asked, turning her head to look at him. “No one else was hurt?”

“No,” he told her.

Tonks sighed, “Thank Merlin.”

“How are you feeling?” Harry asked.

“Like I got run over by the Knight Bus,” she said, wincing as she moved her shoulders. “What did I get hit with?”

“Voldemort hit you with some kind of dark Cutting Curse,” Harry said. “The Healer said you should be fine in a couple of weeks.”

“Harry thinks it’s his fault you got hurt,” Penny said.

Harry sighed as Tonks glared at him.

“Penny, would you smack him upside the head for me? It hurts too much to move right now,” she said.

Smiling, his girlfriend cuffed him across the back of the head lightly.

“Don’t be stupid,” Tonks said. “Of course, it’s not your fault. If anything, it’s my fault for not being clear enough. I should’ve told them to leave the Death Eaters and get out. Madam Bones isn’t pissed at me, is she?”

“Nymphadora, must you swear?” Andromeda asked.

Tonks rolled her eyes.

“I don’t think so,” Harry said. “We were all just worried about you. You were bleeding a lot when you Portkeyed in.”

Tonks sighed, “I really hope I didn’t screw up my first big mission.”

“You did beautifully,” Harry said, taking her hand and giving it a squeeze.

“Thanks,” Tonks smiled. “Do you know what went wrong?”

“One of the Death Eaters wasn’t stunned,” Harry said. “He was able to call Voldemort through his Dark Mark.”

“I didn’t even know they could do that,” Tonks said, scrunching her brow.

“Harry, it might help you make a list of everything you know about You-Know-Who and give it to the Aurors,” Penny said. “You know more about him than anyone except Dumbledore.”

Harry nodded thoughtfully. Sitting back in his chair, he stayed and talked with Tonks and her parents for another hour until the nurse came in and gave Tonks a bunch of potions. Within a couple of minutes, she had dozed off to sleep.

Flooding back to the Ministry, they walked back to the Auror Office, preparing for a long night at work.

Stumbling out of the Floo, Harry brushed himself off. Glancing at the pile of paperwork sitting on his desk that had appeared overnight, he sighed and made his way to the door.

“Morning,” Penny said brightly.

She placed a cup of coffee in his hand and kissed him on the cheek.

“Thanks,” Harry smiled before he opened his mouth wide in a yawn.

“I’m afraid you have a busy morning,” Penny told him. “Amelia moved up the trials for Malfoy, Nott, Crabbe, Goyle, and McNair. They start in half an hour.”

“I know. I was up all night doing the paperwork,” Harry said tiredly. “Anything else?”

“After the trials, you have a meeting with the Heads of Department,” Penny told him with a sympathetic look. “But after that, you’re all caught up.”

“Yeah, except for the pile of paperwork sitting on my desk,” Harry sighed.

“Well, aren’t you just a bright little ray of sunshine today,” Penny smiled. “How about I help you after lunch?”

“That’d be great,” Harry said gratefully. “Could I talk you into helping me find the files I need for the trial?”

Smiling, they walked back into his office. Penny knew exactly where to look and found everything he needed in just a few minutes. As they got everything organized, Hermione stepped through the Floo.

“Morning,” she said brightly. “You left early.”

“Malfoy’s trial got moved up to this morning,” Harry told her.

“What!? When did that happen?” Hermione exclaimed.

“Amelia thought of it last night,” he replied.

“Why didn’t you tell me? I could’ve helped,” she complained.

“You were already asleep by the time I got home,” Harry shrugged.

“What time did you go to bed?” Penny asked curiously.

“Um... a little after three, I think,” Harry said, his brow furrowed.

“No wonder you’re so cranky,” Penny smiled.

“I’m not cranky,” Harry grumbled.

Hermione giggled and took the papers from his hands. She quickly had everything organized and ready to go. Making their way to the elevator, they ran into Daphne and brought her along. Kim and Markus greeted them with a silent nod and summoned the elevator.

“How’s Tonks doing?” Kim asked as they stepped inside.

“She’ll be alright,” Harry told her. “She should be able to go home tomorrow, and she’ll be back to work in a couple of weeks.”

“Thank Merlin for that,” Kim sighed. “So, no permanent damage?”

“No,” Harry said. “It nicked the bone, but it missed anything vital. She kind of got lucky. That curse was one of Voldemort’s favorites during the last war. They only figured out a counter-curse a few years after he disappeared. From what the Healer said, it won’t even leave a scar.”

“Good,” Markus nodded. “She’s a gifted witch. I’d hate to see her career end before it’s even truly started.”

“Moody and Matilda aren’t happy, though,” Kim said. “You might want to warn her they plan to give her a bollocking when she gets back.”

“I’ll let her know,” Harry said, his lips twitching.

“Why are they upset with her?” Hermione asked with a frown. “It wasn’t her fault she got hurt.”

“She wasn’t clear enough with her orders,” Markus said. “They only give her a hard time because they like her. If they didn’t think she could handle the job, they’d park her at a desk.”

“Is that why they beat the snot out of Potter every time he goes to visit Moody?” Daphne asked with a smirk.

Harry rolled his eyes. He’d trained with Moody a couple of more times in the last week, and both times came back battered and bruised but happy.

“Pretty much,” Kim grinned.

The elevator came to a stop, and they stepped out into the dimly lit halls of the courtrooms. They walked deep into the bowels of the Ministry to courtroom ten. Most of the Wizengamot had already arrived and were talking quietly, including Amelia, who was talking to Arthur. Spotting Harry, she waved him over.

“Morning,” Harry said, taking his seat while Hermione and Penny laid out the paperwork.

“Good morning, Minister,” Amelia said.

“Morning, Harry,” Arthur smiled. “I really can’t thank you enough for the new office.”

“Don’t mention it,” Harry smiled. “It was ridiculous to have an entire department working out a closet. So, what brings you this far down?”

“Oh, I just needed a quick word with Amelia,” Arthur said. “We’ve seen a surge in Muggle baiting, I’m afraid.”

“Do you think it has anything to do with Voldemort?” Harry asked, stifling a sigh when Arthur winced at Voldemort’s name.

“Oh, no. Nothing that bad,” he replied quickly. “Just the usual Fanged Toilet Seats and Biting Teacups. Things calmed down after the Aurors started patrolling Knockturn Alley, but I suspect someone got in a new shipment.”

“We’re keeping an eye out, but the Aurors have been quite busy as of late,” Amelia said. “If you can give me an idea where to look, that would certainly help.”

“I understand. I just wanted to keep you updated,” Arthur said amicably.

They all turned at the sound of murmured voices and watched as visitors began entering. Some of the first to enter were Narcissa and Draco Malfoy. Narcissa looked quite subdued compared to what Harry remembered of the woman from the World Cup. Draco, on the other hand, looked as arrogant as ever. Glaring at Harry, he sneered before being pulled away by his mother.

“Well, it looks like it’s time for me to get going,” Arthur said. “Good luck.”

“Thanks, Mr. Weasley,” Harry said.

“Good morning, Minister, Director,” Judge Pennington said as he took the seat Dumbledore normally occupied.

“Good morning,” Amelia replied while Harry gave a respectful nod. “I take it you’ll be overseeing the trial today?”

“Indeed. The other judges and I thought it would be best since I’m already familiar with the latest charges,” Pennington said. “I trust everything is in order?”

“The Ministry is ready to present its case,” Amelia said formally.

Pennington banged his gavel three times, silencing the room as people shuffled to their seats.

“If everyone is here, then let us begin,” he said, his voice carrying around the room effortlessly. “Aurors, bring in the accused.”

A door on the left side of the room opened, and a dozen Aurors marched several men into the room. The chains connecting the manacles on their wrists and ankles clinked loudly in the silent room. Malfoy, wearing a plain, black robe, was the first to be forcibly pushed into one of the stone chairs in the center of the courtroom. Thick, iron chains sprouted from the back of the

chair and snaked around his chest. Malfoy sneered at the Wizengamot as they whispered quietly amongst themselves.

Nott, Crabbe, Goyle, McNair, Runcorn, and the Carrow twins were pushed into the seats next to him. They were the last Death Eaters captured during the raid to be prosecuted. Amelia had originally put their trials off for as long as possible to gather as much evidence as she could. However, after the escape attempt, she wasn't willing to take the risk of keeping in the Ministry any longer.

"Lucius Abraxas Malfoy," Judge Pennington said. "You've been accused of fourteen counts of kidnap and assault of Muggle women, thirty-two counts of murder, ten counts of black, and one hundred and twenty-two counts of bribery of Ministry officials."

The Wizengamot gasped, and had Harry not read the files beforehand, he would've been shocked as well. Many witches and wizards had been convinced, or convinced themselves, that even if people like Malfoy had joined the Death Eaters willingly, they surely stopped their crimes after being caught. Harry suspected it was how many justified letting him walk on the excuse of the Imperious Curse sixteen years ago. Now, the Wizengamot were being faced with reality, and it was far more horrific than any of them could've imagined.

Perhaps even more frighteningly, because of the rules for questioning suspects under Veritaserum, that, almost certainly, wasn't all he was guilty of. In order to ask a suspect a question under truth serum, you had to demonstrate some evidence they might have committed that crime. You couldn't just ask a person what crimes they committed, and you couldn't use someone else's word under Veritaserum as evidence. It made things difficult but not impossible. Between Connie Hammer and Matilda Bennet, the lead investigators, they uncovered some alarming evidence.

"Not guilty," Malfoy proclaimed once the murmurs died down.

Pennington continued down the line, reading off similar charges for Crabbe, Goyle, and Nott, though he had the added charges of use of an Unforgivable and murder of an Auror. Things got even worse when he read the charges for McNair. The former Head of the Department for the Control and Regulation of Magical Creatures and Ministry Executioner was easily the sickest of

the lot. Along with the charges of bribery and blackmail, he was charged with over two hundred counts of kidnap, assault, and murder of Muggle women. From the evidence they found and his confession under Veritaserum, they knew McNair enjoyed hunting down Muggle women, assaulting them for days or weeks on end in his home, and then beheading them in his garden. Thanks to a little black book they found in his home, he was also charged with sending the notorious Werewolf, Greyback, after business rivals and political opponents.

The Ministry's reputation would take a hit from his conviction, but Harry didn't care. Frankly, he thought it deserved it after letting these witches and wizards escape justice for so long.

By the time Pennington finished reading all the charges, the entire Wizengamot was looking green. With the exception of Runcorn and the Carrows, these were wizards that freely wandered the halls of the Ministry and attended dinners and fundraisers in their own homes. To know someone you openly associated with and invited into your home was capable of such depravity was quite the shock.

"The defendants have pled not guilty," Pennington said to Hermione, who wrote it down for the record. "We'll start with the prosecution. Madam Bones, make the Ministry's case."

Amelia stood and smoothed out her robes. For the next quarter of an hour, she went over the basics of how Malfoy came to be arrested and what physical evidence she had gathered. After producing the warrant for the use of Veritaserum, a Pensieve was brought out.

"I'll now show you the recording of Mr. Malfoy's questioning under Veritaserum," she said, pouring the silver, smoky liquid into the floating basin.

With a tap of her wand, an image was projected above the Pensieve. It was of the inside of one of the smaller interrogation rooms. Amelia sat on one side of the table, Kingsley and Dawlish standing guard over her shoulders, while Malfoy sat chained on the other side.

"Lucius Malfoy, by order of Judge Colleen Abbot, we are hereby authorized to question you with the use of Veritaserum," Amelia said, holding up a scroll.

Malfoy tried to fight, but Kingsley and Dwlsh were both large men, well over six feet tall, and easily overpowered him. Moments after the Veritaserum touched his tongue, Malfoy's face went slack.

"Were you aware that it was Aurors at your residence on the night of July fourteenth?" Amelia asked.

"Yes," Malfoy replied in a dull monotone.

"Why did you attack them?" she asked.

"I knew they were there to arrest me," he admitted.

"Were you hoping to kill them?" Amelia asked, her face expressionless but her dark blue eyes blazing.

"Yes," Malfoy replied.

"Who were the other people at your home, and why were they there?" she asked.

"They were fellow Death Eaters," Malfoy answered. "We were discussing the situation with Potter and what to do with him."

"And what were you planning?" Amelia asked sharply.

"We discussed killing his supporters. You, Weasley, and Diggory were the most likely targets," Malfoy said emotionlessly. "We also talked about kidnapping his Mudblood and breaking her before sending her back. The difficult part would be getting a hold of the little bint. No one knows where she and Potter are staying."

Harry clenched his fist and glared at the real Malfoy furiously. The blonde kept his head down, his disheveled hair covering his face.

“Were you planning to assassinate the Minister?” Amelia asked, drawing his attention back to the memory.

“We wanted to, but the Dark Lord made it clear Potter is his to kill,” Malfoy replied.

Amelia pursed her lips and looked over the parchment in front of her.

“We discovered a book of transactions in your study,” she said after a brief pause. “What is that for?”

“It’s a list of the bribes I pay and the blackmail I collect,” Malfoy said.

“And the payment you made on July the eighth. Who was that to, and what was it for?” Amelia asked.

“A bribe for Fudge,” Malfoy told her. “The Dark Lord wanted Potter tried publically to further tarnish his reputation.”

“What do the initials in that book mean?” Amelia asked.

For the next few minutes, she questioned him about the records he kept and how to read them. It was boring to watch, but it was one of their best pieces of evidence. Malfoy had records on every corrupt person in the Ministry, and that book was their ticket to rooting them out. It also showed the depths of Fudge’s corruption. The man had taken bribes for years for just about anything.

“Ma’am, it’s starting to wear off,” Kingsley told her.

“Give him another dose,” Amelia ordered.

Malfoy’s head was yanked back, and three more drops of Veritaserum were placed on his tongue.

“Now, tell me about the room hidden under the Drawing Room,” Amelia said. “What do you use it for?”

“Mostly to store Dark Artifacts I don’t want the Ministry to find, but I occasionally use it to hold Muggle woman we capture,” Malfoy answered.

“And what do you do with these women?” Amelia asked.

Malfoy described, in horrific detail, what he and his friends did to Muggles. One witch grabbed the wizard’s hat off the man next to her and was sick into it.

“What do you do with the bodies?” Amelia asked.

“I transfigure them into mulch and spread them throughout the garden,” Malfoy said. “It’s probably the most useful thing they’ve ever done.”

The questioning continued for a couple of more minutes until she asked about the various posions they found. The answer he gave to one of them surprised everyone.

“I’ve been thinking of using it on my wife,” he explained. “She’s getting a bit on in age, and I’m thinking about looking for someone younger.”

Harry glanced at Narcissa, who was staring wide-eyed and pale at her husband. Next to her, Draco looked like he’d been punched in the gut.

The memory faded before a second took its place. After the original questioning, they had enough evidence to question Malfoy about the crimes he'd been acquitted of in his first trial. By then, no one was shocked when he confessed to doing everything of his own free will. Often happily.

"Mr. Malfoy, do you have anything to say in your defense?" Judge Pennington asked.

Lucius stayed silent, not even raising his eyes from the floor.

"This is your last chance to say anything before we vote," Pennington warned.

Again, silence greeted him.

"Very well, all those who believe he is guilty, raise your wands," he said.

For the first time in centuries, the Wizengamot voted unanimously to convict. They moved immediately to sentencing, where Lucius Malfoy was given life in Azkaban with no chance of parole. He would spend the rest of his life in the high-security wing with only his fellow Death Eaters and Dementors to keep him company.

"I almost wish we had the death penalty," Harry grumbled.

Penny nodded and gave his hand a squeeze. She looked pale and ready to be sick at any moment.

"Do you need to take a break?" he asked softly.

"No," she replied, her voice cracking before she cleared her throat. "I want to stay."

Harry nodded but decided to keep an eye on her. The next two hours were spent watching the interrogations of the other Death Eaters. McNair's was by far the worst. Even on Veritaserum, you could still sense his glee as he described assaulting, torturing, hunting, and killing young Muggle women. By the time he was sentenced, Penny and Hermione both looked so pale he was worried they might faint.

"Perhaps we should take a short recess," Harry suggested.

"Indeed," Judge Pennington said tiredly. "The court will take a fifteen-minute recess."

"Kingsley!" Amelia called as people began to file out.

The tall, broad-shouldered Auror approached and leaned close.

"Get those four to Azkaban straight away," she said firmly.

"Yes, ma'am," Kingsley nodded.

Relaying the message to the other Aurors, Malfoy, Crabbe, Goyle, and McNair were swiftly ushered out of the room. The Carrow twins and Runcorn were left in their chairs, looking defeated.

Helping Penny out of her seat, Harry led her out of the courtroom and down the hall to the loo. She walked inside shakily, followed a moment later by the sound of heaving.

"Could you check on her for me?" Harry asked Kim.

Nodding, she disappeared into the bathroom while Harry sighed tiredly. A short way down the hall, he watched as Hermione clung to Daphne, tears rolling down her cheeks.

“It’s times like this that I really hate that you’re Minister.”

Harry turned and looked at Amelia questioningly.

“You and your friends should be enjoying your Summer, talking about the girls you fancy and playing Quidditch, not sitting in a courtroom listening to that,” she frowned.

“The Wizengamot should feel properly ashamed they allowed this to happen, and it took a seventeen-year-old to point it out to them,” Marcus nodded.

“Yeah, well, hopefully, this’ll be a wake up call,” Harry said.

“I sure as hell hope so,” Amelia said, glancing back over her shoulder at the members in the hall.

“I think we should push to make being a Death Eater illegal at the next meeting,” Harry said quietly.

Amelia turned to him sharply, her gaze hard as she nodded.

“If it’s ever likely to happen, then it’s now,” she agreed. “Dumbledore will be against it, though. His opinion carries a lot of weight.”

“I know,” Harry nodded. “It’s still worth a try. If just taking his mark will land you in Azkaban, it might make people less likely to join him.”

Looking around, he pulled his wand and put up a discrete Silencing Charm. Amelia raised her eyebrow and looked at him curiously.

“We need to talk about Azkaban, too,” he said. “I’m worried it’s only a matter of time until he breaks them out. Given the choice, I think we both know the Dementors will join Voldemort over us. What the hell are we going to do if we can’t even keep the ones we catch in prison?”

Sighing, Harry ran a hand through his hair agitatedly.

“I have a couple ideas,” Amelia said. “The biggest problem will be getting the Wizengamot to spend the money for better security. The Dementors cost nothing. Staffing the prison with wizards would mean a large tax hike for everyone.”

“What about foreign prisons or the Goblins?” Harry asked.

“The Wizengamot would never agree to turn our citizens over to a foreign government, no matter how disgusting their crimes,” Amelia said. “And the Goblins would only be marginally better than Dementors, and they’d charge an arm and a leg.”

“This is ridiculous! We should be able to secure our own prison, for Merlin’s sake!” Harry ranted.

“I agree with you,” Amelia said calmly. “The trick is convincing the Wizengamot.”

“If I may?” Marcus asked, getting a nod from Harry and Amelia. “If the Ministry were to declare war, wouldn’t the Minister have the executive powers to make that kind of change without approval from the Wizengamot?”

“Hmm, he would,” Amelia said thoughtfully. “It might be a bit of a stretch to get the Wizengamot to declare war right now. In fact, I don’t think the situation we’re in fits the legal requirements. I’ll have to look into it.”

The bathroom door opened, and Harry dropped the Silencing Charm. Penny had washed her face, and there was a bit more color to her skin. Wrapping his arms around her, Harry kissed her temple and held her close.

"I'm fine," Penny mumbled.

"You sure?" Harry asked softly.

Penny nodded against the crook of his neck.

"I can't believe they were allowed to go free for so long," Hermione raged, cheeks pink and eyes red as she walked over to join the group. "So many lives could've been saved if it wasn't for corrupt *people* like Fudge. It's disgusting. Can't we arrest him or something?"

"I'm afraid not," Amelia said. "Since the majority of the Wizengamot signed off on it, he can't be held accountable. Well, at least not without holding the entire Wizengamot liable as well."

"Like they'll ever admit they made a mistake," Daphne scoffed.

Harry could certainly understand Hermione's anger. He wanted heads to roll over this. Someone should be held responsible for allowing those monsters to walk free without a proper investigation. But maybe he could stop it from happening again.

"Hey, Hermione," he said. "Maybe you could look into making some new policies or laws to make sure something like this can't happen again. Like a law that anyone claiming the Imperious Curse has to get a full medical scan and testify under Veritaserum or something."

Hermione's brown eyes lit up.

"Harry, that's brilliant!" she exclaimed. "Why didn't I think of that?"

“Come by my office tomorrow, and I’ll help you get started,” Amelia said. “This could be the push the Wizengamot needs to make some much needed changes.”

“And we only have ten days to do it in,” Harry said. “After that, it’s up to the next Minister.”

“We can do it,” Penny said firmly. “I’ll help.”

“Me too,” Daphne added.

Harry smiled at them gratefully.

“Looks like people are heading back in,” Kim pointed out.

“You sure you want to stay?” Harry asked Penny softly.

“I’m sure,” she said.

“You’ll be alright,” Amelia told her. “The worst of it’s over now.”

Together, they headed back into the courtroom and took their seats. Looking out at the crowd, Harry noticed a number of visitors hadn’t returned, including the remaining Malfoys.

Amelia was right. The Carrow twins and Runcorn, while still despicable people, weren’t nearly as bad as the Death Eaters they’d listened to earlier. Amycus and Alecto Carrow had a knack for finding blackmail and used it to extract money, favors, and, disgustingly, sex from their victims. While they’d certainly committed more than a few murders, it wasn’t nearly at the level of McNair.

Runcorn was the last to be tried. Watching the memory of his interrogation, they learned that he'd joined the Death Eaters just a week before Voldemort fell. Unlike the others, he hadn't spent the last sixteen years hunting Muggles and committing atrocities. He'd lived a normal life as an Auror, slowly working his way up the ranks. Or, he had, until the night Voldemort returned.

The moment he knew the Dark Lord was back, he worked hard to be as useful as possible. He saw this as his opportunity to rise quickly in the ranks of the Death Eaters instead of being looked down upon as a hanger-on like he had at the end of the last war. Harry honestly found it quite disconcerting how fast he'd turned on people he'd worked with for nearly two decades for the chance at a bit of power.

All three were swiftly sentenced to Azkaban for life. It had been an exhaustive three-hour trial, and everyone was quick to leave the courtroom. Evangeline waited for Harry near the doors to ask him a quick couple of questions about how he thought the trial went. After promising to give her another one-on-one interview later in the week, Harry jumped into the elevator with Penny, Hermione, Daphne, and his guards before heading back up to his office.

"Kim, can you take the girls out to London for lunch?" Harry asked.

"You're not coming?" she asked.

"I have a meeting with the Department Heads in fifteen minutes," he told her. "I know you're supposed to guard me, but I don't want them going alone after what Malfoy said at his trial."

Kim shared a glance with Marcus, who nodded.

"Alright," she said.

"Thanks," Harry smiled.

Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a few Galleons and put them in her hand.

“Lunch is on me,” he said.

As Kim left, Harry summoned one of the Ministry House Elves and ordered a sandwich for lunch. While he ate, he relaxed as much as he could. A few minutes later, he left his office and was back in the elevator. Going down two floors, he headed to the meeting room where most of the Heads were already waiting for him. For once, Julia Edgecomb didn't scowl when she saw him. She was much more subdued, sitting at the table by herself while the others talked quietly.

“Hello, Harry,” Arthur smiled, clapping his shoulder lightly. “You look like you've been hit with a Tenderizing Charm.”

Harry snorted, “Feels like it. That trial was a nightmare.”

Arthur squeezed his shoulder sympathetically.

“I really wish it wasn't up to you to do things like that,” he said. “But I can't tell you how proud I am of what you've accomplished. You've made one heck of a difference around here, and you've put some very bad people behind bars. The wizarding world is a lot better off because of you.”

Harry felt a swell of pride and blinked to fight the burning in his eyes.

“Thanks, Mr. Weasley,” he said softly.

“I think we know each other well enough for you to call me Arthur,” the redhead grinned.

They talked for a few more minutes while they waited for everyone else to show up. Amelia was the last to arrive, looking as tired and worn as Harry felt. Taking their seat, he sat back with a sigh.

“Right, Arthur, let’s start with you,” Harry said. “How are things in your department?”

“Not too bad,” Arthur replied. “The new office is making things easier, but as I mentioned before, we’ve seen a rise in Muggle baiting. I looked through our case files while you were at the trial. I marked all the locations where we’ve had incidents. I’m not sure what you can get from that, but I thought it might help.”

Harry took the map and gave it a glance before handing it to Amelia.

“Do you have a list of cursed items you’ve been finding lately?” she asked Arthur.

Looking through his files for a moment, he handed her a piece of parchment.

“Thank you,” Amelia said. “I’ll tell my Aurors to keep an eye out.”

“Anything else?” Harry asked, to which Arthur shook his head. “Alright. Amelia, do you want to go next?”

“Certainly,” she said. “We’ve put a number of new policies into place to improve the security within the Ministry. Now, as I’m sure you’re aware, there was an incident yesterday where two of my Aurors had their families kidnapped and held for ransom. One of the reasons this happened is because they talked about their jobs in a public place. In response, we’re issuing a ministry-wide advisory. To avoid things like this happening in the future, no one should talk about the specifics of their job outside close friends and family.”

“Isn’t that a bit extreme?” Dirk Cresswell asked.

“For most of you, yes,” Amelia replied. “This is more aimed at the Aurors and anyone who works with sensitive information. That said, it’s a precaution I think everyone should take, just to be safe. In addition, we’ve placed a night guard in the Floo offices. With your permission, Minister, I’d like to set up a line of communication between there and the Auror offices. It might only save us a few seconds compared to the paper airplanes we use now, but it could make a difference.”

“Wouldn’t it be easier to set up a Floo in the Auror offices?” Harry asked.

“For calls to the Aurors, yes,” Amelia said. “However, in assaults resulting in injury, people almost always call St. Mungo’s first. If we can catch that call in the Floo office, we can send Aurors to respond minutes faster.”

“Alright, go ahead, then,” Harry nodded. “Speaking of the Floo Offices, how are things there?”

“We replaced the two employees that were arrested and instituted the policies Madam Bones suggested,” Julia said softly. “Have you had a chance to read the notice I sent you today?”

“No, I haven’t,” Harry replied.

“I see,” she said nervously. “Well, I’m afraid to say six of our employees were discovered listening to private calls and relaying that information to various sources. They’ve since been fired, and all evidence has been turned over to the Aurors.”

“Oh, bloody hell,” Harry sighed, dropping his head into his hands.

“Six out of the eight people in the Floo Office were selling information?” Amelia asked angrily.

Julia cleared her throat nervously, “Yes, ma’am.”

“We have got to do something about this,” Harry sighed. “This is insanity. There’s corruption at every level. How the hell are people supposed to trust the Ministry when people are listening to their private conversations and selling that information.”

“Were any of those six sending information to Fudge or Umbridge?” Amelia asked.

“I don’t know the specifics,” Julia admitted. “The Aurors were the ones to discover it, and they refused to share any information with me.”

“Good,” Amelia nodded. “Minister, I’ll talk to the Aurors involved when I get back to the office and let you know what they found.”

Harry sighed and nodded. Continuing around the table, they discussed a few small issues, but nothing big came up. As they all got up to leave, Saul Croaker approached him.

“Do you have time to visit the Department of Mysteries today?” he asked.

“Oh, right,” Harry said.

He’d had to cancel three scheduled visits because things kept popping up and getting in the way.

“Actually, I could use a break from all of this,” he said, waving his hand around.

“Excellent,” Saul smiled as they made their way to the elevator.

“So, what does the Department of Mysteries actually do?” Harry asked.

“A number of things, but our main focus is research,” Saul replied. “We study the very depths of magic to gain a better understanding of the world around us.”

“Sounds like Hermione’s dream job,” Harry smiled.

“We’ve had our eye on Ms. Granger for quite some time,” Saul nodded. “She’s an exceptionally intelligent witch. We’d be happy to have her among our ranks.”

“You’ve been watching her?” Harry asked incredulously.

“We keep an eye out for students that show exceptional talent, such as Ms. Ganger... and yourself,” Saul said.

“Me?” Harry asked. “I’m nowhere near as smart as Hermione.”

“Intelligence isn’t the only thing we look for,” Saul told him. “You have a gift for understanding magic on a level most don’t. I watched you closely during the Triwizard Tournament. Your performance was impressive.”

“I had help,” Harry muttered.

“And you think the other Champions didn’t?” Saul asked, cocking an eyebrow.

The elevator stopped on the lowest level of the Ministry, and the doors opened.

“Level nine, Department of Mysteries,” the cool female voice of the elevator announced.

As Harry, Saul, and Marcus walked down a long, narrow hall toward a blue door with a knob in the middle, Harry slowed his steps.

“Minister?” Marcus asked.

“I’ve seen this before,” Harry said softly.

“When?” Saul asked curiously.

“In my dreams,” Harry said. “I see myself in this hall, walking toward the door, but it keeps getting further away.”

“How often do you have these dreams?” Saul asked.

“Almost every night,” Harry admitted.

“Perhaps you’re a bit of a seer,” Saul suggested.

Harry snorted, “Not according to Professor Trelawney.”

Saul smiled and led Harry through the door. They entered a circular room with eight doors evenly spaced apart. As soon as Marcus entered, the door slammed shut behind him, and the room began to spin.

“This is designed to confuse anyone trying to infiltrate the Department of Mysteries,” Saul explained. “The trick is to look at the ceiling.”

Looking up, Harry noticed runes etched into the stone. The runes changed rapidly as the doors spun, but as they came to a stop, so did the runes. Unfortunately, Harry didn’t take Runes, so he couldn’t read them. Opening one of the doors to the left, Saul led him into a room full of cabinets containing hourglasses of all shapes and sizes.

“This is where we research Time Magic,” Saul explained. “As you can see, we mostly use Time-Turners. There are other ways to time travel, of course. However, these are the safest and most efficient way to do so. This is the one Ms. Granger used in her third year.”

Saul pointed to a cabinet, where Harry saw dozens of necklaces. Among them, he spotted a familiar looking one with a long chain. They walked through several more rooms, where Saul explained what they were for and why.

“The Cognivores were a bit of an accident,” he admitted. “We were looking for a way to store the human consciousness outside of the body for critically ill patients. However, They’re a bit too quick to devour thoughts.”

“Why did you keep them if it didn’t work?” Harry asked, keeping his distance from the tank.

“To discover what went wrong,” Saul said. “Now, if you go through here, you’ll find something very interesting.”

Opening the door at the back of the room, they walked into a room that looked like a theater. A ring of stone benches led down to a circular platform upon which sat an arch. An odd, ghostly veil covered the arch, fluttering despite the lack of wind. As they walked closer, Harry began to hear whispered voices. A chill ran down his spine, his body forcing him to come to a stop.

“What are those voices?” Harry asked.

“What voices?” Marcus asked.

“We don’t know,” Saul said. “We don’t know what the voices are or why only some people can hear them. This is called the Veil of Death. However, that’s a bit of a misnomer. All we know is that anyone who’s gone through hasn’t come back. Many believe this leads to the land of the dead, but there’s no real evidence for that. The name mostly comes from the sixteenth century, when it was used to execute prisoners.”

“How can you not know what it does?” Harry asked. “Someone had to make it, didn’t they?”

“The Department of Mysteries, and later the Ministry, was built around the arch,” Saul said. “We don’t know who made it, when, or why. It’s the greatest mystery we have. Despite thousands of years of research, we still know almost nothing about it.”

Creeping a bit closer, Harry closed his eyes and tilted his head, listening closely. The indistinct murmur of voices seemed to grow louder, but he wasn’t able to make out what they were saying. Opening his eyes, he shivered and stepped back. A part of him was curious. If this was a bridge to the land of the dead, he could be only feet away from hearing his parents. Despite that tempting promise, something inside of him was screaming to get as far away as he could.

“That thing gives me the creeps,” he shuddered.

“Understandable,” Saul smiled. “I don’t suppose you heard anything you could make out, did you?”

“No,” Harry replied.

“Ah, well, maybe one day we’ll know what they’re saying,” he said. “If you’ll come with me, I have one last room to show you.”

Walking up the stone steps to a different door than the one they came in, Harry looked back at the arch one last time before stepping into the next room. It was massive, the ceiling three stories high. Rows and rows of shelving ran as far as the eye could see. Stacked on the shelves were thousands of crystal balls, each with a handwritten plaque sitting in front of it.

“This is the Hall of Prophecy,” Saul said, his voice echoing in the cavernous room. “Every prophecy made since the formation of the Department of Mysteries is stored here. Be careful not to touch anything. They’re heavily charmed to keep them safe.”

Pulling a scrap of parchment out of his pocket, Saul glanced at it before leading them deeper into the room. Looking at the numbers on the shelves, he stopped at row eight hundred and ninety-nine.

“Ah, here we are,” he said. “Mr. Dresden, this one is yours.”

Marcus blinked in surprise and looked at the crystal ball Saul was pointing to.

“You can take it,” Saul said. “It’s yours.”

“Why didn’t I know about this?” Marcus asked.

“Some prophecies aren’t clear who they’re about until long after they’re made,” Saul replied. “But anyone can come into the Ministry and ask if there’s a prophecy about them anytime they like. We used to send out notifications, but that was stopped hundreds of years ago to save money.”

Turning back to the crystal ball, Marcus picked it up as the mist within swirled.

“You can listen to it in private if you prefer,” Saul said. “Just tap it with your wand to activate it.”

Drawing his own wand, the Unspeakable gave it a wave, and another crystal ball appeared on the stand. Turning, he walked back toward the center aisle. Marcus pocketed his prophecy while Saul glanced at a scrap of parchment again.

“You can let Ms. Greengrass know there is a prophecy for her as well,” Saul said, leading them deeper into the room.

They walked for a long time, more than halfway through the colossal room, before Saul came to a stop.

“Here we are, row ninety-seven, shelf six,” he said.

Harry counted six up from the bottom shelf and froze when he spotted a bronze plaque with his name on it.

S.P.T to A.P.W.B.D (partial S.T.S)

Dark Lord and (?)Harry Potter

“What are these initials?” Harry asked.

“The first is the person who gave the prophecy, and the second is the person it was given to,” Saul replied. “In this case, the prophecy was given by Sybill Trelawney and heard by Albus Dumbledore. The prophecy was also partially heard by Severus Snape.”

“Snape?” Harry asked incredulously.

“Indeed,” Saul said. “I didn’t mention it at the meeting, but we’ve detected several people sneaking into the Hall of Prophecies the last few days. They were all known associates of the Headmaster. We watched them for a couple of days and determined that they seemed to be standing guard. I confronted Dumbledore about this, and after he’d waffled on for a while, he admitted Voldemort is after something here. I suspect this is it.”

“Why wouldn’t he tell me?” Harry asked, staring at the glass orb.

“I’m afraid I can’t answer that,” Saul said.

Tentatively, Harry reached out and took the prophecy. It was small, fitting nicely in his palm. Holding it, a weight settled in the pit of his stomach. Swallowing thickly, he stuffed it into the pocket of his robes.

“Do you have a blank crystal ball?” he asked quietly.

Looking at him curiously, Saul held out his hand and conjured one with a twirl of his wand. Harry took it and placed it on the stand that had held his prophecy.

“Smart,” Marcus nodded.

“What do you want to do about the people standing guard?” Harry asked.

He was certain they were Order members, and he really didn’t want to see any of them get into trouble.

“I see no reason to turn down free security,” Saul smirked.

Harry nodded in relief.

“I think that’s enough for one day,” Saul continued. “When you have time, I’d like to ask some questions about what you’ve been through. The information you have might help us get a handle on the Killing Curse and how to stop it.”

Harry nodded silently, his thumb running over the smooth glass orb in his pocket distractedly.

Sitting in his office, Harry stared at the Prophecy orb sitting on his desk. Across from him, Penny, Hermione, Daphne, and Amelia watched him closely.

“Just get it over with, Potter,” Daphne said.

“Daphne,” Hermione hissed.

“Putting it off isn’t going to change what it says,” Daphne shrugged.

“I know,” Harry said, his eyes locked on the orb, staring at the swirling mist inside.

Reaching across the desk, Penny took his hand and gave it a squeeze.

“We’re here for you,” she said.

“There’s a good chance Voldemort wants to know what this prophecy says,” Harry said, finally looking up and staring at each of them in turn. “Just listening to this could put your life at risk.”

“I’m not going to let you face this alone,” Hermione said adamantly.

“Neither am I,” Penny agreed firmly.

“Voldemort already wants me dead,” Amelia shrugged.

Everyone turned to look at Daphne.

“I’ve already picked a side,” she said, glancing at Hermione. “Might as well go all in.”

Taking a deep breath, Harry picked up his wand. The tip trembled lightly as he tapped the orb. The mist flowed out of the top of the orb, forming an image of Professor Trelawney's face, her eyes staring unseeingly ahead.

"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives... The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies..."

Harry blinked, the words resonating in his mind as a weight settled heavily on his shoulders.

"Well, fuck."

Chapter 10

Harry stared into the swirling midst of the orb on his desk, lost in thought as the Floo burst to life. He didn't need to look up to know who it was. He'd been waiting for the man for over an hour.

The man took two steps into the room and then stopped, an oppressive silence settling over the office.

"Why?" Harry asked, finally looking away from the orb and into the troubled blue eyes of the man he had counted as a mentor and friend. "Why didn't you just tell me?"

"I did not wish to burden you," Dumbledore said, taking the seat across from him. "I wished for you to enjoy your childhood."

Harry snorted derisively, "My childhood ended the day you left me with the Dursleys. You should've told me. I had a right to know."

“When?” Dumbledore asked, his shoulders slumping tiredly. “When you first returned to our world, moments after learning the truth of your parents? After you had returned from the Chamber of Secrets with young Ginny, triumphant against impossible odds? Should I have told you moments after discovering the truth about Sirius, only for him to leave that very night? Or, perhaps I should’ve told you at the conclusion of the Tournament, whilst you lay in the Hospital Wing, battered and beaten – but once again triumphant? I spent many sleepless nights contemplating each of those scenarios and many, many more in between. Alas, I could never bring myself to do it. How do you tell a young man who has suffered so much – a young man you care for like a grandson – that he is destined to suffer more?”

“You still should’ve told me!” Harry yelled, his anger bubbling to the surface. “I could’ve done things differently! I – I could’ve studied more or trained hard!”

“And what would that have changed?” Dumbledore asked, remaining calm in the face of Harry’s shouting. “What spell could you have used to stop a Basilisk? What magic could you have learned to stop Lord Voldemort any of the times you faced him? Your strength has never been your talent with your wand – skilled though you undoubtedly are. Your greatest weapon has always been your heart. Your strength of character, your strength of will, your unwavering sense of right and wrong. That! That has always been your greatest strength and what has seen you through so many harrowing trials. And, I believe, it is that which will see you through to defeating Lord Voldemort once and for all. Not something as fleeting as power.”

“What the hell does that even mean!?” Harry yelled, dropping his head into his hands and gripping his hair tightly. “How the hell is my *character* going to help me beat Voldemort if I don’t have the spells to fight him?”

“Voldemort has decades more experience than you and has delved so far into the depths of dark magic that, even given the time, you could never hope to equal him with a wand,” Dumbledore said.

“So, I’m screwed,” Harry said defeatedly.

“Certainly not,” Dumbledore replied, his mustache twitching.

Harry looked up and glared, "For one, can you just give me a straight answer?"

"I'm afraid it's not that simple," Dumbledore told him. "I don't know how you will defeat Voldemort, but I find it highly unlikely in the extreme that you will be able to out-duel him. If you wish to train, then by all means, please do so. I'm sure Ms. Granger would be more than happy to assist you in that endeavor."

"Why didn't you train me?" Harry asked, his frustration bleeding to the surface. "I mean, you've had years to get me ready--"

"And teach you what?" Dumbledore asked, raising a bushy white eyebrow. "Harry, you have only just finished learning the basics of magic. Any of the spells I could teach you that might be useful in a duel against Voldemort would just as easily kill you from the slightest mistake. I may have put off informing you of the Prophecy to spare you the burden of what you must do, but I would not intentionally hinder your chances. If there was more I could do to help you, I would be doing it."

Harry felt chastised by the Headmaster's look, but the anger burning in his chest allowed him to ignore it.

"So, what am I supposed to do then?" he asked bitterly. "Just wait for Voldemort to come after me and hope I figure something out?"

The Headmaster hesitated, and Harry immediately picked up on it. Their gazes locked, and he felt an odd tingle behind his eyes. Then, Dumbledore looked away, and Harry blinked. Something had happened, but he didn't know what.

"There was another reason I hesitated to tell you of the prophecy," Dumbledore said after a moment. "Last year, you told me of some dreams you had. Dreams of real people and real places that you should've had no way of knowing about. Do you remember?"

“Yes,” Harry said softly, a sinking feeling in his stomach.

“Have you had any more dreams like that?” Dumbledore asked, his eyes watching him intently.

For a moment, Harry considered lying. A petulant part of him wanted to get back at him for the secrets the Headmaster had kept. But in the end, he knew it wouldn't do him any good.

“Just one,” he said after a moment. “For the last few weeks I've been dreaming about the door leading to the Department of Mysteries. I didn't even know where the door led until this morning.”

Dumbledore nodded as if his answer was expected, a hand stroking his beard lightly.

“I've come to believe there is a connection between you and Lord Voldemort,” he said softly. “One that connects your minds. The visions you saw last year were from him. His weakened state allowed you to inadvertently enter his mind during your sleep. Your visions of the door are more troubling. Now that he has returned to his full powers, it can only mean he wished for you to see it. Most likely in an attempt for you to get the Prophecy for him.”

“He knows about it?” Harry asked worriedly.

“I'm afraid so,” Dumbledore said. “The Prophecy was given to me when I was interviewing Professor Trelawney for the Divinations post. Unfortunately, I neglected to ward the room. In my defense, I hardly expected to hear a prophecy of such magnitude. A Death Eater heard the first half before he was thrown out by the owner.”

“Snape,” Harry spat.

In a single moment, it all came together.

“Severus has done everything he can to make up for his mistake,” Dumbledore said.

A fury like he had never felt before burned through Harry’s veins as he glared at Dumbledore.

“Make up for it?” he hissed. “He’s the reason Voldemort went after my parents! He’s the reason they’re dead!”

“Harry-”

“And you!” Harry spat. “You let him treat me like shit! You let him bully me for years!”

“It was my hope that Severus would eventually let go of his dislike of you,” Dumbledore sighed. “It appears that hope was in vain. However, there are reasons Severus acts the way he does.”

“Yeah, like what?” Harry asked venomously. “His pathological need to make everyone around him as miserable as he is. How can you trust him? How could you make him a professor after what he did? He should be rotting in Azkaban!”

“Harry, please, let me explain,” Dumbledore said, gesturing for him to calm down. “As I’m sure you’re aware by now, Severus and your father did not get along at school. I must take responsibility for some of that. I allowed James’ pranks to go too far on more than one occasion. However, his hatred is based on more than just a schoolyard rivalry. You see, when Severus first came to Hogwarts, he really only had one close friend. Lily Evans.”

“What!?” Harry asked, feeling like the bottom of his stomach had just dropped out.

“Indeed,” Dumbledore nodded. “They grew up next door to one another. One day, Severus saw your mother performing magic in front of Petunia. He told her all about the wizarding world, and they quickly became close friends. They stayed close even after reaching Hogwarts and being sorted into different houses. As you can imagine, neither of their housemates were happy to see a Gryffindor and a Slytherin getting along. Over the years, they slowly grew apart. Lucius

Malfoy seduced Severus with promises of power and a better life. He began spending more time with people that openly despised Muggleborns, straining their friendship considerably.

“Just after their OWLs, things finally came to a head. James and Severus got into a confrontation, and your mother decided to intervene. Instead of accepting her help, Severus grew angry and called her something deeply offensive. I believe Mr. Malfoy has used that slur against Ms. Granger more than once. I don’t think it was the name itself that truly hurt Lily. I believe it was the fact that she saw her childhood friend heading down a dark path that caused her to end their friendship. Severus was devastated. He tried to apologize countless times, but she never forgave him. Of course, as most teenagers tend to do, he sought to put the blame on anyone other than himself. He already hated your father, so convincing himself that it was James’ fault was little trouble.

“Another year passed, and while James began to mature, Severus sank deeper into Voldemort’s grasp. During their seventh year, your parents started dating. For Severus, seeing the woman he loved with the man he’d grown to hate more than any other just drove him further into a world of darkness. So, a little over a year later, when Severus overheard part of a Prophecy concerning the Dark Lord, he immediately ran to tell him. It didn’t take Voldemort long to determine that two boys fit the first part of the Prophecy. You and Neville Longbottom. When Severus realized the danger he’d put your mother in, he came to me. Begged me to protect her. From that day onwards, Severus has done everything he can to protect you and bring an end to Voldemort once and for all.”

“Bullshit!” Harry spat.

He’d never been more angry than he was at that moment.

“Snape has done nothing but go out of his way to make my life miserable since the day I set foot in Hogwarts!” he continued furiously. “So, what? I’m supposed to feel sorry for him now because he chose to rape and murder instead of being friends with my mum?”

“Harry-”

“Get out,” Harry growled. “Get out!”

“I understand you’re upset, but there’s more we need to discuss,” Dumbledore said, still infuriatingly calm. “As I was trying to explain, Voldemort may be able to look into your mind. Now that you know the Prophecy, it’s imperative that you learn Occlumency.”

“What does it matter? He already knows half of it,” Harry said. “So what if he finds out the rest?”

He knew he was being petulant, he didn’t want Voldemort in his head, but at that moment, he didn’t care.

“It would be disastrous,” Dumbledore said. “Should Voldemort learn you are the only one that can defeat him, how do you think he would respond?”

Harry knew exactly what he would do. He’d lose all fear of being killed. He’d start taking over Britain and kill anyone that got in his way.

“Fine,” he said. “I’ll find someone to teach me.”

Dumbledore looked like he was going to protest but stopped himself.

“Just make sure whoever you find is someone you can trust,” he said. “We must keep Voldemort from learning the full Prophecy. While we are on the subject, who else knows the contents?”

“Hermione, Penny, Daphne, and Amelia,” Harry replied.

Dumbledore frowned, stroking his beard, “Are you sure Ms. Greengrass can be trusted with such information?”

“If someone had told me how important it was, I might’ve thought about who I had in my office at the time,” Harry glared. “But yes, I trust her. She even gave me a vow not to talk about it without my permission. She said it was as much to protect her as it was to protect me.”

Dumbledore hummed thoughtfully, “Very well. I shall trust your judgment.” Standing, he smoothed out his robes. “I know you’ve learned many painful truths today, Harry, and I know you are angry with me. Rightfully so. However, I promise you I will do everything in my power to ensure you defeat Voldemort and live a long and happy life.”

Watching him walk to the Floo, Harry’s fury came back with a vengeance. He wanted to ask many questions, but he was too angry and wanted him gone too badly to open his mouth. The moment the Headmaster disappeared in a flash of emerald flame, Harry grabbed his half-filled glass of Firewhiskey from his desk and hurled it into the fireplace with a scream.

“You son of a bitch!” he shouted, panting furiously.

Dropping back down into his chair, he dropped his head in his hands, tears of frustration, anger, and sadness threatening to fall from his eyes.

“Why the fuck does this keep happening to me?” he asked miserably.

Lost in thought, he didn’t know how long he sat there before someone knocked on his door. With a wave of his wand, he dropped the privacy wards.

“Who is it?” he croaked.

The door cracked open, and Hermione stuck her head in.

“Harry?” she called softly.

Taking one look at his face, she didn't even bother to wait for a response before rushing and pulling him into a tight hug. Harry hugged her back, soaking in the comfort of her embrace. A moment later, as she pulled back, Amelia, Penny, and Daphne entered his office and closed the door behind them. Penny instantly took Hermione's place, sitting on the arm of the chair as her arms wrapped around him. Not caring about their audience, Harry pulled her into his lap and held her tightly.

"I take it your talk with Dumbledore didn't go well?" Amelia asked.

Snorting, Harry told them everything he'd learned. They listened silently, an array of emotions flitting across their faces. As he finished his retelling, Amelia poured several drinks before downing hers in a single swig.

"Alright, let's deal with things in order of importance," Amelia said. "First, Occlumency."

"What is Occlumency?" Harry asked.

"It's a technique to magically protect your mind," she told him. "It's often used to defend against Legilimency, the art of reading a person's mind. Learning Occlumency is a very personal process. Whoever teaches you needs to know both and will have free access to your mind. Given the risk of someone stumbling across the Prophecy, it would be best if I were to teach you myself."

Harry nodded before a thought occurred to him.

"Er, the things you see in my head... they can't be used in court, can they?" he asked tentatively.

Amelia smirked, "No. And frankly, Potter, I don't care what laws you've broken. I know you well enough by now to know whatever you've done, it was for a very good reason."

"It's not me I'm worried about," he muttered, resisting the urge to glance at Hermione.

"I have more important things to worry about than getting your friends in trouble," Amelia told him. "We'll start in a couple of days. You're too emotionally exhausted to get any benefit out of it right now. We'll work out a schedule when you go back to Hogwarts."

"Is that allowed?" Hermione asked.

"Yes," Amelia replied. "Any student can hire professional tutors if they wish."

"Could I learn too?" Hermione asked. "If it's not too much trouble?"

"You can come with Harry, and I'll help you if I have time, but you have to understand I'll be focusing on Harry," Amelia told her.

"I should find a tutor for Potions, too," Harry said. "I don't think I could spend time in Snape's class without wanting to kill him."

"I'll find one," Amelia said firmly. "Susan will be joining you as well. I don't want her anywhere near that bastard if I can help it."

"Don't you have enough to get him fired?" Daphne asked. "If the Wizengamot learned he was responsible for what happened to the Potters, they'd be out for blood, especially with how popular Potter is right now."

"You're right, but there's more to it than that," Amelia said. "As much as I'd love to see Snape rotting in a cell, Dumbledore keeps him around for a reason."

"He's a spy," Harry said.

Amelia nodded, "Unfortunately, it's a necessary evil. It's virtually impossible to get a spy within You-Know-Who's ranks."

"Do you really think we can trust him?" Penny asked, her fingers caressing Harry's arm lightly.

"Now that I know his motivations, I'm much more inclined to believe he's against Voldemort," Amelia said. "I always wondered why he suddenly switched sides. Make no mistake, that man isn't on our side. We just happen to have a common enemy."

"You know, I never liked Snape," Daphne said. "His clear favoritism makes the other houses resent us. It's ironic that he regrets becoming a Death Eater, but all of his actions as our Head of House drive his students in that same direction."

"I think we're all missing the bigger picture here," Harry said. "How the hell am I supposed to beat Voldemort?"

Penny tightened her arm around him, and Hermione squeezed his hand as everyone fell silent.

"I think there's more to this than we know," Amelia said after a long moment. "Dumbledore has always kept his cards close to his vest. I have a feeling he'll tell you what he has up his sleeve once you learn Occlumency."

"And if he doesn't have anything?" Harry asked, his heart hammering in his chest.

"Then we fight as hard as we can for as long as we can," Amelia said.

"Right," Harry said, licking his lips in thought. "Right, okay. Here's what we're going to do. For my last week here, I want to focus on cleaning up the Ministry, securing Azkaban, making possession of the Dark Mark a crime, and ensuring we have a competent Minister to take over after I leave office."

“That’s a lot to do in a week,” Amelia said.

“I just need to get it started,” Harry said, giving her a pointed look. “It’ll be up to the next Minister to see it through.”

Amelia sighed and poured herself another drink.

“I know I’m going to regret this,” she said, taking a sip. “I’ll run for Minister on one condition.”

“Name it,” Harry said.

“I want your word that you’ll look out for Susan if anything happens to me,” Amelia said, her grey-blue eyes boring into his. “I do not want to see the Bones line end.”

“I would do that anyways,” Harry said. “But if it makes you feel better, I promise to look after Susan if anything happens to you.”

“Thank you,” Amelia said gratefully before sighing and getting to her feet. “We’ll talk more once you’ve had time to digest everything.”

Walking around the desk, she reached over Hermione and clasped his shoulder.

“No matter what some stupid prophecy says, you’re not alone,” she said firmly.

“No, you’re not,” Hermione agreed.

Penny kissed his cheek while Daphne nodded.

“You don’t have to do this, Daphne,” Harry said, feeling guilty for drawing her into this mess.

“Don’t flatter yourself,” she scoffed. “I’m not doing this for you, Potter. Not good will come from following that madman, and I’m sure as hell not going to sit back and hope for the best. Now that I know the truth, I’m going to stay right here and make sure you win. You’re stuck with me. Deal with it.”

Harry smiled, “Thank you.”

As Amelia took her leave, Hermione hugged Daphne gratefully. He chuckled as the normally unflappable Slytherin blushed as Hermione held the hug longer than usual. Slowly, the smile fell from his face as his thoughts turned back to the Prophecy. Suddenly, Penny climbed off of his lap. When he looked up at her questioningly, she smiled and took his hand, pulling him to his feet. As she led him over toward the couch, she shared a glance with Hermione.

“We’ll give you two some time alone,” Hermione said quickly.

Grabbing Daphne’s hand, she pulled her out of the office and closed the door. Turning to Penny with a curious look, she smiled softly as they took a seat.

“Are you okay?” she asked gently.

Harry sighed and stared down at his hand while Penny laced her finger through his.

“I’m... scared,” he admitted softly, watching the way the skin on the back of her hand creased when he ran his thumb across it. “When I fought Voldemort in the graveyard... he just toyed with me. He was so powerful. It was terrifying. I knew I was going to die. I *knew* it. I still don’t really understand what happened with our wands or how I managed to survive.”

“But you did,” Penny said. “And you did so much more than that. You made it back to Hogwarts, became the bloody Minister for Magic, and warned everyone that You-Know-Who is back. Look at everything that you’ve done in just three weeks. You’ve arrested most of his Death Eaters, you’ve revitalized the DMLE – you’ve done so much more than anyone could’ve ever expected. And you’re missing the most important point. You did beat him. You beat him in your first year, in your second, and you beat him the in the graveyard. It doesn’t matter if you know how you did it. It just matters that you did. And I know you’ll do it again.”

Curling her fingers under his chin, Penny tilted his head up and kissed him. Her full, soft lips molded around his as she ran her hand over his chest. Shifting around, she swung her leg over his and straddled his lap as she kissed him more passionately. Just as Harry started to feel a little hot under the collar, she pulled back, flushed and smiling.

“Lock the door,” she whispered breathily.

Pulling out his wand, Harry gave it a twirl. The locks audibly clicked into place, and then the door glowed blue briefly, the piracy wards falling into place. Reaching up, Penny combed her fingers through his hair. It felt so soothing that Harry closed his eyes and sighed.

“You’ve been carrying so much weight on your shoulders for so long,” Penny said softly. “You need to take your mind off things for a bit. Take some time to relax.”

“I wish I could,” Harry mumbled.

“Then it’s a good thing you have me,” Penny smiled.

Shrugging off her robe, Harry licked his suddenly dry lips as she began unbuttoning her blouse. With each one she undid, more and more of her creamy, pale skin was revealed to his hungry gaze. Her large breasts were cradled in a white bra, the garment pushing them together and creating a long, deep line of cleavage. A shrug of her shoulders sent the blouse fluttering carelessly to the floor behind her.

“You’re so beautiful, Penny,” Harry whispered, caressing her bare stomach with a feather light touch.

Smiling, she reached behind her back and unclasped her bra. Harry swallowed thickly as she slowly slid the straps down her arms. Butterflies fluttered wildly in his stomach. He’d never seen a real pair of breasts before, and Penny had a body that he thought rivaled even Fleur. Sure, Penny wasn’t as breathtakingly beautiful as the French part Veela, but she had that girl next door look that he found incredibly cute.

Lowering her arms, Penny’s breasts bounced into view and took Harry’s breath away. They were, in a word, perfect. The perfect size, the perfect shape, with perfect wide, pink areolas and perfect red nipples. Her expansive pale globes were smooth and blemish free, save for a couple of red marks from where her bra had dug into her skin. Harry knew he was gaping like an idiot, but he just couldn’t help himself.

Penny giggled, causing her breasts to jiggle alluringly. Reaching down, she pulled his hands from her hips and placed them on her breasts. With a contented hum, she started combing her fingers through his hair. Tentatively, Harry caressed her full, soft mounds. A light squeeze caused her to moan softly and her hips to rock against his straining erection.

Wrapping her arms around his head, Penny pulled him forward, burying his face in her chest as she continued to gyrate her hips. Groaning, Harry grabbed her hips, pulling her more firmly against his erection while he kissed, sucked, and licked at her amazing breasts.

“Harry,” Penny moaned.

Shifting in his lap, she grabbed her dress and bunched it up, exposing her pale thighs and allowing her to press her panty covered mound directly against his raging excitement. With a harsh roll of her hips, she gripped his hair, pulled his head back, and kissed him hungrily. They both moaned as they bucked against each other, only a couple layers of cloth preventing them from rutting like animals. Harry’s hands returned to her bare breasts, his touch much firmer than before. Penny gasped and shuddered above him when he took one of her hard nipples between his fingers and gave it a squeeze.

“Harder,” she panted.

Harry did as she asked, pinching her nipple and giving it a light tug. A trembling gasp left her lips as she tilted her head back and ground against him desperately. The friction caused him to hiss and buck up into her. His cheeks flushed with embarrassment when he realized he was getting dangerously close to a climax.

“Penny,” he panted, “I’m...”

Tilting her head forward to meet his eyes with a lustful stare, Penny ground against him again,

“Me too,” she said breathlessly. “Cum with me.”

Pressing her forehead against his, they stared into each other’s eyes as they bucked desperately, their movements gradually losing their coordination. Harry was fascinated by the look on her beautiful face. Their breath mingled as he dropped his hands down to her bum, pulling her down hard each time she rolled her hips. He tried to hold on as long as he could, but all too soon, it became too much, and he tumbled over the edge.

“Shit,” Harry hissed.

Penny shuddered as he pulsed against her mound. With a gasp, her eyes slammed shut, and her mouth hung open while a series of breathless grunts were forced from her lungs. It took Harry a moment to realize she was cumming, her face screwed up in an almost painful grimace. Through the haze of his climax, he was enthralled by the way she shook against him. It looked like her body was vibrating from how good she felt. Knowing that he’d brought her to that point filled him with a sense of pride.

Eventually, Penny sagged against him as they both panted for breath. Burying her face in the crook of his neck, she nuzzled his skin with a soft moan, peppering light kisses along his pulse point. Harry closed his eyes, savoring the relaxed, intimate moment while caressing her smooth back.

Chapter 11

Harry, Penny, Hermione, and Daphne worked long into the night, preparing the ambitious bills they hoped to get passed at the Wizengamot meeting in three days. Under normal circumstances, it took months or even years to prepare these kinds of presentations. They all knew there was little chance of them getting passed before he was out of office, but they all hoped to lay a foundation for the next Minister for Magic to build upon.

There were three main things they decided to focus on. The first was Hermione's Muggleborn Equality Act, a bill designed to make employment opportunities and taxes fairer for Muggleborns.

The second was making the bearing of the Dark Mark itself an illegal act. With that passed, they would be able to check Ministry employees and Wizengamot members for the mark, ridding the Ministry of their poisonous influence.

The final bill they hoped to pass was one that would remove Dementors as the sole guards at Azkaban. Harry knew Britain would never be safe from Dark Lords so long as those Dark Creatures watched over the prison. In their research, Hermione discovered over two dozen incidents of Dark Witches and Wizards convincing the Dementors to join their cause. It was terrifying they had been allowed to stay in place for so long.

As the night grew late, they put down the parchment and lounged comfortably in Penny's living room. Penny curled up in Harry's lap, her head resting on his shoulder as the telly played in the background. Next to them, Daphne and Hermione leaned against each other tiredly.

"Do you think we'll be able to finish this in time?" Harry asked.

"We should be able to," Penny said, flexing her hand. "The real question is, can we do it with getting carpal tunnel."

Chuckling, he took her hand in both of his and massaged the back of it with his thumbs. Sighing contentedly, she kissed the side of his neck and rested her head on his shoulder.

“You should get some Dittany lotion,” Daphne said. “It’ll help with that.”

“We went through gallons of that stuff during NEWTs. I think I have some in the bathroom cabinet,” Penny replied. “You can use it if you want.”

Daphne climbed to her feet with a groan and walked to the bathroom. They heard the cabinet open and close before she returned with a short, fat tin. Taking her seat between Harry and Hermione, she popped open the lid and dipped two fingers into the thick cream inside.

“Here, let me see your hand,” she said, turning to face Hermione and tucking one leg under the other.

Taking Hermione’s hand gently, Daphne rubbed the cream all over it and then rubbed it in with her thumbs.

“Mh, that feels nice,” Hermione murmured, her eyes falling closed.

Harry smiled and plucked the cream out of Daphne’s lap. Taking some with his fingers, he put it back before rubbing it into Penny’s hand.

“We should do something when this is all over,” he said after a moment. “Maybe we could all go out to dinner. Someplace nice.”

“That would be nice,” Hermione smiled, opening her eyes to look at Daphne. “Maybe we could make it a double date?”

Daphne froze for a moment before whirling around to face Harry with a glare.

“You told her?” she hissed angrily.

“I didn’t,” Harry said, raising his hands while Penny watched on amusedly.

“He asked me if I was interested in women,” Hermione said with a giggle. “I put the rest together myself.”

Daphne closed her eyes and took a slow, deep breath.

“Potter, I swear, you’re about as subtle as a Hippogriff in heat,” she sighed.

“It’s not my fault she’s too smart for her own good,” Harry said.

Daphne glared at him again before turning back to Hermione with a surprisingly vulnerable look.

“And you’re really okay dating a witch and a Slytherin?” she asked softly.

“I never have cared for the house rivalries,” Hermione smiled, reaching out to take Daphne’s hand in hers. “And I’ve never really thought about dating a woman until now, but I’m willing to give it a try.”

Smiling, Daphne locked eyes with her and slowly leaned forward. Hermione met her halfway, their lips coming together in a soft, gentle kiss. Harry couldn’t help but grow excited at the sight. He just hoped that Penny couldn’t feel him swelling against her bum. As they broke apart, they smiled brightly and leaned against each other while holding hands.

“So, how long were you planning to wait to say something?” Hermione asked curiously.

“I was going to wait until Potter was out of office,” Daphne said. “I thought it might help to give you time to think about it when we weren’t working together.”

“Then maybe it’s a good thing Harry’s too curious for his own good,” Hermione grinned. “Now, you don’t have to wait all Summer for an answer.”

“Maybe,” Daphne said, glaring over her shoulder at Harry, to which he gave her a cheeky grin. “But I’m not going to let him off that easy.”

After talking for a little longer, Harry, Hermione, and Daphne headed home just before midnight. Walking into the kitchen, they let Sirius and Mrs. Weasley know they were back and then headed off to bed. Harry felt like he’d barely closed his eyes before he was roughly shaken awake.

“Get up, Potter,” Moody barked. “There’s been an attack in Edinburgh. You’re needed at the Ministry.”

“What happened?” Harry asked, sitting up to put on his glasses and grab his wand.

“Werewolf attack,” he grunted.

Cursing, Harry climbed out of bed and walked across the hall to bang on Hermione’s door. She yanked it open a moment later, her bushy hair a mess as she rubbed her eyes.

“Harry? What-”

“Werewolf attack in Edinburgh. We need to get to the Ministry,” he told her.

Eyes widening, she nodded and closed the door.

"I'll be right there!" she yelled.

Harry turned towards the stairs just as Sirius ran up. As he began knocking on doors to wake up the Order members staying there, Harry made his way to the Floo. The moment he stepped out into the Auror Office, he was nearly run over by a trainee rushing around in a panic. Making his way through the fervor, he found Amelia talking quickly with Matilda, Kingsley, and Scrimgeour.

"What's happening?" Harry asked.

"We have confirmed sightings of between six and eight Werewolves attacking Edinburgh," Matilda told him. "The rapid response unit is on scene and keeping them contained. We're just about to send in everyone on call as soon as they arrive."

Harry nodded, but something didn't feel right about this. Voldemort had to know the Ministry was equipped to handle even that many werewolves. What would he gain from this?

"Amelia," Harry said, unknowingly interrupting her mid-sentence. "I think we need to call in everyone."

"Why?" Amelia asked, her brow furrowed. "The on-call Aurors are more than capable of handling this."

"Because I think there's more to this," Harry said. "What does Voldemort gain from throwing away the lives of Werewolves when he's trying to recruit as many as he can to his side?"

"You think this is a diversion?" Matilda asked.

"I don't know," Harry sighed. "But this attack just doesn't make sense on its own. He could be waiting for the Aurors to be busy dealing with the Werewolves before sending the Death Eaters after them, he could attack the Ministry, or he could go after Azkaban. I just don't know."

“You’re right. Gibbons! Call in every available Auror now!” Amelia shouted before turning back to Harry. “I’ll send a small squad to keep an eye on Azkaban, and we’ll keep the rest here. They’ll be able to respond in seconds if something comes up.”

Harry nodded gratefully just as Hermione caught up with him.

“I sent a Patronus to Penny and Daphne,” she told him.

“Thank you,” he said before filling her in on what was happening.

While he was doing that, Scrimgeour was rounding up the arriving Aurors.

“Listen up!” he barked. “We have eight confirmed Werewolves loose in Edinburgh. Your mission is simple. Kill on sight!”

“No!” Harry shouted. “Until we know what’s going on, I want them brought in alive.”

“I’m not risking the lives of my Aurors to catch a few beasts!” Scrimgeour growled.

Before Harry could respond, Amelia grabbed his arm and pulled him to the side.

“This is standard protocol,” she whispered urgently. “Any Werewolf that proves to be a danger to humans like this is put down on sight.”

“I don’t care,” Harry said angrily. “We don’t know what’s going on, and until we do, we’re not going to go around killing everything. I want them brought in alive and held for questioning. Kill only if absolutely necessary.”

The room went silent and stared at him during his rant. Scrimgeour fumed, his face turning red while Amelia frowned unhappily.

“Is that understood?” Harry asked forcefully.

“You heard the Minister,” Shaw said, addressing the team he was leading. “Kill only as a last resort. Let’s get those Portkeys ready.”

Growling, Scrimgeour spun around and grudgingly told his Aurors the same thing.

“I hope you know what you’re doing,” Amelia said unhappily.

She turned and walked back over to Matilda, who gave him a respectful nod. Letting out a sigh, Harry tried to let go of his anger.

“You did the right thing,” Hermione said, rubbing his back. “It’s awful the way the Wizarding World treats werewolves.”

“I just hope it was the right decision,” Harry said, doubts creeping into his mind. “If Voldemort attacks someplace else and the Aurors are still busy rounding up Werewolves...”

Hermione bit her lip. Not knowing what to say, she wrapped her arms around him, giving him as much comfort as she could. A few moments later, Penny and Daphne arrived in their pajamas along with Marcus and Kim, just as the Aurors Portkeyed away. Harry quickly filled them in on what was happening while they listened to the reports coming in.

“We’ve got a lot of bodies here, Amelia,” Shaw said over the enchanted Wireless. “It looks like some sort of festival going on.”

Harry felt the bottom of his stomach drop out while Hermione gasped behind him.

“Send any survivors you find to St. Mungo’s,” Amelia told him. “They’re prepared for incoming.”

“Understood,” Shaw said, the sound of panting and heavy footfalls in the background. “We’ve spotted one Werewolf and are in pursuit.”

While Amelia coordinated the teams on the ground, Matilda kept track of the Aurors on brooms. They flew above the city, tracking the Werewolves they could see, and relayed that information to the Aurors on the ground.

“One in custody,” Shaw called a couple of minutes later.

Amelia leaned over to another microphone.

“Detainment team to the ready, prisoner incoming,” she said, the words echoing from down the hall to the holding cells.

Several Aurors raced into the room, wands at the ready. Curious, Harry took a few steps to the side to have a look. The Aurors formed a circle around a big red ‘X’ painted on the floor. When the Werewolf was Portkeyed in, stunned, and wrapped in heavy iron chains, they hit it with three more Stunning Hex before levitating it into a cell.

Letting out a breath, Harry walked back over to listen to the reports. His heart sank when he heard more and more calls of bodies being found, but very few survivors. The Aurors captured five more relatively quickly, but the last two put up quite the chase. One found its way into a museum, forcing the Aurors to chase it through the maze of rooms and halls. The last one stayed on the streets, and the Aurors were forced to slip up into three groups to finally corner it.

“Any word from Azkaban?” Harry asked once the Obliviators were sent in.

“All clear,” Amelia told him. “Same with the Atrium, and we haven’t had any calls about Death Eaters. It looks like it might be over.”

“So, we got dragged out of bed for nothing?” Dawlish asked grumpily.

“I think it’s safe to send everyone home,” she continued, ignoring him.

Checking his watch, it was just past four in the morning. From what he knew, most of the Aurors not on call would need to come back in at six to start their shift. Yawning widely, Harry nodded.

“Alright, everyone,” Amelia said. “Thank you for coming in, but it looks like the worst is over. Go home and get some rest.”

Some grumbled as they got to their feet, some just looked relieved, and a few decided to stick around until the start of their shift.

“You should go get some sleep too, Minister,” Amelia said without turning to him. “I’ll let you know if anything else comes up.”

Harry knew she was still upset with his decision, but frankly, he was too tired to care. Slowly, he climbed to his feet.

“You all did a great job tonight, everyone,” he said. “Thank you for coming in. I’ll be in my office if anyone needs me.”

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Harry was woken abruptly by a loud knocking on his door. Sitting up, he lifted his head from the desk with his glasses askew and a sheaf of parchment stuck to his cheek. Bright light streamed

in through the enchanted window behind him. He pulled off the parchment and fixed his glasses just as his door opened, and Amelia poked her head in.

“Is this a bad time?” she asked.

“No,” Harry said, running a hand through his hair.

Glancing across the office, he spotted the girls still sound asleep. Penny had enlarged the couch so they could all fit on it. Harry had tried to sleep with them, too but gave up after an hour. His mind just wouldn't stop wondering what Voldemort was trying to accomplish.

“Just try and be quiet. The girls are asleep,” he said, gesturing to the couch.

Nodding, Amelia took the seat across from him and set a thick fold on the desk.

“I owe you an apology,” she said softly. “We just finished interviewing the werewolves we captured this morning. You were right; something was wrong. All of them were captured by Death Eaters in the last two days. They held them prisoner in an undetermined location before Portkeying them into Edinburgh just before moon rise.”

“What?” Harry asked, his brow furrowed. “But why would...? He knew. He knew how the Aurors would respond. He wanted them to be killed. We would've driven the Werewolves right to him. They'd have no choice but to join or be the next victim.”

“That was my conclusion as well,” Amelia said. “Though it took me a little longer to come to it. You made the right choice last night. Had I followed protocol, every Werewolf in the country would've been on his side by the time the sun came up.”

“Bloody hell,” Harry groaned, rubbing his face.

“We still need to determine what to do about the Werewolves we captured last night,” Amelia told him. “All of them cooperated fully and allowed themselves to be questioned under Veritaserum. To complicate matters, one of them is Auror Shaw’s daughter, Megan Shaw.”

“You’ve got to be shitting me,” Harry said.

“I wish I was,” Amelia said. “He’s been sitting with her since we discovered who she was. Ordinarily, any Werewolf that poses a risk is put down or exiled. The Ministry has never made an exception before. I probably don’t need to ask, but I will anyways. Would you like barrister Tonks to press charges?”

“No,” Harry said, shaking his head.

Amelia nodded and made a note on a piece of parchment.

“You need to know, this will cause an uproar with the public,” she warned. “I just got the numbers an hour ago. Thirty-four dead, all but two were Muggles, and fourteen are still being treated at St. Mungo’s. All of them are at risk of being infected if they survive.”

“Fucking hell,” Harry said, taking off his glasses to rub his face. “I’ll make an announcement over the wireless and explain what happened. Hopefully, that will calm people down.”

“It’s probably your best option,” Amelia nodded. “This also brings up the question of how they found those people. I suspect the Death Eaters have a copy of the Werewolf registration ledger. Either they have an old copy, or someone in the Ministry is leaking them the current one.”

“Can’t we just get rid of it?” Harry asked.

“We could, but I have another idea,” Amelia said. “I’d like to move the current ledger to the Minister’s office but leave a copy in the DCRMC office. If they have an old copy, there isn’t much we can do other than advise Werewolves to move. If someone is giving them

information, we could make a few alterations to the ledger and hopefully lead Death Eaters into a trap or find out who's behind the leaks."

"I'm fine with that," Harry nodded.

"I'll talk to my Aurors and come up with a plan," Amelia told him. "Do you have anything else you want to add?"

Harry shook his head.

"Then I'll get back to work," Amelia said as she stood. "Get some rest, Minister."

"Harry," he corrected out of reflex.

She gave him a small smile, "Get some rest, Harry. You're no good to us if you're exhausted."

Harry blinked in surprise as she left the office. That was the first time she'd called him by name since he'd taken office. As soon as the door closed behind her, the girls sat up. Chuckling, he shook his head.

"So, I take it you heard everything?" he asked.

"I told you you made the right choice," Hermione said smugly.

"You did," Penny smiled. "But we can talk about that later. Come get some sleep, Harry."

"I don't know if I can," he replied softly. "My brain just won't shut off. I have to deal with the fallout from this attack, we need to finish those bill proposals..."

“That can wait a few hours,” Penny said firmly. “Come get some sleep.”

Standing up, Harry stretched and made his way over to the expanded couch. Laying down on the end next to Penny, he groaned at the ache in his back from falling asleep hunched over. Crawling over to him, Penny wrapped an arm around his waist and laid her head on his chest. The girls settled back down to sleep, but he stared at the ceiling, his mind running wild. There was so much to do in the few days he had left as Minister, and it felt like he’d never get it all done in time.

“You really are stressed, aren’t you?” Penny asked.

“Sorry,” Harry said. “Why don’t you three get some more sleep, and I’ll get some work done?”

“You need to rest,” Penny told him.

Before he could reply, she rolled over and whispered to Daphne and Hermione. He caught a word here and there, but not enough to understand what they were talking about. Hermione sat up, picked up her wand, and waved it at the door, the lock audibly clicking into place. He looked at her curiously, only for Penny to roll over and kiss him passionately. He could feel her bare breasts rubbing against his chest through their thin t-shirts. By the time she pulled back, he felt flushed and breathless.

“You need to relax,” Penny smiled.

Scooting down, she grabbed the waistband of his pajama pants and started tugging them down.

“Penny!” Harry exclaimed.

Quickly, he glanced over at Hermione and Daphne. They were both lying on their sides, watching him closely. Hermione blushed red while, behind her, Daphne looked at him and smirked.

“Consider this payback,” Daphne told him.

Swallowing thickly, Harry turned back to Penny just as she pulled his waistband down past his length. She hadn’t even touched him yet, and he was already hardening in excitement. Wrapping her hand around his shaft, Penny smiled up at him and stroked him lightly until he was completely hard.

“I didn’t expect it to be so... big,” Hermione murmured.

“Gee, thanks, Hermione,” Harry said, rolling his eyes and smiling teasingly.

He knew the familiar banter probably sounded out of place, but it helped make him feel better about the situation.

“I didn’t mean it like that,” Hermione said while Daphne and Penny giggled.

Suddenly, the top of his length was enveloped in a hot, wet cocoon, drawing a gasp from his lips. Penny swirled her tongue around him, causing him to shudder and groan pleurably as she bobbed her head up and down. It was an amazing feeling, and Harry couldn’t believe she was doing this with Hermione and Daphne lying just feet away. Glancing over at them, Daphne cuddled against Hermione’s back while they both watched Penny’s head bob up and down raptly. It was absolutely surreal.

Turning his full attention back to Penny, Harry brushed her long blonde hair out of the way so he could watch her lips move up and down his shaft. The sight was so erotic that he nearly climaxed on the spot. He tried to hold off as long as he could. The feeling was incredible, and he wanted it to last as long as possible. Despite his best efforts, he knew he couldn’t hold back for long.

Glancing back at Daphne and Hermione, his eyes widened. Daphne was kissing and sucking at Hermione’s neck, her hand under her shirt and cupping one of her breasts. Hermione’s shirt

had ridden up so far that Harry could see her small, perky breast. He could even see Daphne's fingers tugging at her hard, pink nipple.

"Bloody hell," Harry groaned. "I'm going to cum."

Penny sucked so hard the breath left his lungs. Her hand stroked his shaft rapidly while her lips remained wrapped tightly around his swollen, throbbing glans. Tightening his hands into fists, Harry grunted as he erupted in her mouth. He fought to keep from thrusting his hips but couldn't stop his muscles from clenching. Penny swallowed around him as he filled her mouth, moaning lightly and sending pleasurable vibrations through his sensitive length.

As he came down from his climax, he collapsed back onto the couch tiredly. Penny sucked lightly one last time before letting him slip from her lips with a wide smile. Crawling up his body, she kissed him on the lips and laid back down next to him.

"Feel better?" she asked.

"That was incredible," Harry said, his mind blissfully blank.

Giggling, she kissed him on the cheek and ran her fingers through his hair. Harry closed his eyes, savoring the comforting feeling.

"Get some sleep, love," Penny said softly.

As he drifted off to sleep, he heard the girls whispering around him.

Chapter 12

For three days after the Werewolf attack, Harry spent a good portion of his time trying desperately to calm the public. Some Ministry officials who did polls among the public told him

that they were split right down the middle. Half the Wizarding population thought he was doing the right thing not charging them, and the other half was calling for blood. While he was putting out fires and calling for calm on the Wireless and in interviews, the girls worked tirelessly on the new bills.

With everything going on, time seemed to move at the speed of light. Before he knew it, it was the day of the Wizengamot meeting on his last full day in office. Tomorrow would be the day that determined whether he remained part of the Wizarding world or if he was left destitute and without magic. But there was nothing he could do about that. Amelia had all the evidence she could gather, and no one really knew what would happen. The book simply said that magic would be the judge, but no one could tell him what that would mean. Even the DoM was clueless. Apparently, no one had ever enacted the law before.

Putting worries of tomorrow from his mind, Harry focused on what he wanted to get done. The moment he and Hermione stepped outside his office, they were met by Amelia, Penny, and Daphne. They talked about the upcoming Wizengamot session, finalizing tactics as they made their way down to the courtrooms. While Hermione, Penny, and Daphne had done most of the hard work, it was decided that it would be best if the proposals came from Wizengamot members. Daphne's father, Darius, would be introducing the bill to remove Dementors from Azkaban. Amos Diggory would introduce the amendment to an existing law that would make bearing the Dark Mark an arrestable offense. And finally, Amelia herself would introduce Hermione's Muggleborn Protection Act.

It was unlikely anything would get passed by the end of the day, but all of them hoped this would be the start of a much needed change at the Ministry. They all knew it would really come down to who became the next Minister. Amelia had agreed to run for office, but none of them could predict who the other nominees would be. There was just simply no way to know how successful they would be.

This time, as they exited the elevator, there were no reporters or concerned citizens to greet them. Only a few Wizengamot members and their aides waved as they made their way to courtroom four. They were early, but Daphne's mother, Evangeline, was already in the gallery with her photographer. When she glanced at Harry, they shared a friendly wave while Daphne and Hermione broke off to join her. Meanwhile, Harry, Amelia, and Penny made their way to the Minister's seat, an ornate seat in the very middle, and slightly raised above the rest.

"I really hate this seat," Harry sighed. "I feel like I'm sitting on a pedestal where everyone can stare at me."

"You can always change it," Amelia told him.

Harry closed his eyes and cursed under his breath before drawing his wand. With a quick wave, he lowered the chair so it was even with the rest. Looking over at Penny, he smiled and kissed her on the cheek.

"Much better," he said.

Penny giggled and laced her fingers through his while Amelia smiled at the pair.

"I can't wait," Harry said.

"Considering how many times your life has been in danger there, I thought you'd be less anxious to go back," Amelia frowned.

"I'll take those over politics any day of the week," Harry said, smiling crookedly.

Amelia shook her head, "I'd like to argue with you, but in your place, I'd probably feel the same. But you call me if something happens next year, and I don't care what Dumbledore has to say. And I would take it as a personal favor if you could teach Susan to defend herself. She's not a fighter at heart like you or I, but I want her to at least master the basics."

"I don't know how much help I'll be," Harry told her. "Matilda turned me into a cat the last time we duelled."

“Of course, she did,” Amelia said, visibly fighting a smile. “Matilda has sixty years of experience over you. She thinks quite highly of you, and Moody would compliment you even if you managed to kill him. Even then, he’d grumble about you taking so long.”

Harry snorted and smiled as the room began to fill up. When Dumbledore showed up a few minutes later, looking resplendent in his bright blue, sparkling robes, everyone quieted down and took their seats.

Harry didn’t have much to do for most of the meeting. Others stood up to make the proposals from him, running through the well thought out points and arguments the girls had painstakingly refined over sleepless nights. A part of him still bristled that they weren’t getting the credit they deserved, but the girls assured him that getting the bills passed was more important than who got their name in the press.

Amos went first, making a passionate and compelling plea to make the Dark Mark illegal. He visibly and audibly choked up when he mentioned Cedric’s name, reminding the Wizengamot that it could’ve easily been one of their sons or daughters in his place. Dumbledore frowned at the proposal, glancing back at Harry only once to show his visible disapproval. Harry honestly didn’t care if the Headmaster liked it or not. This was something that should’ve been done years ago. Amelia made sure to put in provisions that would ensure those who were threatened or coerced into taking the Mark would get fair treatment. The rest could go hang for all he cared.

Darius was up next, speaking calmly and coolly about removing the Dementors from Azkaban. He focused on the danger they represented to the Wizarding community if they joined Voldemort. For half an hour, he listed time after time how they’d submitted to the control of one Dark Wizard or another, and how many magicals were kissed as a result. By the time he mentioned what it would cost the Ministry, most looked ready to jump on board. Of course, it wasn’t that simple. The question of what to do with the Dementors remained unanswered. It was the biggest hang up for the bill, and one that could take months or years to find a solution to. Harry could only hope someone came up with an answer soon.

Lastly, Amelia made her pitch for the Muggleborn Protection Act. This one, unfortunately, didn’t garner as much support as the first two. Amelia had warned them this might happen. She thought the Wizengamot would be quick to push it to the side for more immediate concerns. Despite the lack of enthusiasm from the crowd, she pushed onward, detailing what the

amendment was for and why it was needed. Slowly, she drew people in, garnering nods and grumbles of agreement from the Wizengamot. By the time her speech came to a close, Harry felt hopeful that, in time, it would pass.

“Thank you, Madam Bones,” Dumbledore said as he stood. “Since we’re so short on time, we’ll discuss these proposals at the start of the next meeting, which will be held Thursday at nine AM. For those of you who have not received the owl, there will be a special session tomorrow at ten to resolve the matter between current Minister Potter, and former Minister Fudge. Attendance is recommended, but not required. Before we adjourn for the evening, I believe Minister Potter would like to say a few words.”

Penny gave Harry’s arm a squeeze as he wiped his sweaty palms on his robes. Getting to his feet, he marched mechanically up to the podium, gripping the edges tightly to still his shaking hands. The sound of him clearing his throat echoed through the room, bringing heat to his cheeks.

“As I’m sure all of you know, today is officially my last day as Minister for Magic,” Harry began. “I’m not much of a public speaker, so I’ll keep this brief. The amount of corruption I’ve seen since taking off is frankly horrifying. I don’t know how it got that way and, frankly, I don’t care. What matters now is how do we fix it? How do we keep this country from falling into the hands of Voldemort?”

Harry paused to let his question settle, as well as his stomach. All eyes in the room were staring at him intently, listening and judging his every word.

“I’ve worked with some brilliant people in my capacity as Minister, and today, we’ve given you the keys to what we think will help,” he continued, glancing at Hermione and Daphne in the audience. “There’s a lot of work to do to stop Voldemort, and I don’t have all the answers. I wish I did. What I do know is that the only way he will ever truly be defeated is to end what created him in the first place. The Wizengamot has had sixteen years to stop the corruption and bigotry that led to the first war. Instead, you went back to the way things were, and now, your children will suffer because of it.

“This is your chance to fix that mistake! This is your chance to give them a better future! The choices that you make, here, in the heart of the Ministry, will determine whether we win this war, or not. It’s your choices that will determine if we face another Voldemort in a generation, or two. What kind of world do you want to hand over to the next generation? One full of greed and mistrust, anger and resentment? Or a world where we can stand together, lifting each other up to heights we could never reach alone? What happens next, is in your hands.”

Harry stepped back, taking a deep breath as the sound of applause swelled. The thunderous sound echoed off of the stone walls of the chamber. Amelia was the first to her feet, followed moments later by a dozen more. In moments, nearly the entire Wizengamot was giving him a standing ovation. Smiling and waving shyly, he waited awkwardly for them to stop before taking his seat.

“And on those inspiring words, I declare this meeting adjourned,” Dumbledore said, banging his gavel.

Harry had barely gotten to his feet while supporters and well-wishers swarmed around him. It got so bad that Marcus and Kim hurried over to keep him from being overwhelmed.

“That was a wonderful speech, Minister,” Augusta Longbottom said, shaking his hand firmly. “It’s about time someone had the balls to say it.”

Harry smiled and murmured his thanks before she was replaced by someone else, then another, and another.

“I wish you didn’t have to go back to Hogwarts.” “Wonderful speech, Minister.” “I hope Fudge get what he deserves tomorrow.”

Harry’s arm started to go numb from the number of times he shook hands. One of the few young witches there, looking to be in her thirties with long, dark hair and a dazzling smile even kissed him on the cheek. He swore he felt Penny’s eyes glaring holes in the back of his head as he smiled and nodded at the witch politely.

“Avada Kedavra!”

Harry spun, plucking his wand deftly from his robe. He caught a flash of green out of the corner of his eye just a few feet away. Just as the thought crossed his mind that he didn’t have time to get out of the way, he was roughly knocked to the ground. The wind was knocked out of his lungs as a large, heavy body covered his. Screams rang out, people shouted his name in fear as the Aurors rushed in.

“I’m fine,” Harry said, trying to shove the person off of him.

The weight didn’t move, so he pushed harder and they finally rolled to the side. When he sat up to see who had saved his life, his heart dropped into his stomach. Marcus stared unseeingly at the ceiling, his blue eyes dead and lifeless.

“No,” Harry whispered in shock.

“Get the Minister out of here!” Amelia shouted. “Lock down the Ministry! No one in or out!”

Kim grabbed him by the arm and yanked him to his feet with shocking strength. As she forcibly pushed him out of the room with the help of Penny, Kingsley, and Matilda, Harry spotted Moody subduing someone in the crowd. With so many people in the way, he couldn’t see who it was.

“No, wait! I-”

“He’s gone, Potter,” Matilda interrupted firmly, her face stony. “Our priority is to keep you safe.”

In seconds, he was dragged out of the room and down the hall. Glancing over his shoulder, he spotted Hermione and Daphne rushing after them, their faces white and eyes wide. Harry felt numb, his chest hollow as they climbed into the elevator and rode up to his office. Hermione

watched him cautiously - as if he would break at any moment - while Penny clung to his arm like a lifeline.

“Did anyone see who did it?” Harry asked, bubbling anger rising to the surface.

“Thadeus Nott,” Kim said, her eyes red as she blinked back tears.

Not knowing what to say to her, Harry rested his hand on her shoulder and gave it a reassuring squeeze. As soon as the elevator door opened, Matilda held him back while Kim and Kingsley stepped out, wands raised. The staff’s questions and exclamations were met with stony silence from the focused Aurors.

“Clear!” Kingsley called.

Matilda led him out of the elevator and guided him straight to his office.

“Clear this floor and lock it down until Bones gives us the all clear,” she said as they passed Kingsley.

“Is that really necessary?” Hermione asked.

“Until we know more, yes,” Matilda said firmly. “Minister, please wait in your office until we know it’s safe.”

Harry sighed but knew they wouldn’t let him leave even if he tried. Minister or not, Hermione alone would tie him to his chair.

“Fine,” he said. “But I want to know the moment we find out anything.”

Matilda nodded and pushed him into his office. Penny, Daphne, and Hermione followed him inside before Kingsley and Kim took up positions on either side of the door, wands in hand. Meanwhile, Matilda pulled up a chair and sat down. With a wave of her wand, she sent off a Patronus.

For over an hour, Harry sat in his office, waiting impatiently for any news. Penny gripped his hand tightly the whole time. The girls tried to make conversation, but he was too anxious to pay attention for long. Finally, after an agonizing wait, Amelia's Badger Patronus shot through the elevator doors and stopped in front of Matilda.

"All clear," Amelia's voice came from the silver Patronus. "I'm sending an escort to bring the Minister to the Auror offices."

"Finally," Harry said, climbing to his feet.

As he left his office, Matilda waved her wand, unlocking the elevator doors with a squelch. A few moments later, a troop of four Aurors stepped out, a familiar head of pink hair leading the way.

"Tonks?" Harry asked. "What are you doing here? I thought you were still on the mend."

"Amelia called me in," Tonks replied, lacking her normal cheer. "She wants people she can trust around you. Don't worry, I'm healthy enough for this. How're you holding up Kim?"

"I'm fit for duty," she answered stonily.

"That's not what I was asking," Tonks said kindly.

"I'll feel better after that bastard gets his date with a Dementor," Kim growled.

Tonks nodded in understanding and gestured to the elevator. The inside expanded itself to fit everyone in and they headed down one floor to the DMLE offices. The moment the doors opened, Harry marched straight towards Amelia, who was talking to Connie Hammer and another Auror he didn't recognize.

"Not here," she said before he could open his mouth. "My office."

Nodding shortly, Harry followed her to her office. Penny and Hermione tried to follow him in, but Amelia stopped them with a look.

"Just the Minister for now," she told them. "He can fill you in later."

Impatient to find out what was going on, Harry nodded to the girls. Amelia closed and sealed the door before walking around the desk to take her seat.

"What's happening?" Harry asked, taking the seat across from her.

"Thadeus Nott was the one to cast the Killing Curse," she said, her stern expression giving way to one of tiredness as she rubbed her eyes. "He was arrested and detained after killing Auror Dresden. Judge Pennington was there for the Wizengamot meeting and signed the order to use Veritaserum before Nott was even out of the room. Under truth serum, he testified that he was placed under the Imperius Curse and forced to against his will to attempt an assassination. A Healer from St. Mungo's confirmed he shows very recent signs of being under the curse."

Harry grew angrier with every word. When she finished, he jumped to his feet and paced back and forth, fighting the urge to shout and scream. Taking a deep breath, he thought the situation over.

"Did you get anything useful out of him?" he asked.

“Nothing,” Amelia sighed. “He testified he’s not a Death Eater. He doesn’t have the Dark Mark. He didn’t see who cursed him or recognize the voice.”

“Fuck!” Harry yelled.

Furiously, he threw a punch at the wall, denting the wood paneling and leaving his knuckles throbbing.

“Feel better?” Amelia asked.

“No,” Harry growled, clenching his fist against the pain. “This is bullshit! There’s no way Voldemort isn’t behind this and Nott didn’t know exactly what was going to happen.”

“I agree, but there’s no proof,” Amelia told him. “The question is, what changed? The other Death Eaters said he wanted to kill you himself.”

“Who knows?” Harry asked. “Maybe he changed his mind after they were arrested? So, what happens now, is he just going to get away with killing Marcus?”

“I can press charges if you demand it, but there’s little chance of winning at trial,” Amelia told him. “Everyone on the Wizengamot can easily imagine themselves in his position. It was a common tactic during the last war.”

“That son of a bitch,” Harry growled, gripping the back of his chair in a white-knuckled grip. “How the hell does he know nothing about what happened? There’s no way Nott has been with Voldemort since the beginning.”

“Veritaserum isn’t foolproof,” Amelia reminded him. “There are spells to block certain memories for a time. I suspect he’s used some variation of that. He went to school with Tom Riddle, and he doesn’t even recognize the name. Unfortunately, without evidence, I can’t order

a mind Healer to check. I've ordered Aurors to search his home but I'm not hopeful. This was well planned and has likely been in the works since shortly after you took office."

Pacing back and forth a few times, Harry sighed and retook his seat.

"So, what do we do?" he asked heavily.

"As much as it pains me to say this, we need to follow the law," Amelia said, her lips twisting in a grimace. "That bastard killed one of my best Aurors, but we can't take matters into our own hands. Doing so would send a poor message to the public. We continue to investigate and hope something turns up."

Harry snorted at the idea, but he didn't have a better one. As much as he hated it, Amelia was right. Taking off his glasses and rubbing his eyes, there was a knock at the door. Amelia flicked her wand, causing the locks to click open.

"Enter!" she called.

The door opened and Connie stepped inside.

"Minister, Madam Bones, we found this in Auror Dresden's robes," she said, holding out a wrinkled envelope.

"Thank you, Connie," Amelia said, taking it.

As Connie stepped back outside, Amelia read the front before handing it to Harry across the desk.

To Harry in the event of my death

Swallowing thickly, Harry broke the wax seal with his thumb and opened the envelope. Inside was a single sheaf of parchment folded into thirds. Unfolding the letter, he read.

Harry,

If you are reading this, then I've likely been killed fulfilling my duty as your personal guard. Please, do not mourn my death, and ask Kim to do the same. I've known for some time now this was likely to happen. If you remember, I was given a prophecy of my own during your visit to the Department of Mysteries. I won't bore you with the full prophecy, but it basically told me I would die protecting you. I felt no hesitation or fear in continuing my duties. You have accomplished more in 30 days than Bagnold or Fudge did in their entire careers. It has been an honor and a privilege working with you. You are bound for great things in this life Harry, whether you like it or not.

Your Friend, Marcus

P.S. Tell Kim I know she'll be a great Auror. Out of all the trainees I've seen rise up the ranks, she is my favorite. Watching her grow from a nervous schoolgirl into a confident, skilled young woman has been a joy.

"He knew," Harry said, blinking the tears out of his eyes. "He knew and he didn't tell me."

Shaking his head, he handed the letter to Amelia.

"Damn it, Marcus," she said, bowing her head. "He didn't tell anyone because he didn't want to put them at risk. He was one of the best for a reason."

"How do I make sure he gets an Order of Merlin?" Harry asked.

"I'll send you the paperwork," Amelia said, fixing her monocle. "There's nothing more you can do here, Harry. Go get some rest. You have a big day tomorrow."

Emotionally drained, Harry nodded and stood.

“And send in Kim, would you?” she asked.

“Sure,” he said.

Walking out of the office, he found Kim diligently standing guard outside.

“Amelia wants to see you,” Harry told her.

Nodding, Kim walked inside and closed the door.

“What’s going on?” Penny asked.

“I’ll tell you when we get back to my office,” Harry replied.

The door to Amelia’s office opened a few moments later and Kim rushed up to Harry and pulled him into a tight hug. He rubbed her back as she sniffled, her shoulders trembling.

“It’s not your fault,” she said shakily.

“I know,” Harry said through a tight throat. “Come on, let’s go back to my office. I think we could all use a drink.”

Chapter 13

“Harry, get up!”

“Urgh,” Harry groaned.

“Honestly,” Hermione said exasperatedly. “Get up or we’re going to be late.”

“M up,” he said groggily.

Blinking his bleary eyes open, he squinted at the light coming from his bedside table. His mouth was dry and foul-tasting and a throbbing pain beat at his temples. It took a moment for him to remember what had happened the day before and when he did, he groaned. Marcus’ death combined with the fact that there was little chance of getting a conviction on Nott for his murder had led Harry to drink more than he should have. After having a couple of glasses of cognac with Kim and Penny, he’d come home and shared a few more drinks with Sirius, Remus, and the Aurors in the Order. Vaguely, he remembered Tonks helping him upstairs sometime after midnight.

“Don’t make me have to come back in to get you again,” Hermione warned, her voice heading towards the door. “I won’t be so gentle next time.”

Groaning again, Harry rolled over and sat up at the edge of the bed, head held in his hands. Once the room stopped spinning, he made his way gingerly towards the bathroom. Fifteen minutes later, after a quick shower, he felt marginally better. Getting dressed, he carefully made his way down to the kitchen. The noise coming from the room caused him to wince, prompting several chuckles.

“Bit too much to drink last night, Harry?” Tonks asked amusedly.

“M fine,” Harry grumbled, dropping into a seat.

“Here, drink this,” Hermione said, placing a steaming goblet in front of him.

He wrinkled his nose at the smell and leaned back, his stomach roiling.

“What is that?” he asked disgustedly.

“It’s a Hangover Draught,” she told him. “As much as I think you should suffer through this to learn a valuable lesson, I’m not letting you spend your last day as Minister with a hangover.”

Harry looked closer at the red potion and took a tentative sniff. Immediately, he gagged, his shoulders hunching up.

“Merlin, I think I’d rather keep the hangover,” he mumbled.

That prompted more chuckles from most of the room and glares from Hermione and Mrs. Weasley.

“Oh, stop being such a baby and drink it,” Hermione said, pushing the goblet closer. “Just plug your nose and drink it quickly, you’ll hardly even taste it before it starts working.”

Sighing, Harry pinched his nose and downed the goblet in three large gulps. For a moment, he felt he was going to be violently sick all over the table. Just as he was about to bolt for the sink, the potion kicked in and all of his nausea, along with his headache, vanished in an instant.

“Whoa,” he said, blinking rapidly.

“Don’t think this means you can make a habit of this,” Hermione told him sternly. “I’m not making this for you again if you go out and get drunk for no good reason.”

“Yes, mum,” Harry smirked.

Hermione rolled her eyes, but her lips quirked upwards. With an angry sniff, Mrs. Weasley put a plate down in front of him.

“So, what’s the plan for today?” Tonks asked.

“I’m not really sure,” Harry admitted. “No one knows what’s going to happen when my time as Minister ends. Fudge and I are just scheduled to meet in courtroom seven at nine. After that? No idea.”

“Alright,” Tonks nodded. “Amelia wants me to be your replacement guard for the day. Security at the Ministry is being tightened as well. Only Wizengamot members and the press are allowed to enter the courtrooms, and you can expect more guards than usual.”

“Does that mean I won’t be able to watch?” Hermione asked worriedly.

“Bones made an exception for you, Penny, and Daphne,” Tonks smiled. “You should expect the Wireless broadcasters to show up as well, so no cursing out the entire government this time.”

“They deserved it,” Moody growled, his face twisting in a smile. “‘Bout time someone had the balls to say the quiet part out loud.”

“It’s still not becoming of a young man, especially the Minister for Magic,” Mrs. Weasley huffed.

“Which I won’t be after today,” Harry sighed, sitting back in his chair. “Thank Merlin it’s almost over.”

“Now we just have to hope Fudge doesn’t get back into office and Amelia gets elected,” Remus said softly.

“I’m sure everything will work out just fine,” Mr. Weasley smiled, patting him on the shoulder.

One by one, those working at the Ministry left as they finished breakfast. Since Harry was the last to arrive, he ate quickly while Hermione talked with Tonks about the security measures.

Ron, the twins, and Ginny entered the kitchen just as he finished eating. With a few handshakes from the boys, hugs from the girls, and wishes for good luck, they Flooed to the Minister's office.

"Finally," Penny said, giving Harry a hug and a kiss the moment he stepped out. "I was getting worried you were going to be late."

"Sorry," Harry said, taking her hand. "I had a bit of a rough night last night."

"And a few shots of Firewhiskey," Tonks smirked. "I'll go check in with Kim, but we should get going soon."

"Thanks," Harry said sarcastically as Penny looked at him with a frown.

"Are you alright, love?" she asked, running a hand through his hair.

"I'm fine," he told her. "A few Aurors came over last night and I just had a bit too much to drink. Hermione gave me a Hangover Draught this morning."

"Good," Penny smiled, kissing his cheek. "After everything you've been through this month, you're allowed to let loose a bit."

"Oh, good, you're here," Daphne said, poking her head through the door.

Stepping inside, she walked up to Hermione and gave her a kiss on the lips. Wrapping her arm around her waist, she turned to Harry.

"I ran into Amelia on my way in," Daphne told him. "They're ready when you are. That idiot, Fudge, is holding his own little press conference in the Atrium."

“Great,” Harry muttered. “Alright, let’s get this over with.”

“It’ll be fine,” Penny assured him softly. “If magic is judging you, there’s no way Fudge weasels his way out of this.”

“I’m just anxious to get out of this job,” Harry told her. “I feel like I’ve been in office for a year. Did Amelia mention anything about the Order of Merlin for Markus?”

“It’s all set,” Daphne replied. “His sister, Amy, is here to receive it.”

Harry’s throat felt tight as he nodded before leading the group out of his office. Kim and Tonks called the elevator so that it had already arrived by the time they reached it. Climbing inside, they descended to the courtrooms. Kim and Tonks flanked Harry when he stepped out, the girls trailing behind. Turning the corner to the courtrooms, he paused at the sight that greeted him. Dozens of Aurors, all in their ceremonial robes, lined the hall all the way to courtroom seven.

“Attention!” Matilda yelled.

The Aurors snapped to attention, standing rigidly straight with their backs to the walls.

“Present wands!” she shouted.

As one, the Aurors raised their arms at a forty-five-degree angle, wands aloft. The tips glowed a soft blue, bathing the normally dreary hall in a calming white-blue glow. Standing still as statues, they created an archway just big enough for one person to pass through.

“Er, what-”

“It’s their way of showing you their support,” Tonks whispered urgently. “They’re here because they respect you.”

Swallowing a knot in his throat, Harry nodded, blinking back the burning in his eyes. Starting slowly, he walked down the hall, his eyes darting back and forth between each and every face. As he passed each one, they snuffed out their wands and lowered them before stepping back, allowing the girls to pass. Just as Harry turned into the courtroom, he met the eyes of Shaw, who gave him a subtle nod.

Returning the gesture, Harry walked purposefully into courtroom seven. The room went silent as he and the girls entered. Fudge was already there, talking to a large group of reporters. Seeing Harry, he sneered, only for his brow to rise a moment later when dozens of Aurors poured into the room and positioned themselves around the perimeter.

“What’s the meaning of this?” Amelia asked, though Harry was sure she already knew.

“We’re here to protect our Minister, ma’am,” Kingsley said, stepping forward calmly, his deep voice reverberating around the room.

“I thought I told you to take volunteers only,” Amelia said, her face betraying nothing.

“I did,” Kingsley replied smoothly. “After what happened yesterday, every Auror we have volunteered to protect Minister Potter.”

Murmurs broke out around the room. With a nod from Amelia, Kingsley stepped back to his position.

“Perhaps we should get started,” Fudge said, blustering forward in his fancy blue robes. “I’m sure I have a lot of work ahead of me.”

“Not just yet,” Amelia said firmly. “Whatever magic is binding your oaths won’t start for another fifteen minutes. First, under the direction of Minister Potter, there is one more piece of important business to finish. Amy Harper, would you please come forward?”

A tall, brunette woman who looked to be in her forties stood from the gallery and marched forward. Harry knew instantly from the look of grief and barely repressed tears that she had to be Markus' sister. He was glad Amelia was doing this for him. As much as he wanted to do it himself, he didn't think he would be able to get the words out around the lump in his throat. Once Amy was standing next to Amelia at the podium, she cleared her throat to silence the whispering crowd.

"Yesterday, just down the hall from the room we stand in now, Senior Auror Markus Dresden tragically lost his life in the performance of his duties," Amelia said. "When one of our own was Imperioused to assassinate Minister Potter, Markus selflessly and heroically stepped in front of the Killing Curse, saving the life of the Minister. What the media wasn't told, and I can only reveal now with the permission of Mrs. Harper, is that Auror Dresden knew that, should he continue to guard the Minister, he would almost certainly be killed."

Harry looked at Amelia, surprised she was revealing that much as she took a moment to get her emotions under control.

"Two weeks ago, during a trip to the Department of Mysteries, Auror Dresden was given a prophecy," she continued. "In that prophecy, he was warned that continuing to protect the Minister would see him killed. Rather than reveal this to me or ask for a transfer, he stayed in his position. Knowing Markus as I have for more than twenty years, I can only surmise he did so to protect his fellow Aurors. Despite knowing that by simply hesitating he could spare his own life, Marcus never hesitated to step in front of that Curse. For his brave and selfless actions, Minister Potter has awarded Auror Markus Dresden with the Order of Merlin, First Class."

The crowd applauded as Amelia pulled a red velvet case out of her robes. Opening it, she revealed the golden medal of two crossed wands inside. Tearfully, though maintaining her composure, Amy took the case, cradling it to her chest. As the crowd began to talk amongst themselves, Harry worked up the courage to step down next to her and clear his throat.

"I'm so sorry for your loss," he said softly. "If I had known what was going to happen..."

“That’s why Markus kept the prophecy to himself,” Amy said, smiling sadly. “He was always protecting people, even as a kid. He thought highly of you, you know? Kept saying how he thought you were going to change the world for the better. And you know what, after everything he told me about you, I believe it, too.”

Harry swallowed thickly as Amy gave him a small smile and hugged him gently. Pulling away, she wiped her eyes and walked back over to the gallery. Ignoring the reporters asking her questions, she hugged a tall, blonde man that Harry guessed was her husband. Harry took off his glasses with a sigh and rubbed his eyes.

“Holding up alright?” Amelia asked.

“Yeah,” Harry replied, settling his glasses back on his nose. “It’s just been a long month.”

“I’ll bet,” Amelia said, her lips quirking up briefly as she checked her watch. “It’s about time. You ready?”

“As I’ll ever be,” Harry sighed.

“I’ll go get Fudge,” Amelia said.

As she walked away, Harry looked back over his shoulder at Dumbledore.

“Any idea what’s about to happen?” he asked.

“Something quite memorable, I suspect,” Dumbledore replied, his eyes twinkling. “The older magics tend to be quite spectacular.”

Harry snorted and shook his head.

“That’s not what I meant,” he said.

“I’m afraid when it comes to the specifics, I’m just as much in the dark as you are,” Dumbledore replied. “However, I have faith in your character and abilities. You have risen marvelously to every challenge life has put before you. This one will be no different.”

While it wasn’t the answer he wanted, his words did make Harry feel a bit better. Their brief conversation came to an end when Amelia returned with Fudge in tow. His balding head was covered in sweat, and he looked nervous but tried to hide it behind a confident swagger.

“Let’s get this over with,” Fudge blustered, adjusting his robes. “I’d like to get back to my office and back to work as soon as possible. I’m sure the Ministry has suffered without proper guidance for the last month.”

Harry snorted, as did a good number of the Aurors near him. Even Amelia had to hide a smile as Fudge went red and glared.

“It should start in just a moment,” Amelia said, checking her watch. “We should take our seats.”

Harry and Fudge stood across from one another while everyone else waited and watched. Fudge tried to glare at him, but Harry found it hard to see the pudgy man intimidating. They stood silently for a long moment before he felt magic begin swirling around them. The torches along the wall flared, burning brightly as dozens of small, silvery balls of mist flew through the walls. They circled around over their heads, creating a gust of wind before stopping suddenly in a perfectly formed ring around the two of them.

Slowly lowering to the floor, the mist began to expand rapidly until it settled like a fog in the middle of the courtroom. Billowing and shifting, the fog began to take shape from the inside out. First, it morphed into a flat, round table with a hole in the middle just big enough for Harry and Fudge. Then, around the outside formed seats. The last of the mist gathered around each chair, forming ghostly shapes that gradually became clearer and more detailed. As the faces developed, Harry spun around to look at each one, his eyes going wide when he recognized a very familiar face.

“Merlin,” he gasped.

“Indeed,” the elderly wizard smiled. “A pleasure to meet you, young Potter. Aside from myself, we are the original sacred twenty-eight. Our essences have been preserved within these very walls to adjudicate over the most delicate of matters. We are the Council of Magic.”

“Impossible,” Fudge whispered, his eyes wide and bulging.

“Oh, I assure you it is quite possible, Cornelius,” Merlin said, his stare piercing.

Fudge swallowed and took a step back before gathering himself and straightening his robes.

“Ah, well, yes, of course,” he rambled. “I’ve prepared a presentation to show how preposterous Potter’s allegations are and how much good I’ve done for the Ministry.”

“That won’t be necessary,” A witch sitting at the round table said. “We have much more reliable ways of obtaining the information we need.”

Harry couldn’t help but smirk as Fudge shuffled nervously.

“I’d like to start with Harry first,” A wizard said, smiling kindly. “We’ve heard rumors of you for years, and we’ve seen what you’ve done since taking office, but I’d like to learn more about the wizard my house produced.”

“We’re related?” Harry asked, surprised.

“In a manner of speaking. Bartholomew Potter, at your service. Or, what part of his magic remains in this world,” the wizard said. “We’re not ghosts, and cannot communicate with the

dead, unfortunately. We are merely echoes of our past selves. A part of ourselves we left behind to protect what we built.”

“Indeed,” Merlin nodded. “Now, if there are no objections, let us begin.”

He waved his hand, and mist flowed from the table and began swirling around Harry’s feet. Traveling up his body, it continued up to the ceiling, forcing necks to crane back to keep it in sight. The mist spread out like a cloud, colors shifting across its surface. Those colors merged into an image of a young boy cowering in a cupboard while a storm raged outside. Thunder shook the house, causing dust to fall from the stairs above him.

Harry blushed with shame, wondering why Merlin and the others wanted to see so far back in his life. Looking away from the image above him, he listened absently as the most formative and important moments of his life played out for all to see. From the gallery, he could hear a low murmur coming from the Wireless broadcasters as they described the scenes to their audience.

It felt utterly humiliating to have the whole country find out about the Dursleys and the way he grew up. Relief washed over him when the images started to focus on his Hogwarts years. Everyone watched raptly as he struggled to cope with his fame, making friends, and his classes, all while dealing with Voldemort in the background. Mercifully, the images were short, only showing the most important parts of his school life.

Much more time was spent on his fourth year, the Third Task of the tournament, and his dealings with the Ministry leading up to his trial just a month ago. The council members whispered amongst themselves during his fight with Voldemort and escape from the graveyard. Bartholomew looked at Harry and smiled at him proudly before turning back.

For the next few minutes, they reviewed his actions as Minister. Looking back at what he’d done, Harry was surprised by how well everything had turned out. There were so many moments where a single mistake on his part could have led to disaster.

“Merlin,” Bartholomew called the moment the memories ended. “I propose we bring Mr. Nott here to discover the truth of his involvement.”

“That’s not why we are here,” another wizard with a chiseled jaw said. “We are here to discover if the former Minister knowingly attempted to end the scion of two of the sacred twenty-eight.”

“We here to preserve our way of life,” Bartholomew argued. “That was the purpose of leaving a part of our magic behind. There is clearly more going on here than either Harry or Fudge is aware of. I believe Fudge to be merely a pawn in a much grander scheme to see the Ministry destroyed.”

The other wizard looked at him for a long moment before nodding his head.

“I withdraw my objection,” he said.

“Are there any others that wish to object?” Merlin asked, pausing to wait for a reply that never came. “Very well. Madam Bones, if you could bring Lord Nott here, perhaps we may be able to get to the truth of his involvement.”

Amelia nodded to Kingsley, who left the courtroom quickly, taking two other Aurors with him.

“Now, Mr. Fudge,” Merlin said, turning his penetrating gaze on the trembling man. “Let us get to the truth of *your* involvement in all of this.”

“Now – now wait just a minute!” Fudge shouted. “This is an invasion of privacy!”

“And one that you agreed to when you took office,” A witch from the council interrupted firmly.

Merlin waved his hand again, and Fudge tried to wave away the mist to no avail. In seconds, another cloud had formed above their heads, and images danced across the surface. The first showed a much younger and thinner Fudge sitting with Barty Crouch and a woman Harry vaguely recognized as Minister Bagnold.

“You say that Black blew up the street?” Crouch asked, pacing in front of a nervous Fudge. “That’s what all the witnesses said?”

“Er, yes, sir,” Fudge stammered. “I questioned them myself before Obliviating them. A few thought the spell from Pettigrew, but they’re just Muggles. I’m sure they were mistaken.”

“All of them stated that the spell came from Black, do you understand?” Crouch asked firmly. “The official reports will reflect that.”

“Of – of course,” Fudge said, bobbing his head quickly.

“Barty?” Bagnold asked, sitting forward in her chair.

“You know how these politics work,” Crouch said, turning to face her. “He’s still a Black and being so close to You-Know-Who, many in the Wizengamot will be afraid of him. We cannot let him back out on the streets. He could even claim the Imperious like many of his friends.”

“What, exactly are you suggesting?” Bagnold asked.

“Merely that we do our jobs,” Crouch said, taking a seat. “It is our job to protect Magical Britain from monsters like Black. His greatest chance to escape justice comes from the Wizengamot. Why give him the chance when we can simply send him to Azkaban?”

“The people would never accept that,” Bagnold said. “And the Wizengamot would crucify us for even trying. As you said, he is still a Black.”

“But he is weak,” Crouch said. “His is all that remains of that family. With all the other trials going on, the public won’t even notice he hasn’t had a trial. As for the Wizengamot, tell them he was tried under a special tribunal due to the danger he presents. With the overwhelming evidence we can present to the public, no one will ever go looking into his records.”

Bagnold was silent for a long moment before she nodded. The image shifted and now Fudge was standing at a press conference, smiling for the cameras as Bagnold described how he single-handedly captured the notorious Sirius Black.

What followed after that was a litany of small but corrupt acts Fudge committed to advance through the rankings in the Ministry. Once he met Umbridge, he used the information and blackmail she gave him to beat out people much more suited for the positions he took. From the memories, it was clear that the only reason he won the election for Minister was because he had a reputation for being able to be bought. That, and Dumbledore refused to take the position.

Fudge hadn’t been in office more than a few hours before Malfoy came into his office and blatantly bribed him to free him and his friends. Over the years, they built a relationship that led to Fudge falling deeper and deeper into his pocket. Fudge pushed laws for him, fought others, and made changes in policy all while making a tidy profit on the side.

Then came the Third Task and his staunch refusal to believe Voldemort could be back. After that, Malfoy and Umbridge were in his office much more often, discussing ways to stop Harry and Dumbledore from warning the public.

“Perhaps we could spin it as Potter falling to the Dark,” Malfoy suggested during one such meeting. “I believe you mentioned the Dementors being unnaturally attracted to him last year.”

“Don’t remind me,” Fudge said, rubbing his brow. “Blasted things nearly killed him three times. Do you have any idea the nightmare I had when the press found out?”

“But you handled it wonderfully,” Umbridge simpered with a grating, girlish giggle.

“You know, I have a reliable source that says they spotted Black in Surrey,” Malfoy said, swirling his drink. “I believe that’s where the Potter boy lives, isn’t it? Tell me, do either of you find it suspicious that Potter changes his mind about Black moments before he escapes from a locked and guarded tower and now he’s spotted in the area where the boy lives?”

“You think they’re working together?” Fudge asked, leaning forward.

“It would make sense,” Malfoy said, taking a sip from his glass. “Potter gets close to Black, then he miraculously escapes, and now the Dark Lord has suddenly returned. The timing is a bit too suspicious. Perhaps sending Dementors to the area to search for Black would be a good idea.”

“I think that’s a wonderful idea,” Umbridge smiled. “If all goes well, we may be able to rid ourselves of both of our problems in one night.”

“And how would I explain to the public that Dementors killed the Boy-Who-Lived?” Fudge asked. “They would hound me out of office if something like that happened under my watch.”

“Not if Black convinced a few of the beasts to join his side,” Malfoy smirked. “It would certainly explain how he was able to escape Azkaban so easily. Of course, it would be a tragedy if he were to lose control of them while in a muggle neighborhood.”

“Yes, yes. It would, wouldn’t it,” Fudge said, nodding his head thoughtfully.

The image shifted again, showing Fudge and his office in a panic when they learned that Harry survived. The rest of what happened was predictable and, thankfully, over quickly. Fudge was pale and trembling, beads of sweat on his forehead as the memories came to an end.

“You bastard!” someone shouted.

That single shout started a cascade that took several moments to be quieted by the efforts of Amelia and Dumbledore. Just as the Wizengamot and the gallery quieted, Kingsley returned

with Nott. The elderly man paled and had to be dragged forward when he spotted the ghostly council.

“Lord Nott, how good of you to join us,” Merlin said, a dangerous glint in his eyes.

Chapter 14

Nott was dragged forward against his will, his face pale as his toes dragged along the floor.

“Thadeus Nott,” Merlin said, pinning the frightened man in place with his gaze as the Aurors stepped back. “You claim to be innocent in your attempt to assassinate the Minister. Let us see if that is true.”

Without waiting for a reply, Merlin waved his hand, sending the silvery mist swirling around his body and up to the ceiling. Nott began to back away as the image solidified above him but was stopped when Kingsley pressed the tip of his wand to his neck.

High above them, Nott sat at a long table. Known Death Eaters sat on either side of him, and at the head of the table, Voldemort’s snake-like visage stood out stark and pale.

“We need to mitigate Potter and Dumbledore,” Voldemort hissed. “I need more time to gather my forces before we challenge the Ministry. Lucius, what has our dear Minister Fudge told you?”

“I’ve convinced him that this is all a ploy by Dumbledore to steal his position,” Malfoy bragged. “The fool is as good as yours, my lord, he just doesn’t know it. That Umbridge woman may need to be dealt with. Just this morning, she confided in me a plan to send Dementors after Potter. I have convinced her to hold off for the time being.”

“Dementors,” Voldemort hissed, stroking Nagini’s head as she slithered into his lap. “That may just work in our favor. Tell her to send them and ensure Fudge is complicit in case he decides to become obstinate later.”

“But, my lord,” Malfoy said, nervously licking his lips. “I thought you wanted to kill Potter yourself.”

Voldemort turned to look at him sharply, holding his gaze until Malfoy looked away fearfully.

“Do you think a boy who has managed to thwart me so many times will be felled by such a pitiful attack?” Voldemort hissed dangerously. “Do you believe your lord so weak that he cannot accomplish what a few Dementors can?”

“O-of course n-not, my lord,” Malfoy replied softly, sinking into his chair.

“The boy will be mine to kill,” Voldemort said firmly, turning away to look into the distance. “No, Potter will not his end so easily. He will escape, as he always does. With luck, he will be forced to use magic, allowing our dear Minister to further muddy his name. No doubt Dumbledore will come to his aide, sullyng what’s left of his reputation in the process. Now, how is our recruitment going?”

The image faded, and another took its place. The room was the same, but the fear was palpable as Voldemort paced back and forth furiously.

“You allowed yourself to be outwitted by a boy?” he asked in a dangerous whisper.

“My lord, there was nothing I could do,” Malfoy pled. “I wasn’t allowed in the courtroom, and the law he used is bound by ancient magic. If that fool Fudge hadn’t-”

“Crucio!”

Malfoy let out a blood-curdling scream and collapsed to the ground under Voldemort's wand.

"I don't want to hear excuses," Voldemort hissed, lifting the curse. "You've lost us the Ministry!"

"M-my lord, I-"

"Silence!" he yelled, returning to his pacing as Malfoy pulled himself back into his chair. "McNair will suffer for being captured."

Voldemort strode over to the nearest Death Eater and grabbed his arm roughly. Pulling back the sleeve, he pressed the tip of his wand against the Dark Mark. The snake writhed angrily on the skin and all the Death Eaters clutched their forearms, teeth gritted in pain. After a long moment, he lifted his wand, causing everyone at the table to slump forward in relief.

"M-my lord?" the Death Eater whose Dark Marked he'd used asked tentatively.

"We must keep my Death Eaters in the Wizengamot a secret," Voldemort hissed. "That spell will prevent you from speaking of them. Tell the others in the Ministry to keep watch. If they decide to move against us, we will have plenty of time to react. I need to go to the continent to boost recruitment. Malfoy, Crabbe, Goyle, ramp up your recruitment efforts here and do not get caught. My plans will need to be accelerated. When I return, we will free your brothers and sisters from Azkaban. Do nothing overt until I return, or you will suffer a slow and painful death."

Voldemort's cloak flared as he spun and strode angrily from the room. The image faded and reformed, this time on top of a grassy hill.

"Wait!" Harry yelled. "If he could do that, why not hide all of his Death Eaters?"

“Magic like that is complex,” Merlin replied. “I suspect he only hid three to four names at the most. Doing so for all of his Death Eaters would have left him weak for days.”

“Oh,” Harry said, turning his attention back to the cloud above him.

On the hill, Nott and two others, Selwyn and Rosier, both members of the Wizengamot, waited. Without a word being said, the Aurors in the courtroom surrounded the two wizards and stripped them of their wands. Harry wasn't sure if this kind of evidence would hold up, but he could deal with that later.

His attention was drawn back to the cloud when he heard the sound of a *crack*. Voldemort stepped seamlessly out of thin air, his eyes narrowing at the three figures as they knelt.

“Why have only three of you answered my call?” he hissed.

“My lord,” Selwyn said, bowing low. “Potter is more competent than we expected. He and that bitch, Bones, arrested most of us. We sent the rest into hiding.”

“How many?” Voldemort hissed, sounding more snake than human.

Selwyn shivered in fear, “A-All that were at your rebirth and the first two batches of recruits, my lord.”

“How!?” Voldemort barked.

“T-They sealed the M-Ministry and launched a full a-assault, my lord,” Selwyn stammered. “Aurors hit all of our homes and safehouses at once. We had no chance to warn them. I was only just released from the Ministry a few minutes ago.”

Voldemort turned away and looked into the distance. With a shout of pure rage, he thrust his wand forward. A massive red, writhing spell leapt from the tip. It traveled over half a mile in just over a second, impacting the side of a distant hill. The explosion sounded like a bomb going off. The top half of the hill was completely destroyed, exposing the dirt and bedrock within.

“Potter will pay for this,” Voldemort hissed softly, pacing back and forth for a long moment. “Find out where they’re holding my Death Eaters. Focus on finding the most important ones. I want them free before they’re taken to Azkaban.”

The image shifted again, revealing Nott as the one to give Voldemort the information about who was guarding Malfoy and the others. Then it showed the kidnappers that escaped, who turned out to be new recruits, being tortured for their failure. Harry could see Voldemort losing some grip on his sanity in those moments. It gave him an almost perverse sense of pride that he was causing him so many problems. Next, the Dark Lord ordered the Werewolf attack in an attempt to demoralize Harry. When that failed, Voldemort actually killed one of his Death Eaters in a rage.

“Potter must be stopped,” Voldemort said, now staying in a much less luxurious home than the Malfoy’s. “Nott, I require your services.”

“Of course, my lord,” Nott replied, bowing low.

“We need you to keep your position on the Wizengamot, but you’re uniquely placed to get close to him,” Voldemort said. “Since all of you are incompetent, I’ll be controlling you myself.”

“My lord?” Nott asked nervously.

“You will need proof of the imperious if you are to claim it at your trial,” Voldemort smirked, his eyes glittering with glee as Nott swallowed nervously. “No need to fear. I will ensure they get nothing from you. You will be released shortly, Potter will be dead, and we will free my Death Eaters from Azkaban.”

Nott bowed his head as Voldemort laughed and raised his wand.

"I'm happy to be of service, my lord," he said.

"Imperio!"

The cloud faded into nothing, and Nott swallowed as all eyes turned to him.

"Aurors, arrest Selwyn and Rosier," Amelia barked furiously.

"Bring them forward," Merlin said. "As members of the Sacred Twenty-eight, they are bound by the same oath as Fudge. By taking part in the attempted assassination of the Potter heir and failing to stop it, they shall be punished accordingly."

The Aurors turned to Harry, who nodded. If Merlin wanted to deal with them and save him the trouble, he was more than happy to comply. Selwyn and Rosier were marched forward at wand point and forced to stand next to Nott.

"Members of the council," Merlin began. "I put to you that these wizards have forsaken the ancient oath made by their ancestors. They have attempted to end the Potter line and overthrow the Ministry without cause. If you are in agreement, please stand and make yourself known."

Bartholomew Potter was the first to stand, followed shortly by the others. Not one council member remained seated, their glares directed at the three men held at wand point.

"You are a disgrace to the House of Nott," one wizard spat. "It disgusts me to see one of my house bow so low to such a monster willingly."

“When the ancient houses spoke of pure, they meant of magic, not of blood,” a witch that looked like Rosier said, shaking her head. “How you have twisted and perverted what we worked so hard to build.”

“The Council of the Round Table, and later the Wizengamot, were built with a single purpose,” Bartholomew said, standing tall and proud. “To protect all magicals, no matter who or where they come from. You have lost sight of that purpose. Ours is not to rule. Ours is to guide and shelter.”

“You would have us bow to Muggles,” Selwyn spat. “I follow the Dark Lord and the ways of Salazar Slytherin proudly.”

“Then you are a fool,” A wizard, Selwyn’s ancestor Harry presumed, said softly. “You trust the word of a self-proclaimed lord, a usurper, with no understanding of history. Salazar Slytherin once served on this council long before the Ministry was built around it. He hated Muggles because they killed his wife and daughter. He left Hogwarts not because they allowed Muggleborns to attend but because he wanted to remove them from their Muggle parents to protect them. It was a different time - when being magical could see you drowned or burned at the stake. This Dark Lord you follow will only see our world destroyed, and your only motivation is greed. If this is how far our family has fallen, then we do not deserve a voice in this chamber.”

“Nott, Selwyn, Rosier, and Fudge,” Merlin called. “For your crimes, we hereby strip you of all titles, monies, and properties to be given to Lord Potter. It will be up to Magic herself if you are allowed to keep her gift.”

Holding out his hand, the mist swirled and formed a staff in his hand. Merlin banged it on the ground three times, the sound of wood on stone echoing loudly through the chamber. The mist swirled around them, and Harry took a step out of the way. All four men shouted and yelled in fear as they were consumed in a cyclone of thick, silvery clouds. He heard screams, and the mist glowed brightly before shooting straight up. The men trembled before dropping to their knees, pale and covered in sweat.

“What happened?” Harry asked.

“Magic judged them unworthy,” Bartholomew told him.

“The houses of Nott, Selwyn, and Rosier are expelled from the Sacred Twenty-eight,” Magic said. “It will be up to you to vote in worthy replacements. Choose wisely.”

With that, the ghostly table and figures began to fade.

“You have done House Potter proud, young Harry,” Bartholomew smiled.

Harry smiled in return, and they were gone, fading like fog under the sun.

“Get those four out of here,” Amelia said, pointing to Fudge, Selwyn, Rosier, and Nott. “We’ll figure out what to do with them later.”

Standing, Dumbledore raised his hands for quiet.

“Well, that was certainly enlightening,” he said, prompting a bit of laughter. “I think, if there are no objections, we can consider this matter closed.”

Raising his gavel, he brought it down on the block. A loud bang echoed around the chamber, shaking the entire room and causing dust to fall from the ceiling. Surprise rippled through the courtroom, and Dumbledore looked at his gavel in surprise.

Boom!

As the room shook, Harry yelped from a sharp pain in his scar.

“Voldemort,” he said, fighting against the pain and getting to his feet. “He’s here.”

Amelia jumped to her feet, wand appearing in her hand as she followed Harry towards the doors.

“Aurors, with me!” she yelled.

“Harry, perhaps it would be best for you to go back to Headquarters, where it’s safe,” Dumbledore said.

Harry knew it was more of a demand than a suggestion, but he still shook his head.

“No, he’s here for me,” Harry said. “I’m not hiding from him anymore.”

“Harry?” Hermione asked nervously as she, Penny, and Daphne joined them near the doors. “What’s happening?”

“Voldemort’s here,” he told her, turning into the hall and striding towards the elevator.

“You’re going to fight him, aren’t you?” Penny asked, biting her lip nervously as she took his hand.

“If I have to,” Harry said, stepping into the elevator.

A dozen Aurors poured inside while the rest moved down to the other elevators. Once their car was full, Dumbledore hit the button for the Atrium, the only place the Ministry could be breached from the outside. As they rose closer to the surface, another explosion rocked the building. Bits of debris hit the top of the golden elevator, clanging on the roof.

“Please don’t let me die in a falling elevator,” Tonks said. “I’d never live that down.”

Harry snorted, and some of the tension broke, Aurors chuckling around him. Reaching over, he grabbed Dumbledore's sleeve and pulled him closer.

"I have an idea," he said softly. "Trust me."

Before the headmaster could respond, the elevator came to a stop, and the doors opened. Stepping out, Harry swallowed at the sight of the destroyed Atrium. Rubble from the ceiling lay on the floor in large chunks, sunlight streaming in through the hole in the sidewalk above. The phone booth normally used to ride up and down lie shattered and broken near the Floos. The desk guard was sprawled on the tile floor, his face frozen in an expression of agony, blood dripping from his ears, nose, mouth, and eyes. Several more bodies lay scattered amongst the debris, people slaughtered as they went about their day.

At the center of the carnage stood Voldemort, his red eyes gleaming as he stared at the witch floating in front of him. The woman struggled, letting out choked pleas as she gasped for air. With a negligent flick of his wand, Voldemort ended her life in a flash of green before he turned his gaze on Harry.

"Ah, Harry," he said, a sickly smile stretching his lips. "So kind of you to join me."

"Tom," Harry said, striding forward with a flick of his wand to shut off the Floo.

Voldemort glared at him furiously for the use of his real name.

"I'm surprised Dumbledore let you come," he said. "Have you finally come to face death, Harry, instead of sending someone else to face it for you?"

Harry tightened his grip on his wand but refused to take the bait.

"So that's why you've done all this?" he asked instead. "Just to kill me?"

“Among other things,” Voldemort smirked. “I must admit, you’ve proved far more competent as Minister than I expected. You’ve caused me more setbacks than I’d care to admit, but no matter. I’ll be rectifying that very soon with your death.”

“And then what?” Harry asked, forcing himself to walk closer to Voldemort and further from his support despite his fear. “You really think killing me will make any difference? If you kill me, there are plenty of other witches and wizards better than I am willing to stand against you.”

“Oh, Harry, once you’re gone, none will dare stand against me,” Voldemort said with a laugh.

“I dare,” Matilda said, taking a step forward.

Voldemort threw his head back and laughed manically.

“This is the best you can offer?” he asked. “An old woman?”

“I dare,” Hermione said, stepping up next to Matilda.

“So do I,” Amelia said, joining them.

“Me too.” “And me,” Penny and Daphne added.

“And us,” Tonks said, taking a step forward.

A moment later, every single Auror took a step forward in unison, their boots sounding like the march of an army.

“You see?” Harry asked. “Say you manage to finally kill me, so what? Say you manage to kill all of us. Do you really think that will be the end? There will always be someone willing to stand up to you, and it’s only a matter of time before they win.”

Voldemort looked truly disconcerted for a moment, his face twisting in confusion before he snarled and slashed his arm through the air.

“Foolish boy!” he yelled. “You know nothing! Your precious Dumbledore hasn’t told you about the prophecy, has he? Keeping secrets are we, Dumbledore?”

“Fuck the prophecy,” Harry said, causing Voldemort to look at him sharply. “It doesn’t matter. I choose my own destiny.”

“Then you have chosen death!” Voldemort hissed, smirking dangerously.

His wand flashed up, and Harry’s followed a split second behind.

“Avada Kedavra!” Voldemort shouted.

“Defodio!” Harry shouted.

His Gouging Spell and Voldemort’s Killing Curse met in the middle and connected, just as they had two short months ago in the graveyard. But it was different this time. This time, Harry knew he could win. With all his might, he pushed, forcing the golden bead in the middle closer to Voldemort’s wand while a golden cage formed around him.

Suddenly, Voldemort laughed.

“You still can’t win, Harry,” he shouted over the rush and sizzle of their colliding magic. “You still can’t kill me.”

“But we can,” Amelia said. “Surround him. As soon as Potter drops his spell, hit the bastard with everything you’ve got.”

Voldemort growled as the Aurors surrounded him behind and on the side, getting as close to the cage as they could. Amelia stood directly behind him with her wand aimed squarely at his heart.

“Get out of this, you son of a bitch,” she growled.

As Voldemort’s spell inched closer to his wand, its progress slowed. Harry didn’t know if he was fighting harder or if it was the magic at work, but he pushed forward, determined to win. He wouldn’t be able to release the spell until he did.

“You think you’ve won?” Voldemort asked, straining from holding back Harry’s magic. “You will never defeat Lord Voldemort.”

Everyone froze as a silvery-blue fox dashed through the wall and stopped next to Amelia.

“The Dementors have abandoned Azkaban. We’re under attack. Send help!” came a panicked wizard’s voice.

Harry’s stomach dropped as Voldemort laughed.

“What’s it going to be, Amelia?” he asked smugly. “Will you and your Aurors stay to kill me, leaving your guards to die at the hands of my Death Eaters, or will you abandon Potter to his fate to save them?”

Harry felt a white-hot rage course through his veins as Voldemort laughed manically. This whole time, he’d thought this was about him, but it was just another game. With a shout, he forced his magic forward with more power and determination than he ever had before. The laughter

stopped abruptly when a golden bead the size of a Bludger surged towards Voldemort's wand. This time, it didn't slow as it got closer, continuing to plow forward.

"Noo!" Voldemort shouted.

Harry's spell connected with Voldemort's wand so violently that Voldemort was pushed back from the force, his bare feet sliding on the slick marble floor. Ghostly figures leapt from the wand one after the other, barely forming into recognizable figures before they swarmed around him.

"Now!" Harry shouted.

With a great heave, he wrenched his wand free, ending the spell and causing the golden cage to collapse. Dozens of spells in a rainbow of colors rocketed towards Voldemort from all directions. They clashed in the middle, popping, exploding, and bursting against one another. Those closest to the spells stumbled back from the intense backlash.

But when the air cleared, Voldemort was gone.

"You can't win, Harry," he said, his voice echoing from everywhere. "I've already won."

"Damn it," Harry growled. "Get everyone to Azkaban, now! Professor, I need you to go with them."

"Harry, I don't think-

"You and I are the only ones that can hold him off," Harry said firmly. "If he shows up and we're not there, he'll slaughter them, and you know it. Now, either you go or I go, which is it?"

Dumbledore stared at him for a long moment before sighing.

“Very well,” he said.

Harry let out a breath he didn't realize he was holding as Amelia got her Aurors together.

“Jones, I want you and your team to stay here and guard the Ministry,” she barked. “If anything happens here, you contact me immediately. I want all non-essential personnel evacuated and a constant guard on the Minister until this is over. Hargrave, Tonks, that means you. The rest of you, with me!”

Exhaustedly, Harry sat on a large chunk of concrete as the Aurors followed Amelia back to the elevator.

“Are you alright?” Penny asked, sitting next to him.

“Just tired,” he said, sighing. “And mad at myself. I should've known he was here for more than just me.”

“Stop blaming yourself, Potter,” Daphne told him. “It's unattractive, and no one expects you to see everything coming.”

“You're not a mind reader, Harry,” Hermione said more kindly. “You can't know everything. If this was easy, we would've beaten Voldemort a long time ago.”

Harry sighed and nodded. He knew they were right, but that didn't mean he had to like it.

~

It was hours later when Harry looked up from his desk as the door opened. Amelia walked in, her robes tattered and burned, a thin cut running down her cheek.

“How bad is it?” he asked warily.

“Bad,” Amelia said, taking the seat across from him. “We lost all the prisoners except for Voldmeort’s inner circle. I had them moved to a different wing in secret and enchanted it to remain hidden from the rest of the guards. Fortunately, Voldemort never showed up, and his Death Eaters didn’t find them. I think we managed to hurt him or at least wear him out.”

“How are the Aurors?” Harry asked.

“No one died, fortunately, but two may never work as Aurors again, and a further twelve were injured enough they needed to go to St. Mungo’s,” she told him, sighing tiredly.

Taking off his glasses, Harry rubbed his eyes with his palms. He was relieved that no one was killed but frustrated at the same time.

“So, all that work we did was for nothing,” he grumbled.

“This is a blow, I’ll admit, but it could’ve been much worse,” Amelia said, pouring a couple of drinks. “I’ll tell you this, though. I’ve never seen my Aurors fight as hard as they did today. You really inspired them with the way you stood up to Voldemort.”

“Well, at least I did something right,” Harry said, taking a large gulp of the amber liquid in his glass. “I feel like even when I win, I still lose, you know?”

“It might feel like that, but I still count today as a win,” Amelia told him, downing her glass in a single gulp.

“How do you figure that?” Harry asked.

“Most of his Death Eaters escaped, yes, but he would’ve recruited anyways,” she said, pouring another two fingers. “All we lost today was time. But we gained something more important. Hope. You probably didn’t notice, but those Wireless reporters were in the Atrium when you fought Voldemort. The whole nation just listened to you send him running from this building. What you said and did today is far more important than you understand.”

Harry shook his head. She was right, he thought; he didn’t understand.

“What’s going to happen with the election?” he asked to change the subject.

“It will be held first thing tomorrow morning,” Amelia replied. “Looks like you get to be Minister for just a little bit longer.”

“Great,” Harry sighed. “Just what I wanted.”

Chapter 15

Making his way downstairs for breakfast, Harry yawned and waved to Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, Hermione, Kingsley, Moody, and Tonks as they greeted him.

“Amelia sent an owl,” Kingsley said as he took a seat, handing him the letter. “She wants us to escort you directly to the courtroom this morning. After yesterday, she wants this election over with as soon as possible.”

“Probably a good idea,” Harry said, setting down the letter and taking a bite of his eggs. “The sooner I’m out of office, the better.”

Tonks scoffed, “For you, maybe. I like having a competent Minister for once.”

“Then you’ll just have to hope Amelia wins the election,” Harry shrugged.

“Do we know who’s running against her?” Hermione asked curiously.

“Tiberius Ogden and Yolanda Travers,” Mr. Weasley replied. “They put their names on the docket yesterday.”

“Travers?” Harry asked, the name sounding familiar.

“Markus Travers was a real piece of work,” Moody said, pointing to his fake eye. “Took my eye. Yolanda is his niece. Not nearly as insane, but just as dangerous.”

“So, she’s Voldemort’s pick?” Hermione asked.

“Essentially,” Moody nodded. “I don’t think she has much of a chance, but politics was never my strong suit.”

“Really, I couldn’t tell,” Tonks smirked before turning to Harry with a grin. “I’m sure Bones will win. After the last month, people have a lot of faith in you. If you say Bones should be Minister, they’ll listen.”

“She’s not wrong,” Mr. Weasley smiled.

Harry rolled his eyes and went back to his breakfast. It bothered him that so many people, especially Wizengamot members, were turning to him to lead. These were people that should be able to think for themselves. They shouldn’t have to wait for his opinion to do the right thing.

Sighing to himself, he finished his breakfast and rose with the others who were going to the Ministry. They all Flooed directly to his office and walked directly to the elevator with only a brief greeting to his staff. Mr. Weasley got off on the second floor to go to his office while the others descended to the courtrooms.

Today, there was no show of support from the Aurors, probably because they were all busy looking for the escaped Death Eaters. The only people waiting in the hall were Penny, Daphne, a couple of guards, and a handful of reporters. Harry ignored the journalists' shouted questions as he took Penny's hand and led her into the courtroom. Inside, only about half the seats were occupied. Taking his seat next to Amelia, who was hunched over a thick stack of parchment, Harry sighed and rubbed his eyes.

"Rough night?" Amelia asked, glancing up from her pile of parchment.

"You could say that," Harry replied, rubbing his scar absentmindedly. "Anything new I should know about?"

"We're still looking for the escapees," she told him tiredly. "So far, none of them have shown up on the streets, and their homes are still empty. We think Voldemort must have set up safehouses in preparation."

"So, we just have to sit around, waiting for them to attack," Harry sighed. "Great."

"Unfortunately," Amelia said, patting his arm. "We've weathered this kind of thing before; we can do it again."

"Amelia," Hermione called. "It seems to me the biggest problem is finding out about an attack quickly enough, right?"

"One of them, yes," Amelia nodded, looking at the younger witch curiously. "Why?"

"Well, I've been thinking," Hermione said, straightening up like she was preparing to give a lecture. "What if we created a device people could carry in their pocket that would alert the Aurors to an attack? I came up with something that could work, but it's pretty simple. I'm sure the Unspeakables could improve on it."

Reaching into the pocket of her robes, she pulled out a sheaf of parchment and handed it to Amelia.

“Sometimes, simple is best,” Amelia said, looking it over. “For Merlin’s sake, why didn’t any of us think of this sooner? I’ll send this over to our Researchers and get them working on it right away.”

“Oh, that reminds me,” Harry said, reaching into his breast pocket and pulling a folded piece of parchment. “When I got home, there was a Gringotts owl waiting for me to let me know the funds from Fudge, Rosier, and Selwyn had been transferred to my vault. I took what I didn’t need and made a donation to the DMLE.”

“Thank you,” Amelia said, taking the folded parchment when he offered it to her. “We can use all the help we can get.”

Unfolding the parchment, her eyes went wide, her monocle falling from her eye.

“Harry,” she gasped. “I can’t take this.”

“It’s already in the Ministry vaults,” Harry told her firmly.

“Two million Galleons is more than the entire department spent in the last five years,” Amelia hissed.

“Then you should have plenty to hire whoever you need to,” he shrugged. “Oh, and I took care of the back pay we owed those retired Aurors. They should be notified later today.”

“I...,” Amelia trailed off, shaking her head. “Are you sure I can’t convince you to run for Minister?”

“I do a nice thing like this, and you want to punish me?” Harry asked with a smirk.

Rolling their eyes, Hermione and Penny smacked the back of his head lightly. Chuckling, he looked up as Dumbledore entered the room. He hadn't noticed over the last few minutes, but the room had filled up while he'd been talking. All of the Wizengamot members were in their seats, the reporters had quills poised to write, and the Wireless broadcasters looked anxious to start.

“Madam Bones, Minister,” Dumbledore greeted with a nod of his head. “If you're both ready?”

“More than,” Harry smiled.

Chuckling quietly, Dumbledore nodded and banged his gavel.

“Witches and Wizards of the Wizengamot,” he called, gathering everyone's attention. “While I'm sure you will all join me in lamenting the loss of Harry Potter as our Minister for Magic, it is indeed time for us to elect his replacement. Our list of nominees is as follows: from the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, we have Minister Potter's chosen replacement, Madam Amelia Bones.”

Pausing, he allowed Amelia a moment to stand and be recognized, garnering a small round of applause.

“From the renowned Firewhiskey distillery of the same name, we have senior Wizengamot member Tiberius Ogden.”

An old, smiling wizard with a long, braided mustache stood and waved to a smatter of applause.

“And finally, we have the owner of Travers' Apothecary, Yolanda Travers.”

A thin witch with a narrow, pretty face, and long, straight black hair stood and smiled thinly as a few people clapped quietly. As she sat back down, Harry noticed she clutched her hands in her lap to keep them from shaking. It made him wonder just how much of this was her choice. Glancing at Amelia, he saw that she had noticed it as well, her eyes narrowing slightly.

“Now, before we begin, is there anyone else who would like to nominate themselves or someone else?” Dumbledore asked.

When no one spoke up after a full minute of silence, Dumbledore banged his gavel gently three times.

“Then I open the floor to opening statements from our nominees,” he continued. “Tiberius, would you like to go first?”

Hermione sat upright and took diligent notes, apparently fascinated by the election process, but Harry found himself bored only a few minutes in. It seemed pretty straightforward to him. Each candidate made an opening statement about what they planned to accomplish as Minister, and then the Wizengamot was allowed to ask all three of them questions.

In his view, Amelia was the clear winner. Travers was nervous and had a long-winded way of saying nothing of substance, while Ogden made vague promises without going into any detail. Amelia, however, answered each question directly, laying out exactly what steps she planned to take.

While the majority of the discussion was focused on the war with Voldemort, Harry did get annoyed with some of the questions about taxes, permits, and stances of flying carpets. It made him wonder if some of those in the Wizengamot even cared about how much danger they were in. There were far more important things to be talking about.

It took a couple of hours for the questions to finish, and then the candidates were allowed a final five-minute speech before voting began. With how long the questioning took, Harry was a little surprised by how fast the election process itself really was.

“Witches and Wizards of the Wizengamot, when I call the name of the candidate you wish to vote for, please raise your wand and light the tip,” Dumbledore said as if instructing a class. “Please wait until all of the votes have been counted before lowering your wand. Now, our first candidate, Tiberius Ogden.”

Out of the fifty-two members of the Wizengamot, Harry counted eleven votes for Ogden. Below him, the court scribe scribbled down the results.

“Now, Yolanda Travers,” Dumbledore called.

Travers got a mere seven votes, but to Harry, the woman looked less upset and more relieved.

“And finally, Amelia Bones,” Dumbledore called.

So many wands went up Harry didn’t bother to count them. His shoulders slumped in relief as he realized Amelia Bones was going to be the next Minister for Magic. Finally, his job was done.

“Very well,” Dumbledore announced. “By the powers vested in me by magic and this august body, I name Madam Amelia Susan Bones the duly elected thirty-seventh Minister for Magic.”

Harry felt a slight pull on his magic as control of the Ministry wards was taken from him and given to Amelia. A swirl of air whipped gently around her feet as her robes changed from plum to black, the Ministry crest appearing over her left breast. As the Wizengamot stood to applaud, Harry did as well, a smile on his face.

Stepping forward, Amelia took the podium and waved for silence.

“Thank you,” she said, clearing her throat. “I’m honored to be entrusted with the safety and security of Wizarding Britain. As my first act as Minister, I will be naming David Greene to replace me as Head of the DMLE.”

Harry felt a bit surprised, thinking back to the kindly old man he'd brought back out of retirement. He'd expected the job to go to Matilda or even Kingsley. In the end, he shrugged, trusting Amelia's judgment.

"Since I've worked so closely with Mr. Potter over the last month," Amelia continued, "I'd like to have another meeting in two days to elect new families to the Wizengamot and update you on our efforts to recapture the escaped Death Eaters. Until then, it looks like I have a lot of work to do."

Amelia received a few chuckles and another round of applause as she stepped back to her seat.

"If that is all?" Dumbledore asked, pausing with his gavel raised. "Then I called this meeting adjourned."

Bang.

"So, why did you make David the new Head of the DMLE?" Harry asked Amelia curiously as they boarded the elevator. "Not that I'm complaining; I just thought you'd give the job to Kingsley or Matilda."

"Matilda was injured during the Azkaban breakout," Amelia said, continuing quickly at Harry's worried look. "She'll recover, but this time, she's retiring for good. Don't worry. She's a tough old bird. I heard she's already got a new job lined up. As for Kingsley, I felt he would be better remaining in the field."

"Fair enough," Harry nodded.

"I'm glad you approve," Amelia smirked.

Harry raised his hands placatingly.

The elevator came to a stop, and Harry and the others stepped out into a shouting match.

“You’ve got to be joking,” Penny growled angrily.

Harry clenched his fists as he watched Percy Weasley and the rest of the Minister’s staff, who had quit on his first day, trying to take back their old position. Fortunately, his new head secretary, Mary, wasn’t having it. Harry opened his mouth to ask what Percy thought he was doing, but Amelia beat him to it.

“What the hell is going on here?” she asked, her powerful voice cutting through the din.

“Ah, Minister,” Percy said, smoothing down his dress robes. “We’ve come to take back our positions.”

“Your position?” Amelia asked with surprising calm. “You left a month ago without a word.”

“We left in protest of the way Mr. Potter took the position,” Percy replied.

“You left because your lips were stuck to Fudge’s arse!” Penny yelled furiously.

“We were unaware of the former Minister’s illegal actions,” Percy said, frowning when Harry wrapped an arm around Penny’s waist in an attempt to keep her calm.

“Merlin, I can’t believe you think you can just waltz in here and get your old job back,” Penny scoffed.

“I believe that’s up to the *new* Minister,” he responded, giving Harry a dismissive glance.

“Indeed, it is,” Amelia said calmly. “Why should I hire any of you back after you walked out the way you did on Minister Potter?”

Percy grimaced as if he had a bad taste in his mouth, and the people behind him glanced at each other nervously.

“Minister Bones, we simply didn’t want to work for a *Minister* that stole control of the government,” he replied.

“Stole?” Amelia asked, eyes narrowed. “Right, I’ve had enough of this. Firstly, Potter didn’t steal the position. He took it legally, and he accomplished more in thirty days than Fudge did in his entire career. And you want me to fire all the people here who have worked their arses off for the last month so you can have your job back? Do you have any idea how much we’ve paid out in overtime and bonuses for the incredible work they’ve done? I’m astounded you thought a play like this would work, Weasley.”

“Minister, we would’ve been happy to stay on under proper leadership-”

“What, like Fudge and Umbridge?” Amelia scowled. “Did you consider them proper leadership?”

“Ma’am, we had no way of knowing they were committing such crimes,” Percy said, sweat gathering on his forehead.

“Frankly, that calls into question your competence,” Amelia spat. “Get the hell out of my office, Weasley. If any of you want a job working here at the Ministry, you can apply like everyone else.”

“I believe we have a few openings in the mailroom,” Daphne added with a smirk.

The elevator opened, and Harry glanced back to see who it was. Kingsley, Hestia, Jackson, and Richards stepped out and looked at the group curiously.

“You called, ma’am?” Kingsley asked.

“I did,” Amelia said, her penetrating blue eyes never leaving Percy. “Please escort Mr. Weasley and his friends back down to the Atrium. From there, they can either apply for a position properly, or they can leave.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Kingsley nodded. “If you’ll all come with me?”

Looking shaky and dumbfounded, Percy and his group allowed themselves to be ushered into the elevator. Just as the doors started to close, Tonks stuck out her tongue, and Kim gave him the finger.

“I can’t believe him,” Penny huffed.

“I don’t know where Arthur went wrong with that one,” Amelia said, shaking her head. “But, that does remind me. Ms. Granger, Ms. Greengrass, I understand both of you are leaving tomorrow to return to Hogwarts. I just personally wanted to thank you for the amazing work you’ve done. I’ll be leaving you both with a personal recommendation, should you ever wish to work here again.”

“Thank you, Minister,” Daphne replied before nudging a shocked Hermione.

“Oh, yes. Of course. Thank you so much,” Hermione stammered.

“You’ve both more than earned it,” Amelia smiled. “Harry, Penny, could I see you two in my office for a moment?”

“You called me Harry,” he smiled as he followed her to the Minister’s office.

“You’re no longer the Minister,” Amelia shrugged, then looked over her shoulder with a smirk. “I could refer to you as former Minister Potter if you prefer?”

“Please don’t,” Harry pleaded, earning chuckles from a few of the secretaries who overheard.

Walking into the Minister’s office, he blinked when he spotted a wizard with white hair already there, setting up an easel and paints.

“Who are you?” Harry asked.

The man turned around and smiled widely under his big, bushy mustache and mutton chops.

“Harry, this is Marco Fontaine. He paints all of the portraits for the Ministry,” Amelia said.

“A pleasure to meet you, Mr. Potter,” Marco beamed, shaking his hand vigorously.

“Nice to meet you, too,” Harry said politely before turning to Amelia. “Portrait?”

“Every elected Minister needs to have their portrait done,” she explained.

“Why didn’t Harry have to have his done?” Penny asked, frowning.

“Ah, there was a bit of confusion over that,” Marco replied. “We’ve never had a Minister that wasn’t elected in some capacity before. It took us a while to figure things out. We found out just yesterday that Mr. Potter, in fact, does qualify for a portrait. I’ll actually be painting both of you today.”

“Er, is that really necessary?” Harry asked.

“Yes,” Penny and Amelia replied in unison.

Marco chuckled as Harry raised his hands in surrender.

“Consider it the last little bit of unpleasantness you’ll have to suffer in office,” Amelia said, taking a seat behind the desk. “You’re lucky. My job has only just begun. Marco, we have a few things to go over before we get started.”

“By all means,” Marco said, bouncing on the balls of his feet with a wide smile. “I’ll just finish setting up my paints. Pretend like I’m not even here.”

He walked back over to his easel, and Harry and Penny took seats across from Amelia.

“Alright, first things first, Penny, would you like to stay on as my Senior Undersecretary?” she asked.

“I appreciate the offer, but I’m going to be going back to Hogwarts,” Penny smiled, taking Harry’s hand in hers. “Professor Flitwick agreed to help me get my Charms Mastery.”

“I know,” Amelia smiled. “I just wanted to make the offer, regardless. You did a wonderful job.”

“Thank you,” Penny said happily.

“Now, Harry, do you have any recommendations for families to take up the three open Wizengamot seats?” Amelia asked.

“Er,” Harry said, not expecting the question. “I don’t really know that many families. Maybe the Weasleys?”

“I thought you’d say that,” Amelia nodded. “They were one of my first choices as well. If you think of anyone else, let me know by the end of the day tomorrow.”

Harry nodded.

“Well, I think that’s it,” Amelia said, setting down her quill. “Unless there’s something you wanted to bring up.”

“No,” Harry chuckled. “The job’s all yours.”

“Then let’s go get your portrait done so you can go home,” Amelia smiled.

Having his portrait painted was even more boring than Harry anticipated. He had to sit in a single position for hours while Marco painted him framed against one of the office's enchanted windows. The only interesting part was when he got to see the enchantments used to animate the portrait. But even then, it was far too complicated for Harry to even begin to understand. Penny enjoyed it, though, and asked Marco numerous questions as he finished up.

“The real trick to making it lifelike is how you extract the memories,” he told her. “You need to draw out those little moments in life that make a person who they are. Far too many magical painters don’t put enough thought into this part of the magic.”

Walking over to Harry, Marco pressed the tip of his wand against his temple. Drawing it back slowly while mumbling a long incantation, he drew out a long, wriggling silver strand. Carefully, he walked back over to the portrait and, still mumbling his incantation, dropped the memory on the canvas. When it hit the surface, it quickly spread across the entire painting and soaked into the paint. Harry waited for the painting of himself to come to life, but it remained perfectly still.

“Finished,” Marco said happily.

“Er, isn’t it supposed to move?” Harry asked.

“Oh, not yet,” he explained, smiling. “Portraits like these only come to life after the subject has passed away. We can activate them early, of course, but that’s what’s in our contract with the Ministry.”

“Oh,” Harry said.

“Since this is currently your office, Minister Bones, where would you like this portrait?”

“Directly across from my desk, please,” Amelia smiled. “That way, I can be reminded of the legacy I need to live up to.”

Harry rolled his eyes, prompting a giggle from Penny.

“I’ll go see if Hermione and Daphne are done cleaning out their desks,” she said, kissing his cheek. “Why don’t we go back to my place and relax for a while?”

“Sure,” Harry smiled.

Hours later, Amelia sighed and set down her quill. On the wall behind her now sat her new portrait. It depicted her smiling softly while leaning against the hearth, arms crossed. Looking up, she smiled at the portrait of the young man sitting on the wall across from her. Out of every portrait in the office, his was the only one where the occupant wasn’t smiling. It was clear from his expression he didn’t want to be there. Chuckling, she poured herself a glass of Cognac and lifted her glass.

“To the man who never wanted to be Minister and still did a better job than the rest of us.”

Two days later, Harry found himself being greeted by parents and classmates alike as he tried to get on the Hogwarts Express. Reporters tried to question him, but he ignored them. Thankfully, Kingsley and Tonks were there to keep him from being mobbed. As he passed Amelia and Susan, he smiled and waved. They waved back, her Auror guard giving him a respectful nod.

Together with Ron and Hermione, Harry boarded the train and found an empty compartment.

“Bloody hell,” Ron huffed as he dropped into his seat. “I thought we’d never get through the crowd.”

“I tried to warn you,” Hermione told him. “Why do you think everyone wanted to leave early?”

“I thought Moody was being paranoid,” Ron said defensively.

Before Hermione could argue back, there was a knock at the door. Looking up, Harry smiled at Daphne and unlocked the door.

“Mind if I join you?” she asked.

“Not at all,” Harry smiled.

Grabbing her trunk, he lifted it into the overhead rack for her while Daphne took the seat next to Hermione. Smiling softly, they held hands and shared a brief kiss. Ron gaped at them, his mouth hanging open.

“Oh, close your mouth, Ronald,” Hermione huffed, her cheeks flushing prettily. “I told you I was dating Daphne.”

“I thought you were joking!” Ron exclaimed.

Smiling, Harry shook his head while Daphne rolled her eyes.

“Weasley,” Daphne greeted him indifferently before turning to Harry. “Is Penny riding the train with us?”

“No,” he replied, shaking his head. “She’s already at the castle. Flitwick wanted to get her situated before the other students showed up.”

“I can’t believe you’re dating Percy’s ex,” Ron said with a shake of his head as he turned to Hermione. “And you’re dating a Slytherin.”

“Yes, Ron,” Hermione replied, rolling her eyes. “I’m dating a witch in Slytherin. Honestly, I don’t know why that’s such a big deal.”

“She’s a Slytherin!” Ron exclaimed as if it should be obvious.

“Yes, we got that,” Daphne said dully. “We’re failing to understand why that’s a problem.”

“Well, it’s – you know,” Ron stammered. “Harry, help me out here.”

“Oh, no,” Harry chuckled. “You dug this hole on your own, you can find your own way out.”

In frightening unison, Hermione and Daphne glared at Ron and folded their arms over their chests. Realizing he was in trouble, Ron gulped audibly.

“Er, anyone want to play chess?” he asked nervously.

Darkness had fallen by the time they arrived at Hogwarts. For the last half of the trip, something had felt off to Harry, and it was only when he stepped out of the compartment and spotted a familiar head of blonde hair that he realized what it was.

“Hermione,” he said. “Don’t you think it’s odd Malfoy didn’t come bother us like he usually does?”

“Maybe he’s finally grown up?” Hermione asked.

Harry, Daphne, and Ron all gave her disbelieving looks.

“What? I said maybe,” she said defensively.

“The only time Malfoy doesn’t make a scene is when he’s trying to hide something,” Daphne said. “Fortunately, he’s not very good at hiding things. I’ll ask around and see if I can find out what he’s up to.”

“Please be careful,” Hermione said, chewing her lip worriedly.

“I’ll be fine,” Daphne assured her. “And stop chewing your lip like that. It makes me want to snog you.”

Hermione blushed as Daphne pulled her by the hand toward the carriages. While they were waiting, she introduced her to her sister, Astoria, and best friend, Tracey Davis. They both seemed happy enough to meet Hermione and Harry, but they were a little wary of Ron. That was understandable, given the suspicious looks he was giving them.

Soon, they were riding as a group up to the castle. Astoria talked a mile a minute the entire trip, skipping from one thing to the next with barely a breath. Harry could hardly believe the two girls were related when they were so different.

Eventually, they reached the castle and headed inside.

"I have to go to my table," Daphne told Hermione softly.

Giving her hand a squeeze and her cheek a kiss, they separated and took their seats. Harry looked up to the head table and grinned when he spotted Penny waving at him from next to Professor Flitwick. Waving back, he took his seat just as the sorting began.

Once the sorting was done and the houses had welcomed their new members, Dumbledore stood to make his start of year announcements.

"Welcome back to another year at Hogwarts," he said, spreading his arms wide and smiling. "And I believe this is the first time in the school's history we've had the opportunity to welcome back a former Minister as a student."

Harry smiled as his friends chuckled around him.

"I'd also like to welcome our new Defense Against the Dark Arts instructor, former master Auror Matilda Bennet," he announced.

Harry turned and grinned as the doors to the Great Hall opened, and Matilda walked in, leaning on a cane for support.

"Finally, a good teacher," Harry said over the smattering of applause. "This year might not be so bad."

A/N: That's the end of this story for now. I may do a sequel to it in the future, but for now, I'm going to move on to other projects. Thanks for reading, and I hope you all enjoyed this fun little story.