

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 Obliviate 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 murmurers 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 murmurers 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 Ministers 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 some 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 Goblin 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 wilful 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 Apparatioin 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 Sneekeazy’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.

"From 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.

“Actaully, 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 schooling 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 running 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.