Roar

by Elenothar

Summary

After Graves' fourth escape attempt Grindelwald decides that turning the man into a magical creature - a process thought to be impossible to reverse - will take care of the problem quite nicely. Too bad he didn't anticipate Newt Scamander.

Notes

I'm frustrated with life and work, so here's the first chapter of what I've been working on for a while now. The draft isn't quite finished, but I've got 30k already so it should be fine. (Famous last words...)

Wampus!Graves was inspired by hamelin-born, stylishbutdefinitelyillegal and aethelar over on tumblr, with their lovely and hilarious worldbuilding threads begun here. Extra special thanks to the brilliant hamelin-born for continuing to brainstorm with me - this fic would definitely not be what it is without you!

Thanks also to my lovely beta TheSilverQueen!

The first chapter is kind of grim because Grindelwald (non-graphic torture warning), but I promise it gets better.
See the end of the work for more notes.
Percival Graves’ fourth escape attempts ends exactly like the first three – with Grindelwald *tsking* at him in fake disappointment (“*another* attempt, oh Percy, you should know better by now”) and him writhing in pain that he would’ve called unendurable a month ago. He has learned a lot about endurance since then. And pain. When he finally loses consciousness, Grindelwald is still looking at him, a considering look on his pale face.

He got the closest the first time, Grindelwald too arrogant to expect further resistance, Graves still in comparatively good shape just a few days into his captivity. Overloading the shackles that bound his magic had taken every last drop of magical potential he possessed, but he had almost made it out. If Grindelwald hadn’t come back from work earlier than Graves ever does, he would’ve made it. As it was, wandless and already tired from expending so much energy, he hadn’t stood a chance against the dark wizard.

The second attempt involved dislocating both of his thumbs to slip out of the shackles and lasted until he ran into the new wards placed on the doorway. With enough time he could possibly have dismantled them, but they had also alerted Grindelwald to his attempted escape. The ensuing punishment left him shaking for days.

The third attempt was less premeditated and more ‘oh look at that, one of Grindelwald’s curses accidentally loosened the metal, how convenient’. That one went even worse than the other two and frankly Graves would rather not think about what followed ever again.

He had actually felt hopeful about this fourth one, sending a message out to call for help instead of trying to make his way out himself once he’d slipped his bonds. If given enough time and persistence *everything* can be subverted, even magic-dampening chains, and yet the lack of success had been the same, leading to –

Graves wakes again an indeterminate amount of time later to the usual pain in places he hadn’t even realised could hurt (the cruciatus curse is *very* thorough) and goes through the ritual of checking the chains around his wrist, tethered to the wall, for any possible slack. He hasn’t quite given up hope that one day his wrists will have grown thin enough that he’ll just be able to slip out of the cuffs. Grindelwald certainly isn’t feeding him much beyond the absolute limit needed to sustain his life. After all he doesn’t need to be *healthy* to supply the madman with the necessary ingredients for polyjuice potion. Alive, yes, but not well, as demonstrated by Grindelwald’s insistence on using blood as the vital ingredient rather than the more standard hair. If he ever gets out of this dark cellar – which, despite his stubborn refusal to give in, he is very much starting to doubt – he’s pretty sure he will bear those scars along his ribcage forever.

Footsteps on the stairs. Graves forces his gummy eyes open wider, tensing despite the futility of the act. It’s always footsteps first, then the slight creak of the door. At this point it’s probably charmed to only let Grindelwald through.

“Ah, Percy, you’re awake!” Grindelwald’s cheer grates on the nerves Graves still has left, as does the dramatic way he flares his coat in his wake as he steps right into Graves’ personal space. He learned that early on – personal space is a non-entity where Grindelwald is concerned. “I have such *exciting* news to share with you.”
Grindelwald stops talking, seems to wait for a response. Out of principle, Graves doesn’t give him one, only glares as best he can when his vision keeps wavering. In this, at least, he can out-wait the dark wizard – the man loves to talk far too much to let Graves’ silence stop him.

“You see,” Grindelwald picks up again, just as predicted, and he must be in a really good mood because he doesn’t even punish Graves’ for his lack of cooperation, “you’re being far too troublesome a prisoner. Admirable, in some respects, of course, but an unnecessary… annoyance for me. Especially when transfiguration does just as well. Your co-workers are remarkably unobservant after all.” That stings, still. Graves has tried his best not to think too much about the fact that a madman of a dark wizard is apparently convincing enough in his impersonation of Graves that none of his colleagues, some of which he would even call friends, have noticed. Unfortunately in his current predicament there is little else to do but think.

Grindelwald smiles, an expression so chilly that Graves can’t quite help his reflexive shiver. Smiles never bode well for him. Grindelwald’s smile widens into a grin. Graves’ hand literally tugs with the desire to punch him right in his self-satisfied, smug face. “So I put my not inconsiderable genius to the task, and as it so happens there’s an obscure little potion I’ve been meaning to experiment with.”

Grindelwald is pacing now, the audible swish of Graves’ coat that the bastard is still wearing making his teeth ache with the force he needs to keep his jaw locked and not spilling obscenities. He keeps staring at the dirty ground, the easiest bit of defiance he can muster.

“I could let you discover the potion’s effects for yourself of course,” Grindelwald continues. “But then I said to myself, Gellert, where would be the fun in that? You shouldn’t leave your guest hanging. Have you ever heard of the Penita Creatura draught, Percy?”

He hasn’t, but doesn’t bother voicing that fact. Whatever it is, it’s hardly going to be pleasant for him.

Now Grindelwald sounds contemplative, which is almost as concerning as happy. “Of course, where would you have? It took me years to hear of it, and for all your admirable qualities you’ve never made a study of the dark arts.” A slash of a smile across an already grotesque face. “Such shortsightedness, Director.”

Graves is still stubbornly looking at the floor, watching a trickle of water meander across the stone, but he can’t stop the flinch as Grindelwald steps close, too close, and pale fingers dig into his jaw until he’s forced to look into his captor’s mismatched eyes.

“Penita Creatura will turn you into a creature in all but name, Percival Graves.” He taps Graves’ chest, an almost manic gleam in his eyes. “A magical creature. You know what that means, don’t you? Permanent transfiguration, impossible to undo. Such an interesting property, you can’t recreate it with mere animal transformation. Magical creatures are fascinating that way. I’m afraid to say you’ll be rather… stuck. And not just any creature… whoever you are in there” – and here he taps a long finger first on Graves’ forehead, then just above his heart – “that is what you will transform into. Complete transformation. Oh, you will keep your mind for a while if you’re stubborn enough to fight, but sooner or later your thoughts and humanity will slip away until only the beast remains. That is, if you don’t go mad at the outset. I would be very disappointed if you do that, Percy.” There’s that smile again, chilly as winter winds. Graves wishes Grindelwald would stop smiling. “It takes a while to brew, dark potions are always so finicky. But rest assured I will brew it correctly. Your grace period starts now.”

Graves listens numbly, icy showers passing down his spine. He has existed in a state of fear for weeks now, unavoidably so, but this is something beyond that, a visceral dread that consumes all
hope. Grindelwald couldn’t have come up with a worse way for Graves to die if he’d tried. (He probably had.) His mind was the last thing left to him with his body hurt and his freedom taken away. To slowly go mad under the weight of a creature’s instincts until he couldn’t even remember his humanity? Only Grindelwald could be so cruel. Grindelwald who is watching him, savouring the panic that must flash through Graves’ eyes. Grindelwald who smiles.

“Enjoy your last week as a human being, Percival Graves.”

The week passes both too slowly because any week spent in this hellhole is too long and too quickly because if Grindelwald is telling the truth – and one thing the dark lord has never done so far is outright lie, he doesn’t have to when the truth hurts so much more – then this is Graves’ final week as a human. The quandary makes an already painful existence agonising. This is exactly what Grindelwald was aiming for when he told Graves of his fate: limbs shaking with repressed panic, his mind coming up with ever new ideas of what it might feel like to slowly lose his mind while trapped in the body of some kind of beast.

It’s almost a relief when Grindelwald returns. A vial floats next to him, filled with a violently yellow liquid that bubbles threateningly, and Graves’ gaze catches on the glass, unable to look away.

“Almost done,” Grindewald tells him, grin far too wide. “Just some of your blood” – a cut appears on Graves’ arm, dripping red, and he doesn’t even flinch – “and the light of the half moon” – another flick of his wand, and it is his this time not Graves’ own that he still hates seeing in a murderer’s hand, and a window appears in the wall. For a moment Graves is blinded by the first natural light he’s seen in weeks, pale and silver though it is – “and power.”

The vial floats over to Graves, gathers dripping blood, then stays hovering in mid-air, right in the beam of moonlight. Grindelwald closes his eyes, starts chanting under his breath, wand pointed at the vial and even in magic-suppressing cuffs Graves’ can feel the build-up of power, the hairs on his arms rising in response to the electricity suffusing the air. Dimly he thinks he should look away, but he can’t tear his gaze from the bubbling liquid that’s slowly turning shiny and silver in colour. Grindelwald finishes his incantation on a shout like a thunderclap and for a moment the potion glows with power before its shine dims.

None of the charged feeling remains in the air. Grindelwald, for the first time since the duel that landed Graves in this predicament, is breathing hard, and at least Graves now understands why this potion isn’t attempted more often. If it drains a powerful wizard like Grindelwald to this degree, few others would stand a chance. Not that that’s of any help to him now.

Finally he tears his gaze away from the vial, watches the last moments of life as he knows it slip away in his mind’s eye and doesn’t look up until Grindelwald’s shiny shoes appear in his vision, accompanied by a dark chuckle. When Graves does raise his gaze, his eyes burn with the last vestiges of defiance he drags out of his heart.

“Time to take your medicine,” Grindewald whispers as invisible fingers clamp around his nose and open his mouth. “Do try not to die, that would hardly be useful for further study.”

The entirety of the vial’s contents flow down Graves’ throat and no amount of coughing can bring them up again. The potion tastes of electricity and moonshine and not nearly as vile as many others he has had to drink over the course of his life, and isn’t that just the perfect irony. For a few long seconds nothing happens, and the tiniest bloom of hope unfurls below his collarbone. Then the first seizure rips his body apart and the bloom turns to ash.
The last thing Graves sees with human eyes is Grindelwald’s sickly triumphant smile.

The next thing he knows Grindelwald is crooning in his suddenly overly-sensitive ear, “Oh, interesting, Percival. Your inner beast, a creature of death,” and he doesn’t even know what that means, none of the sensory information reaching his brain makes any sense, everything is too loud and there are so many smells and too many arms and legs touch the floor where he was forced into a half-standing half-kneeling position before, except they aren’t arms and legs because when he looks down he sees paws and dark fur bristling in fright and confusion and something is wrong with his sight and –

Graves’ mind shuts down again.

The next time he becomes aware, Grindelwald is gone, but the dark wizard left his presence behind in the form of a new cage – the kind of cage used to contain dangerous beasts a voice murmurs at the back of his mind – barely big enough to hold his form, and a heavy, choking collar around Graves’s neck. And when he looks up through the bars he finds that he’s looking right at a mirror, the entire wall transfigured into a gleaming image of himself.

Graves stares at the silver eyes that meet his gaze, stares and stares because that is not what he looks like. There’s nothing human in the way a short snout full of deadly sharp teeth opens and closes helplessly, the shuffling of too many paws – paws, and shining silver claws as long as his fingers used to be – the restlessly thumping tail, the… everything. A moan works his way up through his throat and even that comes out changed, a high whine that he never could’ve produced with a human throat. He wants to curl up and hide his head, muffle the multitude of sounds assaulting his twitchy ears and not keep looking at what Grindelwald has done to him – he wasn’t even in House Wampus dammit –

but the cage is too small, too confining to even allow him that. All he can do is flop onto the ground and push his front paws over his eyes until there’s only darkness and little pinpricks of pain as his claws dig into fur.

He can still hear Grindelwald’s laughter echoing in his head.

There’s madness roaring at the edges of his mind – not human insanity, but the mindlessness of animal instincts hunt eat die roar mine. It scares him more than anything else in this place. Grindelwald has finally succeeded in finding something Graves is more afraid of than him.

Once the first rush of despair has run its course and his mind feels a little less clouded, he starts to go through everything he has ever learned about Wampuses. It’s a depressingly short list. He knows the Ilvermorny definition of course: warrior, actions, body. He knows what a Wampus looks like, though now he only has to look up to find that form staring back at him. The last thing he recalls is something about the cry of a Wampus being potentially deadly and for a moment excitement jumps high in his throat. He opens his mouth, draws in a deep breath and starts to shout. Sound has barely escaped from his throat when the collar suddenly tightens, glowing with magic, and Graves chokes, whine disappearing into silence as he labours for breath. Only when he gives up on trying to produce a loud sound does the collar return to its normal size, leaving him gulping air in big lungfuls. Bleakness overtakes him once more. So Grindelwald has planned for this too.

It won’t be the last time that the collar’s charms activate. Sometimes he forgets himself. Sometimes
he tries just to see if the charm has worn off. Sometimes his rage and pain don’t allow for anything else.

At first his captor comes often, observing Graves with almost detached curiosity flaming in his pale eyes. Graves can do nothing but growl, bare his teeth in a challenge that he wouldn’t win, and even then the inhuman noise tastes of defeat, a reminder of his changed nature.

“Not so very dangerous, are you little kitty,” Grindelwald purrs, and “I would really have expected your creature form to be something more… impressive,” and “MACUSA’s attack dog an omen of death, fitting don’t you think?” and “what a beast you already are, look at you, ugly and misshapen.”

Graves tries not to listen, tries not to let the words sink into his psyche, but it’s hard with the way the cat roars in helpless challenge to Grindelwald’s words.

Grindelwald makes notes, with a quill of all things because apparently all wizards who’ve spent any kind of time in Britain delight in being as uselessly traditional as possible, and Graves wants nothing more than to ram it up his nose. That thought, at least, is very much his own.

As Grindelwald comes less and less often, but always takes fur or blood or claws or teeth that Graves can only pray won’t become the ingredients in some kind of dark potion, until he can barely stay upright on his legs, the combined effects of blood loss, open wounds, and sheer unending hunger weaken him further bit by little bit. His fight, all the determination and stubbornness he can still scrape together turn inwards. He may be slowly dying, but his mind is still his and will remain so till the end if he has anything to say about it. Grindelwald wants him to lose his fucking mind? Well, he can think again because Graves isn’t fucking letting it be lost.

A few days in – or has it been weeks? – the world has narrowed down to the collar around his throat, the bars that cage him and a litany in his head.

*My name is Percival Graves. I am human. I have worked for MACUSA for twenty years. Grindelwald does not own me.*

He entrenches himself in memories, plays through scenes from his Ilvermorny years, his mother and father now long dead, his greatest successes as Director of Security. He remembers losses and funerals, decisions taken he’d wished to never have had to contemplate. A patronus frolicking around him in silvery light, the small smile on Seraphina’s lips as they first met as President and Director, years after Ilvermorny. Goldstein’s face as she was promoted to full Auror, Johnson’s as he made Senior Auror. His childhood home, the pet kneazle he’d sworn up and down he wasn’t fond of until the day she died and he’d cried and cried and cried.

*My name is Percival Graves.*

The last case he’d been working on, the dinner he’d been looking forward to. The colour of the flowers he’d planted in his tiny, neglected garden in a fit of aesthetic pique last summer. The warmth of his mother’s embrace. The first time he had cast a silent spell.

*My name is Percival Graves.*

The recipe for roast chicken he’s used ever since he had tasted Queenie Goldstein’s cooking for the first time. Every single song he can remember the lyrics to. He knows a lot of songs, has always sung to himself under his breath in the privacy of his own home.

*My name is Percival Graves.*
He has lost track of the passing of time in the outside world, but inside his head a whole life unfolds in slow motion. The cat snarls, but he keeps it down.

*My name is Percival Graves.*
Enter Newt. POV will be alternating from here on. The next chapter will be longer!

Newt Scamander shuffles his feet in an uncomfortably familiar MACUSA corridor and tries not to look like he’s loitering. This is difficult, since somehow people always seem to think he’s loitering even in the (rare) cases that he’s hanging around a government office on official business. Maybe he just has the face of a loiterer. The last time he’d been at the Ministry of Magic a guard had accused him of ‘malicious lingering’. Newt would really rather avoid repeating that experience. He isn’t sure why Tina asked him here – he was supposed to get on a steamship later today, but it’s looking less and less likely that will happen. Just as he’s casting another nervous look towards the door to the interrogation room, Tina stalks through it, eyes tired and mouth tight.

“Ah, there you are, Newt.” She manages a brief smile. “Thank you for coming.”

Newt nods in her general direction, fingers tight on the handle of his suitcase. “Is this about the search?”

Tina had told him about their continuing efforts to find the real Percival Graves. It’s the only thing he can think of that she could possibly need him for.

She sighs. “In a way. We’ve been interrogating Grindelwald. Not with much success, mind, but he has given us the location of his base of operations in New York.”

“Which has what exactly to do with me?”

Tina grimaces, clearly unhappy with the entire situation. Newt can sympathise. His memories of MACUSA headquarters aren’t exactly fond.

“Grindelwald made some comments. Dropped hints. We think he may be keeping a creature there.”

Newt couldn’t have stopped himself from perking up at that if he had tried. “What kind?”

“We don’t know. And honestly, he might just be lying. He has no reason to tell us anything.” She glares at nothing in particular. “None that we can think of anyway.”

“Ah,” Newt says, some of his excitement subsiding. Then he hazards, “Maybe he told you because doesn’t want the creature to die?”

Tina gives him a deeply unimpressed look and Newt has to admit that he isn’t really convinced by that explanation either. Grindelwald, much like most of humanity, hasn’t shown any sign that he cares about the continued well-being of magical creatures.

“Either way, we have to make certain. Are you willing to accompany the Auror investigative force?
We might need you.”

With the possibility of a creature in danger – and the already attested curse-happiness of MACUSA’s Aurors – there really is only one answer to that question.

-“Where are we?” Newt asks, letting go of Tina’s arm. They’ve landed opposite a squat and somewhat squalid-looking brownstone. The rest of the street fares little better.

“Northern edge of the city,” Tina tells him, distracted by the arrival of the other two Aurors assigned to the recon mission. MACUSA is taking no chances in the wake of Grindelwald’s deception, but Tina looks about as happy at having to deal with the two men as Newt is to be told to stay outside while they clear the house.

At Tina’s pointed glare he swallows his protest – though he can’t quite bite back a plea to please just be careful with any creature you might come across – but instead of fidgeting uselessly on the stoop he presses his ear to the crumbling brick and whispers a spell to increase his hearing ability. At first he only gets the sound of footsteps, creaking stairs and the tense murmuring of the Aurors, then he focuses downward a little and suddenly he can hear the muted whining of a creature in distress. The whining gets louder, and he draws back for a moment, frowning. It almost sounds like the creature is calling to be heard. When the sound reaches a certain pitch and Newt’s stomach lurches, he cancels the spell with a quick flick of his wrist, eyes wide. He thinks he knows what this is.

Without a second thought he bursts through the door, calling for Tina.

“You need to protect your ears,” he tells her when she appears in front of him, scowl firmly directed at him and mouth already open, no doubt to castigate him for failing to do as he was told again, “I’m almost certain there’s a Wampus in the basement. Their roar isn’t immediately fatal, but it’s certainly not a pleasant experience for humans.”

As Tina directs the author Aurors who look dubious and uncomfortable respectively, Newt takes care of dampening his own hearing, though not very far. He needs to be able to listen to the Wampus’ sounds and breathing to be able to do his job properly. He doesn’t even notice the giddy smile on his face, nor Tina’s exasperatedly fond glance in his direction. A Wampus! He hasn’t even seen one before, much less got close enough to study them, and many of the sources he has been able to track down are rather contradictory, especially in regards to their abilities. Excitement bubbles through him as he takes the steps down towards the cellar two at a time, Tina puffing in frustration behind him.

“Step back while I deal with the door,” she snaps at him.

Newt hurries to comply, if only for the sake of expediency. The door creaks open in a matter of seconds, not even spewing fiery death at any of them. Grindelwald must not have expected anyone to find this house. He steps through the doorway, ignoring the pungent smells with long practice even as the Aurors gag before casting quick cleaning charms.

Excitement turns to rage and grief in the blink of an eye as he takes in the scene that greets him. The dimly-lit room is empty safe for a cage that dominates it, yet is still clearly far too small for the creature trapped behind its bars. It is a Wampus – and despite everything Newt’s heart still makes the little hop-skip it always does when he comes across a new creature. A male one going by the fur colour. He is also in terrible shape. Newt has seen many atrocities throughout his travels, some worse than this but not many. Whole patches of fur are burned away, open wounds glisten red and white in the low light, and some of the creature’s silver claws are missing. Several of the six legs look broken
and Newt is pretty sure that he can count every single rib sticking out from matted fur. Worse, and now Newt finds himself wishing he’d taken the chance and punched Grindelwald right in his murderous face, the Wampus’ neck bears a heavy, metal collar that looks tight enough to choke.

“Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,” one of the Aurors whispers behind him. “It’d be a mercy to put that beast out of its misery.”

Rage simmers beneath Newt’s skin still, and when he rounds on the man he is perhaps a bit more forceful than he usually would’ve been. “Would you say that if that were a human suffering?” he snaps, eyes flashing and angry enough that he doesn’t even startle at finding the entire wall around the door covered in mirror glass when he turns. “Would you deny them their chance at rehabilitating and living in peace?”

He doesn’t wait for an answer, doubts he wants to hear it either way, and refocuses his attention on the Wampus.

The Auror is speaking again. “It’s not exactly hu-”

A fleshy thump follows, and a strangled urgh. Newt leaves it to Tina to herd the two Aurors out of the basement. They’re not needed for this.

He inches forward slowly, telegraphing every movement. The Wampus’ hazy silver eyes follow his approach, but for the moment the creature remains calm. He has been surprisingly calm throughout all of this, in fact, and Newt is going to wonder about that later. Right now his priority is helping this abused creature who didn’t deserve any of what Grindelwald did to him.

An arm’s length away from the bars, Newt takes out his wand, noticing with some fascination that the Wampus’ gaze zeroes in on the wood immediately. There are locking spells all around the cage, powerful ones that would take a while to dissemble. Newt scratches at the back of neck in thought, then twirls his wand and simply disintegrates the steel.

The Wampus looks startled as fine particles rain down around him – and yet he still doesn’t move. Newt’s breath catches and he chokes down another wave of bleak fury. For a hurt, terrified creature to stay so still even with freedom in their grasp, what came before must’ve been truly terrible. “You poor thing,” he murmurs, “what did he do to you.” He keeps up a stream of chatter as he moves even closer. “What should I call you, hm? What about Prestor? You look like a Prestor. Lovely name for a lovely cat. You’re a right sweetheart aren’t you?”

The Wampus huffs, the first sound Newt has heard from the creature since he listened through the wall, and his large eyes blink. He wonders if Grindelwald punished him for making noise, then quickly has to divert his train of thought before he gets too angry again.

“It’s a good name,” Newt agrees, trying to keep the Wampus’ attention on his voice instead of his wand, which is passing through a range of diagnostic spells. Prestor still flinches every time the wand pokes in his direction and Newt is really starting to hate Gellert Grindelwald. The spells tell him little that he doesn’t know – malnourished and weak, with broken bones and other hurts enough that he’s half surprised the Wampus is still alive at all. Prestor must’ve been hanging on through sheer stubbornness.

“All right,” Newt tells him quietly, mostly focused on casting healing spells that will dull the pain for a while – at least until Newt has the chance to truly start fixing his hurts, “there’s nothing I can’t fix with a lot of time, but I’m afraid you’re going to be miserable for a while yet, sweetheart.” Prestor blinks again, almost as if to say you don’t say and Newt smiles his gentlest smile. “Let’s do
something about that nasty collar then.”

His first attempt ends in the Wampus yowling in pain as his neck and Newt’s hands receive an electric shock. He falls back, fingers twitching uncontrollably for a moment, half noticing that the collar seems to be warping somehow, but mostly preoccupied with amazement that Prestor hasn’t even made a move to bolt, is just sort of cowering on the floor, making small, choked off noises.

“Shh, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.”

Newt keeps whispering soothing nonsense, until Prestor is calmer again, if still a little curled in on himself. Frankly, it’s a something of a miracle he hasn’t tried to bolt yet.

“It must be charmed to prevent removal,” Newt mutters, more to himself than anyone else, then jumps when Tina clears her throat behind him. He hadn’t even noticed her return.

“Let me try, Newt? We’re trained in countering these kinds of charms.”

He looks up at her through his fringe, nods slowly. “Be gentle.”

Tina crouches down next to him, mouth a firm line. He knows enough of her by now to realise that she, too, doesn’t like seeing anyone in pain, creature or human. The Wampus is staring at her, silver eyes fixed on her face as she starts murmuring spells under her breath. She keeps her wand movements small and tight, and Newt makes a mental note to thank her for that later.

When the collar finally pops open and clatters to the floor, appearing like nothing more than a simple metal band, something in the Wampus seems to relax. A low sigh slumps already drooping shoulders further and he doesn’t even flinch when Newt gets up and retrieves his suitcase from the corridor outside.

He lays it down on the dirty floor and opens the lid.

“Come in here and I will help you heal. Nothing will hurt you in here,” Newt tells the Wampus, who’s gazing at the case with his head cocked.

Then, inexplicably, the Wampus looks away from the inviting opening of the case. At Tina. Tina, who looks as bemused as Newt feels. When she doesn’t do anything, he gently elbows her leg.

She startles, eyes darting to Newt, then back to the Wampus, who seems to be waiting for her judgement. Finally Tina nods, a little jerkily, but her voice doesn’t waver when she says, “Newt is safe, and so is his case. He will take care of you.”

She glances at Newt again, as if to check that she had done it correctly, and he flashes her an encouraging smile. The Wampus hesitates a moment longer, then slowly, painfully – and oh does Newt itch to try to help, but the trust isn’t there, not yet – shuffles forward on some of his legs until he is swallowed up by the case.

Newt closes the lid, exchanges a tired smile with Tina. Exhales.

“I’m almost glad you didn’t tell me where you’re holding Grindelwald,” he says, and means every word.

Tina nods, but he knows she doesn’t truly understand. Newt has yet to meet anyone who cares about magical creatures quite the way he does. Tina tries and he loves her for it, but it’s not the same. She tries for his sake, not the creatures’.
He stands, knees creaking from their prolonged contact with the hard floor. “Can you bring the case back to your apartment? I need to start treating the Wampus, or we might still lose him.”

“Of course,” Tina says immediately, looking relieved to finally have something useful to do. “I’ll drop you off before returning to MACUSA.”

Newt nods his thanks, then opens his suitcase again and slides down into the shed.
Percival is pretty sure he has finally gone delirious. Or lost the thread entirely. One moment he’s fighting for his life and sanity in Grindelwald’s clutches, and the next a man with the kindest eyes he’s ever seen coaxes him into a battered leather suitcase and he lands in a world of bright colours and fresh scents. For a split second he considers the possibility that he has actually gone and died, but that notion disappears quickly enough, given that a) he’s still a big cat and b) everything still hurts. The lights and scents may be a nice change from the dank basement, but his mind is already reeling, the colours too bright and the noises too loud, and even though the cat part of him is urging him to *keep going hide find shelter*, he doesn’t make it two shuffling steps before collapsing onto the ground, eyes tightly shut against the glare.

There’s grass beneath him. Real, soft grass that smells of fresh things and he buries his nose into the ground, both chasing the smell and trying to block out everything else. There’s nothing he can do about the noise assaulting his ears, and Percival winces with every new chitter, roar and squeak. If this is a hallucination, it’s a damn *convincing* one, he should be proud of his brain for making up something so detailed.

A snuffling sound reaches his ears, steadily increasing in volume. He opens his eyes to slits, looks down, and without his mind’s approval Percival flinches away from the snout that’s nosing along his silver claws. Even at his most imaginative he’s pretty certain he wouldn’t have come up with a Niffler eyeing him with a beady glare. It looks more than ready to start a fight over territory and no matter how much Percival tries to tell his panicked reflexes that a *Niffler* is nothing to worry about, everything is just too much all at once and –

“Hugo!” a familiar voice calls, exasperated, and Percival can’t quite stop the whimper escaping his raw throat at the loudness. Immediately, the man’s voice hushes. Newt, Percival dimly recalls Tina calling him. Strange name, that, but then he sounds English and if there’s one thing Americans agree on it’s that the English are strange. “Leave him alone, you’re scaring him.”

The Niffler scarpers, stub of a tail wagging tauntingly. Newt’s footsteps come closer and Percival stops himself from flinching reflexively out of sheer stubbornness, keeps himself still as the other man kneels down in the grass near his head.

“Sensory overload, huh?”

He sounds sympathetic, voice no louder than a whisper. He hasn’t moved to hurt Percival. The collar is gone, his cage is gone. His surroundings are unaccountably different. But it’s the gentle hand coming to rest on the top of his head between his ears, a feather-light weight, caressing softly, that finally convinces Percival that this is *real*, that he is truly rescued from Grindelwald’s prison. If he were still human he would be crying. Grindelwald hasn’t won. Percival’s mind is still his and he is *free*.

Some sound must escape his throat, for Newt shushes him, fingers brushing over Percival’s ears. “Hush, darling. You’re safe here.”

Finally, Percival lets himself go entirely limp.
Newt can tell the exact moment the Wampus’ last defences crumble. The body under his hand slumps, the shivers of tension disappearing and Prestor’s eyes drift shut.

“Well done,” he murmurs and gets to work. He would’ve started to heal Prestor’s wounds anyway if it had taken much longer for the Wampus to relax, but it’s safer to do when a first bond of trust has been established. Or at least he’s less likely to get mauled accidentally.

When he first started travelling Newt spent a considerable amount of time training himself to use the inevitable thrum of anger at being confronted with magnificent creatures who have been hurt and mistreated. Newt had been average at healing spells during his time at Hogwarts – now he is very good.

Under his careful guidance, magic mends broken bones, closes open wounds, soothes burns and encourages fur and claws to regrow. Every new atrocity his roaming eye uncovers channels further dedication into his spells, adding potency and a dagger-like precision. Only when he comes to the poor beast’s neck does he pause. The entire area is rubbed raw and his mind flashes back to the moment he’d tried to take the collar off. At the time he’d been distracted by the electric shock, but now that he thinks back he’s almost certain that the collar actually tightened when Prestor yowled in pain. Tightening collar. Wampus cries. The pieces fall into place and Newt’s jaw clenches, fingers trembling with anger. Sensing his upset, Pickett clambers up onto his shoulder, hugging Newt’s neck and chittering.

“I’m all right, Pickett,” Newt murmurs. “I’m just angry. Humans can be so very cruel.”

Pickett nods his leafy head, then points at Prestor.

“Yes, you’re right, I should finish healing him.”

Satisfied, the Bowtruckle disappears back into Newt’s coat pocket while Newt runs his wand along the sores and welt clinging all the way around Prestor’s throat. Even with the most effective magical healing the area would be painful for a while yet.

That leaves the malnutrition and general weakness to deal with, and for that there’s sadly no magical cure. Prestor would have to eat as much as he could – which at the beginning probably won’t be much – for weeks before he has any chance of reaching a healthy weight. Really, he should be starting as soon as possible, but Newt just doesn’t have the heart to rouse him now that the Wampus has finally relaxed enough to let himself rest.

As soon as he wakes, Newt tells himself and goes to prepare a place for his new guest to sleep. He’ll make a proper habitat later, but for now a quiet, soft place with less light will do.

Percival wakes to warmth and comfort and for the space of a single breath he doesn’t remember what came before, expects to find human limbs and the shaded darkness of his bedroom when he opens
his eyes.

Instead he finds himself staring at soft green moss, pillowing his decidedly not human body. His many hurts have receded to a dull throb, though a familiar tenderness tells him he probably shouldn’t move his legs too much for a while as the bones finish healing in the position they’re supposed to be. Still, he feels better than he has in weeks – months? – and, even more significantly, his mind feels clearer too. Without the distraction of pain and the fear of Grindelwald hanging over his head it’s much easier to hold on to his thoughts and ignore his new instincts.

Grindelwald. He still doesn’t know what happened to the man, though he assumes that his impersonation of Percival has finally been discovered, given that Aurors were searching Grindelwald’s safe house. Searching for him, possibly – and entirely unaware that they had found him. The bastard must be laughing himself sick at the irony. But that train of thought leads nowhere productive, so Percival forcibly turns his mind to other questions. There are a lot of questions. His memory of recent events is unreliable at best. He is sure Tina Goldstein was there when he was freed, but most of his recollections centre around the strange Englishman with the gentle hands and kind eyes. Tina seemed to trust him and Percival is pretty sure that it’s his magically expanded suitcase he has ended up in, but from there his memories grow even fuzzier, pain and exhaustion obscuring events. He is almost certain there was a Niffler, and then Newt had begun healing him, but beyond that he can’t recall anything besides the overwhelming feeling of fresh air on his skin and the absence of the collar around his throat.

Everything seems quieter now, less bright, though that might just be his overloaded system finally having adjusted to the increase in stimuli. Outside of the dark, dingy cellar the changes to his vision are more obvious, most colours dimmer than he is used to, some hues missing altogether, and blues and greys dominating. On the other hand, he had already established that he sees better in the dark than he ever used to, which could at least be useful.

Percival raises his head from the ground and yawns widely, relishing the feeling of being able to freely move his head.

“Oh, you’re awake!”

Percival swivels his head mid-yawn, body tensing, but it’s only Newt staring at him from his spot under a nearby tree. He is just about to close his mouth, feeling slightly sheepish because he may not be human-shaped right now but it’s still bad manners to yawn in polite company, when the other man frowns, all joy drooping from his face.

“Merlin’s beard, your teeth.”

A moment later Newt is kneeling in front of him, trying to coax his mouth open again while mumbling distractedly. “I must’ve missed this yesterday. That utter bastard.”

Percival can only surmise that he means Grindelwald and nods emphatically. They both freeze, Newt’s eyes wide and Percival –

Percival is in the middle of an epiphany. They may not know that he is Percival Graves, transfigured into a different form, but he can still try and make them understand. His mind is still (mostly?) human and he won’t behave like an animal. That should be enough to give people a clue, right?

But before he can do anything else, Newt shakes his head sharply and returns to the topic of teeth.

“Come, open your mouth, let me have a look at those,” he coaxes, and it takes Percival a moment to figure out why the man is so upset. He had got used to missing some teeth – those were the first
Grindelwald had come for after the transformation. He eyes Newt for a moment, then sighs to himself and obediently opens his mouth. It’s not like the other man hasn’t already had the run of Percival’s body when he first healed him, and it would be stupid to turn down the help.

Again Newt looks startled, clearly having anticipated more of a fight, but a moment later he’s intently studying Percival’s open mouth.

“Hmm. Skele-gro would work best, really,” he mutters, and Percival tries to make a face at the suggestion – that stuff is vile – but only succeeds in quivering his whiskers.

Newt, however, seems to pick up on his discontent, possibly because his face is bare inches away from a mouth full of fangs – Percival can already feel himself start to worry about this ridiculous man who seems to have no concept of personal safety around dangerous beasts.

“Re-growing them naturally will take a lot longer,” he informs Percival, nose all scrunched up in what he assumes is supposed to be disapproval but actually looks rather adorable. “I can encourage the growth, but it’ll take days.”

Percival does his best to shrug his shoulders and nudges his nose towards the pocket he knows Newt’s wand is stowed in, if only because the tip is peaking out.

Newt smiles. “Slow regrowth it is. You know, yesterday you really didn’t like a wand pointed at you.”

That makes Percival pause. It’s true – between Auror training, which generally drilled you into extreme wariness whenever anyone points a wand in your direction, and Grindelwald’s fondness for painful hexes he really should be more worried about a virtual stranger (no matter how kind he seems) using a wand near him. Percival isn’t, in fact, entirely certain why he doesn’t mind the thought so much even though he dimly recalls flinching yesterday.

Newt seems to be waiting for some kind of signal for him to proceed, a worried frown marring his freckled forehead. Percival does the only thing he can think of and nudges the man’s cheek with a careful snuffle. When he pulls back, Newt is grinning wide enough to replace the light charms strewn throughout the habitat.

The growth-enhancing charms take only a moment and before long Newt is standing up with a satisfied little groan.

“How about something to eat then?” he says cheerfully. “You need to start putting some weight back on.”

Percival’s empty stomach agrees with a loud rumble that would have had him blushing with mortification in human form. Grindelwald had sustained him with a series of charms after the transformation, not wanting to bother with the hassle of regular feeding. It feels like a long time since he’s actually eaten food.

It’s only when Newt returns with a bucket filled with raw meat that Percival realises the flaw in the entire plan – while the cat part of him is all but purring in anticipation, his very human sensibilities are in the process of staging a revolt at the idea of having to eat ‘cat-appropriate’ food, and he dolefully stares down at the meat that Newt has already cut into smaller chunks to make it easier for him.

He considers, just for a moment, letting his cat instincts come to the fore before giving himself an abrupt mental shake. That kind of thinking leads nowhere good. It’s already enough of a fight to hold...
onto his human thoughts in this body, he’ll be damned before he does anything that might make the
fight harder. Or, in this case, not damned but eating raw meat.

Nothing for it.

Newt watches in silent, horrified fascination as Prestor begins to eat. Or rather, attempts to eat. It
doesn’t look like the Wampus has any idea how cats do eat – he’s currently trying to spear a chunk
of meat with a claw and then bring it up to his mouth. More often than not the meat slithers back to
the ground before his paw has made it halfway there. Even when he finally does lower his head to
snatch at the meat, his chewing is… off, like he doesn’t really know how to best use his remaining
teeth to shred the meat.

Newt could swear Prestor is glaring at the food, as if he thinks it’s being uncooperative on purpose.
He’s beginning to think that Grindelwald hadn’t stopped at using this poor Wampus as a living
potion ingredient and had in fact experimented on Prestor as well. Some of his oddities can be
explained by having been reared in captivity, such as the fact that Prestor seems to not know how to
act like a cat at all, but Newt is having more trouble understanding the startling intelligence in the
Wampus’ penetrating eyes. Prestor seems to actually understand Newt when he talks, communicates
in nods and shakes of his head and sometimes points with his paws. Even never having met a
Wampus before, Newt doesn’t think that’s strictly speaking normal behaviour. Though, he supposes,
it might be. It’s not like they know. He should really start taking notes.

He watches Prestor struggle through one more small piece of meat before giving up, and makes a
mental note to try and figure out if there’s any other food that would appeal to Wampuses. Their diet
is reportedly meat-based and that’s what would get weight back onto his bones the quickest, but
Newt doesn’t want Prestor to struggle unnecessarily.

“You did good,” he murmurs, stroking a hand over the blacker ruff of fur on top of Prestor’s head.
Prestor reacts strangely to touch – at first he tenses (which doesn’t surprise Newt at all, given his
history of interaction with humans), but then he just sort of melts into Newt’s touch, as if
subconsciously lapping up the kindness offered. While Newt usually tries not to acclimatise the
wilder creatures under his care to human touch, he is more than willing to make an exception here.
Partly because even with a lot of rehabilitation he doubts Prestor will ever be able to survive on his
own in the wild – he doesn’t even know how to eat for Merlin’s sake– and partly because he seems
to need the affection after Merlin knows how many years of neglect and abuse. Newt doesn’t really
want to think about how Prestor looks to him to be a fully grown, adult Wampus. If he was truly
born into captivity…

His fingers, still carding through shaggy fur, catch on a tangle.

“You need a bath, my friend,” he says out loud, completely missing how Prestor’s eyes widen at the
last word because he’s too busy smiling at the ears suddenly standing to attention. “I do hope you
don’t dislike baths as much as muggle cats.”

As it turns out, Prestor adores baths. And showers. And generally getting everything around him –
including Newt – wet, as dirt and dried blood finally wash off his body. Even sopping wet and with
a big, damp cat leaning against his side, Newt can’t stop his wide smile at seeing this tentative
nearing of care-freeness and Prestor’s obvious enjoyment at being clean once more. The Wampus’
joy is enough to distract him from the building anger at just how many scars he finds littered over Prestor’s body. Even discounting the current injuries, there are an awful lot of them, both old and new.

He has just finished gently washing out the last of the soap suds, carefully avoiding any areas that are still healing, when Queenie’s voice floats over from the shed.

“Newt, honey?”

Giving Prestor a last pat, Newt straightens. “Coming!”

Queenie is waiting for him at the shed, looking at his shelf of potions with the same spark of curiosity he sometimes thinks she regards the whole world with. It’s only when he turns to close the door that he realises Prestor followed him and is now crowding into Newt’s work room, gaze fixed on Queenie and bringing the rather unmistakeable smell of wet cat with him.

The Wampus seems to be waiting for something, head tilted expectantly, but Queenie only smiles at Prestor absent-mindedly before returning her attention to Newt. Out of the corner of his eye, Newt sees Prestor slump, as if disappointed, but still the Wampus remains in the shed with them, awkwardly hunkering down on his hindmost pair of legs.

“Teenie wants to see you. She just got back from work.” Queenie’s gaze runs over his drenched white shirt with a little bit of a smirk. “You might want to dry off first.”

Heat rises to his cheeks. “Yes, of course, I’ll, er, do that.”

He casts about for a towel, before remembering that he is, in fact, a wizard and can just use a drying charm on his clothes. Behind him Prestor huffs quietly, almost as if he’s laughing.

“Shush, you,” Newt grumbles. “It’s your fault I’m wet in the first place.”

Queenie is grinning at the both of them, and he’s still blushing when he climbs out of the suitcase into the Goldstein’s guest bedroom.

Tina looks tired and worn out, her hair in disarray as if she’s constantly been drawing her fingers through it.

“Newt, good. Have you found out anything else about the Wampus?”

Her tone is brisk, like she’s still mentally at MACUSA, stiffly professional.

“He’s doing better,” he tells her, as much of a reprimand as he feels comfortable voicing.

To her credit, Tina picks up on it immediately and her expression falls. “I’m sorry, Newt, I wasn’t thinking. I’m glad he’s doing better.”

Her tired sincerity almost makes him feel guilty for bringing it up, but no. Prestor deserves that much consideration. Neither of them mention that ‘doing better’ really doesn’t have to mean much, given the state they’d found him in.

“I’m pretty certain he’s been used as a living potion ingredient supply.” He doesn’t look at either of them, wary of just how much anger they could read in his expression if he did. “Missing claws, teeth, that sort of thing.”

“We found a potion’s lab in the house,” Tina says, voice tight and pinched. “Not even our best
potions masters know what any of them are and Grindelwald isn’t telling, but I don’t doubt they are what Prestor suffered for.”

Silence falls as Newt unclenches his fists with slow, deliberate movements.

When Tina speaks up again, her voice is even smaller, defeated in a way Newt doesn’t like hearing at all. “And we found no sign of Mr. Graves.”

Newt winces. He’d been so busy with Prestor he’d entirely forgotten that Tina would still have been searching for her lost boss. He has never met Percival Graves himself, but Tina seems to think he’s a good man, worthy of grief. They both know that if he wasn’t in the house Grindelwald gave up to MACUSA, the chances of finding him alive have shrunk to vanishingly small.

“I’m sorry,” Newt offers, shoulders shrugging helplessly. No one deserves dying as Grindelwald’s captive, without even seeing a friendly face before the end.

A clatter from the kitchen finally makes him look up. Queenie is stirring a ladle through a steaming pot, plates already flying through the air.

“Since you’re up here for once,” Queenie says brightly and not at all like the sly person she’s revealing herself to be, “sit down and have some food. You’ve been down in the case with your poor Wampus for days now. You need sustenance.”

“… I could’ve been feeding myself.”

Queenie and Tina pin him with identical dubious looks. A few weeks ago he would’ve hunched in on himself, unhappy to be the centre of attention – now he just huffs, mildly vexed that they know him so well already. He really should’ve asked why Tina didn’t just come down into the case. Clearly this had all been part of an elaborate plan to feed him.

Newt returns from the flat above looking like someone who has been stuffed full of good food. He smiles at finding Percival waiting for him in the shed and Percival couldn’t stop himself from perking up if he tried. He’s warm and clean and Newt is smiling, a small, bashful thing that makes him look undeniably cute.

“Have you been waiting for me?” Newt asks quietly, smile widening at Percival’s nod, and he ruffles Percival’s ear as he passes by on his way out of the shed. “Come on then. I’ve been meaning to get your habitat done for a while now, but then I started researching and I wasn’t really sure what kind of surroundings a Wampus would prefer...”

Newt keeps chattering about the various options all the way to the edge of the case, where an empty rectangle of earth is waiting to be charmed. Percival is content to just listen and follow along. He admits to some curiosity how Newt actually works the charms that keep the suitcase running. It’s obvious some very sophisticated undetectable extension charms are at work, but Percival has more trouble figuring out how he gets the habitat to seem so damned lifelike. Because they are – once or twice he almost forgot that he isn’t outside, the air feels so fresh and the light so real. If anything it’s a little too pretty to be real, colours a little bit more vibrant than usually found in nature.

So Percival finds himself a nice spot of ground to stretch out on and watches Newt at work. Over the
next half hour his estimation of Newt’s capabilities as a wizard rises dramatically. Not only are many of the charms he uses to draw vegetation out of the ground and shape a small stream very, very specific, half of them appear to have been invented by him in the first place. He doesn’t look laboured at all, even after having just created a whole small forest of mixed evergreen and deciduous trees, added some rocky areas with moss and lichen and then carved out a way for a pebbly riverbed. His wand-work is precise and understated. Not quite as tightly controlled as Percival’s own, but not falling into the trap of overdramatics he sees far too often with new recruits in his department. As he watches, water begins to fill the stream with a last swish of Newt’s wand. It’s done so seamlessly that Percival can only tell where the stream ends in a magical barrier that automatically transfers the water back to its top when he pays a lot of attention.

Newt tucks his wand away and turns to Percival. “How is that? I know Wampuses inhabit various parts of Northern America, but this is what felt most right.”

It’s lovely, of course, and if Percival were an actual Wampus he has no doubt he would appreciate the habitat a lot more. As it is, he doubts he’s going to spend that much time here – he doesn’t want to be alone in a forest. Still, Newt’s looking so hopeful and he doesn’t have the heart to appear disapproving, especially since he doubts Newt would understand the real reason behind his disquiet, so he moves over bumps his head against Newt’s shoulder companionably.

It even smells like a real forest, fresh pine and the clean smell of water mixing with Newt’s own scent of earth and tea and parchment and Newt. It’s the calmest Percival has felt in weeks.

Even though his plan to just have Queenie read his mind failed, another full night’s sleep later – he spends most of his time sleeping at the moment, actually, which makes for something of a change – Percival continues in his efforts to make Newt understand that he’s not in fact a creature but a human being who was transfigured by Gellert fucking Grindelwald. Clearly just acting oddly isn’t doing the trick. And that begs the question exactly what kinds of creatures Newt interacts with usually that he takes unexplained sentience in stride without so much as batting an eye. Or maybe that’s just Newt’s nature.

(Percival is also trying very hard not to think about the fact that he was just washed and rubbed down by a complete stranger who he’s already starting to feel attached to and liked it.)

It takes him rather embarrassingly many hours to stumble over the obvious. At the edge of his new habitat – which he has so far only spent time in while sleeping because there’s no way Percival will stick to it when he’s awake once he feels less like a weak, uncoordinated mess of a person – there’s a patch of bare earth, dusty and devoid of greenery. Bare earth that his claws leave marks in. Sudden excitement surges through him as he positions one claw over the ground, all ready to write I AM PERCIVAL GRAVES in really big letters before he halts in sudden confusion. His claw dips.

Percival knows he knows how to read and write. He knows the letters, knows their shapes and the way you put them together to create words. And yet when he pokes his claw into the dirt, the practise eludes him, his mind flowing around the knowledge like water parted by a rock. He snarls in frustration, flinches, modulates his voice to a quieter sound, then remembers that he can be loud now if he wants. The knowledge is there, he can feel it, but every time he tries to put it into practice everything becomes jumbled.

He stares down at the aimless lines and circles he’s drawn in the dirt and bites back despair. It’s just another manifestation of his transformation, he tells himself. Just another way Grindelwald has taken him and shaped him into something else. Just another way his life is slipping away from him.
For a while he lies on the ground, despondent, listening to the sounds of life around him. Newt is moving around in the shed, muttering to himself under his breath and occasionally tapping his fingers and scratching with a quill. In the habitat next to him something big moves across the grass – he hasn’t explored that one yet, after Newt mumbled something about Nundus and ‘getting her used to your scent first’ and ‘better safe than sorry’. Given that Newt seems to view any and all of his creatures of various lethality with fond indulgence and absolutely no fear, Percival had decided to listen to him on this one. The Erumpent is stomping around in ill humour somewhere near, and from farther away he can just make out the little chirping sounds of contented Occamy. Those little buggers, even Percival can admit, are really quite cute. No matter his feelings on most of his situation, he has to give it to this body – his new senses are sharp. Now that he’s grown used to them more and the bewildering cacophony has turned into filterable sources of input, he can’t help but be slightly impressed.

He closes his eyes, takes a deep breath. Then Percival Graves, Director of Security at MACUSA, picks himself up and starts to walk towards the shed. His gait is still uneven, more shuffling than grace because six legs are just too damn many to coordinate, but he doesn’t pay it any mind. So he can’t write anymore, probably can’t read either. But the knowledge is still there, somewhere, and Percival will not let this one thing be what breaks him. The despair isn’t banished entirely, he doesn’t think he’s capable of doing that at this stage, but he pushes it back until he can think clearly again.

The shed door is open as usual, letting in the light and sounds from the habitats, and now a Wampus on a mission.

Newt stops tapping his feet on the floor at his entrance and looks up from his piece of parchment. Percival’s gaze lingers, for a moment, on the smudge of ink across the bridge of his nose.

“Prestor? Is there a problem?”

Not for the first time Percival marvels at the way Newt speaks to his creatures as if he really expects them to understand him. He treats his entire menagerie like people and it’s… it’s the furthest from Grindelwald Percival could’ve found, really.

He whines quietly and pads over to the workbench Newt is bending over. He’s just tall enough for his head to clear the top and he stuffs his face in front of the parchment with a surge of hope that dies again immediately. Whatever it is that Newt has been writing, probably something creature-related, Percival can’t read it. The words are just inky smears on the page that his brain can’t translate even though he remembers reading as vividly as he can see a vial of pepper-up potion on a low shelf right now.

He hasn’t even noticed his whine growing louder, ears and tail twitching in distress as he now realises that some of his earlier return from despair had been fuelled by a small flicker of hope that he would still be able to read even though writing eluded him. Then Newt’s hand lands on his head and he flinches reflexively, throat closing around any further sound. The hand remains still, a steady weight, until Percival remembers that he won’t be punished here and relaxes.

“Just like that,” Newt encourages him softly. “No one is going to hurt you.”

Slowly Percival calms again, feeling slightly ashamed of himself for being so jumpy. He knows he isn’t Grindelwald’s prisoner anymore – Newt literally couldn’t be more dissimilar to the dark wizard. And yet here he is, still jumping at shadows.

When Newt starts scratching behind his ears, he leans into the touch.

“Would you like me to read to you?” Newt asks quietly and Percival’s head raises in astonishment.
“You can follow along on the page.”

He nods, does his best to smile to convey his appreciation, then startles when a soft, rumbling purr issues from his throat.

Newt takes one look at what must be a truly spectacular feline expression of surprise as Percival goes slightly cross-eyed trying to look at his own mouth and starts giggling.

Even his *giggles* are charming.

That is how Percival comes to spend an hour hunched on his haunches, gaze riveted on Newt’s slender finger running along the parchment as he reads out a chapter on Erumpents.

(He ends up knowing far more about Erumpents than he’s ever likely to need, but Percival considers it a worthy sacrifice.)

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He should’ve expected the nightmares after that. Percival already has ample evidence, after all, that lacking a human body doesn’t stop night terrors from visiting.

*The collar is back, chafing and constricting, he can’t move, and only a few feet away Grindelwald is smiling in a way that makes him want to shrink back were there space to do so.*

“Can’t even read anymore,” Grindewald whispers, almost pitying, as if he’s capable of the emotion. “Such a beast already.”

*Percival growls, even as his own wand lashes out and fire licks at his fur, wants to shout and scream and deny, but he can’t speak, hasn’t uttered words in weeks.*

*What if he has forgotten how to speak as well?*

He wakes to the sound of pitiful whining, high-pitched and fraying at the edges. Only when he becomes aware of the vibrations in his own throat does he realise that *he* is the one making the noise and immediately snaps his jaws shut. Except there’s still a low, rumbling purr reaching his ears even though Percival’s pretty sure he’s now stopped making any sound.

Percival sits up, ears pricked, and finds himself face to face with a Nundu. The only reason he doesn’t jump backwards from the sudden adrenaline rush is because the rest of the Nundu is in the way. Quivering with tension he keeps as still as possible instead, recalling something about trying not to appear as a threat – he *isn’t* one, the Nundu is huge and not injured and can probably kill him with its *breath* – and lets its golden gaze roam over his body.

Do Nundus *purr* when they’re about to pounce?

Then the Nundu leans forward and, before Percival can do anything to defend himself, starts licking the top of his head, still purring. He tries to duck his head because *Nundu saliva all over his fur*, but it only follows his movement and drapes a heavy, warm paw over Percival’s back.

It finally occurs to him that this might be the Nundu’s idea of giving comfort. It must’ve heard his distressed noises and come to investigate. Were Nundus and Wampuses related? It seemed unlikely, given the ocean between their natural habitats, but it seems quite content to smother Percival with the cat version of affection.
Slowly the tension starts draining out of his body and the Nundu responds by drawing him even closer to its belly, cocooning him in warmth as it starts in on grooming the fur on his back. Not exactly dignified, the entire thing, but it feels surprisingly… nice.

When he wakes again hours later, he can’t remember falling asleep in the first place. The Nundu is snoring loudly right next to him, but its hold has relaxed a little, allowing Percival to get up and put his plan to explore the case into motion. Partly to escape the overbearing Nundu, and partly because he thinks it’s really past time that he learns how to properly walk in this body.

He has seen some of the habitats already, in passing as Newt led him to the shower area, and the path to the shed. What he hadn’t realised is just how much more of it there is. The magical night cycle is nearing its end, but most of the case’s inhabitants are still asleep and barely stir as he pads past on silent paws. Even the clumsiest Wampus, it appears, moves quietly still. He finds wood habitats, a snow habitat with a floating bubble of something that looks disturbingly like an Obscurus that he hastily backs out of, a savannah habitat with a large rock outcropping that seems to be deserted, a lake, and even a little bit of desert. For every creature that he recognises – Erumpent, Graphorn, Occamys, Demiguise, Fwooper – there are two that he has never seen or heard of before.

It’s all rampantly illegal. He tries not to think too much about the fact that he’s pretty sure they are still on American soil and if he were himself right now he would have to arrest Newt because Mercy Lewis is this illegal. And yet Percival still can’t quite stop himself from gawping at the sheer size of the place, and the magical power that must’ve gone into building it. It’s messy, but also functional and beautiful and mesmerising, in its own way. It’s perhaps the most blatantly magical place he’s seen since his school days in Ilvermorny. For the first time he’s almost glad that he isn’t human right now – the law would demand something be done about the illegal trafficking (not to mention keeping) of beasts that Newt couldn’t deny if he wanted to, but in this case Percival has little inclination to follow it to the letter. Given the circumstances it’s a moot point anyway.

The simulated sunrise finds him when he’s studying a small tree filled with snoozing Bowtruckles, a wash of golden light that has him closing his eyes in contentment. There’s a physical warmth to the magic light that bathes his body and he stretches his muscles happily in its glow. Then the sound of footsteps on the ladder leading to the outside world disrupts the silence and his ears swivel towards the noise. Newt coming for the morning round, no doubt. He’s pretty sure that the determined joint force of the Goldstein sisters is the only reason Newt isn’t still sleeping in the case every night now that Percival is out of immediate danger.

Loping toward the shed as best he can he arrives exactly in time to find Newt stepping out of the door.

Newt doesn’t try to hide his yawn as he steps out of the shed into the early morning light of the day-night-cycled habitats. Tina had kept him up late with possibly case-related questions about various magical creatures that may be native to the New York area. Before he has even taken another step, Prestor comes walking up from the direction of the Bowtruckle tree. Now that the Wampus isn’t hunched over himself anymore Newt realises that his head actually comes up to Newt’s shoulder. Wampuses are built slender and lithe rather than bulky, something like a cross between the non-magical panther and mountain lion, just scaled up as is so often the case with magical creatures. Prestor seems to be moving with a little more ease, though ‘walking’ is still putting it somewhat optimistically. A mixture of shuffling and tottering would be more accurate. Newt has had to get
even better at swallowing down righteous anger in recent days. Prestor should be running wild and free in some far-reaching forests right now, with all the grace of the noble predator that Newt knows Wampuses are. He shouldn’t barely be able to walk and eat, and flinch at loud noises and sudden movements. At least he’s making sounds now, though it hasn’t escaped Newt’s notice that none of these sounds ever exceed a certain volume.

Newt’s increasingly dark thought process is derailed when a wet nose pushes at his fingers, searching for contact. Smiling a little, he starts scratching behind Prestor’s ears, pleased at the quiet purr the act elicits. All things – and especially Grindelwald – considered, the Wampus is actually surprisingly well-adjusted. For him to be able to trust a human again and so quickly… that’s a mental fortitude most creatures wouldn’t display in that situation.

Throughout the entirety of his morning feeding rounds Prestor stays glued to his side like an overgrown shadow, alert eyes taking in everything Newt does. Newt doesn’t even notice when he starts talking, explaining what food is meant for which creature, their preferences and feeding habits. When he looks at Prestor, the Wampus almost seems like he understands what Newt is saying, makes acknowledging noises now and then when Newt stops to take a breath.

The rest of the morning he spends working on his manuscript, reading the new passages out loud for Prestor, who’s curled up on Newt’s bed like a slightly lost house-cat, as they form in his mind. It’s Queenie who finally disturbs them, coming down the steps with a tray laden with food and drinks bobbing along behind her.

“You’ve missed lunch again,” she informs him with the kind of sweet reproach that immediately makes him feel like a heel no matter what his offense was. She pats his shoulder. “You really are a sweet one.”

To distract her, he grabs at the food on the tray, coming away with a delicious-smelling pastry. Newt studies the Niffler shape and tries very hard not to feel like some kind of traitor when he bites off a leg.

“You’ve been to the bakery again?”

She nods, curls bouncing. “It’s doing very well.”

“And Jacob?” Newt asks, after a moment’s hesitation. “Does he remember?”

Queenie bites her lip, eyes sad. “Flashes sometimes, but nothing cohesive. He tries very hard.”

He hesitates again, tries for a reassuring smile. “If you ever decide, well, if you need… you’ll always be welcome in England. The laws are quite a lot more sensible there.”

On the bed Prestor stirs, shuffling on the covers before settling down again.

“Thanks for the offer, honey.” Queenie’s smile is true, if still edged with sadness. “But New York is my home and his too. And the bakery. I doubt we would want to leave.”

Newt shrugs, fiddling with the cuff of his shirt. “The offer remains. Just in case.”

Then he busies himself with the Niffler pastry, while Queenie wanders over to the bed to coo at Prestor and tells the Wampus he’s looking much better already. Newt keeps an eye on them both just in case, but Prestor seems disinclined to bite her head off so he lets them be, doesn’t even think twice about leaving them in the shed when loud, angry chittering erupts from the Occamy nest.

When he comes back, a blissful-looking Prestor is splayed all over the blanket while Queenie gives
him belly rubs.

Over the next few days Newt gets so used to Prestor following him around from the moment he steps foot into the habitats that he halts in surprise at the lack of large Wampus waiting for him outside the shed one morning. Abandoning his usual routine, he heads towards the Wampus habitat, but finds it empty. Consternation stirs and he frowns to himself. As far as he has noticed, Prestor is very attached to his routines, which makes this sudden deviation all the more worrying. Well, he may not have the necessary senses to track a Wampus, but other inhabitants of the case do. Nundus, for example, are excellent trackers – as Addie herself had shown when she followed Newt across the Savannah for several days while still a little cub before he picked her up. He couldn’t leave a starving, orphaned creature behind after all. Since then she has become so comfortable in his suitcase that any attempt to return her to the wild had failed because she simply refused to go, and Newt hadn’t had the heart to force the issue.

As he sticks his head through the flap into the neighbouring Nundu habitat, Newt’s eyes grow wide. In the hollow under her rocky outcrop Addie is curled around Prestor, boxing in the Wampus’ smaller form until little but his head peeks out from the tawny mess of her legs and paws. She seems fast asleep, but Prestor’s head rises upon Newt’s entrance and he proceeds to bestow such a look of long-suffering grumpiness at being used as a grown Nundu’s cuddle toy on Newt that he’s hard-pressed not to laugh. They make such a joyful picture that Newt’s chest threatens to burst open with light. Addie, while a complete (if sometimes a little playful) sweetheart unless she’s threatened, tends to intimidate not only humans but fellow magical beasts as well, so to see her taking to another creature so well is a bit of a relief. And while Prestor’s expression looks grumpy, the Wampus seems quite relaxed, even content in his gentle captivity.

Smiling to himself, Newt tiptoes back out of the habitat to finally begin his morning round.
iv. Reconciliation

Percival is on his third lap around the perimeter of the case, counting the breaths it takes for him to complete the round. Reaching the Nundu’s habitat – called Adelaide, he’d found with some bafflement after accompanying Newt at feeding time – he stops with a quiet purr of satisfaction. His time has improved. When he first started days ago, he could barely even do a whole lap, shuffling along disgracefully while gasping for air. With food and rest his stamina has kept improving, as has his ability to coordinate the unnecessary number of limbs he now sports. He even managed a short sprint without falling all over his feet yesterday, and his trot is becoming more and more natural.

At first the lack of pain and chance of true rest had been enough to banish any other considerations, but now that he’s fully healed and less starved, boredom is starting to set in. Percival is used to a busy life, doing important work for long hours every weekday and more weekends than he strictly should’ve done. Having absolutely nothing to do all day is starting to make him twitchy. None of said twitchiness has anything to do with the fact that Newt has been busy with the Erumpent’s (Rosemary, apparently – Percival doesn’t know why he expected better from the man who named a Nundu Adelaide and a Wampus Prestor) heat for the last two days, leaving him with barely any time to care for the other inhabitants of the case, let alone read to a bored Wampus.

Taking a breather in the bit of forest that he’s pretty sure houses a Unicorn, though Percival has yet to meet the creature, he sighs to himself. Newt is still around, if a bit distracted. He really shouldn’t be missing the man. The problem lies in Newt’s general… goodness. He cares so deeply for all his creatures, treats them as people, and that has helped Percival immensely in trying to keep a hold of his own mind and not give in to the Wampus instincts clamouring to drown all rational thought. Without Newt, he’s pretty sure he would’ve gone insane already. Grindelwald doesn’t lie – at best Percival will be stuck with a human mind in a Wampus body until he dies – but even Grindelwald’s twisted genius hadn’t anticipated Newt. Newt, who is so very dedicated and bestows his love freely. Newt, who looks far too cute with his red hair and shining eyes and freckles dotted across pale skin. Newt, who is as human-shaped as he is unaware of the fact that his Wampus is, in fact, also a human.

Percival sighs again and starts plodding back towards the shed only to halt near the Bowtruckle tree. Newt is conked out on the ground, snoring gently and looking tired even while asleep. He probably tried to convince that one very attached Bowtruckle to return to the tree and his fellow Bowtruckles, though the small green head peeking out of his breast pocket tells of his lack of success. As Percival is looking, the head disappears – Pickett has so far mostly avoided the large Wampus who is probably quite intimidating to someone so small. Newt’s nose scrunches to accompany a small snore.

Percival would grumble about the utter ridiculousness that is Newt’s general everything, but settles for rising fondness as he looks down at the sleeping wizard. He doesn’t exactly look comfortable on the ground like that, but even a very intelligent Wampus can’t easily move a whole human without waking him and Newt clearly needs his sleep. Fortunately the door to the shed is open, so he can easily slip in and drag a blanket from the bed outside. Draping it over Newt as best he can, he fusses with the edges until the man is fully covered and less likely to catch a chill, the Bowtruckles chittering in encouragement. Feeling slightly better about the world, Percival then decides that he should also unearth some food because he’s pretty sure Newt has been neglecting more than just his body’s need to rest occasionally. Which leaves Percival with a new problem, unrelated to his lack of
opposable thumbs. He knows where Newt keeps the feed for all the creatures in the case, but he has no idea where any food suitable for humans is kept. He assumes Newt must have some, considering how much time the man spends down here, but Percival hasn’t actually seen him eat anything that wasn’t brought by Queenie.

At this point his activities have drawn the attention of other curious beasts, and when he turns he finds Dougal the Demiguise studying him intently. Before Percival can do anything else, Dougal’s eyes flash a startling blue and then the Demiguise pokes at him, motioning towards the shed door. Percival does his best to appear grateful, which isn’t easy as a Wampus, but Dougal seems to understand him just fine, for he gently pats one of Percival’s many knees. Sometimes it still bowls him over a little bit, the little piece of heaven Newt has created here, with all these different creatures helping each other (and Newt) out. The entire time he has been here no fight has broken out between any of them that wouldn’t be classified as a mild tussle at most.

Inside the shed, Dougal points at one of the higher-up cabinets and makes some kind of chirruping sound before leaving Percival to it. Very useful fellow, is Dougal. Which is not something Percival had ever believed he would end up thinking about a Demiguise, but then his life hasn’t exactly made sense for months now.

With his middle pair of legs braced on the counter, Percival is tall enough to fiddle the cabinet open with one precise claw and finds himself faced with two whole shelves of bags filled with tea leaves and not the expected food bounty. Does Newt seriously not have anything edible for himself in here? Some increasingly desperate nosing around later, Percival has found one squished packet of cookies and retreats with his prize, as well as a newfound incredulity as to how many different types of tea one man could possibly need.

He drops the package next to Newt’s form, careful to be as quiet as possible on his cat paws. It’s a pitiful offering, and he makes a quiet, displeased sound because Newt needs, deserves better than that. Right. If he wants Newt properly fed, realistically there’s only one avenue he can pursue. And even that depends on the cooperation of a bunch of charms that are already temperamental at best.

Never one shy away from difficulties, Percival heads back into the shed. He squints at the ladder leading up into what he hopes is currently the Goldstein sister’s residence, then closes his eyes, and jumps. Even though he doesn’t remember there having been a ladder the first time he entered the suitcase, when he opens them again to find a homey room with two beds and a fair amount of lace Percival has to admit to a bit of surprise that his gamble actually worked. Logically, it makes sense for the suitcase to have secondary charms that take care of large creatures leaving and entering, but he definitely needs to have a word with Newt about leaving it unlocked all the time. He catches his thoughts a moment too late, can’t do anything against the flash of sorrow dousing the feeling of accomplishment getting out of the case had roused. He can’t have a word with Newt about leaving the suitcase unlocked. He can’t even have any word with Newt.

Instead of dwelling on what’s likely the bleak constant of his future, Percival paws open the door and enters the living room of the flat. A loud exclamation almost makes him cringe – his ears really are so much more sensitive now – but the wand pointed at him takes precedence. As her mentor, he’s quite proud of Tina’s drawing speed. As a human stuck in a Wampus body who only wants to feed his friend, he’s less impressed. Still, he makes himself as unthreatening as possible, waves his tail and doesn’t move.

“Relax, Teenie, that’s just Prestor,” Queenie calls from the kitchen. “He must’ve got out of the case.”

Still eyeing him suspiciously, Tina slowly lowers her wand. Percival recognises the tenseness in her arm – she’s just waiting for him to make a wrong move and bring her wand up again. Determined
not to get himself hexed by his subordinate, Percival telegraphs his movements as best he can and slowly starts to move towards the kitchen.

“Hello, sweetheart.” Queenie smiles at him and ruffles his ears. “Who’s a good boy?”

Percival would really like to be able to point out that he’s not in fact related to dogs at all and not even No-Maj cats appreciate that kind of language, but can only huff. Besides, he shouldn’t get distracted from his mission. He nudges at Queenie’s blouse-clad arm, then points his paw first at the food on the counter, then in the direction of the case.

Queenie stares at him blankly and for a moment he wonders how much she normally relies on being able to tell what people are thinking for her cues. Percival misses being able to speak, being able to effectively communicate. Even for a grumpy bastard like him communication is important and being deprived of it is turning out to be worse than missing his arms and hands, even his magic. And he really misses his magic.

He turns to Tina, repeats the motions, and gives her an expectant look.

She frowns at him, then posits, “You want us to bring food somewhere?”

Percival nods vigorously, which, while unambiguous also seems to make her more wary of him. Newt took his Wampus’ obvious sentience very much in stride, but he probably shouldn’t have expected Newt to be a good template for everyone else.

At least Tina has finally worked out what he’s trying to get at. “Oh! Is this about Newt’s eating habits?”

Percival nods again and huffs for good measure.

“He has missed a couple of meals,” Queenie points out, then turns to address Percival. “Don’t worry, honey, we’ll bring something down for him as soon as it’s finished cooking.”

Queenie Goldstein is a wonderful person.

Even though Newt looks more grumpy than grateful when he wakes up to find his creatures have conspired with Tina and Queenie to get him fed, Percival maintains that if Newt doesn’t take care of himself, they will just have to do it for him.

He stays long enough to see Newt take his first bite, then slinks off into the depths of the case. His mind is starting to reel beneath a wave of delayed emotions because Tina Goldstein has just pushed the last brick into the cell that is his new reality. Tina, who he has mentored for years, who knows him the best aside from perhaps Seraphina (and that’s only because of their Ilvermorny days). She still mourns him now – if she doesn’t recognise who he is even stuck in this Wampus body, no one will.

The realisation breaks over him with the force of a tidal wave. All of his attempts at twisting his way out of Grindelwald’s plan for him have failed. Grindelwald was right. He is going to spend the rest of his life as an overgrown cat, unable to communicate, unable to do magic, to do his job, to help. Silenced.

His mind may still be his own, for now, but what does it really matter? Even Percival Graves is going to grow tired of fighting one day.

Unconsciously, his feet have carried him to the habitat Newt created for him. A habitat. Not his room, his bed, a habitat. A wail of misery builds in his throat and he turns, stumbles away. He ends
up curled up in the farthest corner of the Unicorn forest, nose buried under his paws to stop the sounds from escaping. He stays in that position for what feels like days, despair clinging to him like a second coat of fur, unwilling to move even for food or water. Newt is probably worrying about him, but even that thought is dim and far away.

Percival isn’t paying any attention to his surroundings, lost in his head and an extinguished future, so he misses the soft stamp of hooves in the moss. Then light, soft yet blindingly white at the same time shines through his eyelids and a velvet muzzle ruffles the top of his head. He opens his eyes to find himself face to face with a massive, spiralling horn. He might have flinched back, but the peacefulness radiating from the Unicorn in front him is so overpowering that he only subsides with a tiny flinch.

The Unicorn whickers quietly, nudges him again. Its breath is soft on Percival’s face, a clean scent of green and growing things. He thinks there might be compassion in its deeply intelligent eyes, but it seems just as likely that he has completely gone around the bend and is now ascribing emotions to creatures that couldn’t care less about his existence. The Unicorn snorts, as if in reproof, and when he doesn’t do anything else, seems to sigh. Graceful, slender legs that shine as silver as the rest of the creature bend and then the Unicorn is lying on the ground next to him, a shining bulwark against the darkness without and within. The feeling of peace intensifies until even the well of despair he’d thought bottomless runs dry and he slips into a deep sleep, unbothered by nightmares.

When he wakes again, the Unicorn is gone – he isn’t, in fact, entirely certain he didn’t just dream the entire thing – and his mind is clearer. The grief is still there, hovering at the edges of his mind where Wampus instincts are already waiting, but the ugly outpouring of despair has trickled to a stop. If nothing else, the Unicorn reminded him that, while his current situation is so very far from ideal, things could be much worse. He’s surrounded by creatures and occasionally people who wish him no harm, sometimes even seem to actively like him. Pain is a remembered echo from his time with Grindelwald not a constant reality, and his surroundings are as beautiful as they are peaceful.

And then there’s Newt. The man who took him in with nothing to gain for himself but yet another mouth to feed, who gave him a bath when Percival was too weak to even clean himself, who lets him get away with stealing his sandwiches when Percival really doesn’t feel like even the more palatable Wampus food options Newt has come up with, who reads out loud to him and touches him with gentleness. Percival might be ever so slightly in love with him, not that it matters much. It’s jarring to think that without Grindelwald they might never have met. Granted, he would prefer having met Newt looking like the human he actually is, but as compromises go he’s encountered worse ones when fighting with Congress.

He snorts at his own ridiculousness, then pricks his ears in surprise at the ominous rumbling from his stomach that follows. Newt is going to be so disappointed in him for not taking better care of himself – especially given all the effort the man has put into figuring out that Percival prefers cooked meat and doesn’t, in fact, get sick from it as long as he doesn’t stuff himself with it for every meal. On the other hand, Percival is becoming more and more shameless about accepting the pampering that usually follows Newt’s disappointment.

Hissing slightly as muscles are stretched for the first time in hours, Percvial gives himself a shake and sets off towards the more populated areas of the case.

“There you are!” Newt is already walking towards him from the direction of the shed, half-eaten sandwich in his hand. “You really had me worried, Prestor. A few hours more and I would’ve started searching the case.”

There must be something in Percival’s demeanour that Newt understands, for without even breaking
his stride he holds out his hand and lets him gobble up the sandwich before gently scratching at the spot behind his ears that never fails to make him purr.

The rush of fondness that follows isn’t even a surprise anymore at this point.

- Queenie is down in the case again, quietly whistling to herself while organising Newt’s shed – which Percival is pretty sure Newt won’t appreciate but he sure as hell isn’t going to stop her because even Newt’s idea of organised chaos is enough to make a headache bloom – and occasionally talking to Percival, who lies stretched out in his customary spot on Newt’s bed. He’s pretty sure she’s bored. Queenie is whip-smart and languishing in a half time job that mostly seems to consist of supplying MACUSA employees with tea and coffee is a complete waste of her time.

Percival listens to her stream of words, everything from the weather today to the newest recipe she discovered and really must try and wonders if perhaps Queenie likes the quiet of the case, being alone with her thoughts occasionally. Constant involuntary legilimency must be exhausting.

“Newt has offered to bring Jacob down here,” Queenie tells him suddenly, hands stilling on the mountain of sketches of various beasts she’d been shuffling into some sort of order. Percival shifts a little to give her his full attention. He never really appreciated humans’ tendency to talk to their pets before being turned into one.

“He thinks it might help him remember.” She smiles a little wistfully. “No place more magical than this.”

Percival makes the feline equivalent of a thinking face, which usually involves quivering whiskers and a claw scratching some mostly imaginary itch. He still doesn’t know what actually happened with Grindelwald, beyond his impersonation of Percival having been uncovered. It’s clear that this Jacob was involved somehow, and that he’s a No-Maj. How exactly he’d been dragged into what must’ve been quite a mess remains unclear, but it makes sense that he would’ve been obliviated at the end of it – Rappaport’s Law is strictly enforced, always. Percival should know. Yet obliviations are absolute and only highly trained charms expert have any hope of recovering someone’s obliviated memories, and even then it’s usually a bit of a patchwork job. Newt would know that – and still he thinks that bringing the man down here would make a difference? Percival is missing something, something big, and he doesn’t like the feeling at all. He has now been in Newt’s suitcase for almost a month, if his count is correct – at first he’d been too busy healing and luxuriating in his new freedom and pain-free existence to worry too much about what had happened. These questions creep up on him more and more now, his thoughts consumed by the burning need to know that had driven much of his tenure as Director of Magical Security. If he doesn’t know what’s going on, he can’t control the situation, can’t help. Except in his current state he can’t help anyway, and that sits even worse with him. Hell, they probably think he’s dead, at this point. It’s a depressing thought.

And yet… despite the questions he now asks himself, much of the time he still doesn’t quite seem to care enough. Percival knows himself well enough to be aware that he should and usually would and that something else must be at play. Then he starts wondering if perhaps it’s because cats, even intelligent magical ones, don’t really have much use for concepts like ‘the past’ and ‘the future’ and that’s what’s affecting his subconscious. He knows he doesn’t have as many nightmares as he should, that he recovered from the mental trauma inflicted by his captivity back to a functioning level too easily. It’s not beyond the bounds of possibility that the Wampus instincts that he fights somehow cushion him from the worst of it, as much as he shivers unhappily at the thought.

When he tunes in again, Queenie has moved on to chattering about some book of No-Maj literature. The moment the cry rings through the air, Percival is on his feet, loping out of the shed with Queenie
behind him. The source of the noise is quickly revealed as Dougal who is chittering in as upset a manner as Percival has ever heard from him. It puts his fur on edge.

Footsteps sound from the shed and for a very brief moment he thinks that it’s Newt come back from whatever errand Tina whisked him away for – then the smell hits. It’s the one sense that Percival has tried to block out the most. He can cope with hearing far better than he’s used to, even altered sight, but having a very sensitive nose is not fun, given just what percentage of smells is quite frankly disgusting. But he would know Newt’s scent anywhere, and whoever is coming down those stairs is not Newt. Then more footsteps creak down the ladder, bringing more foreign scents and Percival’s fur bristles, muscles coiling for a leap. The chances of these being four strangers who mean well are very, very low, especially given Newt’s absence. In all the time Percival has been in the case, only Newt, Queenie, and Tina have been down here – Newt protects his creatures with a single-minded ferocity and doesn’t seem to trust humans in general.

For a moment everything hangs in balance. Strangers are invading the case. He needs to protect Queenie, not to mention all the other inhabitants. He doesn’t have magic. All he has is a body that was forced on him and instinct he has so far refused to let gain any ground in his mind. Without them he’s little more than a bumbling human in a Wampus body. Yet if he gives in, if he accepts those instincts that already scream at the back of his mind defend blood intruder mine... his daily struggle to keep from turning even more feral than he already is will be for nought. There’s no guarantee that he would be able to recover his mind after. In fact, it seems far more likely that he won’t, that he’ll truly be a Wampus and forget all that once made him human just like Grindelwald promised.

Something deep within him cries out at the thought, railing at the unfairness of the world.

But. If it means saving Queenie and the case, he would make that sacrifice every time. Queenie is a capable witch, but she isn’t trained in duelling and there are four men advancing on them.

Percival Graves takes a deep breath and lets the Wampus rush in.

All the trouble he has been having trying to control his new body, getting his six legs to cooperate and his tail to stop being in the way slips away, replaced by a smooth control that he hadn’t even known he could miss. The powerful muscles of a Wampus bend under his will – yet his will is quickly subsumed by instincts that hone his movement further, quicken his reactions. All thoughts of strategy recede, replaced by the urge to act now. As soon as the first strange man has taken a couple of steps out of the shed, powerful legs propel him forwards and the wizard goes down with a choked scream and a gush of blood where sharp claws tear into him. The enraged Wampus doesn’t care about wands, about spells, doesn’t even flinch when a red bolt of light passes so close that it singes his fur. Behind him the second wizard falls with a dull thud, dispatched by Queenie, and the man in front of him follows suit, unable to bear the entire weight of the Wampus who has just jumped on him. A crack echoes through the suitcase and the man goes limp. When he looks up, the fourth wizard is legging it back into the shed, stinking of sweat and terror. With a hiss, he follows hot on the heels of the pungent scent and just catches sight of the hem of a coat disappearing up the stairs. Even if he’d wanted to, he couldn’t stop his pursuit now, so he closes his eyes, jumps, and lets the spell do its work. His territory was invaded. All of his instincts are shouting at him to make absolutely certain that the perpetrator will never be in a position to do so again.

He bursts out of the case, focussed solely on the escaping invader, and without even thinking about it he opens his mouth wide and roars.

The rush of power is immense, like casting a patronus, or the strong kind of shield charm, and it’s only when the last echoes die away that he notices the assembled wizards and witches. His prey lies on the ground, unconscious and barely breathing, but there is a ring of Aurors around them and the suitcase, all with varying degrees of green-tinged faces and expressions of pain twisting their faces.
But the one his gaze is drawn to is Newt, the only spot of colour in the grey stone place he now finds himself in. Newt, who smells like safety and is beaming wide enough to set the world on fire.

“Good boy, Prestor,” he says, voice like a warm tingle, and where he bristled when Queenie said it he doesn’t mind with Newt. Quite on reflex he lopes over to get his ears scratched. “Well done.”

“Holy mother of Jesus,” someone says, only to be shushed by at least three others.

Percival ignores them all. Something peculiar is happening in his mind. With every gentle scritch he calms further, bristling fur returning to smoothness and snarling mouth closing, but what’s more astonishing is that the Wampus instincts that took over his mind recede as well. He had expected that giving his mind over to the cat would erase what makes him Percival Graves, the self he had clung to with such desperation. Instead, his mind actually feels more peaceful than it has in a long time, as if his ceding of control had somehow pacified the instincts he usually pushes back. The echoes of territorial possessiveness are the last to fade, his mind still reeling slightly from the retrospective force of the MINE that had battered his mind. His Wampus instincts had clearly already decided that the suitcase and all its inhabitants were his territory, his to defend and his to love. Now that he can think clearly again, he finds with no small amount of astonishment that Percival Graves the human’s opinion doesn’t differ much. The extended inside of the suitcase, with its variety of habitats, the preponderance of magical creatures, one more fascinating than the next, and the cosy shed feels like a sort of home to him now.

With greater clarity comes real awareness of his surroundings. He raises his head to find a quarter of his Auror taskforce staring at him. Some have their wands still raised in his direction, but Tina and some others have already lowered them. Out of deference to Newt, he hopes. because if a spell accidentally hit the man there would be hell to pay.

“You have a Wampus in your case?” Senior Auror Johnson finally says, sounding a bit as if he’s in shock.

“Oh, Prestor is usually quite harmless,” Newt says quickly, probably aiming for reassuring, but missing by several miles. Even Percival huffs in amusement at the blatant lie. “Wampuses get quite territorial when someone invades their space, is all.”

He even sounds like he believes it. Percival knows that he believes it – he just has trouble understanding how someone so intelligent can be quite so blind to the dangers that magical creatures pose.

It’s Queenie who interrupts the horrified silence that ensues, popping her head out of the suitcase.

“Fellas,” she says cheerfully, “does someone feel like dealing with the lowlife down here? One of them is about to bleed out.”

Newt starts trying to get Percival to move back to the case, but for a moment he hesitates. Should he try to reach out? These are the people he has worked with for years, Aurors he has trained and mentored. But then, these are also the people who didn’t notice he was being impersonated and, really, what can he do? He’s still a damned Wampus either way.

He lets Newt corral him into the suitcase, the man murmuring praise and encouragement the entire way.
Newt doesn’t know what to make of the change in Prestor. Ever since the attempted attack on the case – and Newt still beams proudly just thinking of the way Prestor dealt with those wizards – the Wampus has been doing better. Newt has been keeping a close eye on him, worried that he would backslide after this reminder of human cruelty, but Prestor doesn’t seem bothered at all. There’s something close to the animal equivalent of a spring in his step now and Newt has seen him with Addie several times, watching her walk and jump and eat, then mimicking the motions. It’s as if Prestor is making an effort to live now, to embrace the nature that being raised in captivity denied him. Maybe the attack had been what he had needed then – a chance to strike back at those who would hurt him, and to successfully defend his territory. From everything he has read, Wampuses seem to put great stock in territory. They stay in their piece of land their entire lives, and are said to be terribly loyal to their chosen mate and family.

After the third time Prestor has brought him food or nudged him towards his bed in the days that follow, Newt starts to wonder if he has somehow ended up in the family category for the Wampus. On the other hand, Prestor seems to have formed no attachment to his habitat at all, and barely spends any time there. When he isn’t sticking to Newt’s side like glue, the Wampus can usually be found in Addie’s enclosure and if he isn’t there, then he’s prowling around the Occamy and Niffler nests as if guarding them from some danger that only he can see. In fact, Newt has surprised him and Hugo, the Niffler, playing several times now, Prestor nudging the much smaller creature playfully and, much to Newt’s astonishment, Hugo wriggling in glee and pawing at Prestor’s fur. It’s something of a miracle, given Hugo’s usually cantankerous nature. The Wampus, in fact, seems to be attracting other creatures like honey does bees, despite never seeming to take the first step. Addie has all but adopted him, Dougal can be found clinging to his back occasionally, and the Unicorn, Lucinda, has yet to kick him out of her patch of forest when he passes through. Only Pickett remains stand-offish, still eyeing the Wampus with more wariness than anything else. But then again, Pickett is constantly in a bad mood at the moment anyway, now that Newt has taken up trying to get him to at least spend the night with his fellow Bowtruckles again.

But most of his time Prestor still spends next to Newt. The Wampus has taken to actively helping him on his feeding rounds. Newt is still trying to figure out the reason for that, but he hasn’t discouraged the behaviour because Prestor has turned out to be actually helpful. Newt still reads to him every so often, sitting at his desk with a huge, black head resting on his arm and peering at the words as Newt speaks them. He always feels rather accomplished when he gets a purr out of Prestor. Sometimes the reading is enough, but more often he’s scritching the Wampus’ sensitive spots, while the big cat leaves hair all over Newt’s sheets. He can’t say he minds. Cuddling with a Wampus might not have been on his immediate to do list, but it is really rather comfortable and soothing for the both of them. Besides it allows him to examine Prestor’s fur more closely under the guise of more scritching, which he has wanted to do ever since he caught a shimmer out of the corner of his eye after the incident with the smugglers. A little bit of subtle experimentation later, Newt has determined that Prestor’s fur coat isn’t, in fact, entirely black as he’d previously thought – there are subtle highlights of silver running through it, which glimmer ever so slightly when the light hits them just right. Remembering how lank and matted the Wampus’ fur had been just a couple of weeks ago, it isn’t exactly surprising the effect hasn’t been noticeable till now. It really is rather pretty. There is so much they still don’t know about Wampuses.

One such session, halfway through reading out his pretty meagre draft of a section on lethifolds a week after the smugglers tried to make off with the case, he gets interrupted by Tina banging down the stairs.

“Come on,” she says, voice brittle. “We’re going for lunch.”
Newt almost groans, even as Prestor growls quietly in irritation. Tina has put it into her head that, though the case is ‘beautiful and impressive and all that’, he should occasionally see actual daylight. In principle he even agrees with her, but a crowded city isn’t his idea of a good time outside. New York has little to recommend it, beside a handful of places that sell decent tea and being a magnet for trouble.

But Tina looks tired, has been looking tired for weeks now and he can’t bring himself to say no. Disentangling himself from Prestor is always harder than expected, given the six legs and long tail, but five minutes later they’re on their way to a little magical café near Central Park, hidden behind a tailor’s store front.

He orders his customary Earl Grey from the floating menu, while Tina requests the largest coffee they make, as black as can be.

“You’re overworking yourself,” he ventures after another glance at the deepening shadows under her eyes.

She snorts, entirely unladylike. “Coming from you that’s ironic.”

Their drinks arrive and Tina immediately gulps down half of her coffee in one go.

“It’s been over a month since Grindelwald and the department is still in shambles. The interim director is doing her best, but without Graves… the position isn’t tenable, but no one wants to assign someone else while he’s still missing.”

Newt stirs his tea, frowning slightly. Never having met the real Percival Graves, he has less stock in the man’s well-being than Tina, but he can’t help but think that whoever inspires such devotion in her must be a character indeed. So he does his best to be a good friend and let her talk.

“It would be easier if he were confirmed dead,” she murmurs, eyes bleak. “Then we could at least properly mourn him.”

He nods his agreement. With every day that passes the man’s survival becomes less likely. In truth, he’s probably already dead, but Newt doesn’t think Tina needs to hear that at the moment.

She takes in a deep breath and draws her hand over her eyes.

“And then there’s Queenie. The whole thing with Jacob is making her miserable and she isn’t letting me help. She doesn’t want to put me in a position where I have to lie for her. Says it wouldn’t be fair, as if I don’t know that she’d do the same thing for me in a heartbeat.” Tina looks at him, something wry in the twist of her lips. “I’m sorry I keep unloading all of this on you, Newt. It isn’t exactly fair.”

“You’re letting me sleep in your spare room,” Newt reminds her, then ignores her muttered ‘as if you ever sleep in that bed’. “Besides, I’ve never had anyone confide in me before, other than my brother Theseus. It’s nice.”

She musters a smile. “Sometimes I really want to kick all those idiots you went to school with.”

He shrugs and drops his gaze back down to the delicate tea cup, always uncomfortable when his past is alluded to.

“I think we should bring Jacob down into the suitcase,” he says, not even trying to be subtle in his change of topic. “It might help, and it certainly won’t hurt.”

Tina sighs. “Queenie’s afraid he won’t remember and then even that hope will be gone.”
“We can always do it without her,” Newt offers. He doesn’t want to make Queenie afraid. She has never been anything but kind to him.

“I doubt she’d appreciate that either. I’ll talk it through with her.”

He shifts a little in his seat, then murmurs, “Just, he was our friend too, you know.”

Tina stares down into her empty cup. “Yes. Yes, he was.”

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Ever since the incident with the would-be robbers, Percival has felt different. More alive. Yes, he’s stuck in Wampus form forever, but he was of use. He protected the case, and used his different physique to do so. He let the cat’s instincts take over and didn’t lose his mind. And even without intruders to dispatch, he can still do his best to help Newt. Now, instead of just following the man on his rounds like a shadow, he does his best to aid Newt’s efforts – he carries buckets and sacks filled with food between his teeth, stops the rowdier creatures from fighting over their food, and coaxes the Niffler out of his nest of shinies when the small creature refuses to come out to eat. At first Newt looked at him askance, clearly trying to figure out what his strange Wampus is up to this time, but then he just shrugged his shoulders and accepted the help.

A few days later he truly feels like he has been accepted by the other creatures in the case when a slightly frazzled-looking Dougal comes to find him and drags him back to the young Occamys’ nest. There’s some kind of row going on, complete with lots of screeching and what looks like attempted strangulation. Unwilling to stick his nose into such an explosive mix he tries to stick his front paws in there and disentangle the writhing bodies that way, but only succeeds in winding little Occamys all around his legs. A deep rumble of frustration works itself out of his chest and suddenly the shrill chittering ceases. Five pairs of golden eyes fix on Percival’s face, as if waiting for more. Uncertain, he rumbles again, then switches to a low purr that’s easier to sustain when the Occamys all start wriggling in delight. Huh. Occamys like listening to Wampus purrs?

An hour later Percival is about to take a nap in front of the now quiet wicker nest – this babysitting malarkey is more exhausting than Newt makes it look – when he hears steps coming down the ladder and instantly snaps into alertness. There’s the comforting, familiar smell of Newt, first and foremost, and he also recognises Tina and Queenie’s sweeter scents and the clicking of Queenie’s heels, but there’s a fourth person with them. A man, judging by the heavier tread and muskier scent, who lacks the faint tinge of ozone that surrounds all wizards and witches. A No-Maj then, which only leaves the baker who Queenie keeps talking about. Jacob something. It could be someone else, he supposes, but Newt is selective in who he lets into his precious case.

He spots them immediately once the shed door opens, admitting Newt through first, then Queenie, who looks like she’s trying to contain a vast amount of giddy excitement, followed by the stranger and then Tina, who looks more trepidatious than excited.

The man is stocky, with a shock of slightly curly dark hair, a mustache that, to Percival’s mind, can only be termed atrocious, and lively brown eyes. He’s looking around with open amazement writ large on his round face.

“Wow, Mr. Scamander, this is...”
“I told you to call me Newt,” Newt admonishes gently, but Percival isn’t listening anymore.

Scamander. Newt Scamander. This is Theseus’ brother? Mercy Lewis, how did he miss this? Newt fits the profile of the brother Theseus’ letters described perfectly – obsessed with magical creatures, travels a lot, isn’t much interested in human company, and the sweetest person on earth, the apple of Theseus’ eye. Now that he thinks to look, there’s some physical resemblance as well, both of them tall and lanky with a wiry strength and the same nose.

Oh hell, he’s been cuddling with Theseus’ little brother for a month. Well, he thinks glumly, at least being forever stuck in Wampus form saves him encountering Theseus’ reaction to that little fact.

“Oh, honey,” Queenie is saying next to him and for a split, heart-rending second he thinks she’s talking to him, that she has finally managed to read his mind. “We are your friends. It’s not a dream.”

It’s the No-Maj she’s looking at with such emotion in her eyes, her mouth wobbling slightly with all the words she isn’t saying. The flash of adrenaline fades, leaving only the quiet thumping of his traitorous heart behind. Percival had thought he’d lost all hope that day in the Unicorn forest, had finally truly accepted his changed circumstance, yet it proved a tenacious thing, hope.

He’s ripped from his musings by the unmistakeable scent of interest permeating the air. His head whips up. Jacob is looking right at Queenie, a starstruck look in his eyes, and he smells like…

With a dangerous rumble building deep in his chest Percival pushes in front of Queenie, hackles rising. This is Queenie the man is looking at, how dare he?

The conversation grinds to a halt. Everyone is staring at Percival.

“Ah,” Newt says after a moment of silence. He looks a little embarrassed, but, Percival notes smugly, not apologetic at all. “Prestor is a mite protective of all of us. He can probably sense your, uh, interest.”

The No-Maj’s eyes are gratifyingly wide as he squeaks, “Is he gonna eat me?”

Percival is torn between preening at the effect he’s having and sniffing at the very idea. As if he would eat people.

“No, of course not!” Newt says, looking a little offended. He frowns. “No one in this case is going to eat you or even wants to eat you. Very few magical creatures are at all interested in human – ”

“How about we show you around the other habitats,” Tina interrupts quickly before Newt can really get started. Probably a wise move if they want the No-Maj to remember anything rather than be inundated by new and – to him – largely useless information.

Newt, whose love of explaining creatures is only exceeded by his love of showing off said creatures, lets himself be tugged along without much protest, already pointing out things of interest, interspersed with statements like ‘I showed you this the first time’ and ‘here is where you almost tripped over poor Dougal’.

Queenie stays behind for a moment, looking down at Percival with as stern an expression as she ever musters.

“I’m honoured that you feel you need to defend my honour, love, but one, I can take care of myself and two, I really quite like Jacob. He’s a sweet guy. Don’t intimidate him too much, yes?”

She holds his gaze until he gives a surly, reluctant nod and pats his head with a happy sigh.
“There’s the spirit. Let’s go catch up with the others.”

He does still stick to her side like a burr though. He may respect her wishes, despite the many instincts screaming at him that this Jacob couldn’t possibly be good enough for Queenie and should be eliminated post-haste, but he doesn’t have to like it.

They rejoin Newt, Tina, and Jacob in the Graphorn enclosure where Newt is receiving his customary slobbery mouth tentacle greeting. The No-Maj is staring every which way with a dazed expression.

“I remember flashes of… stuff, but it ain’t making much sense to me,” the man admits. “Some dark cloud ripping cars apart? How did I get involved in all of this?”

Percival perks up. This is new.

Newt disentangles himself from the adult Graphorn with a wet noise.

“We, well, we met at the bank. You were trying to get a loan for your bakery, I was trying to contain my Niffler. Rather unsuccessfully, if I’m to be honest. But the real trouble didn’t start until we accidentally switched suitcases and you brought all this” – he waves an expressive arm around - “to your home. Some slight mishaps later” – at this Tina snorts audibly – “you ended up helping me find some of my escaped creatures. That would’ve been the end of it really if not for the Obscurial.”

Newt’s face darkens and Percival has to bite back a concerned whine.

“His name was Credence. He’d had to hide his magic, suppress it, and instead of learning to control his powers he developed what we call an Obscurus. The black cloud you saw, that was him when the dark force burst out. I don’t know how he slipped past MACUSA, but by the time we met him he’d started losing control. He needed help, but a dark wizard, Grindelwald, wanted to use him to expose the magical world to the muggles. He would’ve succeeded too, if Frank hadn’t helped us obliviate the whole city. That’s how you lost your memories, too, Jacob.”

“What happened to him, to Credence?” the No-Maj asks quietly, looking as stunned as Percival feels.

Newt’s face twists. “The Aurors killed him on the President’s orders.”

Percival sits rooted to the spot, thoughts whirling numbly. What Newt has just revealed is clearly only a fraction of the full story, but even what that implies is nothing short of horrifying. Newt’s creatures running amok in his city is bad enough, though he probably couldn’t even bring himself to scold anyone at this point. The kind of security breach he seems to be glossing over is worse, though it sounds like it was contained in some way, even if Percival has no idea who the hell Frank is supposed to be and how he managed to obliviate a whole city full of No-Majs. But what freezes his mind into a shuddering mess is the thought of the Obscurial. Credence. Who was apparently executed on Piquery’s orders. Who Grindelwald tried to use, probably while looking like Percival. A boy, who was already in a situation bad enough to turn him into an Obscurus, who had been failed by the wizarding community at large and who Grindelwald had got his dirty fucking hands on. Percival doesn’t know what exactly Grindelwald did to Credence, but it’s Grindelwald so he doubts it was anything good and even the thought of someone with his face preying on a vulnerable, traumatised boy is enough to make him want to tear something – preferably Grindelwald – apart in rage and then scrub himself raw.

The rest of Jacob’s stay goes by in a haze and Percival eventually slinks off to sleep feeling tired and worn and deeply unsettled.
It’s not the last Percival sees of Jacob. Two days later the man returns, just as loud and ungainly as before, but this time the No-Maj seeks him out specifically. That, Percival hadn’t expected – it takes guts to be willing to face a large creature who has made no effort to be nice so far. Plus, it speaks well of the man’s trust in Newt, which is a point in his favour. Everyone should trust Newt.

For once Percival is actually in his habitat, having retreated there in search of some quiet while still mulling over the revelation of what exactly had gone down with Grindelwald. His first reaction to someone intruding on said quiet is irritation, but Jacob looks so shyly earnest that Percival can’t quite bring himself to snarl at him. Also, the No-Maj is bearing some kind of pastry in his hands that smells heavenly and good food is even harder to come by in this body than it was when he was human.

So he raises his head, fixes Jacob with a measuring stare, and waits. He figures he looks less threatening when not standing on all six paws, at which point his head is basically level with the No-Maj’s, but he still has to be a bit intimidating. The man wants to court Queenie after all. He better get used to being scrutinised.

“Right, so, Newt said I should just talk to you,” Jacob starts, stumbling over his words in the face of Percival’s unblinking stare. Newt is probably lurking at the edge of the habitat somewhere, just in case, though he seems to have decided that Percival is unlikely to tear the hapless No-Maj apart. “He said you would understand.”

Percival nods at him, partly because he does understand and partly because he wants to know what the man will do. Jacob gapes at him for a moment then visibly shakes himself, a smile spreading over his good-natured face. “This magic stuff really is something.”

He sounds wondering, amazed and there’s a light in his eyes that shines even brighter now. Percival almost pities him – to grow up without magic, to live outside the magical community… it sounds like a dull life.

Still smiling, Jacob sets down the pastry-thing he’d been carrying.

“Newt said that magical creatures are much hardier than other animals and that you can eat pretty much anything. I’m a baker, not so good with the savoury stuff. Uh. Others have said this is a nice combination?”

Percival looks down at the pastry curiously and almost snorts a laugh. A Wampus looks back at him, six legs and tail and all, golden-glazed and looking back at him with glittering sugar eyes. It’s a surprisingly good likeness, quite aside from the enticing smell. Percival prods the pastry with a claw, then looks up Jacob, who’s still smiling and makes an encouraging noise. Without much more thought, Percival bites off two of the legs and part of the stomach and chews. Flavour explodes on his tongue, delicate buttery pastry and peach filling. Peaches are Percival’s favourite, though Jacob couldn’t have known it. It’s possibly the best pastry he has ever eaten and the rest of it ends up gobbled down in record time. He licks crumbs of his chops, chasing the last of the flavour, then settles back into focussing on Jacob.

The whole thing is blatant bribery, but it’s effective bribery. The man certainly can bake and seems to share Queenie’s enthusiasm for the culinary arts. To his surprise Jacob sits down in front of him, only about a metre away, and though the man is sweating slightly he doesn’t seem overly afraid.

“You see, I know Queenie is a great gal. The best gal, really, and far too good for the likes of me,” Jacob tells him earnestly. “But I can’t help loving her. I loved her even when I’d forgotten everything else but the creatures, and if she’s decided that I’m worth loving back I ain’t stupid enough to argue
Percival cocks his head, distantly aware of his tail swishing over the ground. In truth, Jacob has a point – it is up to Queenie and if she has decided, it’s not Percival’s place to try to interfere. Besides it’s rather hard to think of someone who can bake so well as a threat. Slowly, he nods his head, a tingle of amusement running down his spine when Jacob’s face splits into as sincere a grin as Percival has ever seen. To make sure the man doesn’t float away on his success, Percival narrows his eyes, then raises a paw to first point at his own eyes, then stabs it towards Jacob in a gesture that should be universal enough.

“You’ll be watching me, gotcha.” Jacob doesn’t seem too concerned. “If I end up hurting her, you have my permission to take a bite, yeah?”

Percival snorts out a breath. He’s starting to see how this No-Maj fits into the ragtag group of human disasters he now calls his own.

“He doesn’t eat human anything!” Newt’s voice calls from behind a nearby bush.

When Jacob bursts out laughing Percival doesn’t hide the way his own mouth opens to show sharp teeth in a feline smile.
They have just finished reading another chapter of Newt’s manuscript draft, leaving Percival very knowledgeable about Hippogriffs indeed – even Newt had admitted that he should ‘probably cut down that section a bit no matter what Mother thinks’ – and Percival is now busy turning to putty on Newt’s bed. He is so very weak to Newt’s clever hands, moving along his fur and scratching behind his ears just right. Half flopped over the man’s legs where Newt sits up against the headboard, Percival can watch the play of lean muscles under Newt’s white shirt with half-lidded eyes, purring in contentment. Traitorously, he can’t quite help thinking that he never had this before being turned into a Wampus.

“Tina just told me they caught the rest of the smugglers who tried to get my case,” Newt tells him, apropos of nothing. Percival makes an effort to look more alert, eyes flickering to Newt’s face. “Apparently someone at MACUSA blabbed about having an interest in it for potions research.”

Percival makes a concerned noise, shifting so he can face Newt fully. Newt flashes him a quick smile, fingers still carding through Percival’s fur.

“Don’t worry, it’s not the first time. I just thought you might like to know why you had to defend the case. Tina has just finished putting better wards on her home. No one should be able to get in now.”

Percival wasn’t really worried in the first place, but nods anyway, if only to elicit another smile from Newt. This one lingers a little longer and Percival tries not to stare at it too much. He flops back down onto his stomach, ignoring Newt’s quiet oof and sighs to himself. Maybe all of these emotions will go away if he ignores them for a while. It’s not like it’s practical, developing... feelings in his new state.

Except that plan fails to take one thing into account: Newt himself. Over the next few days Newt continues to be his caring, lovely self, still dotes on the little Occamys and indulges Percival’s need to be touched. He keeps carrying buckets around, shirt rolled up to his elbows, hair mussed and smudges of dirt over his hands and face. Percival happens across him silhouetted in warm, magic sunlight until he fairly seems to glow with an inner fire no less than three times in as many days. Whenever Tina or Queenie are around Newt is still adorably bashful, yet he now doesn’t hesitate to show the core of strength beneath all that, informing Tina in no uncertain terms that if MACUSA has no intention to revise its beast laws then he doesn’t see the point in coming in and talking to anyone.

By the end of the week, Percival has taken as much as he can bear with this new awareness sloshing around in his brain and instead of joining Newt in the cabin in the evening slinks off to the Niffler’s nest instead. Hugo chitters at him from his hoard, almost sounding concerned for Percival’s wellbeing. When he only droops his head, a heavy gold coin pointedly bounces off his head. He snorts in surprise, glaring at Hugo as the Niffler scrambles down from the nest to retrieve the coin only to wave it in front of Percival’s face accompanied by forceful squeaks. He’s probably trying to tell him something, but what exactly it is Percival has no clue. The commotion draws Dougal from his own nest. The Demiguise, at least, tends to be more sympathetic to Percival’s various plights and today is no different. Big eyes blink up at him, then Dougal gently pats his knee and hops onto his back. He starts making soothing noises right into Percival’s ears and doesn’t seem bothered when he trots off towards Addie’s habitat. The top of the rock outcropping that dominates the middle of her enclosure has become one of his favourite places when Newt isn’t around to shamelessly cuddle up to.
He isn’t avoiding Newt, per se. Percival doesn’t think he could at this point, even if he wanted to. Newt has become rather central to his life over the last few weeks – he keeps catching himself thinking it has been far longer than that, actually – and Percival wouldn’t even know how to start filling his days without Newt in them. They’d certainly be bleaker. What he is doing is taking a small break to let his thoughts settle. Sometimes a little bit of distance for a little while goes a long way. Besides, Newt is off doing something with the Goldsteins anyway.

Or at least he’s supposed to be. Percival has just made himself comfortable on the sun-warmed rock when he catches voices drifting over from the shed. He looks up to find Newt and Tina walking towards him.

“I’m really not sure about this,” Newt is saying to Tina, forehead drawn in a worried frown. “Aren’t these the same people who somehow let it slip that there’re several creatures in my case who would be of great interest to experimental potion brewers?”

“One of them had had a drink too many, yes,” Tina replies, sounding resigned enough to imply that this isn’t the first time they’re having this discussion, “but it wasn’t malicious. They’ve assured me they just want to have a look at Prestor. Apparently one of the potions they found had very potent healing effects.”

Newt stuffs his hands into his trouser pockets, still looking obstinate. “I just don’t understand how seeing Prestor is going to help any, unless they want more. I’m not letting him be mistreated again, Tina.”

The thing is, and even human Percival would’ve found this baffling, that Percival believes him, completely and entirely. Newt would do everything in his power to keep any of his creatures safe, would probably sacrifice his own life if it came to it, though that’s certainly not an acceptable outcome. It’s been a long time since anyone had thought Percival either worth such protective instincts or in need of them. Much of his job as Director had involved presenting a strong, unflinching front in the face of even the darkest things wizardry could throw at him, until the need to always be in control had sunk into Percival’s being far too deep to be easily uprooted. Grindelwald had changed that – with just one potion he had taken away any illusion of control Percival had still clung to. Slowly, step by step he has been taking some of it back, but he knows that the extent to which he leant on Newt during the process has made the other man an immovable part of this future he’s trying to build for himself.

Tina’s face is a study in pained pride, which seems to be a common reaction to Newt among those who know him well. “I’m not asking you to. But they’ve been haranguing me about bringing you in for weeks now and can’t you just come this once and I’ll be there and we’ll make sure nothing happens?”

Newt sighs, but Percival already knows he will agree. He has a soft touch for Tina, and she does look harangued.

“Just don’t blame me if it ends in property damage,” he says and that decides the issue.

Then, because that’s just the kind of person Newt is, he steps forward and asks Percival for permission too.

“I’ll make sure nothing happens, but you still don’t have to agree,” Newt tells him earnestly, watching Percival’s ears and tail for reactions. “They have no right to demand this, so it’s really just doing Tina a favour.”

Percival, who isn’t too bothered about the entire thing, makes a shrugging motion and yawns.
Newt sighs again, but pats him on the shoulder nonetheless, before lifting Dougal from Percival’s back.

“All right then. Tina and I will get the suitcase to MACUSA. If you wait in the shed I’ll let you know when to come out.”

Percival nods at him, something very close to excitement humming in his blood. Whatever ends up happening, at least it’ll be interesting. Peacefulness is nice, but he isn’t exactly wired to enjoy it indefinitely.

He has only been waiting in the shed for a little while when Newt signals from the other side by knocking on the lid. Percival is getting rather practised at the blind jump out of the case and finds himself emerging in one of the more visitor-friendly labs of the Magical Research Department in short order. A few crates of varying sizes that smell strongly of magic are stacked haphazardly against the far wall. Something about them pings his danger sense, ears curling back against his skull, but for the moment nothing seems to be happening. Percival reflexively makes a mental note that they really need to crack down on security protocols in the MRD, then huffs to himself. He can but hope that the new Director of Magical Security is competent, whoever they decided on.

Aside from Newt and Tina, hovering on his right, there are three people in the room, dressed partly in the dragon-hide protective gear that all experimental magic requires because things have a tendency to blow up. He recognises all of them – Senior Researcher Linsky, and behind him two junior researchers, Jónsdóttir and Ramirez. He’d worked with Jónsdóttir before, on a murder case that involved the use of experimental charm-work and he’d liked her quiet competence and sensible attitude. The fact that she looks uncomfortable now doesn’t exactly fill him with confidence that this meeting is going to go well. When he glances at Newt’s face, he finds that Newt has noticed Jónsdóttir’s expression as well, worry flattening his mouth into a thin line as his gaze skips to rest somewhere in the area of Linsky’s chin.

Linsky’s eyes, meanwhile, light up on spotting Percival.

“A magnificent specimen, Mr. Scamander!”

Newt’s mouth goes even flatter. “Prestor has been recovering for weeks after what Grindelwald did to him.”

Linsky nods. “Yes, yes, of course. You are aware that Grindelwald brewed experimental potions with Wampus ingredients?”

“Yes.” Newt’s tone is downright frosty, compared to his usual gentle Britishness. Percival is almost certain Newt has never met Linsky before, yet an intense dislike seems to colour the way he looks at the man.

“After a long and thorough period of analysis,” Linsky goes on, seeming unaware of the hostility Newt is radiating like an angry bear, “we found that only two of the potions were near a finished state. One of them had immense healing properties – not as great as anything involving Unicorns, not that we use those kinds of banned ingredients, but quite powerful in treating curse damage specifically.”

There’s a storm brewing behind Newt’s changeable eyes. Percival suspects that he too sees exactly where this is going.

“What was the main magical ingredient in that potion?” Newt asks quietly – but this is not his usual gentle quietness, it’s a whisper of warning that leaves a tenser silence in its wake.
For the first time Linsky looks a little uncertain, but he soldiers on. “Wampus teeth, Mr. Scamander, but consider –”

Percival almost feels bad for the man. He’s clearly doing what he feels is right, no matter the dubious nature of his work. What is the difference between using Dragon blood and Wampus teeth, really? Where does the use of potions fail to exceed the cruelty involved in gathering their ingredients? If not for Newt and his own current state, Percival himself might not have such definite views on the subject.

Newt’s left hand lands on Percival’s shoulder, a firm warmth that promises protection. “If you think I will let you torture my Wampus further in your quest for more powerful potions you are very much mistaken, Mr. Linsky.” His voice rings around the laboratory like a cold wind, but Percival’s heart is full of warmth. The strength of Newt’s protectiveness, aimed at him, is a marvel. Though he had not doubted Newt’s conviction while down in the case, it’s still something else to witness it in action.

In the ensuing silence everyone hears Jónsdóttir’s mutter of “Told you so, sir” and Percival’s mouth stretches into a grin that, coincidentally, shows Linsky all of those sharp, big teeth the man wants so badly.

Perhaps they would’ve avoided what follows if Linsky hadn’t still opened his mouth to say, “But the good that –”

Newt’s eyes flash and at the same moment that his magic flares in the room, raising the fur all over Percival’s body, one of the boxes falls over and releases a dark shroud.

If his fur wasn’t already standing on end it would now because he’s almost certain this is a Lethifold, which makes for a big problem because conventional spells don’t work on Lethifolds and their main characteristic seems to be their intention to devour anything that lives. Alarm flares as Percival realises two things at once: the first is that the likelihood of any of the researchers being able to cast a patronus charm is quite low and he hasn’t ever seen Newt cast one, which leaves Tina. The last practice session that had included casting a patronus had ended with her producing a pretty good mist but nothing strong enough to repel either a dementor or a Lethifold fully. She certainly has the potential, but Percival has no idea if she has reached it in the meantime – in fact, given all that’s been going on, he rather doubts there has been much time for her practice. The second realisation concerns Newt, who had taken an interested, suicidal step towards the creature rather than backing away as any sane man would and is now closest to the Lethifold, about to bear the brunt of its attack.

Percival’s heart wants to panic. There is no way in hell he can just let Newt die, but in his current body he’s helpless to stop the Lethifold – the creature will eat him just as happily as it would Newt, so jumping in front of him would achieve little more than a few seconds’ grace and then Percival would be dead and unable to help anyone ever again. What he needs is his magic, his old self and the power that came with it. His feet are already moving, carrying him towards the Lethifold because even buying a few seconds is better than nothing. Wampus instincts are pushing against his mind and instead of simply accepting their rise, this time he pulls on them, anything to give him an edge, lets the beast roar through him while he wishes with all his might, with all his will power, harder than he ever has before –

*I am Percival Graves. I am Percival Graves. I need to be Percival Graves.*

The change when it ripples over him is like a soft wind that washes his captivity away, painless and instantaneous, and suddenly he can feel hands, fingers, toes, the cold of the air around him where fur used to insulate. But all that can wait because more than anything else he feels his magic, the warm core of energy that twines through his being and rises in a flood as if asking *where have you been all this time.*
As he focuses the flood, he only has to think *expecto patronum* and light spills from his outstretched hands, blinding, silver light that coalesces into a tall winged form and falls onto the Lethifold with all the dangerous wildness of a Thunderbird stalking its prey. Even as Percival watches the new form of his patronus scatter the darkness into tiny particles, he knows that he will never be able to do this impossible thing again, to cast a charm of this magnitude without a wand and without words. The first surge of his magic returned to him is already abating, and in its wake he can feel himself flagging, staggering weakly on legs that no longer want to support him. The Lethifold is gone and as he watches, the Thunderbird opens his beak for a proud, silent cry before vanishing into the air.

Then there are gentle hands lowering him to the floor and the last thing he sees before passing into unconsciousness is Newt’s face hovering above him, eyes warm even as his expression is caught between horror, wonder, and rage.

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Newt watches the beautiful translucent form of the Thunderbird dissolve into little sparks of light, then slowly turns, mouth already open to ask Tina why she’d never told him she has a *Thunderbird patronus*. The words never make it past his suddenly slack jaw. Prestor is gone and in his stead stands a familiar man. Percival Graves is swaying on unsteady legs, one hand still outstretched towards Newt, a dazed look in his eyes. Pushing the multitude of thoughts that are clamouring for his attention to the side, Newt steps forward and reaches out just in time to cushion the man’s descent to the floor. Brown eyes flecked with tiny specks of green, entirely unlike Prestor’s silver ones, meet his before fluttering shut, the body in Newt’s arms going lax. Newt stares down at the slack features of a man who should be dead, a haze of anger invading the edges of his mind. As far as he knows there’s only one way of transforming a human into a magical animal and just moments ago Newt, just like any other witch or wizard, would’ve said that such a transformation is impossibly to reverse. Every documented case had ended with the victim being driven mad. Even for someone like Grindelwald to stoop so low to do this to another person… the implications drop into Newt’s mind like a rain of heavy stones into a lake, rippling outward.

The rattling of another one of the boxes stacked against the wall unfreezes everyone else from their shocked inaction.

“A wandless, wordless patronus!” Linksy breathes, at the same time as one of the junior researchers whose name Newt has already forgotten again squeaks, “Director Graves?”

When he looks up at Tina, he finds her silent, the kind of guilty heart-break reflected in her expression that tells him that she, too, has thought of the implications.

“He needs a healer,” Newt tells her, ignoring the researchers. “There is no precedent for his situation, but his health should be monitored.”

Tina nods, the dazed look in her eyes vanishing with the instantaneous snap back to duty all good Aurors Newt has ever met have perfected. She grabs his case without prompting, then barks, “You three, make sure nothing else goes wrong.”

Newt, gathering the unconscious man in a more secure hold, stands with Graves in his arms and follows her out the door without another word.

“There is a second apparition point on the DMLE floor, five stories up,” she tells him quietly,
glancing around alertly as if she’s expecting enemy wizards to jump out from behind every door. “I
don’t think it’d be wise to go to the atrium right now.”

Newt nods, though he’s barely paying attention to what she’s saying. His mind is whirling, cycling
through the facts as he knows them over and over again. Graves was held by Grindelwald.
Grindelwald must’ve forced the *Penita Creatura* draught on him, turning the man into the magical
creature that most closely matches his spirit. In one swoop the dark wizard eliminated any chance of
Graves exposing him and ensured his prisoner’s death, one way or another. He probably thought
MACUSA would simply kill the Wampus, but even in the event they didn’t, Grindelwald could rest
easy knowing there was no way for Graves to turn back and that eventually he would lose his mind,
crushed under the weight of animal instincts. It’s one of the worst things a wizard can do to his
fellow men, to doom them to a slow disintegration of self, and it makes Newt want to gnash his teeth
until they hurt. How dare Grindelwald? Newt may not have known Percival Graves, but he knows
*Prestor*, has watched him throughout his slow recovery, his tentative steps towards creating bonds
with the other creatures in the case, his absolute loyalty to Newt and his charges. Prestor – and
Prestor is Graves, he reminds himself – did not deserve this. Nobody does, but certainly not someone
who babysat the Occamys and did his best to make Queenie smile when she was feeling down about
Jacob. He’d been angry enough at Prestor’s evident ill-treatment, but this…

It’s Tina who brings him out of it, with a soft touch to his arm. “Calm down, Newt. If you
accidentally set something on fire housekeeping will be upset with you.”

He raises a startled gaze to her, stopped mid-step halfway up the stairs. He hadn’t even noticed the
build-up of magical energy crackling along his skin, too mired in his anger at Grindelwald. He takes
a couple of deep breaths, thinks of Mooncalves frolicking and the chirping of Occamies, and nods at
her. There’s a sympathetic slant to Tina’s mouth, but she doesn’t say anything else, just starts
walking again.

Suddenly Newt feels ill. Merlin, his Wampus *isn’t a Wampus*. He’s been playing host to the Director
of Magical Security for the last month and a half, has given the man head-scratches and read to him
and bathed him, all without knowing that he’s actually a human being. There were so many clues
that Prestor wasn’t an ordinary Wampus, clues that Newt ignored or chalked up to a life in captivity
and now everything makes so much more startling, horrifying *sense*. How could he not have
noticed?

Pausing along yet another flight of back stairs, Tina pins him with a look, mouth drawn in a tight,
stressed line.

“It’s not your fault, Newt. We didn’t notice either and Queenie and I have at least met the real
Graves before.”

He isn’t sure he believes that. The signs were all there – the intelligence, the unfamiliarity with his
own cat body, the desire to read. But there’s no use hashing it out right now. “You’re turning into
your sister.”

Newt counts it as a victory when the curve of her lip curls up. “You were starting to look slightly
rabbity on top of scarily wrathful.” She resumes their walk up the stairs. “Besides I was thinking the
same thing.”

That drags a rueful smile out of him. Of course she was. Anyone would be. When a small voice in
the back of his mind points out that *she* didn’t spend time with the transfigured man every day, this
time he manages to ignore it.

“Do you want me to take him for a bit?” Tina asks yet another flight of stairs later, gesturing towards
the unconscious man in Newt’s arms.

Newt shakes his head. “It’s fine.”

Even though he’d done his best to feed Prestor as much as possible, Graves is still shy of what a man his size should weigh, and he barely feels like a burden. Newt has carried heavier things while caring for his creatures. He glances down again. At least he can’t see the man’s ribs through the blood-stained tatters of Graves’s shirt, though it and the equally poorly preserved trousers hang a little loosely on his frame. For all that the features are inarguably the same, this Graves looks a far cry from the immaculately put-together Graves that Grindelwald had impersonated. Newt finds himself wondering just how much of that had been Grindelwald and how much of it Grindelwald’s attempt to pass as Graves. Looking down at the man now, it’s hard to imagine him wearing scorpion collar pins.

He only notices that they’ve reached their destination when Tina touches his arm.

“Side-along me?” she asks, foregoing a comment on Newt’s distracted state.

He has to adjust his grip on Graves slightly to be able to lay a hand on her arm, then breathes through the familiar rush of apparition. They re-materialise in the brightly lit foyer of what Newt assumes to be the New York wizarding hospital. The tingle of the wards that alert the medical staff that there’s a new arrival washes over him and Newt barely has the time to blink before a group medi-witches and -wizards bear down him. Graves is whisked away before he can voice any kind of protest.

Tina throws him a sympathetic look. “I’ll go with them, see if they’ll tell me anything. Just sit tight, alright?”

And then she’s gone too, though not before passing his case back to him, and he feels a little better with the familiar handle in his hand. For a moment he thinks about leaving, returning to the Goldsteins’ apartment and washing his hands off the entire affair. The Wampus who depended on him is gone, after all.

He dismisses the notion as soon as it comes into his head. Prestor may be gone, but Graves is Prestor and like hell is Newt going to just leave him alone after the man went through so much.

Well, or at least he’s going to stick around long enough for Graves to tell him to bugger off in person.
Chapter 6

vi. Rediscovery

For the first time in what feels like years Percival Graves wakes in the sure knowledge that his body is as it should be. In fact, he feels… fine. A little drained, but no physical pain whatsoever. Perhaps he’ll get used to the feeling eventually. He’s also far calmer than he expected, and immediately suspects an artificial cause. The healers probably didn’t want him to get agitated upon waking, which is reasonable enough but still makes him scowl on principle.

Senior Healer Aiyana Jones bustles into the room. Ever since his promotion to Director she has been his primary healer. At this point she has saved his life at least three times and they’ve grown grudgingly fond of each other despite him being a ‘pain in the ass patient’.

“Percival Fintan Graves,” she says, quite seriously, “don’t you ever do this to us again.”

He opens his mouth, tries not to look too relieved when actual words come out of his mouth. “What, get kidnapped by Grindelwald?”

“Don’t be cheeky.” Aiyana sets down her clipboard with his patient chart on the nightstand. He sneaks a sidelong glance at it and another shiver of relief follows the first when he can make out the words just fine. It must have been something about the Wampus-ness of his thoughts that hindered his reading ability, not permanent damage. Then he registers the long, dark shape of his wand sitting next to the chart the last bit of tension he carried even with the calming draught relaxes. He has missed his wand. His fingers itch to reach for it, but Aiyana is speaking again and reluctantly he returns his attention to her words.

“You’ve been on the ‘missing, presumed dead’ list for weeks.”

“Ah,” he murmurs, for lack of anything better to say. He’d known, logically, that the few people who cared about him in some form must’ve thought him dead, but he’d done his best not to think about them too much. He’d done his best not to think about many things, in the name of staying sane. “I suppose your ire means you’ve verified my identity?”

A shake of her head sets strands of black hair that have escaped her bun flying as she pulls her focus back to him. “Overextension. Between the energy that the transformation required and you deciding to cast a powerful spell wandlessly you overstretched yourself. Also some lingering traces of spell damage that we’ve mostly taken care of.” Her mouth thins. “Given that we still saw it more than a month later, the damage must’ve been extensive at the time. You might occasionally still feel some of the after-effects of repeated exposure to the Cruciatus curse, but nothing permanent.”

Percival frowns at that. “I don’t remember suffering from those while in Wampus form. Would the
Aiyana shrugs helplessly. "We don’t know. You have to understand, as far as we are aware no one has ever done what you’ve done before. We have no idea how the transformation into a magical creature affects anything, let alone spell damage. I rather suspect you’ll have excited researchers trying to knock your door down for the next decade at least."

Percival thinks darkly of researchers who keep damned Lethifolds in their labs without proper precautions taken – and who the hell had approved that anyway – and then his thoughts blacken further because studying magical creature transformation implies possibly experimenting with it and just… no.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea, unless they keep it entirely theoretical and we all know that eventually it’ll go beyond that.” He snorts grimly. “The chances of getting stuck are far too high. Hell, I don’t even know how I managed to turn back yet.”

Aiyana nods at him, rising from her seat. “I agree with you, as it happens, because I have trouble understanding that there are some forms of magic we should keep our sticky paws off, but I’m sure you’ll have to explain it to said researchers several times before they get the hint.” Halfway out the door she calls over her shoulder, “Oh, and we’re keeping you one more night for observation.”

He growls at her retreating back, but she’s gone before he can marshal an argument as to why keeping him here any longer is nonsense. Which it is. He feels fine. His body is human again, he feels better than fine. No more fur and paws and tail. He flexes his fingers, one by one, grasps at the bed sheets just because he can – opposable thumbs, what a marvel – wriggles his toes. It must be the closest a person can come to being reborn. His body is familiar, and his, and he feels comfortable in it, but at the same time the sensations feel new, like echoes of a half-forgotten dream.

Sighing happily he leans back against the pillows and appreciates the slightly rough drag of fabric over the sensitive skin at the back of his neck. Then he reaches for his wand, warmth bursting through him at the touch as golden sparks fly from the tip, and stashes the precious item beneath his pillow for easier access.

Then a knock on the door is followed by Tina Goldstein sticking her head around the corner and he pulls himself together again. Grinning like a loon in front of his subordinate is not how he wants to start his campaign to get reinstated as Director of Magical Security.

He waves at her to come in.

“It’s good to see you awake, sir.”

Percival is mildly impressed that there’s only a small amount of awkwardness in her voice and stance. Given the last few months that must take her considerable effort – effort that he appreciates deeply.

“Thanks to you, I assume. You brought me to St. Jude’s from the lab?”

She nods. “With Newt, yes. Um. Mr. Scamander.”

He gives her a Look. “I lived with the man for over a month, Tina. I’m not going to call him by his last name.” He pauses, brow furrowing. “Unless he wants me to.”

Something in her seems to relax at this clear statement that he isn’t just going to bury the last few weeks and never speak of them again. Percival isn’t normally a proponent of blurring the lines of professionalism between himself and those working under him, but Newt isn’t employed by
MACUSA officially as far as he has overheard and he’s aware that he has already lost that particular fight when it comes to the Goldstein sisters. There’s only so much backtracking one can do after having received belly rubs from someone.

“He’s waiting downstairs, you know,” Tina says softly. “The President had to stop him from going down to the cells to give Grindelwald a piece of his mind.”

Percival tries not to look too relieved, but it’s a losing battle so he focuses on the second part of her statement. “What was he even doing back at MACUSA?”

“I took him with me to break the news to the President. I thought she should hear it from us rather than the rumour mill. With three other people in the room when you transformed back all of MACUSA is going to know by the end of the day.”

He pulls a face. He has always disliked being the object of gossip, though it’s an unfortunately unavoidable side-effect for anyone rising through the ranks as quickly as he had. He already knows nothing that was said then will come close to what will circulate now, between Grindelwald and his dramatic transformation.

“The Madame President wanted me to let you know that she’ll personally debrief you as soon as you’re discharged. You have the option of taking another week off should you feel it necessary, but the post of Director has been left empty for too long as it is.”

His surprise must show on his face. He might’ve been ready to fight for his job, but that doesn’t mean he thought he’d just get it handed back to him.

“You didn’t fill the position?”

Something spasms across Tina’s face, too quickly to catch. “You weren’t confirmed dead, sir. We all agreed that it felt wrong to appoint someone new before we knew for sure. Besides the President wouldn’t hear of it anyway. Akecheta acted as an interim.”

“Oh.” He falls back against the pillows, head spinning. “I see.”

Tina looks very much like she doubts that he does, entirely, but forgoes commenting in favour of heading back to the door. “I’ll just let Newt know you’re awake,” she calls over her shoulder and he could almost swear that’s a wink she just threw in his direction.

Percival winces. Right. So he’s possibly being very obvious about his attachment to Newt. Which could be problematic, given that he has no idea how Newt feels about any of this. It probably isn’t every day that one’s Wampus companion turns out to be a transformed human instead.

Newt looks more tentative now than he has in the entire time Percival has spent around him, shuffling his feet and scratching at the back of his neck. It’s a little heart-breaking because Percival has seen him in his element, unbending and competent, and he hates to think that he’s the reason for this new awkwardness. Then again, in Newt’s situation he’d probably feel awkward too. He knows he’s all but openly staring at the other man, at the vibrant colour of his hair and the way he can see green glittering in Newt’s eyes even from a few meters away. He has missed seeing proper colours. Newt’s taller, too, or maybe it’s just Percival who’s now smaller, especially when lying in a hospital bed.

The silence stretches in a way that would be painful if the calming draught weren’t doing its job, then Newt blurs, “I’m so sorry.”
Percival frowns. Even through the artificial calm flowing through his veins, this new and uncertain Newt isn’t reassuring at all. “What on earth for?”

“Uh, treating you like a creature for a month?”

Now he sounds uncertain too, hands twitching on the handle of the case he’s holding in front of his body like a shield.

“But you didn’t,” Percival says amid dawning understanding of what exactly the issue here is. “Or at least, if you treat all your creatures like that a lot of people could learn something about caring for someone from you.” He leans forward, ignoring the ache in his temples that threatens to overlay the enforced calm, to fix Newt with a brutally honest look. “I never felt less than a person down in that case. Never. Without you I would’ve lost my mind weeks ago and that is a debt I can never repay, Newt Scamander.”

Percival tries to keep his face as open as possible, to let some of the deep feeling that even being in the same room as Newt appears to engender through, and is rewarded with Newt’s stiff posture relaxing. The other man finally sits down in the chair next to the head of the bed, a hint of a blush spreading over his cheeks.

Percival can only hope he doesn’t look as besotted as he feels. Openness is one thing – and a fairly new urge for him at that – but admitting to deeper feelings would probably make Newt go all rabbity again.

“I still should’ve noticed. You didn’t exactly act like a normal Wampus.”

Percival sighs. “No one noticed, not Tina, not Queenie, not any of my Aurors though they admittedly had less of a chance to. You didn’t even know me beforehand.” He shakes his head against the phantom taste of bitter blood in his mouth. “Grindelwald took no chances.”

Newt’s eyes are keen on Percival’s face, showing some of that steel he knows lies underneath.

“And yet you are here. Grindelwald lost.”

“If that’s Grindelwald losing I really don’t want to see what him winning looks like.” Percival is pretty sure it’s only the calming draught that’s keeping him such because suddenly there are memories crowding at the edges of his thoughts that haven’t felt this clear for weeks. But when Newt opens his mouth, looking ready to protest, Percival shushes him. “Hush, I know this is a good outcome. It’ll just take a little while.”

Newt goes a little cross-eyed looking at the finger Percival has unthinkingly laid over his lips, and he quickly retrieves the digit, smoothing down the covers near his hip instead. Merlin, his control is shot around Newt.

Blinking a couple of times, Newt seems to gather himself again. “No one would blame you for needing some time to recover. Trauma is not so easily dealt with, whether we’re talking about humans or creatures.” He halts, draws a hand through his mob of ginger hair. There’s a hesitance to him, in the way he forms the next words. “If you need an escape, the case is open to you. You’re welcome anytime.”

The hesitance stings a little, but a tentative sincerity underlies the question and that’s enough for Percival to breathe easier again. At least the calming draught is stopping him from doing something embarrassing like blurt out just how much he likes Newt in an attempt to set the other man at ease in his company. Except it probably wouldn’t set him at ease and is just generally a bad idea, don’t
Percival.

Newt tries for a smile. “Besides, the others will start to miss you, don’t you think?”

Percival is released home to an empty, dark apartment that both still reeks of Grindelwald to his magical senses and has clearly been gone through by his Aurors though they seem to have done their best to put everything back the way it was, with a warning to take it easy for the next few days because he’ll still tire more easily than usual, and spends a sleepless night tossing on the couch because he can’t face the bed that he probably slept in just yet.

Percival drags himself into MACUSA at the appointed time, blue scarf tucked tightly around his throat, and ignores the excited whispering – he can take excited, excited is so much better than malicious – that follows him through the atrium and almost to the President’s door. It swings open before he can knock.

He can tell from a glance that for the moment he’s talking to Seraphina, not the President of MACUSA.

“Percival,” she says with a measured kind of grief that makes it hard to meet her bright eyes. There are entire words lingering behind the three syllables, echoes of apologies and admissions of guilt. It would do neither of them good to have them spoken.

“It’s all right, Sera.” His hand barely shakes when he draws it through his hair, much longer than he’s used to it being. According to his mirror it suits him and he won’t go back to the cut he had before Grindelwald, but he should get it trimmed soon unless he wants to start wearing some kind of headband. Like this it’s just a hazard. “I’m all right.”

“No it’s not, and no you’re not, and neither does anyone expect you to be.” She smiles wryly. “And here I am, asking you to go through it all again.”

She doesn’t do him the disservice of asking whether he feels up to it.

Percival nods at her firmly and watches as the weight of her office settles around her shoulders, features blanking into cool professionalism.

“Tell me what happened, Director Graves. From the beginning.”

The title rings in his ears like a benediction, the only kindness she can do him, and Percival takes a deep breath. At least they’re not making him testify under the influence of veritaserum. He’s not being treated as a criminal. Then he starts to speak, haltingly, of the night that Gellert Grindelwald had duelled him and won. He knows it’s a courtesy to him that it’s only Seraphina witnessing his outpouring of memory, though all that he says is taken down for the record as per protocol.

Now and then she interjects with questions, but mostly she just lets him speak. He knows what’s required for a debrief, covers topics willingly that others need to be coaxed to voice. He doesn’t think he clears up all her questions, not going by the deepening line between her brows, but eventually he’s said all he can.

It feels like it has been hours.

Percival’s mind is numb, worn thin by hours of reliving his worst experiences that no amount of sympathetic glances from Seraphina could soften. Something of the cat is winding its way through
his thoughts, simple instincts overriding tired thoughts, and when he reaches the apparition point he turns on his heels without much consideration of where he’s going. He reappears on a deserted dock near the Hudson and has to huddle into his coat to ward off the chill wind. Newt’s case has its own magical signature, one Percival has become quite attuned to through sheer prolonged proximity. Just as the magic warding the case has become used to his signature and makes no fuss when he flips the locks and descends into the shed below. The case falls shut behind him with a reassuringly solid thud, and Percival makes his way to a familiar spot in a daze. He’s running almost entirely on instinct as he yawns and relaxes into the comforting scent all around him.

Climbing down into his suitcase dripping wet and with a wounded Kelpie floating behind him in a bubble of water, the last thing Newt expects is to find Percival Graves curled up on his bed. He halts, stares in surprise. Normally Newt always knows when someone breaches the case, between the many wards and his own finely-attuned senses, but nothing at all warned him about Percival’s entry. Then again, he supposes that in some sense the man has lived here for weeks now and has become part of the magical signature that Newt’s mind is so aware of. The Kelpie’s irritated struggling within the water bubble drags his gaze away from the man slumbering wrapped around the blue knitted blanket Theseus gave him years ago, bathed in soft light. He can worry about the Director of Magical Security sleeping in his bed as if he has always belonged there later.

Except later comes, the Kelpie happily splashing around in the small lake while she recuperates, and Newt still has no idea what to do. He had invited the man, but he hadn’t thought that he would actually take him up on that offer. In Newt’s general experience, most people wouldn’t have. In fact, he was rather expecting the other man to distance himself at the first opportunity, if not worse. Everything is all muddled up in his head, Prestor, Graves, the Wampus, the Director, the man who’s currently vulnerable in his bed...

Back in the shed he peeks at the bed again, half expecting Graves to have disappeared. He hasn’t. There’s now a pinched furrow between the man’s dark brows, a restlessness that wasn’t there before. Even asleep the other man looks exhausted.

It occurs to Newt that maybe he has been staring for a bit too long now, and he quickly averts his eyes, feeling embarrassment crawling up his neck. He can’t bring himself to wake Graves. Instead he decides to focus on practicalities – such as bringing the case back to the Goldsteins’ flat. It’s now spelled with enough anti-Muggle wards that no one should even notice it lying on the pier, but recent events have left a sour note of caution in his mind, and with the Kelpie now settled there’s little need to stay near the river.

Stepping back down into his shed, Newt tries to be quiet, but when he reaches the bottom rung and has a view into his small bedroom he catches Graves just in the process of sitting up. Newt steps closer, worried to see a blank, panicked look on the other man’s face.

“Pr – ” he starts, catches himself and in a panic changes to, “Percival. You’re in my case. You’re all right. Nothing here will hurt you.”

The man blinks, some awareness returning to his eyes, and then, incomprehensibly, smiles. “You called me Percival.”
His expression changes again, to something almost confused as he raises fingertips that Newt can’t help but notice are trembling faintly to his throat. Newt finds himself wanting that smile back with a sudden, worrying intensity.

“Are you all right?” he asks, then immediately feels foolish. The man – Percival, who smiles at hearing his name – had been tortured, body and mind for months. Of course he isn’t all right.

Percival is studying his trembling fingers, one hand curling into a fist as the other hovers in front of his eyes. Absently he says, “Calming drought. Wore off yesterday. Didn’t sleep till now.”

And that – that actually explains quite a bit. Newt had thought the man seemed strangely calm in his hospital bed after everything that had happened.

Percival looks up at him, not panicked now, but still not entirely… there.

“So you have a washroom?”

Newt points him towards the unassuming door opposite the one leading to the shed, worries his lower lip as he debates saying something, anything else. His mind still can’t quite decide whether he knows Percival or not, part of him insisting that he knows Prestor and ergo knows the man Prestor turned into, and another part shouting ‘stranger’ loudly in the background.

So he lets him go, doesn’t call out even when Percival stays in there an awfully long time. When the other man finally emerges again he looks calmer, more settled, and his face glistens with wetness where he must’ve washed his face.

“I’m sorry,” Percival says quietly, looking Newt straight in the eye. “For intruding. I wasn’t… thinking very straight when I apparated.”

Newt’s heart skips a little beat, confused and strangely pleased all at once. Does that mean Percival’s instinct had been to come to the case? Prestor’s would’ve been.

“I did invite you,” he points out because he had.

Percival’s eyes are shrewd. “But you didn’t expect me to actually do so.”

“Well. No. Most people aren’t…” he trails off.

Percival doesn’t take step towards him, doesn’t push, in fact seems to be trying to make himself as small and unthreatening as possible. “I spent weeks living here, Newt,” he says softly. “I swear on my life that I will do nothing to harm you or your creatures.”

Newt bites his lip, wanting to believe this man with almost desperate intensity. He sounds sincere, looks sincere, his dark eyes soft and gentle. Others had promised before. But this is Prestor, isn’t it?

He takes a deep breath. “It’s almost feeding time. You could… help?”

The smile he receives in reply makes his stomach swoop. People don’t smile at Newt like this. To cover his uncertainty he turns around, heading for the exit. He doesn’t have to look to know Percival is following him.

As soon as they’ve stepped out of the shed, Addie comes loping towards them, tail twitching in agitation. The Nundu has shown a marked tendency to not stay in her habitat lately – Newt blames Prestor, the Wampus hadn’t –
His thought process comes to a screeching halt. He keeps catching himself thinking of Prestor as an actual Wampus, expecting him to come trotting up from the depth of the case somewhere, but that’s not the truth anymore. He turns around to look at Prestor the man, Percival, and his eyes widen.

Addie has come to a stop right in front of Percival, sniffing the man in between little whines of confusion. Something about Prestor’s scent must still be part of Percival, for she clearly recognises him on some level. But it’s Percival who really takes his breath away. The man isn’t showing any sign of fear, just stands still and lets Addie do as she wishes, even lets her lick his bare wrist without any sign of protest.

With a last loud sniff, Addie bumps her head against Percival’s chest and starts purring. The man pats her nose almost absently, staying well away from the poisonous spikes.

“She looks bigger from this angle,” he tells Newt and Newt only just chokes back a slightly hysterical giggle. No one, not even Theseus, had ever reacted to one of his more deadly creatures with such equanimity.

“She’s small for a Nundu,” he says faintly, then bends to pick up a bucket filled with Mooncalf pellets because he has to keep his hands busy somehow.

Addie huffs, making Percival chuckle. “Don’t tell her that. You might hurt her feelings.”

Not even mentally running through his feeding schedule can distract Newt enough to stop him from goggling at the other man. None of this seems entirely real. To suddenly have the attention of another human like this, who isn’t fazed by Addie and thinks about Newt’s creatures’ feelings and is being kind to Newt, it’s all a bit much.

When Newt doesn’t say anything, Percival turns from his perusal of Addie’s sensitive whiskers to look at him with what Newt could swear is concern.

“Mooncalves first, right? They always get twitchy when they have to wait for too long.”

Newt opens his mouth to ask how in the dickens Percival could’ve known that, when he remembers Prestor, who always followed him on his round and even started helping out in later weeks. It’s becoming more and more possible for his mind to accept that Percival and Prestor are, in fact, the same person. Perhaps it would’ve been easier if he’d seen the man change, but Newt had been (justifiably) distracted by the Lethifold in front of him. Another creature he hadn’t encountered before, and few wizard had ever made it out of such a close encounter alive so he hadn’t been about to waste the opportunity to study the shroud-like creature in as much detail as possible.

“Yes, um, yes,” he finally croaks out and then, in for a penny in for a pound, hands the bucket to Percival. “You go do that. I’ll start with the Graphorns.”

Percival takes the bucket with a nod and wanders off towards the Mooncalf habitat, quietly scolding Addie to stay back when she moves to follow. The Mooncalves are easily spooked as it is, and a giant Nundu really wouldn’t help the issue.

For a while Newt is able to put all other thoughts about Percival and Prestor out of his mind as the Graphorns demand all of his focus. They’ve been a bit tetchy lately and if he didn’t have such a good relationship with them already he would probably have to look out for the sharp horns.

When he’s finished laving attention on young Tommy, Newt finds the Mooncalves all happily munching on their pellets and Percival crouched in front of the Occamy nest to a storm of chirping. Newt watches, fascinated as the man’s voice rumbles deeply and the Occamy chicks settle down,
Percival doesn’t stay after the feeding round, no matter how much he wants to. Newt has warmed up to him considerably after witnessing Percival’s ease with the creatures in his case, but the memory of finding slightly suspicious uncertainty in Newt’s bright eyes is too much for Percival right now. He doesn’t blame Newt, still feels the mortification of having been found napping in the man’s bed without an explicit invitation simply because in his overtired, upset state his instincts recognised it as a safe place lingering at the edges of his mind.

Now, with a clearer head, those very instincts are troubling him. They felt more like the Wampus than like him, and only the thought of the possibility of getting trapped in that form again, of not having left that form fully behind, is enough to send a cold shiver down his spine. The problem is, he doesn’t know how he turned himself back human, exactly. Which means that he doesn’t know if he could accidentally reverse that transformation either.

This time Percival does manage to get some sleep in his own bedroom, but only once he has transfigured the ceiling to look like an open, starry sky and even then it’s not a very restful sleep. He does manage to feel vaguely alive when he strolls into Seraphina’s office the next day, though, so he counts it as a win.

She glares at him over the rim of her reading glasses, then sighs and puts the parchment she’d been perusing to the side.

“I suppose it would be too much to ask for you to take another week off to recuperate?”

“Yes,” he states baldly, feet planted into a fighting stance, arms crossed behind his back. “I’m fit for duty and the department needs every hand on deck.”

Seraphina frowns at him. “How do you know that?”

He raises an unimpressed eyebrow. “Sera, Grindelwald impersonated me for a month, and I doubt he was very keen on doing my job properly. I’m the one who is most qualified to sort through the mess he left behind. Auror Goldstein has looked tired for weeks now and I passed Auror Vincenni on the way up and he looked no better. Besides, if you truly didn’t need me you would’ve passed my job on to someone else before now. You’re not that sentimental.”

Seraphina makes a sour face, but rather tellingly doesn’t argue with his assessment. For a few long moments she studies him, eyes sharp, and he does his best to look as relaxed and confident as he would have three months ago. Finally she nods at him. “All right. You’re on half days for a month, Percival, and that’s not negotiable. Field work only in emergencies until then. We will need you at full strength in the days to come.”

He thinks about arguing, but she has that stubborn tilt to her mouth and he knows he wouldn’t get anywhere. Besides, even though he wouldn’t say it out loud, she probably has a point. He still seems to tire easily.

“Fine,” he says, not entirely leeching his ill-temper from his tone because while he might agree with
her to an extent, a full month is definitely overkill.

“And Percival? The ICW took Grindelwald four days ago. Just in case you were thinking of doing something...unwise.”

Four days. He had been unconscious in St. Jude’s then. *Grindelwald is gone.* Oh, he doesn’t think the ICW could hold him forever, but he’s gone from Percival’s city, from his country. There’s a measure of comfort in that.

His voice is rough when he speaks. “If you think I want to get anywhere near that bastard you’re crazier than I am, Sera.”

It’s not a lie. He would face the other man again in the name of duty if he had to, but Percival would be perfectly content never laying sight on that hated face again.

Seraphina’s lips twitch in amusement and she waves him off. “Go bother your Aurors, Director Graves. They’ve been pining for you.”

Percival snorts quietly to himself as he makes his way to the DMLE floor. He very much doubts pining of any sort has been going on in his absence. It’s not that his relationship with his subordinates is a bad one – or at least that’s what he would’ve said before none of them realised he’d been impersonated by a Dark Lord for a month – but it is very much a working relationship and he doesn’t socialise much with anyone outside of work. In retrospect that had made him an easy target, but he used to think that having the respect of his subordinates, who are assured in his competency and drive to protect them as well as the law, is enough. What he thinks now, Percival isn’t quite sure yet.

The bullpen falls silent when he enters, all eyes turning to him. Then everyone starts talking all at once.

“Director, you’re back!”

“Did you really cast a wandless patronus?”

“They say you can turn into a Wampus –”

“It’s good to see you, sir.”

Mouth curling into a small smile, Percival holds up his hand. The jabbering stops with gratifying speed.

“It’s good to be back. Thank you for holding down the fort while I was indisposed. To answer your questions, yes I was a Wampus for a while, and yes I cast a wandless patronus, though I doubt I could do so again.” He lets his gaze glide over the space, noting things that have changed, things that are reassuringly the same. The evidence board is full. “The President has signed off on me working half-days for the next month, after that I should be back in full capacity. I’ll give you all half an hour to compose a debriefing of all open cases. Goldstein, my office.”

The chatter in his wake as he makes for his office is surprisingly reassuring. It doesn’t appear as if Grindelwald spent any of his time working to alienate Percival’s team, thank Merlin.

He waves the door shut behind Tina, then sinks into his chair, trying not to think about Grindelwald sitting right here, in Percival’s office, in Percival’s stead. It’s Tina who unwittingly anchors him, her steady if a little frazzled presence familiar enough that he can take a deep breath and calm his breathing.
“Tell me, are there any doubts I should address?” At Tina’s alarmed look, he quickly adds, “I wouldn’t blame anyone. Between Gindelwald and my prolonged absence…”

He can’t quite help the shiver of relief running through him when Tina shakes her head urgently enough to make her hair fly.

“We all know that it wasn’t you,” she says, so fast that she’s half tripping over the words, “and, well, I know it sounds bad, but until those last few days he really didn’t do anything you wouldn’t have while around any of us.”

Percival grimaces. She’s right, it does sound bad, even if part of him can’t help but be grateful that Grindelwald didn’t do worse. The man was in a position of authority – there could be so many more messes, professional and personal, for Percival to clean up. As it is, he’ll have to take feeling majorly creeped out by the fact that Grindelwald managed to replicate his characteristics so perfectly.

“All right, then. Thank you. If you could go and prepare your part of the debrief?”

“Yes, sir,” Tina says, and there’s a warmth to the simple phrase that makes him smile.

“And Tina? Tell the others that my door is going to be open for the rest of the day, should anyone want to see me. No reasons or excuses needed.”

She bobs her head with a small smile and heads to the door. Hand already on the doorknob, she suddenly turns back again. She looks nervous but determined, and he guesses what’s coming a moment before she opens her mouth

“Mr. Graves, I’m really sorry I didn’t notice you were being impersonated. Or that you were Newt’s Wampus. I know there isn’t much I can do about it now, but I at least wanted to tell you that. I’m sorry.”

Percival sighs, draws a hand through his hair. He keeps surprising himself with the fact that it’s now longer. He really needs to make an appointment at his usual barber’s.

“It’s not your fault, Tina. It isn’t anybody’s fault, but Grindelwald’s. You said it yourself – he was a convincing actor.”

She’s chewing on her lower lip, a tell that he makes a mental note of training her out of. “Still. It’s not right.”

“Nothing concerning Grindelwald is,” he says, with an air of finality. “If you need to hear it, I’ll say it. I forgive you, Tina, though there’s no fault to forgive.”

She nods, eyes suspiciously shiny, and beats a hasty retreat. Percival hopes he handled that right. He truly doesn’t bear a grudge against anyone in his department.

Over the course of the day, every single Auror who has worked with him longer than a few months comes to apologise. Akecheta, who thinks she bears even greater guilt as his second in command, comes last. He tells them all exactly the same thing he told Tina and hopes it’ll be enough to mend the wounds that Grindelwald left behind in his department. Though he had forgiven them already, it certainly goes some way to healing his own.

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A week later, things have mostly settled into a routine. When not at work, Percival divides his time between cooking his favourite meals – he has missed good food, all right, and besides cooking is a
good way to keep his hands busy – researching magical creature transformation, and turning his bedroom into an approximation of the natural space that it isn’t. Of the three the research is the most frustrating – no one really seems to know anything about the process. He has found references to the Penita Creatura draught, yes, but all sources agree with Grindelwald’s assessment that it’s impossible to turn back human and not lose one’s mind after its ingestion. In short, Percival is an impossibility and if he wants to know anything, he apparently needs to figure it out himself. At work, things run more or less smoothly. With Grindelwald transferred they’re back to the usual business of the city and, in Percival’s case, coordinating the other Auror offices dotted around the United States. There’s a lot of work to be done, even on top of going through all the cases Grindelwald touched, and if he’s stretching the definition of half-day a couple of hours here and there, Seraphina has yet to reprimand him so he blithely carries on. He’s pretty certain he isn’t imagining the increased attempts at friendly overtures from his Aurors, but mostly chalks it up to guilt about not having recognised his impersonator as such. There’s certainly enough grumbling about Percival forcing them all into remedial observation training to balance it out.

Queenie visits every so often, usually to chat with Tina, but she does also keep bringing him delicious pastries. He’s in the middle of writing a strongly-worded reprimand about keeping dangerous life-specimens in the research labs (and implying equally strongly that clearly an audit is in order) that he’s going to take great satisfaction in hand-delivering to the Department of Magical Research when the smell of peach pastry lures him out of his office an hour before his usual lunch time – and just in time to catch the tail end of Queenie’s complaint.

“– moping. He keeps forgetting to eat again.” She catches sight of him. “Oh hello, Mr. Graves. How are ya doing?”

“Just fine, Miss Goldstein,” Percival tells her, amused at her quick changing of tracks. “I assume you’re talking about Newt?”

Their nods are eerily unison.

“I don’t suppose you would mind me dropping by to offer him some food? He does still room with you?”

Tina is looking a bit pole-axed, though not as alarmed at his suggestion as he was dreading. Queenie’s smile, on the other hand, is delighted.

“Oh not at all! I’m sure Newt would love to see you, Mr. Graves.”

“Very good. I’ll drop in for lunch then. I have enough leftovers to feed an army at this point.”

Besides he can drop off the sheaf of permits he has been working on on the side. No one seems eager to accuse Newt of anything, not after his role in apprehending Grindelwald, but Percival would rather be on the safe side with the entire thing. Technically some of the creatures he’s issuing permits for are considered too dangerous to have the usual kind of pre-issued permits that just need details filled in, but under the circumstances – and given that Addie has shown no inclination towards mass-slaughter whatsoever – he feels safe enough in issuing special permits and vouchsafing them with his own signature.

Queenie’s smile, if possible, widens further. “You do that, honey. Come on, Teenie, let’s go outside for your break.”

As Percival watches Queenie drag a protesting Tina out by her arm, he reflects not for the first time, that Queenie Goldstein is one terrifying person.
Newt is knee-deep in revisions to his Lethifold chapter – now that he has his own field notes! – when a hand deposits a steaming plate of food right under his nose.

“Not now Queenie,” he mumbles around the nib of his quill. The plate is obscuring part of his sketch and he moves to push it away despite the enticing smell when a decidedly masculine voice says, “Falsely accused.”

Newt turns around to find Percival looking at him with an amused smile, eyes warm, as he drops a slew of papers onto Newt’s already cramped desk.

“Eat your food, Newt.”

Newt is bamboozled enough by this turn of events that he takes a bite of whatever that is on the plate without quite thinking it through. Flavour bursts on his tongue and he swallows happily. His stomach takes that as a sign to announce its need for more food, so he takes another couple of bites before looking back up at Percival.

“It’s good. What is it?”

“Cottage pie,” Percival informs him, still smiling. He looks entirely too put together for Newt’s ramshackle shed in his smart suit and lovely coat. “It’s a family recipe.”

Newt halts mid-chew. “Your family is British?”


Mouth already full of food again, Newt waves him on. The Occamys had seemed quite happy in Percival’s presence the last time and Newt himself is surprisingly unworried about having the man in the habitats without supervision.

When he’s done eating and the plate is clean, Newt contemplates the bits of his manuscript scattered about on the desk, then listens to the excited chirping emanating from the Occamy nest and decides to step outside instead.

Percival is kneeling on the ground near the nest, coat discarded on the grass. Newt watches him tickle Hugo, drawing little squeaks of joy from the Niffler. For all that Hugo pretends to be standoffish and is, admittedly, a bit of a menace around shiny things, he’s really a bit of a softy. Percival’s long, elegant fingers play over Hugo’s fur, much more efficient in his tickling efforts than Prestor’s big paws had ever been. Newt can’t quite tear his gaze away from the way the other man’s hair falls into his eyes in dark, slightly curly waves, the way his broad shoulders flex under the fabric of his dress shirt and waistcoat.

Warmth pools in Newt’s stomach, both heady and comforting. He blinks.

Oh.

Oh.
This hadn’t really happened before. There’d been Leta back at Hogwarts, but even though he’d truly liked her, it had mostly been him doing what she wanted, more curious than anything else. And then, of course, she’d dropped him like a hot potato, and all thoughts of romance had fled for a long time. Yet here he is, watching a man who is undeniably really quite handsome, especially in the warm light of the case, who is good with Newt’s creatures, who treats them like the intelligent, beautiful creatures they are and doesn’t seem to mind Newt’s awkward mannerisms at all. Percival had brought him home-cooked food. And the man’s patronus is a Thunderbird, just like Frank.

Then Percival looks up, eyes as warm as the light, and he smiles at Newt, and Newt relives the moment of realisation again, except now his stomach is also swooping like Hera when she’s feeling especially hungry for brains.

“You don’t have an Irish accent,” Newt blurts out, then immediately wants to kick himself. Seeing Percival’s raised brow, Newt hastens to add, “I travel a lot. Keeping track of accents can be really quite helpful.”

“I did grow up here.” Percival leans closer, adopting a conspiratorial whisper. “I’ll let you in on a secret though. I do sound a bit Irish when I’m really angry. My mother was what my father liked to call a firebrand. It rubbed off.”

Newt doesn’t quite know what to say to that, but that’s all right because Percival is already straightening, absently shushing Hugo as the Niffler lets out a protesting squeak.

“Would you mind if I visited my – the Wampus’ habitat? If you haven’t taken it down.”

“Oh, no, no, it’s still there. Haven’t had the time.” Or inclination, really, but Newt doesn’t have to mention that. “Feel free.”

He lets Percival go, understanding that he might want to be on his own for this. Newt can’t quite help his curiosity though, so he does sneak a peek into the habitat on his way past. Percival is standing at the edge of the little brook, quite still, facing away from Newt. He seems to be searching for something, but when the man returns to the shed a while later Newt can’t tell whether he found whatever it was.

“You could come by more often,” Newt offers as Percival tugs his coat back on. It really is a very nice coat. “If you wanted.”

Percival pauses on the bottom rung of the steps, the tiniest hint of laughter in his voice when he says, “Someone has to make sure you eat regularly.”

Newt interprets that as the yes I will that it is. He doesn’t stop quietly smiling to himself for the rest of the day. Especially not when he finds that the new stack of papers on his desk are permits for every single creature in the case, all signed by the same elegant hand.
His thoughts keep circling back to the Barebone kid. Percival had finally got Tina to spill the whole story and it had left him fuming. Killed by the very Aurors who were supposed to keep wizardkind safe – on orders of the President. Credence Barebone might have legally been an adult, but he’d spent his life abused to the point that he had suppressed his magic, and he was one of theirs. It shouldn’t have happened. He had needed help, not condemnation for actions largely out of his control. It doesn’t help that Grindelwald apparently had some sort of… relationship with him. While wearing Percival’s face. The thought alone makes him shudder.

When he finally turns up in Seraphina’s office with a plan of action, she doesn’t look surprised to see him.

“Walk me through your reasoning for having Barebone killed,” he demands calmly, in lieu of a greeting.

“I was wondering when you’d come to talk to me about that,” she says, then falls silent. Percival waits her out. He has asked his question – now it’s up to her to answer or lose his respect.

“The entirety of MACUSA had been on high alert for over a week between Grindelwald missing and the spikes of unexplained magical activity registered by the threat monitors. Then the attacks started happening. At first there were no casualties, just extensive property damage and a lot of No-Maj witnesses, but at the point that the Obscurus killed Senator Shaw we were running out of options.” Her voice is steady, clinical. “A massive breach of the Statute was already underway. I judged that eliminating the possibility of a further breach of the Statute took precedence. He was a violent force that no one could guarantee control over.”

He pins her with an unyielding stare. “And yet the report states that Scamander and Goldstein had managed to calm him down sufficiently to retake his human form before Grindelwald intervened.”

“Hardly a guarantee, Director. The slightest provocation set him off again. I had the entirety of New York City to think about.”

Silence falls as Percival gives her words the consideration they deserve.

“I understand why you thought you had to make that choice,” he says finally. He tilts his head, considering the weary lines on her face. “That doesn’t mean I agree with your decision.”
That earns him a glare, but he can tell her heart isn’t in it.

“I am still your President.”

“Don’t give me that crap. You need someone to call you on your bullshit, just like every other human being. At least I’m not going to use this as political leverage. Much.”

“What do you want from me, Percival?” Seraphina asks, finally allowing her voice to reflect the tiredness written in the lines of her face. “I can’t undo the past, even if I wanted to.”

“I want a bill. One that will set a precedent for dealing with situations like this in future. If there had been a law about the treatment of traumatised wizarding children who have slipped through the cracks you wouldn’t have had to make that call.”

She doesn’t reject the idea out of hand, which bodes well.

“I don’t have that kind of power, you know that. You’d need to go through Congress.”

Percival taps his fingers on his leg, humming thoughtfully. “I haven’t shouted at Congress in a while.”

Seraphina snorts. “I think they’d prefer it if you shouted.”

“What?”

“Never you mind. I’ll put it onto the agenda for the next meeting.”

“Thank you.” He hesitates. “Can I count on your support?”

Her lips pinch. Publicly supporting Percival in pushing for a bill that covers the treatment of Obscurials would be as good as outright admitting to a misjudgement in the Credence Barebone case.

“If it comes down to it, yes.”

There is a reason why he respects this woman, and he takes care to let it show in his expression as he nods at her.

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Feeling drained after his meeting with Seraphina – or rather after the stress of the last few days has finally caught up to him – Percival makes his way back to his office. He had got everything he wanted out of the meeting and yet a distinctly cat-like part of him is still growling, still itching for an actual physical fight. It’s a dangerous impulse for the Director of Magical Security to have.

His feet know the hallways of the Woolworth building by heart and don’t require his mental attention. Still occupied with a variety of nagging questions Percival isn’t paying as much attention as he should be when turning into his office. He lets out a quiet oof when he collides with a warm body – Newt, his sense of smell tells him immediately – and would’ve overbalanced if the other man hadn’t steadied him with a firm grip on his arm. For two frantic heartbeats he stiffens, frozen in place by the unexpected touch, then, quite without his brain’s approval, his muscles relax into it and he sags against Newt’s grip.

When Percival looks up he finds Newt studying him with a slightly worried look. Suddenly feeling awkward, he clears his throat and pulls away. Newt lets him go but he’s still frowning a little.
“My apologies. I wasn’t paying attention.”

Newt doesn’t say anything, just keeps looking at him before seeming to come to a decision. Slowly but purposefully he moves back into Percival’s space and starts herding him towards his chair. Somewhat perplexed, he lets himself be herded and sinks down into it.

“No damage done,” Newt finally says, retreating back around the desk but not before giving Percival’s shoulder a firm pat. “But you look like you’re working too hard. Have you been sleeping?”

Percival blinks at him. He’s seen fussy Newt before, but it was always directed at creatures.

“Yes?” he says, then winces because there’s no way Newt didn’t notice the question mark at the end there. The he adds, as if that’s going to help anything, “I’m only working half days. That’s hardly a lot.”

This turns out to be a tactical error because it’s nearing two in the afternoon and Newt hones in like a Thunderbird diving for prey.

“In that case, let’s get you out of this office. Have you had lunch?”

Apparently he takes too long to answer because Newt wrinkles his nose. “I’ll take that as a no.”

Having only just bossed him into the chair, Newt is now bossing him out of it again, summoning the coat hanging by the door with a flick of his wand and stuffing Percival’s arms into it. Still feeling slightly bemused, Percival lets himself be towed out of his office and to the nearest apparition point.

He expects Newt to apparate them to the Goldsteins’, but instead Newt lays his hand on Percival’s arm, clearly waiting for him to apparate them somewhere else.

Oh.

Percival doesn’t particularly want to go home to his empty apartment that still makes his skin crawl with phantom memories of Grindelwald occupying the space, but he also finds himself entirely helpless in the face of this new assertive Newt. Well, not really new because Newt has no shortage of assertiveness whenever no people are involved, but it’s still new for Percival-the-fully-human. As well as massively reassuring because he’d missed seeing Newt in his element, sure of himself and his place in the world.

He takes a deep breath. Perhaps it wouldn’t be so bad with Newt there.

Percival’s apartment is in a quiet neighbourhood, far enough away from the Woolworth building that he doesn’t have to feel like he brings work with him every evening if he doesn’t choose to. Newt is peering over Percival’s shoulder curiously as he leads the way through the entrance hallway. Percival takes it as a personal victory that Newt clearly isn’t trying to hide or tamp down on his interest. Then he awards himself some more points when Newt’s eyes light up at seeing Percival’s assorted greenery.

“You keep houseplants?” Newt asks, already inspecting the Dittany plant with a keen eye.

“It’s a… recent development,” Percival admits, eyes roving over the various potted plants. He keeps his personal favourites in the bedroom – most of the plants in the living room are of a more practical nature. Next to the sofa there is a Valerian plant, and the large window is framed by Star Grass, Mallowsweet, and Silverweed. “I suppose it’s for the best. Even the best water-replenishing charm needs to be renewed occasionally.”
“These are all healing plants or potion ingredient suppliers,” Newt observes a moment later and Percival can’t help but smile. It’s refreshing to have someone who doesn’t need everything spelled out.

“I figured I might as well make the hobby useful. My favourites are in the other room.”

It would’ve taken a stronger man than him to resist the hopeful eyes Newt immediately turns on him. Or possibly just one less enamoured. Either way, Percival leads the way to his bedroom and a curl of pleasure settles in his heart as he watches Newt’s eyes grow wide at the charmed ceiling.

Newt has to admit he didn’t expect *this* whenever he had idly considered what Percival’s bedroom might look like. His first thought is of his case – it almost feels like he’s stepping into one of the habitats, with the flowers dotted around the room, fresh air circulating, and the quiet background sounds that must be charmed because they’re still in the city. Even the walls barely look like walls, glimmering faintly like expanding green grass and waving branches. The illusions aren’t overly powerful, just properly focusing on them lets the dark wood panelling peek through, but the entire effect is one remarkably similar to the habitats in Newt’s case. It’s a curious feeling, to think that the man misses the suitcase, Newt’s world, enough to replicate it, whether consciously or not. It does beg the question though – why?

Then he looks up, and for a moment forgets all about possible implications. The ceiling of Percival’s bedroom is enchanted to look like the night sky – and not the dim excuse for it one can see in the city, but a clear, dark blue darkness shot through with a myriad of stars. It looks so life-like that Newt almost forgets for a moment that he’s standing inside at all.

“The Great Hall in Hogwarts has a charmed ceiling like this,” he murmurs. “It always shows the weather outside.”

Percival shakes his head, what looks like a self-deprecating smile tugging at his lips. “It would’ve taken a lot more power and finesse to charm the ceiling of a hall that large. Besides this one always shows the same starry night sky – it could hardly compare.”

Newt turns to him, not bothering to hide his joy “It’s still an impressive piece of spell-work.”

“Newt, I’ve seen the inside of your case. I’ve seen you set up a habitat, come to that. This,” – Percival waves his hand towards the ceiling – “is nothing compared to what you have accomplished with that place.”

Newt can *feel* himself flushing with pleasure at the compliment, genuine where so many others were not. Casting his eyes about in an effort to ride out the embarrassment of Percival possibly noticing his blush, his gaze lands on one of the plants near the head of Percival’s bed and he cries, “You’ve got a Niffler’s Fancy?”

“The Graves estate has always had a large bush,” Percival explains, sounding far too nonchalant over something that most botanists would give an arm and a leg to possess.

Newt touches one of the large coppery leaves, finds a smooth coldness that feels fresh on his skin.

“I made a cutting,” Percival adds, and when Newt looks up at him he is bent down to smell at a bush
of Sea Lavender on the other side of the bed. Newt watches, transfixed, as the man’s finger gently draws over what Newt is pretty sure is a Moondew plant next to the Sea Lavender. Under Percival’s coaxing touch, the blossoms open and silvery light spills forth.

“That’s Moondew, isn’t it?” he asks quietly, once the light has faded away again.

Percival nods, something wistful in his expression. “My mother was very fond of this flower. It reminded her of her old home.”

In the distance an Occamy cry sounds, quiet but unmistakeable, and Newt almost takes an automatic step back towards the living room where he’d left his suitcase before he remembers the sound-replicating charms layered all over the room. He opens his mouth, glances at the suddenly tight line of Percival’s mouth, closes it again. Years of ingrained habit telling him that this isn’t his business, that he should let the matter lie, are warring with the certainty that Percival the man deserves his attempt at comfort just the same as Prestor the Wampus did.

He steels himself, then asks, perhaps a little more bluntly than is appropriate, “Do you have trouble sleeping?”

Percival’s startled eyes fly to Newt’s face and he keeps himself open, relaxed, non-threatening. Then the other man laughs, a harsh bark without mirth.

“Yes, I do.” He waves his hand at the charmed bedroom, something bitter twisting his mouth. “I suppose it’s obvious with what I’ve done to the place. Can’t seem to fall asleep without it.” He rubs at his eyes. “And this way I know immediately that things have changed when I wake up.”

Newt studies Percival’s face, the crow’s feet fanning out from his eyes, the tired slant to his eyebrows. “When you were Prestor you didn’t have so much trouble sleeping, as far as I could tell.”

Percival only shrugs and Newt lets the topic drop. There would be time later, he would make time later, but for now he hopes it will be enough to offer, “I’ve found physical exertion can help with falling asleep, sometimes. You could come over to supervise the Occamys again if you wanted? They’re getting even rowdier without you there.”

This draws a real smile from Percival, one that only deepens when Newt adds, “We were going to have lunch.”

“You realise the irony here?” Percival says, nevertheless gesturing for Newt to precede him from the room “Usually it’s someone else having to hound you to eat regularly.”

Newt hides his own smile behind his hand as they enter the kitchen. “I do tend to get a bit distracted, don’t I?”

Percival hums his amused assent and starts pulling ingredients out of his pantry and cold-stock.

Newt wanders into the living room, curiosity drawing him towards the coffee-table laden with books and papers.

“What are all these?” Newt asks, pointing to a pile of mail when Percival turns to look at him.

The man pulls a disgruntled face. “Oh, those. I’ve been getting pigeons from what feels like every researcher with a vague interest in human transfiguration or animagus studies in the area. There was even an owl from England the other day. Conspicuous as all hell, I have no idea how your Statute isn’t shot yet.”
Newt expertly ignores that last part. “You haven’t been opening them?”

Percival shrugs, his back turned to Newt again while he dices some vegetables. “I have nothing to tell them. I don’t know why I managed to turn back.”

Newt’s eyes roam over the many pieces of paper, filled with Percival’s neat handwriting, spread out over the coffee table. “You’ve been researching the draught?”

“It seemed like a good idea, considering.” Percival sighs. The last of the sandwiches assembles itself and with a motion of his hand – it’s still amazing to Newt just how easily wandless magic seems to come to the other man, and how much he can do with it – the tray drifts into the living room, settling down in the one empty spot on the coffee table. “There isn’t much to be found.”

Sitting down on the sofa beside Newt, Percival nudges his hand with a sandwich. Newt grins at him, fondly remembering Prestor’s tendency to poke him into eating with his snout, and obliges him by taking a large bite, even while his eyes keep flitting over the notes. There’s a page filled with notes on Wampuses that Percival seems to have appended and it’s fascinating.

“Did you know about the Penita Creatura?” Percival asks him, his own sandwich already halfway gone.

Newt swallows his mouthful of really quite good sandwich. “I did. When I was little I was convinced that my animagus form would be a Hippogriff, until my mother explained to me that it wasn’t possible. Broke my heart at the time. Once I was older I researched for myself and stumbled over the draught. I decided pretty quickly that it wasn’t a viable option.”

Percival snorts. “You don’t say.” He frowns down at the papers. “Do you have any idea how I was able to turn back when it’s supposed to be impossible?”

“Theories, at most,” Newt mumbles around another bite of sandwich. “I can look into it?”

Percival’s voice is warm. “I’d appreciate that, Newt.”

“You do realise it will involve me asking you the questions you’re refusing to answer coming from the other researchers?” Newt asks because any theory is going to be pretty much worthless without Percival’s first hand account to back it up.

“I don’t mind if it’s you,” Percival says, so simply, as if it’s the easiest answer in the world and Newt stops mid-chew to stare at him, wide-eyed. He finds a fond smile directed at himself, and it somehow manages to make Percival even more attractive. That there’s such warmth still to be found in the other man’s eyes after everything he went through is nothing short of amazing.

“Oh,” he says eloquently, and wonders whether maybe he should do something about this crush of his. He couldn’t expect Percival to make the first move, not after everything, but the other man doesn’t seem averse. Contrary to popular belief, Newt is usually good at picking these things up – it’s all about body language after all. Percival’s is much more open around Newt and he has never once flinched away from him or shied from his touch. In fact, so far he seems quite happy to be touched by Newt, though he can’t quite be sure whether that’s a leftover from his time as Prestor, who had been extremely cuddly.

Experimentally, Newt scooches a few centimetres to the left until their legs are touching.

“Eat your sandwich, Newt,” Percival tells him, and now he sounds fond too.

Newt eats his sandwich. But he doesn’t move his leg – and Percival doesn’t move away.
Percival starts coming to visit the case almost every afternoon after that, spending time with the creatures and Newt. Newt isn’t quite sure what convinced Percival to take him up on his offer, or if he had simply needed another reassurance that Newt doesn’t mind his presence, but he’s glad of Percival’s company anyway. Addie, the Occamys and Hugo specifically are all much happier with Percival around more often and besides, Newt can put his plan to keep casually touching Percival into action.

At first it’s small things, when he’s still trying to be careful of Percival’s personal space – claps on the shoulder, little guiding touches to the elbow, the small of his back when they’re walking. The first time Newt lets his touch linger on Percival’s shoulder, the other man starts a little in surprise, then relaxes into the touch, just like he had done in Wampus form. From then on Newt gets bolder and before he knows it he doesn’t even think about the small touches anymore, just automatically reaches out and never stops being delighted by Percival’s consistently pleased reactions.

Then there is the day that they both end up half-conked out on the ground in front of the Bowtruckle tree after a very trying feeding session (Rosemary is acting up again – the poor dear is lonely), Percival’s head resting in Newt’s lap, and when Newt gently starts stroking soft hair a rumbling purr works his way out of Percival’s throat. They both freeze, Percival going cross-eyed as he peers down at his mouth while Newt has to take a few deep breaths to cope with the adorableness. His fingers begin moving again, almost of their own volition, and the next time Percival starts to purr they both just ignore it for the moment, though Newt would swear that the tips of Percival’s ears have turned ever so faintly red.

It’s only later that he starts to wonder. Just how much of a Wampus remains in Percival even after his transformation back?

The realisation has been building for a while. At first it was only little things, getting distracted by patches of sunlight, more appetite for meat than he used to have, the occasional flare of instincts. By the time Percival actually honest-to-Morgana purrs out loud – and in front of Newt no less – the situation has solidified to the extent that the fact that he never used to be able to make anything close to that sound finally breaks the Hippogriff’s back. As much as Percival wants to believe that he has put the Wampus behind him, that transforming back into a human had meant escaping whatever Grindelwald had done to him, it’s clear that something in him has changed.

Newt, too, has been giving him more and more searching glances, but so far he hasn’t said anything, though Percival is pretty certain that Newt has been adding to the notes he copied from Percival. Sometimes, though, his glances are different, lingering in a way that the warm spot of hope in Percival’s chest likes to think has nothing to do with scientific interest.

Today, Percival had brought home-cooked lasagne and they had made themselves comfortable next to the chittering Occamys while eating.

Newt groans happily, patting his stomach and Percival tries very hard not to gaze at him adoringly.

“Where did you learn to cook like that?”
“My mother, mostly,” Percival tells him, scraping the last bit of sauce off his plate. “It’s a useful skill.” He grins. “It gives me an excuse to visit you, for one.”

Newt glares. “I told you you are welcome any time.”

Percival pats his thigh in acknowledgement. “I’m just glad I’ve stopped wanting meat with absolutely everything.”

Newt straightens at that, eyes sharp, though not less warm for it. “I was wondering what other things have carried over.”

“I thought you’d notice that,” Percival half sighs, half grimaces. “You would’ve made a terrific Auror, Newt. You didn’t even know me before.”

“If you’re dodging the question because you don’t want to talk about it just tell me and I’ll drop it,” Newt tells him bluntly, eyebrows twitching in that irritable way he gets whenever people are beating around the bush. It’s one of the things Percival so likes about him, his straightforwardness.

“No, it’s fine,” he says, plucking idly at a leaves of grass. “I should probably talk about it to someone and I’d rather it be you. You were there for most of it anyway.”

Newt’s expression softens, and when he moves closer until their sides are touching, Percival gratefully leans into the contact. He doesn’t remember being this addicted to touches before – before, before, sometimes that word makes him sick – but maybe it’s just a function of having met Newt. He doesn’t want touches from anyone else. Just Newt.

“I’m worried, is all,” he finally murmurs. “I fought for a long time not to… lose myself in the Wampus, and now that I’ve turned back there’re still… things that linger.”

“Hmm?”

He sighs. “I didn’t notice it at first, but some of the instincts are still there. A lot quieter now, but not gone. I was almost late returning from my lunch break the other day because there was a nice patch of sunlight in the break room. I don’t even care about sunlight usually and yet apparently suddenly I wanted nothing more than to take a nap in it. Something’s different with my senses as well. I don’t think they’re sharper really, but I seem to be more attuned to them? I don’t quite understand it. And then there’s the purring.”

He can almost hear Newt grinning, the little shit. “That was quite adorable, you have to admit, Percival.”

“I have to admit nothing.”

Newt is still grinning, but lets it lie, thank Morgana. Instead he offers, “Your reaction times are definitely faster than the average human as well.”

“Huh.” Percival hadn’t noticed that, but then he’d never been a slouch when it came to reflexes. He trusts Newt’s observations enough to make a mental note to explore that further. He should do some of the Auror training simulations soon – he needs to get back into duelling shape again anyway.

“It’s fascinating, you know,” Newt says, a note of delight in his voice. “No one knows anything about magical creature transformation except that it’s a bad idea to try it. You’re literally the first person to have come back from it as far as we know. That makes your insight utterly unique.”

Percival grunts, thinking of the ever-growing pile of mail on his poor coffee table. “I’m more
concerned with the possibility that I’ll turn back at some point and be stuck for good. I like being human, Newt.”

Newt’s response comes gratifyingly quick and steady. “I don’t think that’s very likely. If you managed to turn back once, you can probably do it again.” His eyes light up. “Which, actually, that would make you a magical creature animagus.”

When Percival only sighs a little glumly, because while becoming an animagus had always been a vaguely tempting notion he certainly hadn’t planned on doing it like this and finding these things out by trial and error is not his idea of a good time. Newt gently prods at him.

“How did you manage to turn back? What did you do?”

It’s clear he has been wanting to ask that question for a while. Everyone has been wanting to ask that question, but so far Percival’s scowl had deterred most and his persistent silence the rest.

“I don’t know,” he grumbles. “I certainly didn’t do any magic. One moment I let the instincts rush in so I could at least jump in between you and the damned Lethifold, wishing really hard I was human so I could actually perform a patronus charm, and the next I just… changed. And don’t even start in on the wishing thing because believe me, I’d been wishing that before.”

Newt sits up from his customary slump, eyes alight with a familiar intensity that usually just gets directed at interesting new behaviour of some deadly creature. “What did you say about instincts?”

Percival frowns. “It’s sort of like letting the Wampus take over? Usually I tried to keep my thoughts separate, but my body worked better when I stopped thinking rationally and just let the cat do what it wanted.”

Newt is still staring at him like he holds the key to all the mysteries of the universe. “So you weren’t fighting the Wampus?”

“I was, at the beginning. I thought if I let the instincts take over that’d be the end. Grindelwald had told me that everyone goes mad eventually, and I thought letting go of my rational thoughts would do that, so I always pushed back. But then those smuggler assholes invaded the case and I didn’t have a choice anymore. I would’ve been nigh useless in a fight without the Wampus instincts, so I let go. And then my humanity didn’t disappear.”

“So you were fighting against the instincts all the time until the attack on the case?” Newt asks, hands twitching as if he wants to write everything down right this moment. “And then you stopped fighting to save the case… did you feel different after?”

Percival shrugs. “A bit more settled maybe? But I think a large part of that was just having managed to be useful for once, despite being stuck in a Wampus body.”

“You don’t have to be useful to – ” Newt starts, puffing up a little in protective outrage, but Percival silences him with a finger to his lips.

“Peace, Newt. That’s just a personal failing.”

“Fine,” Newt huffs. “And then in the lab you did the same?”

“Yes, though I was more focused on wanting to be human then. I didn’t need to be to deal with the smugglers, but the Lethifold would just have killed me within seconds and that wouldn’t have raised your chances much.”
“I’m still not happy with your need to throw yourself in between me and dangerous situations,” Newt tells him, chin tilted stubbornly. “That just seems like a waste.”

Percival stares at him. “Saving you could never be a waste, Newt.”

The blush that spreads over Newt’s freckled cheeks is absolutely delightful.

“Yes, all right, I didn’t mean it quite like. Just, your life isn’t worth less than mine.”

“Which is why I have a say in who I would sacrifice it for,” Percival points out. “That’s literally my job, you realise? I protect. That’s the oath I swore and the duty I accepted when I became an Auror, and again when I was promoted to Director.”

“Well, just try not to kill yourself while you’re at it,” Newt mumbles, then yelps when Percival pokes him right back.

“If you agree not to kill yourself trying to study or rescue some dangerous creature. You’re in more danger than I am, most days.”

Next to him Newt shifts, one hand absently reaching out to pat one of the more daring Occamys who’d stuck her head out of the nest. “That seems fair.”

They’re silent for a while, only interrupted by Hugo’s curious nosing as the Niffler decides to plop himself down in Percival’s lap and Newt’s indignant mutter of, “I swear he used to be more standoffish. Why does he like you more than me?”

Percival grins smugly, fingers already tickling lazily at the Niffler’s sides.

“What’s your theory then?” he finally asks, before Newt can get too distracted.

“Hmm? Oh, about your transformation back?” Newt rubs at his chin thoughtfully, and it’s all Percival can do not to reach out and take those slender fingers in his own. “We can’t be certain, of course, but I think it might’ve had something to do with acceptance.”

“Explain.”

“Well, the Penita Creatura, it’s a potion that’s supposed to transform you into the magical creature closest to your innermost being, yes?”

Percival has to suppress a shudder. “That’s what Grindelwald said.”

Newt shifts even closer, a warm hand landing on Percival’s arm in silent support. “That means that in some way, the Wampus came from a part of you, from your own personality. The potion drew it out and forced you into that shape, but it didn’t create all those traits from nothing. My guess is that most wizards drive themselves mad trying to fight what’s, in essence, a part of themselves. When you let the instincts take over you accepted that part of yourself, just as you accept your humanity, and that allowed you to change back.”

Percival shrugs, a little impressed but also very aware of the limitations of their theorising. “It’s a viable theory,” he says. “But there is no way to really know.”

“No, I suppose not.” Newt sighs, a little morose. “Is that why you don’t want to talk to the researchers?”

“Part of it,” Percival allows, “but I know researchers – there were several at Ilvermorny – and once
they got their teeth into a project they just wouldn’t let go. I don’t have the time or patience for that. Besides, if it became widespread knowledge how I survived, some other idiots might try to copy it. Research only ever stays theoretical for so long.”

Newt raises an eyebrow. “That would be quite risky.”

“Yes, well, wizards don’t tend to be the most logical people. I’d rather not be indirectly responsible for some stupid sod getting stuck in magical creature form.”


Percival smiles with rather more teeth than strictly necessary. “They’ll learn.”

“Poor souls.”

“If they keep pestering me they have it coming.”

“Whatever you say, dear.”

Grinning, Percival swats Newt lightly on the back of his head, ruffling already mussed hair further. Even in his most hopeful dreams while he was trapped in Wampus form he hadn’t expected this easy comfort between the two of them, light-hearted in a way none of Percival’s other relationships ever were, and yet no less serious for it. Even when dreaming of returning to his proper human form, a part of him had always thought that something would change between them, once Newt realised who he really is. Prestor’s attachment to Newt had been endearing – he might have acted strangely intelligent, but as far as anyone knew he was still a creature, and people never look twice at creatures who have decided to adopt a human. Percival’s attachment, though technically the same because he is Prestor, could have just as easily been seen as invasive. There had been some awkwardness at first, of course, but things have settled into a comfortable rhythm that he would be loathe to upset.

“What did you think caused Prestor’s intelligence? Since you didn’t know I was human at the time?” Percival asks idly, as though Newt’s answer didn’t suddenly seem rather important to him. He has been wondering about this for a while, though he hadn’t wanted to broach the subject before he was sure Newt wouldn’t take it as a placing of blame that it very much isn’t. After half an hour of being cross-examined about his transformation back, he feels he is due at least this one answer of his own.

“I thought you were raised in captivity,” Newt admits quietly, looking uncomfortably close to guilty again. “With the way Prestor, you, acted it seemed unlikely you had ever been part of a Wampus family unit.”

Percival is silent for a moment, then murmurs, “Well, technically you were correct on that one. I can state with definite certainty that I was not raised by Wampuses.”

Newt stares at him, gaze flickering between Percival’s eyes and his twitching mouth, then he starts to laugh. When their mirth has finally run its course, Newt raises himself up on his elbows and Percival doesn’t even think about reaching out and brushing his messy fringe away from his eyes. He does catch Newt’s look of pleased surprise, and it sends warm shivers through his heart.

Then Newt leans forward, long body stretching until his lips find Percival’s, a brief press that pours comfort into Percival’s soul.

“Does that mean what I think it means?” Percival asks when they have drawn apart, gaze roaming over Newt’s face, looking for any hint of uncertainty, doubt, or regret. He has known that he’s laughably gone on Newt for some time now, but he hasn’t really wanted to let himself believe that Newt could like him back. Dashed hopes, after all, are infinitely worse than realism from the outset.
He finds none, just a gentle smile, luminous as the man it belongs to, and perhaps a tinge of nervousness.

“It means whatever you want it to mean, Percival.”

Percival’s hand finds one of Newt’s where it’s resting on the grass. He has been told so many times to live in the moment, to not overthink everything because he can’t help but look twenty steps into the future and worry about what he will find there.

He trusts Newt. He should also trust him to know his own mind.

“It might make it hard to get rid of me later.” he warns nevertheless, covering up a terrifying amount of certainty with humour. “I’ve been told that Wampuses are very loyal to their chosen mate.”

Newt, of course, looks pleased by the comparison. “Then it’s a good thing I have no intention of letting you go. Besides, the creatures would miss you terribly. Hugo already pines something wicked when you don’t visit regularly.”

“We can’t have that, of course,” Percival says dryly.

Newt grins and, much to Percival’s regret, levers himself off the ground.

“Come on then. Queenie and Tina invited you to stay for dinner.” Catching Percival’s dubious look, Newt adds dryly, “And they won’t take no for answer, believe me.”

Percival sighs. “Queenie is going to have a field day. Are you an occlumens by any chance?”

“Nope,” Newt tells him, surprisingly cheerfully considering the imminent breach of their privacy. “Just think of it this way – worrying about it means you suffer twice.”

Percival levels him with an unimpressed stare, even as he lets himself be tugged towards the shed. “Except when worrying about something means you can avoid the suffering through careful planning.”

Both the Goldstein sisters are bustling around in the kitchen where delicious aromas that make Percival’s nose twitch are wafting through the air. As predicted, Queenie halts as soon as Newt and Percival enter and makes a loud oooing noise, though that may also have something to do with the fact that Newt had neglected to let go of Percival’s hand.

“Oh golly, that’s wonderful!” Queenie says brightly – presumably in answer to whatever Newt is thinking because when Percival gives his mental shields a firm prod they appear as impenetrable as ever.

Tina’s eyes flicker between the three of them. “I don’t want to know,” she announces, going back to setting the table. “You can tell me when you’re ready.”

Percival flashes her a small, grateful smile.

Dinner is a pleasant affair. Percival isn’t expected to talk much and he enjoys listening to Queenie follow along the convoluted trails of her thoughts, Tina’s occasional dry interjection, and Newt’s stories about his travels when coaxed to share. Just a few months ago he wouldn’t even have imagined finding such contentment anywhere, let alone the Goldsteins’ house. The food is divine, of course, and by the time desert is cleared away he doesn’t think he could eat a crumb more. Conversation has tapered off into content silence.
“It’s late,” Percival finally says, though he is loathe to move. He feels full and comfortable and Newt’s presence softens the world. “I should get going.”

Tina opens her mouth, probably to remind him not to attract Mrs Esposito’s attention (as if he hasn’t been sneaking around that woman for numerous visits at this point), but Newt beats her to it.

“You could stay with me,” he offers, looking a little bashful but not at all like he doesn’t want Percival to accept.

Percival casts a quick glance at Tina, who shrugs, and Queenie, who grins, then drags Newt back into the guest room and closes the door behind them.

“Are you sure?” he asks softly. “We only just took the next step. You don’t have to push yourself on my account.”

Newt’s cheeks flare bright red. “Just to sleep, I was thinking. We’ve done that before, though you were a bit furrier at the time.”

“A bit?” Percival exclaims, mock-insulted. “Are you calling me hairy?”

Newt flips open the case, looks up at Percival through the fringe of his hair. “It’s called British understatement, dear. Now come on. I still need to feed the creatures who need more than one meal a day.”

“None of us would’ve minded getting two,” Percival points out as he follows Newt down the steps.

Newt glances back at him, surprised and searching, then grins. “If you remember, I did feed you twice a day. You were most insistent.”

Percival only grins at him, unrepentant. “Let’s get to it then, shall we? Your bed is calling my name.”

The feeding round goes rather quickly after that, though of course Newt still bestows individual attention on every creature. After, Newt goes for a shower while Percival opts for some quick cleaning spells, transfigures himself a pair of pyjamas from a stray towel, and tucks himself under the covers. It’s not that he’s ashamed of his scars – and in some sense Newt has seen them already anyway – but he simply doesn’t want any of that darkness to intrude on this first night with Newt. There would be time for exploration and explanations later.

Also, this way he has a perfect vantage point for watching Newt come in, hair still damp and only clad in a towel, entirely unselfconscious about his body. If Percival wasn’t already smitten, this certainly wouldn’t have helped because Newt is fit and just about as scarred as he is.

Newt smiles in the face of Percival’s interested gaze and ducks into the washroom. He emerges again with his hair dry and sporting pyjama bottoms.

Noticing Percival’s raised eyebrow, he shrugs. “I tend to run hot during the night. You don’t mind, do you?”

“Not at all,” Percival tells him, quite sincere, and draws the covers back so Newt can crawl into bed next to him. “It’s strange, I almost feel like I should have six legs and a tail again. I got quite used to lounging on your bed.”

Newt’s laugh is a gust of air ruffling Percival’s hair. “As much as I like Wampuses, I rather like you like this.”
Percival rolls over onto his side, lets his forehead rest against Newt’s until their breaths mingle.

“I’m glad. It would be a terrible thing to have to contend with my past self.”

Newt frowns at him, the drowsiness in his green eyes momentarily parting. “Well, don’t.”

“As you wish,” Percival murmurs, feeling drowsy himself. “Good night, Newt.”

“Sleep well,” Newt whispers.

And he does. Though waking up cuddled into Newt with his arm thrown over Newt’s lithe waist is even better.
Chapter 8

viii. Trials

Percival sighs down at the mess of papers littering his work desk. The next session of Congress is in four days and he’s still knee-deep in formulating a bill around the Obscurus case that actually has a hope of passing. Given that he also has the work he’s actually employed to do, which currently consists half of still dealing with Grindelwald’s backlog and half of trying to keep what feels like the entirety of MACUSA from falling into chaos, progress is slower than he would like. Seraphina already has been by a couple of times in the past few days to glare at him for stretching the limits of his ‘half-time workday’ and he has found himself curiously reluctant to just take the lot of papers home with him. He used to do it all the time, poring over case-files while eating dinner, but recently he has tried to keep his home a space to relax in, unassociated with work. He gave in yesterday, when it became absolutely clear that he wouldn’t be able to finish his bill proposal if he didn’t continue to work on it at home.

A brisk knock on the door interrupts his increasingly irritated thoughts and he waves the door open. Tina steps through in a manner that can only not be described as ‘determined barging’ because he’s still her superior.

“Newt told me you’re working on a bill to prevent what happened to Credence happening to anyone else,” she says, going straight to the matter at hand.

Percival is too tired to complain about Newt’s rather loose definition of ‘confidential information’.

“Yes,” he acknowledges blandly, only just stopping himself from rubbing at his temples to try and head off a brewing headache. “Anything else you want me to confirm or deny, Auror Goldstein?”

“I want to help,” Tina tells him, ignoring the thinly veiled sarcasm with aplomb. “Credence deserved better, and you look like you’re about to keel over, no offense, sir.”

“Offense damn well taken,” he grumbles, but waves her over to the one visitor’s chair. “Have you ever worked on a bill proposal? I won’t deny that I could do with the help, but only if you’ll actually be of use.”

That’s putting it a little harshly perhaps, but Tina has always had a stubborn streak almost as bad as Percival himself. She juts out her chin, eyes sparking with determination. “I’m a fast learner.”

Percival sighs. “Fine.” He pushes one of the smaller stacks towards her. “Start reading through these old cases and see if any of them seem relevant.”

Tina nods, already reaching for the topmost sheet, and Percival turns back to his first attempt at a draft, which currently boasts more crossed-out lines than legible text.

Once more unto the breach, he thinks and spares a fond thought for Theseus, who introduced him to the British playwright in the first place. At least his old friend is probably drowning in just about as much paperwork as Percival is, with his similar position in the Ministry. Fondness is replaced by a stab of guilt when he remembers that he has yet to write to Theseus about recent developments – no doubt Theseus already knows about the events concerning Grindelwald, but Percival has found himself reluctant to commit any of the more personal aspects to paper. It has always been easier to talk with Theseus in person, not that that’s likely any time soon. Theseus, as far as Percival is aware,
Newt knocks at the dark wood of the door, not quite hesitant but not entirely comfortable either. Percival had told him to come by his apartment any time he wants, but it still seems a little presumptuous for him to turn up unannounced. It was Queenie who had given him the impetus to go – Newt hadn’t seen Percival since the man had started to work on the bill he wants to present to congress in earnest, but now Tina seems to have been sucked into it too and Queenie is sending him with a pointed reminder about sleep and food.

The door finally opens to a bleary-looking Percival, whose face lights up at seeing Newt.

“Newt,” he says, voice warm in a way that still feels so very new to Newt. “Come in. Did something happen?”

Percival’s eyes flicker down to Newt’s suitcase and Newt can’t help but sigh. One of these days he’s going to live down his first few days in New York.

“Just visiting,” he tells Percival, whose small smile widens as he moves in close for a kiss. That’s new too. The kissing. Though Percival seems determined to get Newt used to it, and Newt isn’t at all opposed to this plan.

Entering the living room, he spots Tina on the couch, scribbling furiously on a sheaf of paper already covered in her chicken scratch.

“Queenie wants to remind everyone that eating and sleeping are both activities necessary for the continued well-being of the average human,” he announces, a little louder than his usual wont, and is rewarded with Tina jumping on the couch while Percival just sighs at his back. Queenie didn’t put it quite like that, but if she wants him to convey her messages then she has to deal with him interpreting what she said in a way that makes it more understandable and logical. Besides Newt had never been one for swearing.

“But we aren’t done yet,” Tina mumbles, hair in disarray and looking a little wild around the eyes.

“You still have tomorrow,” Newt tells her gently, setting down his case next to the wall so he can march over and tug her to her feet. “Go home, Tina. Queenie is getting worried and you need to sleep.”

Tina glances at Percival, who nods.

“I’ll see you at the office in the morning.” Percival smiles briefly, though his eyes are shadowed. “Get some rest, Tina. You’ve been a great help already.”

Newt accompanies her to the Muggle-shielded front steps, and has just opened his mouth to ask Tina
whether she’s all right to apparate when she does exactly that, disappearing with a loud crack.

Newt shrugs to himself and returns inside.

In the short time he has been out, Percival has planted himself back on the sofa, nose buried in a book entitled ‘The Laws of the Magical Congress of the United States of America, Volume III’. It sounds like the dullest book on earth, in Newt’s considered opinion, but that’s not the root of his frustration.

“I meant you too,” he tells Percival firmly, tugging the book out of the other man’s hands. “You look like you haven’t slept in a week.”

Percival scowls at him, but it lacks some of its usual ferocity. “I have slept,” he grumbles. He sighs, voice quieter. “Just not very well.”

Newt frowns, eyes flitting over Percival’s features. He looks tired enough that he should have no trouble falling asleep, certainly hadn’t seemed insomniac the nights he’d spent with Newt. Unless –

“Would you mind me staying here tonight?” he asks, as casual as he can manage. “I wouldn’t want to disturb Tina and Queenie again this late.”

One corner of Percival’s mouth twitches up, a little dry, a little amused. He knows exactly what Newt is doing. But he doesn’t complain. Instead he says, voice soft underneath the roughness of a frustrating day, “When I said you can come visit any time you like, staying overnight was included.”

Newt blinks at him, at the openness of Percival’s face, the relaxed set of his shoulders. Sometimes he wonders if anyone else gets to see this side of the man – even with Tina, just moments earlier, there had been some reserve, hardly noticeable for anyone who doesn’t make a study of body language, but clear enough to Newt. Percival, he thinks, is a bit of a marvel.

“My bed or yours?” he asks simply and is unsurprised when Percival immediately opts for the former. It’s flattering, in a slightly absurd way, that he seems to be more comfortable in Newt’s home than his own. Flattering and sad. One of these days Newt is going to sleep with Percival next to the Moondew under the enchanted ceiling, but he’s willing to wait until Percival is ready.

That settled, he nods towards the paper-strewn coffee table. “Will tomorrow be enough?”

Percival sighs, pushes a hand through his hair that Newt notes with some concern seems to be trembling slightly. “It’ll have to be. I’m getting too tired to think properly right now.” A deep frown etches itself between his (impressive) eyebrows. “Part of the problem is that we are law enforcement, not law-making. That’s not usually in our purview. As the Director I have some say about anything security-related, but I’ve only done this,” - he waves a hand at the stacks of paper – “two times before.”

“You’ll do well,” he tells Percival because the man is starting to look haunted again and Newt really can’t have that. “You’re very competent.”

Percival stares at him, then barks out a laugh. “You might be the first person in a long while who’s said something like that and meant it. And not angled for something.”

Newt risks a pointed eyebrow-rise. “I am angling to get you into bed so we can sleep.”

This time Percival’s laugh is honest, and when he finally rises from the couch to bestow a kiss first on Newt’s forehead (and Newt is never going to get over how adorable it is to see Percival stretch up slightly on his tip-toes to reach) and then on his waiting lips, Newt hums in pleasure.
It doesn’t take long to tumble into Newt’s bed after that, their nightly rituals already adjusted to each other. They still haven’t had sex, not that Newt is in any hurry on that front, but their bodies mould together like they’ve slept together like this for years.

Newt wakes to pained whimpers and Percival’s thrashing limbs. Blinking a little in the dim light he scoots backwards to escape the reach of still uncomfortably bony elbows and assess the situation. They’ve slept in the same bed several nights now, and Percival, as far as Newt had been able to tell, had had no trouble sleeping peacefully – then again, he wouldn’t put it past the man to save up his nightmares somehow to have them in the privacy of his own bedroom and not be a bother to Newt or something equally ridiculous.

A sound almost like a growl tears itself from Percival’s throat, and his face is furrowed in distress. Newt’s heart skips a painful beat.

“Percival?” he tries, uncomfortably aware that he really doesn’t know what he’s doing when it comes to humans. “It’s all right, you’re safe. We’re in the case – ”

Percival stops thrashing, becomes entirely still and for a short moment Newt thinks it worked, his voice enough to bring Percival out of whatever terror his mind is visiting upon him. Then Percival convulses once, mouth open but silent, and suddenly he changes, human body replaced by a Wampus one almost instantaneously.

Newt gapes, all thoughts ground to a halt. Does that mean –

Silver eyes open, darting around wildly and a whimper-growl ruffles the bedsheets, his breathing loud and laboured. Newt yanks himself back into the present firmly because while everything in him is screaming Prestor he now knows that the Wampus before him is Percival and that Percival is probably terrified right now.

“Shhh,” he says, moving closer slowly as to not startle Percival, “it’s all right, you’re all right, Percival. May I touch you?”

At the sound of his voice Percival calms a little, gaze latched onto Newt who tries his best to look composed and hopeful. He nods his big cat head, ears twitching.

Slowly, gently, Newt reaches out to smooth the ruffled fur on top of Percival’s head, fingers automatically finding the man’s (the Wampus’) favourite scratching spots. Once Percival doesn’t look like he’s going to panic any moment, Newt draws back a little, keeping one hand on Percival’s head while the other goes groping for his wand on the bedstand.

“I’m just going to make sure the transformation is like it was before,” he tells Percival, still moving slowly, but the other man seems to have recovered his higher functions because he nods before Newt has even finished speaking. His body language is still coiled, on edge, but the panic is gone.

Newt flicks his wrist, movements as small as he can make them, and his breath catches in his chest. In the light of the diagnostic spell, Percival’s fur has turned into the night sky, black deepened into true shadows around silver pinpricks of light, stronger than the glimmer Newt has noticed before – it’s almost as if the spell light draws out the silver hair threaded through black until Percival appears as a creature of shadow and the pure light of stars that fades as soon as the spell light dims to nothingness.

“Well,” Newt says, eyes wide at the unexpected display – he really needs to update his notes on
Wampuses because their fur reacting to magic is not something he has ever read anywhere – “Seems like you’re exactly like you were before you transformed back at MACUSA. I can’t detect any outside influence.”

Percival’s gaze is going rabbity again, tail twitching in agitation as much as it can squished between him and the bed. Newt reaches out, cupping Percival’s face in his hands both to soothe and make him look at Newt.

“Calm down, love. I’m quite certain it’s reversible.”

Percival blinks at him, questioning.

“I think,” Newt says, even as a distant part of his mind is marvelling at the mere possibility, “I think you are an animagus now.”

Even as a Wampus Percival is still clearly able to convey what?! in a feline sort of way, all twitching ears, scrunched nose, and quivering whiskers.

“I know it’s supposed to be impossible, but it was also supposed to be impossible for you to turn back human in the first place. It would make sense.”

Percival’s expression doesn’t indicate that it’s making sense to him, so Newt says, “Just trust me on this, please? Either way you’ve got nothing to lose.”

Percival almost seems to sigh, body going limp as he nods.

“All right, do you know how animagi switch between forms?” At Percival’s shake of the head, Newt continues, “The key lies in will power and acceptance. You have to accept your animagus side as part of yourself, as a facet of your spirit. Once you are reconciled to all aspects of your personality, you can focus on human thoughts and wants. Picture yourself in your human form then channel your magic into making it reality. Breathe with me, one, two – ”

Newt is still holding on to Percival’s face when the shift starts and he quickly lets go, catching Percival’s still slightly bony shoulders as the other man flops back onto the bed, wholly human and pyjama-clad once more.

“Fuck.”

Percival collapses against Newt’s shoulder, breaths coming in short staccato gasps. Then he follows his earlier statement up with an equally unimpressed, “What the hell.”

Newt shifts so Percival’s head isn’t resting on his knobbly collar bones anymore. “Congratulations, love. You have turned hundreds of years of magical theory on its head entirely and become the first attested magical creature animagus.”

Percival’s groan is muffled by the skin of Newt’s chest. “This is just going to make the researchers even more rabid, isn’t it?”

“Undoubtedly,” Newt says, petting Percival’s soft black and silver hair. No matter how much he squints, the hair remains entirely unmagical. A lovely salt-and-pepper, certainly, but no hidden night sky. He supposes that’s rather for the best.

“Did you know that your fur reacts to the light of spells?” he asks, mind flitting through the options. “It must have something to do with your state of health because that definitely didn’t happen when I healed you at the beginning. Though I suppose your fur was rather lank and patchy then – ”
He cuts himself off at Percival’s restless movement next to him. The other man doesn’t look like he’s listening to Newt, the expression in his eyes still a little manic. Right, timing. Newt wants to kick himself. Theseus did always tell him that his sensitivity and brain-to-mouth-filter go out the window whenever he makes some new creature-related discovery.

“Please explain how this is possible,” Percival pleads, voice almost too quiet to pick up. He has shut his eyes tightly, mouth pinched.

A part of Newt thinks this development is wonderful, unprecedented as it is, but he reins himself in. He isn’t the one who has to cope with this sudden, violent change to his life.

“I don’t know,” he says, running a soothing hand down to Percival’s neck when he tenses. “I think maybe the potion does turn you into an animagus. We just never knew because no one ever stopped fighting the change long enough to accept that part of themselves. It seems to be a more complete change than the standard animagus transformation, and more dangerous for it.”

Percival’s expression is still pinched, though his breathing has evened out. “Why now? Why not weeks ago?”

Newt hesitates. Percival is still far too tense, not quite shaking beneath his hands but coiled tight, as if he is afraid of turning back into a Wampus any second now. But avoiding this conversation would hardly help his mental state.

“You were having a nightmare, right before you changed,” he says, keeping his voice carefully neutral. “Combined with the stress of the last few days – and don’t tell me you haven’t been stressed, you’ve been working on that bill of yours every free minute – it might’ve been enough to trigger the change.”

A small, wounded noise escapes Percival’s throat and he turns to smother it in Newt’s skin. “I was dreaming about being Prestor, stuck in a body that wasn’t mine.” He doesn’t look at Newt, traces shaky trails across Newt’s abdomen as a short, harsh laugh bubbles up into the air. “It’s strange, most of my nightmares have been about the time I spent in Grindelwald’s hands, but when I was still human.”

When he falls silent again, Newt tightens his grip, drawing him in closer until they lie intertwined on the bed, heartbeats slowly beginning to match. He has suspicions that the very way Percival’s brain works may be different in Wampus form, the traumas dealt with differently than what Percival endured when human-shaped. Percival, or Prestor as he’d thought then, had bounced back from his captivity and torture so quickly, where a human would have been catatonic or at least seriously impaired beyond the physical for much longer. Yet other things seem to have bled into human Percival’s mannerisms and abilities, far more than an animagus usually adopts traits of their animagus form. Right now is probably not the best time to bring any of this up, however, not when Percival is still grappling with the extent to which he has been changed. So he stays quiet, offering silent comfort, glad that he can at least do that.

Finally Percival stirs. “What time is it?”

With the hand that isn’t still buried in the soft hair at the nape of Percival’s neck, Newt gropes for his wand and casts a quick *tempus*.

“Half five. You still have time.”

“I’m hardly going to go back to sleep after all this,” Percival says, and Newt is cheered by the trace of his usual dryness.
Cheered enough that he doesn’t even protest when Percival gets up to search for the papers abandoned yesterday, though the man could do with additional rest. It will all be over tomorrow, he hopes, and then he can badger Percival into an extended stay in the bed and perhaps even talking about this new discovery. Despite everything Newt still feels slightly giddy. A magical animagus. Childhood dreams, it appears, sometimes do come true – if not entirely how he’d envisioned it at the time.

The Pentragram Office is still as opulent as Newt remembers from his first ill-fated glimpse of the chamber. He’d thought it built to impress then, and hasn’t changed his mind now that he has entered it as something other than a felon about to be interrogated. And executed, but he hadn’t known that at the time.

He has already given his own testimony –

Yes, we did manage to calm Mr Barebone to the extent he could assert control over the Obscurus. It is my firm belief that Auror Goldstein and I could have diffused the situation peacefully if not for Grindelwald’s interference –

No, I don’t know what happens to Obscurials that old, and your actions robbed the entire wizarding community of finding out, not to mention helping a severely abused young man –

Yes, the Obscurus itself is dangerous, but so are we all. Any one of us here could seriously jeopardise the Statute if we so wished –

Newt doesn’t know if he did any good, but Percival smiled at him when he sat down again – small and quick and understated, but a real smile – so it probably wasn’t disastrous. He’d been dubious when Percival had told him there was a high chance that Congress would call him in to consult on this bill, given his ‘expertise’ in the matter of Obscuri, but a summons had indeed reached him for after the session’s break for lunch. Newt had missed Percival’s petition for the newly named ‘Barebone Bill’ as it had been delivered in the first half of the session, but he is aware of the general outline of what Percival is trying to do. When given the chance to stay after his testimony, his curiosity hadn’t allowed him to leave, despite his discomfort in the echoing hall. Besides there’s Tina sitting next to him, a comfortable presence after her own testimony.

Now that he is watching Percival Graves square off against the Magical Congress he finds that there’s another reason to make the stay worthwhile. Because Percival like this, purpose and fury intermingled into one unstoppable force is magnificent. At first Newt doesn’t even realise that Percival is angry, his rage burns so cold, so calm. He doesn’t shout, doesn’t even raise his voice, just speaks in a quiet tone of steel. Only when the tension in the air around him mounts to almost palpable electricity and the tiniest hints of magical energy spark along Percival’s skin does it become obvious.

Congress, in Newt’s opinion, is holding its own rather well in continuing to question the bill because Newt is pretty sure some wizards would have turned tail and run by now.

“You claim that this bill won’t put our community at risk, Director,” a wizard in a pale blue robe says. Newt has no idea who any of these people are, he hasn’t been introduced (and frankly, doesn’t want to be) and didn’t pay attention in any of the classes that might have enlightened him. “Yet recent events have shown what kind of damage the immense destructive force of an Obscurus can do to a city and to the Statute. Yet you want to protect those responsible for such risk.”

From his vantage point Newt can see Percival’s lips curl ever so slightly, as if restraining himself
from growling.

“As it is my job, the government’s job, to protect to protect every single one of its constituents, yes I do. It’s on us that the creation of an Obscurus was possible in the first place.” He tips his head, lips twisting wryly. “As for the risks? If you had bothered paying attention to my proposal, you would know that this is a first response measure. As with any distressed witch or wizard, attempts should be made to help and, failing that, the risk would still be eliminated, as per the law.”

“And how do you quantify these ‘attempts’?” another wizard asks, this time someone with a truly atrocious haircut and it’s not like Newt normally even notices these things.

He probably shouldn’t find the way Percival’s eyes flare even while his voice remains perfectly calm attractive. Some of the less suicidal congress-wizards and -witches are hiding behind conveniently placed bits of paper at this point. The President doesn’t look like she would be inclined to save anyone from Percival’s wrath should they push him too far.

“At the digression of the Aurors first on the scene, as is standard practice. After all we are all trained in dealing with unstable, traumatised individuals. All this bill is designed to ensure is the fair treatment of Obscurials, or other similar cases.” Percival’s gaze sweeps over the stands like a crackling wave of frost. “As is clearly laid out in section 2b of the proposal.”

“Why are we even spending time on this?” Blue Robe demands, and if Newt were feeling more charitable towards him he might have been impressed by his courage in the face of dwindling support. “The chances of another Obscurial are – ”

“Clearly rather higher than we would like to believe, Harting,” Percival interrupts him flatly. “If you are so sure the bill is irrelevant then stop arguing against it.”

Atrocious Haircut, who is clearly in some sort of cahoots with Blue Robe, eyes Percival with such undisguised distaste that Newt has to take a deep breath to stop himself from doing something ill-advised. Percival had warned him that he and Congress are less than fond of each other, but he hadn’t expected it to be this bad. Well, he supposes most of the assembled witches and wizards don’t seem too hostile, or perhaps just have better self-preservation instincts.

“Why exactly are you pushing this so hard, Director Graves? Is it because of your… personal involvement?”

Newt can see the last edges of Percival’s patience fray and next to him Tina makes a strangled noise like an angry cat. A frigid chill descends on the chamber. Percival’s voice is even quieter, barely above a whisper and yet it carries throughout the room effortlessly. “I am pushing this, as you so eloquently put it, because of the wish to see the magical community in the United States thrive under the protection of MACUSA and because of basic human decency. Which you seem to be woefully lacking.” His face is a mask of blandness that could rival any politician. “As for your insinuation of unprofessional conduct, take it before the appropriate committee if you wish to make a formal complaint against me. My involvement, or rather lack thereof, in recent events has already been examined.”

When Atrocious Haircut looks like he’s about to open his mouth to push the matter further, the President rises with the soft rustling of silk robes and a forbidding expression.

“Director Graves has been vouched for. His conduct is not in question here.” Her gaze is almost as flinty as Percival’s. “Are there any other concerns before we put the motion to instate the Barebone Bill to a vote?”
No one speaks. The chill in the air recedes. Newt Scamander is in love.

Meetings with Congress always leave him in a sour mood, but this time was unusually bad. Add onto that the stress of the last few days and the accidental discovery that he’s apparently some kind of magical creature animagus, and Percival is about to reach a breaking point. At least this session wasn’t for naught – a fair number had still voted against the bill, but the necessary two-thirds majority had been reached. The Barebone Bill would be officially adopted after the Department of Magical Law had a look at his proposed wording.

As soon as he has managed to free himself from the press of bodies exiting the Pentagram office, he finds himself flanked by Tina on the one side and Newt on the other.

“Thank you, sir,” Tina says quietly once they’ve reached the quieter peace of deserted hallways. “Credence deserved this much.”

He nods at her, serious. “It’s my job, Goldstein.”

She snorts, entirely unladylike and so very honest in the way he’s long come to associate with her – Tina Goldstein would make a terrible politician, but Aurors can usually be as blunt as they like – and Percival’s lips twitch.

“Can you honestly tell me your predecessor would’ve done this?”

Percival can’t. Director Calding wouldn’t have given a sideline issue like this one the time of day. Still. “That just means he wasn’t doing his job properly.”

Tina rolls her eyes at him, but appears to accept that he understood her point, as she changes the subject entirely. “Some of us Aurors are going to the Giggling Leprechaun after work. You are invited to come if you want.”

She doesn’t press him for an answer, just gives a small wave and heads off in the direction of the DMLE while Newt and Percival continue towards the main apparition point in the atrium.

He’s tired by the time evening rolls around, something bone-deep that makes him wary, but. A drink sounds nice and he’s still painfully aware that there are upsides to socialising with his colleagues that he hadn’t considered before Grindelwald. Even if he mostly just wants to hide at home with Newt and the creatures, he knows he shouldn’t let what happened to him stop him from living his life as he sees fit. People do always call him stubborn.

Newt opts to remain behind, assuring Percival with a smile that he won’t mind spending a few hours alone in the suitcase with his creatures even though he’s still parked in Percival’s living room. Which makes a lot of sense because that’s what Newt has been doing long before Percival was even in the picture and he really needs to stop overthinking these things.

The bar is noisy and warm light spills over him as he enters. The group of Aurors is immediately conspicuous in the way they claimed a whole corner – and the one with the best sight-lines he can’t help but notice. Even Akecheta is there, and she’s usually even less in favour of social interaction with her colleagues than Percival used to be.
He finds a spot next to Goldstein, who smiles at him convincingly enough that he can’t help but believe her sincere in her happiness at seeing him.

“Boss!” several voices shout, and Johnson wastes no time in asking, “What’re you having then? This is a celebration after all.”

Percival raises his brow at Tina, who pinks slightly.

“I thought the bill’s success deserved it,” she defends.

It’s not that he disagrees, but most around the table don’t seem too bothered by the entire thing. At least no one looks disapproving either, more along the lines of ‘if the Director wants to waste his time with a bill that’s probably never going to be called on that’s his business’.

“We worked hard,” he acknowledges, and takes the Guinness Johnson pushes into his hand in absence of Percival voicing a preference. As far as beers go it’s a good one, but he only has to take a sip to remember why he doesn’t usually drink alcohol. There has been a lot of wizardly whining about the No-Maj prohibition making it harder to get a good drink, but it has never bothered Percival.

The conversation turns to Imerez’ latest tragic romance, a topic that thankfully doesn’t require his input at all. Mostly he just listens quietly, letting the din of voices run over him while he tries to relax. He hasn’t been in such a crowded, loud space in… a long while. The back of his neck keeps prickling uncomfortably. He does weigh in at one point when the conversation turns to outrageous travel stories, of which he has quite a few. Not as many as Newt, he would guess, but he has got around the US and Europe.

Percival stays for a couple of hours, only excusing himself when he can feel himself getting twitchy, wanting to swish a tail that isn’t even there. He really should build up his tolerance of crowds again. The last thing he needs is to accidentally transform in public.

Newt is still up when he returns, lounging on Percival’s well-worn sofa with a book, a sight that just about makes Percival’s heart skip in his chest. To see Newt so comfortable in Percival’s environment is a gift he never even expected.

“Percival,” Newt says, sounding warm and happy. Then he takes a look at Percival and immediately stands. “You’ve been overdoing it again.”

Percival leans into him because he can, because he’s too weary to pretend, because Newt doesn’t judge. Newt’s arm snakes around his waist, as steadying as the earth they stood on.

“Have you fed your menagerie already?”

Newt’s smile crinkles the corner of his eyes. “I have. Hugo and Addie are both sulking because you weren’t there.”

That almost stops him short. Has he really been around enough that he would be missed for skipping an evening’s round? Huh.

“We can’t have that,” he says, straightening up from his slouch. “I’ll go pay them a visit before bed.”

“As if they don’t already adore you enough,” Newt murmurs, and doesn’t sound like he’s complaining at all. Not even when he has to pry Addie off of a half-smothered Percival half an hour later so he can drag him to an actual bed. After all Newt is even soppier about all of these creatures than Percival’s best efforts could make him.
Kowalski Quality Baked Goods is a cheery little store, airy and well-maintained. It doesn’t quite make up for the bewildering variety of magical creature-shaped pastries, buns, breads, and cakes that seem to glare at him with raisin and sugar eyes, but Percival appreciates the effort. He has chosen a time so early he knows the store wouldn’t be crowded – which does have the downside that Kowalski notices him immediately, wide smile turning into something more thoughtful as his eyes dart over Percival.

Someone must’ve given him a description of Percival, for the first thing he says is, “So you’re the big cat?”

Percival’s mouth twitches. “Not usually, but yes, that is how you first met me, Mr Kowalski.”

“Please call me Jacob,” the other man tells him with a wide smile. “After all I’m still grateful you didn’t eat me.”

“Very well.” All these lovely smells of baked-goods are seriously interfering with his concentration. Percival has to work not to make his nose twitch. “Although there really never was any danger of me doing so.”

“You never know, with Newt,” Jacob says easily. “What can I do for you?”

Percival hadn’t quite expected the slightly bewildering variety of baked-goods he’s now facing, so he asks, “What does Newt usually buy?”

Jacob points at the Niffler buns.

“I’ll have one of those and two Wampus pastries please.”

Jacob’s face lights up. “You like them then? It would be nice to have the official stamp of approval.”

“I do,” Percival allows, seeing no reason to lie. “I’m rather partial to peach.”

“Is that some kind of magic thing? Me accidentally choosing something you’d like?” Jacob looks curious and a little bit excited, and though Percival’s first instinct is to scoff because what magic would do that, he swallows it down. If he thinks about it, how would a No-Maj who knows nothing of magical theory know to distinguish what magic does and doesn’t do?

“It doesn’t work like that,” he says, watching Jacob wrap up the three baked goods. “There’s no magic that would randomly let you know my fruit preferences.”

“Oh.” The man almost looks disappointed. “Queenie would know.”

Percival smiles wryly. “Queenie is a legilimens. She knows everything about everybody. If she chooses to.”

Even the mention of Queenie brings an almost painful mix of adoration and sadness to Jacob’s face. Percival studies him for a moment, silently considering whether to stick his nose further into this or not. But really, what kind of choice does he have – Queenie gave even better belly-rubs than Newt and has been nothing but kind to him since.

“Has Queenie not been by recently?” he asks quietly.

Jacob looks up from the mess he’s making of the wrapping paper in his distracted state, startled.
There’s resignation there, above all. “Queenie says the law doesn’t allow us to be together.”

Once he has made a decision, Percival doesn’t dither.

“I will see what I can do about your situation.” At Jacob’s stunned expression, he adds, “Not the law itself, that’s beyond my influence. But there might just be some loophole we can exploit to let you and Queenie be together.”

Jacob is still staring. “Why would you do that? You’re Tina’s boss, aren’t you? Shouldn’t you be, you know, enforcing the law and all that?”

“There’s a difference between the law and the Law. One I will protect till my dying breath. The other is only so good as the judgment of the people who enforce it.” Percival shrugs. “This is why Tina was right to want to help a No-Maj boy who was being beaten by his mother, despite the law forbidding contact with No-Majs. Some considerations belong to the spirit of the law, not its wording.”

Jacob still looks a little wide-eyed, but he nods, something like understanding dawning in his eyes. When Percival takes the pastries, the other man refuses to take his money and just tells him to deliver his best wishes to Newt in payment.

Stage two of his plan involves a little more effort on Percival’s part, but since it’s Saturday and Newt is busy trying to placate a sulking Rosemary yet again he has the time. The Graves Estate lies in Upstate New York within appallable distance – for him anyway – a sprawling mansion overgrown with ivy and surrounded by large, old trees. Percival hasn’t spent any significant amount of time here since he was a boy, but to his senses the place will always feel like home. His family’s magic has sunk deep into the earth over the generations. Whenever he visits, his own magic stirs in recognition and that isn’t even taking the numerous wards into account that are keyed to him as the only remaining Graves. No stranger would make it past the treeline, much less the house itself. If Percival had been here that night, Grindelwald would not have been able to overpower him.

He shakes his head, eyes on the familiar outline of roof and chimneys in the rosy sky. It’s no use dwelling on what ifs and he has a job to do besides. Deep within him the Wampus stirs, content in these natural surroundings. It appears that it’s not only Percival’s magic that his home place calls to. For a moment he imagines loping through these woods in his cat-form, free and unfettered in a way that not even Newt’s case can give him. But only for a moment, before his mind uneasily snaps back to reality. Percival is a man who knows himself, inside out, flaws and strengths and everything else, who needs to know himself to be able to do his job – and if that means accepting that a small part of him is now more cat than human after what Grindelwald did, he will pay that price. That doesn’t mean he’s ready to quite consider changing on purpose.

He sighs again, then finally starts walking again. The last time he’d been here was with Theseus, almost a year ago now, one of the rare times the other man had made it over the pond to visit. It’s sobering to think he’s neglecting his heritage so much. Then he rounds the south corner of the house and can’t quite help a smile at the golden- and bronze-dappled light that greets him in the back. The Niffler’s Fancy is large for its species, almost a tree rather than a bush, and gleams even in the subdued sunlight. Much of the garden is overgrown and slightly shabby, but the Niffler’s Fancy stands strong and proud as ever. If nothing else, it’s a valuable thing, should a Graves get desperate enough to sell it, but Percival has always liked it more for its queer beauty. He’d whiled away many an hour sitting under its branches with a book when he was young. Whenever he does visit these days, he toys with the idea of hiring a gardener to take care of the grounds, but it always seems like an unnecessary indulgence since he’s hardly around to appreciate the plants anyway. Maybe if he
ever makes it to retiring age. Though he supposes he could try his own hand at more extensive gardening at that point.

Percival takes his time carefully taking a cutting of the Niffler’s Fancy – they’re notoriously fussy plants – and tucks the sprig away in his coat next to the wrapped pastries.

Newt isn’t in the living room when Percival returns, nor in the bedroom where he sometimes lies down to look at the charmed ceiling, so Percival makes his way down into the case with his cargo in tow.

Newt looks up from the mess of papers on his workbench. “Ah, there you are. I was beginning to think you had skipped out to avoid today’s plans.”

“There are plans for today?”

Newt squints at him, as if he isn’t on a different wavelength to literally every other human being on this planet on a regular basis. “Now that the hearing with Congress is done with I thought you would want to learn how to control your animagus form.”

Ah. That. Percival really wishes Newt hadn’t framed it the way he did – as if it’s a matter of want rather than necessity.

“You have ideas, I take it?”

Newt nods, face already lighting up in scientific excitement, but before he can say anything Percival raises a hand.

“I’ll agree to it if we eat breakfast first.”

He floats the Niffler bun and one of the Wampus pastries forward, lips twitching at Newt’s irritated huff.

“Fine,” Newt concedes when the bun keeps bumping against his hand, though not entirely gracefully. Percival mentally takes pity on him and decides to leave the cutting of Niffler’s Fancy for later.

Newt has barely swallowed his last bite of bun before dragging Percival out of the shed. When they end up in Addie’s habitat, Percival raises an eyebrow at him, even as he lets the Nundu snuffle all over him in greeting.

“This is a place you feel comfortable in,” Newt explains. “And it’s less cramped than inside the shed.”

Percival nods, scratching at the sensitive spot under Addie’s chin. She purrs at him, far louder than anything he can manage even in Wampus form. “How do you want to proceed?”

“I think treating it like a normal animagus transformation should be our first plan.” Clearly sensing some of Percival’s unease, Newt steps closer until he can lean against Percival’s side. With Addie hogging his other side, he could not be more effectively cocooned in support. “I honestly don’t think you’ll have a problem, Percival. You have managed the transformation twice now – all you need is a bit of practice.”

Right. A bit of practice. Percival can do practice. Newt, not exactly fooled by Percival’s forced calm,
“You need to relax a bit. Nothing bad is going to happen to you.” Newt starts rubbing soothing circles into the back of Percival’s neck and he shudders happily despite himself. Newt has such clever hands.

“I’m not sure you continuing that is conducive to getting me to relax,” Percival points out, a little dryly. While they’ve been stepping out for a while now, they haven’t gotten around to sex yet, and Percival is in no hurry. Newt is clearly content with the way things are going – slowly – and Percival himself has never had an insistent sex-drive, no matter what office gossip would have one believe.

“Oh.” A hint of a blush colours Newt’s cheeks, not bashful, Percival doesn’t think, but rather caused by a sudden influx of awareness. To his credit, Newt doesn’t actually point out that Percival is far less tense after this exchange, but then again, Percival is honest enough to point it out to himself. Newt sends him a quick smile. “Are you ready to begin?”

Percival takes a deep breath, looks for the reservoir of calm that he employs in tense situations, and nods.

“All right. The first step is to think of the Wampus. Anything you associate with your animagus form – the feeling of your body, scents, sounds. Try to remember what it felt like being Prestor. Well, being you, while I thought you were Prestor. Oh, you know what I mean.”

Smiling to himself, Percival sinks deeper into recollection. He’s still listening to Newt – he always listens to Newt, even when half-lost in instincts – but he keeps his breathing even and his mind full of Prestor-him things. The feeling of grass beneath his paws. A tail swishing away gnats. Newt’s scent. Addie draped all over him, her purr rumbling through his body.

“Good. Now add feelings, instincts you remember. What drove your Wampus mind?”

The thrill of running. Defending his territory. Saving the case. Newt’s nearness.

“Last step.” Newt’s voice comes as if from far away. “Look for your magic and pull it towards that image you have created. Keep it in mind as clear as you can.”

The warmth and glow of his magic is always there, like a ball of light in his chest. Percival reaches for it with the ease of long practice, mind still full of cool forests and many paws. The image becomes reality within the blink of an eye. Colours recede and scents assault his nose, ears pricking against the sound of Addie’s breathing close to his head. He concentrates on Newt’s hand on his shoulder, fingers gently rubbing smooth fur. With a roar that sounds distinctly approving, Addie starts licking the top of his head. While she had recognised Percival in human form, it’s clear she prefers this one.

“Well done. I knew you could do it. Do you want to spend some time in this form or turn back?”

Percival tilts his head, considering. He doesn’t feel as confined in this body now, not when the choice to turn had been his, but what he really needs to know is that he can turn back without too much difficulty. He taps the ground twice with a forepaw.

Newt nods in easy acceptance. “All right. What you need to do is reverse the process. Think of everything you associate with your human form, hold it in mind, and then tap into your magic. I know you can’t technically use it right now, except for this, but it is still there.”

Percival would frown if he could. He remembers the yawning absence of magic throughout the entirety of his time spent in Wampus form. And he doesn’t remember consciously having reached for
his magic either time he managed to turn back, though it’s entirely possible that he did so without realising. It is an instinctive thing to do for any wizard, after all. But he trusts Newt, so he fills his head with images of his human body, the feeling of his fingers curling around his wand, a razor brushing over his jaw, the clack of shoes on MACUSA’s polished floors. Then he reaches into the space that his magic should be, and though he still doesn’t feel it beyond perhaps the tiniest whisper that couldn’t even light a candle, the same blurring sensation heralds his return to his human body.

The first thing he sees is Newt beaming at him.

Practice goes easier after that.
Chapter 9

ix. Journeys

Percival awakens in his bedroom with the sudden start of someone who is entirely not used to their own bed anymore. It takes a moment for him to remember – Newt is gone. Travelling through Canada for some magical creature-related reason or other. Percival had stopped paying attention after the word ‘leave’ had left Newt’s mouth, too busy dealing with the sudden sinking feeling in his stomach. Newt has already sent one letter that now lies on the night-stand, embarrassingly creased, but Percival’s reply hadn’t yet prompted an answer. He tries not to worry about that too much – Newt did say that messenger birds have a hard time finding him when he’s travelling, especially through regions with many magical creatures who tend to subtly shift the magic of the land. Either way it’s easier for Newt to initiate contact, which at least lets Percival know that he’s still alive and well enough to write.

A small snore from his right makes him turn his head, and a smile works its way onto his face, unbidden. Hugo is sleeping in the plant pot, curled around the glimmering stem of the Niffler’s Fancy in a manner reminiscent of a human child embracing a stuffed toy. Hugo always looks affronted when someone calls him cute, but it’s hard to think anything else faced with such a picture. The small plant reminds him of the delighted look on Newt’s face when he gave him the cutting, the warmth of Newt’s breath as he whispered thank you in Percival’s ear.

With a quiet sigh, he turns his head again, gazing up at the magical starry sky above. Though neither of them had outright named it as such, he knows that Newt’s two-week trip is meant as a trial run of sorts to see how well he would cope without Newt to prop him up. It should be a ridiculous notion. He’s 40 years old, has spent his life mostly alone. Newt isn’t even that far away, just a trip to Canada (possibly looking for Wampuses?), trying to find as many magical creatures on the way as possible, and probably getting into unreasonable amounts of trouble. As it is, Percival is coping just fine – he just isn’t used to missing anyone. There’s a space in his life that’s very much Newt-shaped, and while it doesn’t impact the practicalities of his day, now that Newt is gone Percival feels his absence wherever he turns.

He knows that it has mostly been him keeping Newt in one place for so long, that the other man has become restless being confined to the city. It’s an inherent flaw in the both of them, one always eager to travel the world, one rooted in the city he protects. Percival has never thought much of the future in terms of himself, but now that he is faced with one with Newt, yet often apart, he finds his heart rebelling.

He heaves another sigh, then pushes his way out of the blankets to pad into the washroom. He takes care to keep his movements quiet as to not disturb Hugo, who’s still snoring peacefully. Percival goes through his morning routine even slower than usual, quite aware of the kind of look Seraphina would level at him if he came in early to work yet again. By getting up now he’ll have at least an hour to pass before he can show his face at the Woolworth building, but he can use the time continue practising his animagus transformation. The first time he’d transformed without Newt there had been… trying. Just the knowledge that Newt wasn’t there to talk him down if he got stuck had made him tenser than was probably quite wise, but he’d pushed through the rising fear. He needs to be able to do this on his own, and only practice will allow him to attain the smoothness of transformation he has seen in other animagi. Needless to say he hadn’t got stuck, and ever since then he has made it a point to transform at least once a day. The process has been becoming smoother and quicker, which
in itself is enough to keep him working on it. The newest challenge he set himself is transforming mid-motion, so he steps out of the washroom already concentrating, trying to shift in the middle of the next step. Six paws land on his hardwood floor with slightly more force than he was hoping for, but he’s still moving, having preserved some momentum during the change. Rumbling happily to himself he pads into the kitchen for breakfast.

His month of half-days is nearly over. Come next week he’ll finally be back to full work days, and with any luck he’ll be cleared for field work again not long after that because if he has to spend another week at his desk going through paperwork he might just snap. As the Director of Magical Security he doesn’t get to do as much field work as he would like as it is – reducing that to zero hasn’t improved his mood at all. It hasn’t helped that half his Aurors seem to think his bad mood stems entirely from Newt’s absence and keep sniggering about it.

Case in point, Goldstein the younger coming towards him with an obnoxiously large grin as soon as he enters the DMLE floor.

“How are you doing without Newt, Mr. Graves? You look a little tired.”

“You aren’t even supposed to get access to this floor,” Percival grumbles, but does take the coffee she offers from the tray in her hands. “Are you bribing my Aurors with coffee?”

Queenie winks at him. “I’m bribing you with coffee, aren’t I?”

Percival sighs without any real ire. The cup is warm in his chilled hands and Queenie’s coffee is always exactly right. The woman has a gift. “I’m doing just fine, thank you.”

“It’s all right to miss him, you know,” Queenie tells him, then gives him a light pat on the arm. “You’re both rather attached after all.”

And isn’t that the truth.

She cocks her head at him, looking almost serious. “Come over for dinner again, honey. You could use the distraction.”

Then she swans off before he can even voice a reply, leaving him to make his way to his office with a half-smile and a half-frown on his face, which is entirely normal for an encounter with Queenie. And because the universe likes to laugh at him, the other Goldstein bursts into his office not five minutes later, already babbling about some kind of potions ring at full speed. Life at the DMLE, he thinks with all the conviction of an elderly wizard complaining about the youth of today, really used to be quieter, but he can’t quite bring himself to mind.

A week into Newt’s absence, the wards around Percival’s apartment trigger, alerting him of a witch or wizard on his doorstep. His hand flies to his wand, even as the doorbell rings. Aside from Newt there isn’t really anyone who would visit him at home. Few enough even know where he lives, though the number increased drastically after the Grindelwald debacle, when a troupe of Aurors went through the place. Besides it’s far too early on a Saturday morning for any sane person to be awake, and the fact that he’s already fully dressed and has just spent half an hour tending to his plants doesn’t say anything at all about his mental state. He lets a minute pass, then two, tension thrumming through him. But whoever is outside only waits placidly, then rings the doorbell again. It might still be a trap, but Percival is fairly well-rested and brimming with magical energy and once he used to think no one but the best could beat him. A couple of metres away from the door, Percival opens it with a wave of his left hand, right hand pointing a rock-steady wand at the doorway.
The last person he expects to see is Theseus Scamander, but the combination of ginger hair, freckles, impossible cheekbones, and surprisingly kind smile is unmistakeable. On the other hand Theseus usually owls ahead if he’s coming for a visit, so Percival mutters a quick revelio, relief tightening his insides when the glow of the spell doesn’t wash away Theseus’ visage.

Theseus raises a brow. “Hello to you too, Perce. Is this a new greeting technique you’ve developed here in the States?”

Percival lowers his wand, tension slowly easing. “Oh you know, what with the recent overabundance of dark wizards…”

“I thought there was only one?”

“As I said, overabundance.”

Theseus still hasn’t stepped over the threshold into the hallway, his eyes, greyer and less green than Newt’s, steady as he waits for Percival. He looks entirely relaxed, hands open at his sides, only a hint of sympathy showing in the corners of his mouth. No judgement of Percival’s behaviour towards a dear friend darkens his brow. Theseus has always been good at making others feel at ease when he thinks they need it, and Percival would’ve been chagrined at finding himself at the other end of that treatment if he weren’t so grateful for Theseus giving him this chance to be as comfortable in an unexpected situation as he can be.

“Come in, Thes,” he says, stepping aside and closing the door behind his friend. “Newt isn’t here you know.”

Already halfway to the living room, Theseus throws him an inscrutable look over his shoulder. “I’m not here for Newt.”

By the time Percival makes it into the room, Theseus is sprawled across the sofa, somehow managing to look entirely at home despite having been in the apartment only a handful of times before. His gaze flicks across the many plants, quicksilver.

“Picked up a new hobby, Perce?”

“It’s soothing,” he says blandly, and Theseus’ sidelong glance tells of his understanding of all Percival isn’t saying.

Theseus prods at the closest leaf, an offshoot of Valerian. Percival has never quite understood how the man can be so self-contained and yet so free in his manner at the same time. “I’m sure Newt was tickled.”


They share a look of long-suffering fondness. Theseus has lived with Newt’s obsession with all the creatures in the entire world far longer than Percival has, and Percival... well, he has become fond of Newt’s menagerie, but Newt takes it to a whole new level.

The Percival asks, “Why are you here, Theseus? I do appreciate seeing you, but this is a bit out of the blue. You usually send an owl ahead, at least.”

“I did,” Theseus tells him with a grimace, “but Herbert keeps getting lost. Newt’s terribly fond of that idiot owl but I should probably invest in another one that’s actually reliable. As to why I’m here, it’s the first time off the Minister deigned to allow me, now that Grindelwald is safely locked up in Azkaban. I’ve got two weeks of leave.”
One of these days the mere mention of Grindelwald’s name will stop dousing his back in ice water. “Azkaban is not going to hold him for long.”

Theseus’ gaze is frank and open. “No, I don’t think it will. But what else can we do? There is too much political manoeuvring going on for anything else.”

Percival shrugs, gaze dark.

“Tell me?” Theseus asks quietly. “We got the outline of events, and Newt wrote to me once, but you are the one who lived through it.”

No forms on his lips before he can even think about it. But. This is Theseus, who has been his friend for years, who went through a war with him, always at his side as long as troop movements allowed, who helped put him back together again after. Theseus’ presence is comfortable in a way very few people who’re still alive can claim. Somehow that never seems to change, even when they go months without seeing each other. Theseus has also never done well not knowing the extent of a situation. Percival closes his mouth, searches Theseus’ face. He finds lines of worry and grief, an almost-plea in his eyes.

Percival closes his eyes. He hasn’t even told the entire tale to Newt, who knows much of it anyway, especially of the later days, and the debriefing hadn’t required all the details.

Don’t hide yourself away, mo mhuirnín. You are allowed to feel, his mother used to tell him. Percival hasn’t really lived his life according to her advice in this, but sometimes he still hears her soothing, low voice and grieves a little that he ended up more like his father than her.

“Promise me you won’t ask me again after this,” he whispers finally, and opens his eyes to find Theseus nodding, hand over his heart.

“I shall not.”

Percival nods, a little jerkily, then goes to the kitchen to make himself some fire-whiskey laced coffee – he deserves it, dammit – and Theseus tea.

Then he sits down on the sofa, drinks his coffee in two large gulps and tells Theseus everything, all the pain and darkness and helplessness, the terror of Grindelwald. He has doubted many things in recent times, but he doesn’t doubt that the other man would understand. Throughout it all Theseus sits quietly, sipping at his tea, and only the progressive tightening of the corners of his mouth tells of what goes on in his mind.

At the end of it all, Theseus swears quietly and draws Percival into a tight hug. He goes willingly, breathing slowing to match Theseus' heartbeat. It’s a slow unwinding, body and soul, and Theseus doesn’t say anything when Percival’s eyes start to droop, only shifts a little to stretch them both out on the sofa in a more comfortable echo of the many nights they spent huddling in the same bunk to the sound of distant explosions.

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Percival wakes to Theseus’ flailing arms and muffled swearing. When he opens his eyes, he finds himself face to face with Hugo, whose paws are busy patting down Theseus’ pockets. With Percival half on top of him Theseus can’t move much, never mind defend his pocket watch.

“Merlin’s beard, Perce, you could’ve warned me this rascal was staying with you,” Theseus grumbles when he sees Percival’s eyes open.
Percival grins, but he does take pity on Theseus and scoops a wriggling Hugo up into his arms before the Niffler can empty all of Theseus’ pockets. Hugo pouts at him, but settles into happy wriggling when Percival starts to tickle him just the way he likes it.

When he looks up again he finds Theseus watching him thoughtfully.

“Newt really must like you very much if he left one of his precious babies with you.”

“I’m not sure he did,” Percival says, despite the pleased flush running down his back at Theseus’ words. “I just found him loitering here the next morning. Newt didn’t say anything about it.”

Conclusions flitter over Theseus’ face, then he blurts, “Don’t tell me you made friends with the Niffler of all people!”

Hugo stops wriggling in order to glare at Theseus.

“No specieism please, Thes,” Percival admonishes, keeping his face straight through sheer force of will. “Besides Hugo is quite a sweetheart once you get past his tendency to rob people blind.”

Theseus throws up his hands in defeat. “You’re starting to sound like Newt,” he grumbles. “What happened to the old law-abiding, grumpy Percival Graves?”

Percival shoots him a sidelong glance. “Do you really want me to answer that question?”

He can see the moment understanding dawns in the wince Theseus doesn’t even try to hide. “I take your point. Anyway, you should get off my legs, unless you want them to start snoring louder than you just did.”

Percival snorts, but does as asked, setting Hugo down on the table as he straightens. He isn’t too bothered about keeping a leash on the Niffler in his own home. He doesn’t have that many valuables in the first place, and he knows where to get them back if they do disappear. Mostly, the Niffler’s Fancy seems to keep Hugo happy.

“Should I find a hotel to hole up in for the two weeks?” Theseus asks, stretching his arms and yawning. Apparently Percival’s impromptu nap had been catching.

“Oh, stop being an idiot and go take the guest room. Newt will be back in a few days and he’ll be happy to see you.”

Theseus smirks at him. “Not as happy as he’ll be to see you, I’d wager.”

Percival resolutely keeps down the reflexive blush and shoves Theseus in the direction of the guest room. Theseus goes, laughing.

After a quick lunch, Theseus pokes him in the shoulder. “You look like you could do with some de-stressing. How long has it been since you’ve duelled someone?”

“Too long,” Percival sighs. “I’ve been on desk work for weeks.”

“Oh, don’t tell me you haven’t run yourself through the training. I know you better than that.”

Percival’s expression clouds over. The training courses are useful, but only to a degree. He has no idea how he’d fare against a real opponent right now.“It’s not the same thing.”
“True enough,” Theseus agrees easily. “How about it then? We can go a few rounds, see how you hold up.”

Percival takes a moment to consider it. He breathes deeply, takes stock of himself. Physically he’s as recovered as he can be, perhaps a little thinner still and he still has very occasional muscle spasms, but he’s essentially fighting fit. Has fought with worse many times, in fact. Unfortunately it’s not his physical health he’s concerned about, but his mental one. An unstable wizard is a liability, even in training duels. One of the first things aspiring Aurors get drilled into their heads is that you don’t go on field missions if you can’t control yourself one hundred percent. In practice that isn’t quite true because no country has enough Aurors to allow for that luxury in a real crisis, but the reasoning behind the rule is sound.

Theseus is regarding him with a quiet brand of knowing sympathy. “I’ll be careful, Perce. You know I can handle myself.”

Percival’s nod is perhaps a little jerkier than he’d like, but in truth he knows it’s the right time. He’s far from as unbalanced as he was during his captivity and the complications after, and he feels steady. It could be treacherous, or he could truly be fine. There’s no way of knowing unless he tries.

“There’s a duelling hall not far from here. They have back rooms for private training.” Percival doesn’t usually have to make use of such public buildings, given MACUSA’s well-equipped training facilities, but he has always made it a point to know as much as possible about the city he protects.

“Splendid. Let’s go then.”

The training salle is a high-ceilinged room with many cushioning and protective wards spelled across the walls to guarantee no fight would exceed the bounds of the salle. There is some equipment stacked in one corner, padding and dummies that would activate on a word, but Percival and Theseus have always fought bare-style on the practical assumption that in a crisis they probably wouldn’t have more than their wands at hand.

Grinning with a hint of sharpness, Theseus bows to Percival, wand held at standard guard position. Percival returns the bow, familiar adrenaline beginning to pump through his veins. They start slow, with harmless hexes designed to mildly inconvenience the opponent if they strike – though, given Theseus’ extreme ticklishness, casting rictusempra on him is perhaps a little sly. Theseus is taking it easy on him, letting Percival find his balance. Only once his movements have regained some of their old fluidity and grace does Theseus raise the ante. Neither of them need to say their spells out loud, leading to a furiously quick exchange, silent but for the sound of spells sizzling through the air.

Percival loses himself in the motions, spin, evade, dodge, counter-cast, shield-charm, take the opening, banish the transfigured chair heading for his head. His footwork has always been excellent (a by-product of many a dancing lesson in his youth, or so his mother claimed), and while he doesn’t have much on Theseus in terms of sheer power, he has always preferred quicker movements to his friend’s more stolid defence. That is Theseus’ strength, a defence so good few can break it, until the occasional powerful attack overwhelms his opponent’s defence. Percival usually only escapes that fate because he knows Theseus’ style and how to counter it. On the other hand, Theseus knows Percival’s too, which is why they haven’t duelled to anything other than a draw in years.

Today is no exception, though Percival suspects that Theseus could probably have finished the duel if he had really wanted to. Percival is a little rusty, though not nearly as much as he’d feared. Another couple of sessions like this and he’ll be back to his old strength.

They’re both lying on the ground, breathing heavily and sweaty when Theseus asks, “So, are you
willing to show me?"

It takes Percival a moment to realise what he’s talking about.

“Not here,” he says.

Theseus nods his acceptance, a small spark of excitement lighting his face at the implicit assent.

Back at home Percival barely gives himself time to shed coat and shoes before stepping into a patch of sunlight in the living room and changing. It’s not true nervousness that has him scrambling, not around Theseus, but the slight unease he hasn’t been able to shake yet that changing in front of anyone who isn’t Newt engenders.

Theseus doesn’t take a step back, doesn’t look intimidated or fearful. He only calmly looks Percival over, eyes skirting over this different body.

“Hmm. Grindelwald really miscalculated, didn’t he? You must be able to do a lot of damage in this form.”

Percival stares at him, tail swishing. He hasn’t really thought of it in those terms. In his human form his access to magic makes him undeniably more powerful, but Theseus does have a point. A Wampus is hardly helpless. He himself had proved that when those smugglers had tried to enter the case. Percival shakes his head, irritated with himself. He’s an Auror for Morgana’s sake. Why didn’t he ever stop to think about the advantages this form might offer?

The answer, when it comes is obvious: fear. Fear and the mess of complicated emotions at the root of his new ability because however useful this form might be, however much it is him and his own personality, it was still forced on him by Grindelwald. Percival hadn’t been given any choice at all, and that had tainted everything that came after.

When he turns his attention back to Theseus, his friend is still looking at him, waiting him out. He doesn’t apologise for his statement, probably because he knows that whatever made Percival fall quiet like this it wasn’t his frank appraisal. They’ve known each other for too long and seen too many hardships together to mince their words around one other.

Finally Percival steps forward on silent paws, slowly enough as to not be threatening, and first noses at one of Theseus’ bare hands, held loosely at his sides, before stretching up to bump his nose at Theseus’ cheek. As far as Percival is aware Wampuses don’t do packs like wolves or even prides like lions, but his instinct leads him to scenting Theseus as if he were inducting the man into one. Theseus’ scent is subtly reminiscent of Newt’s, while still unique in its own way. Percival could never put into words what he senses while in this form, as complicated and multi-layered as they are smells simply do not translate into human vocabulary, but he can tell that Theseus and Newt are related, just like he can tell how long ago a certain creature passed through a spot and whether the meat Newt keeps for feeding has been stored longer than a couple of days.

That similarity in scent alone, he suspects, would be enough for his instincts to accept Theseus as ‘not a threat’ and probably even ‘friend’.

He pulls back to find Theseus smiling softly. “May I touch you?”

Percival nods his head, pleased to be asked for all that he knows he wouldn’t mind Theseus’ touch even if he hadn’t.

Theseus doesn’t have Newt’s expert touch with creatures, but his fingers are steady and warm in Percival’s fur and when he lets out a rumbling purr Theseus laughs in delight.
“You always were quite something, Percival Graves,” he says and doesn’t object when Percival decides to use him as a pillow for the next hour in retaliation.

That Monday, his first full day, Percival is accompanied to the Woolworth building by Theseus. His first meeting of the day is only at eleven, so he deposits Theseus in his office – though he has little illusions that the man will actually stay there (which, at least, will conveniently allow Percival to miss the inevitable shocked faces and fawning over the renowned war hero) – and goes to deal with something he has avoided for a few weeks now: his official animagus registration. The office in charge of animagus-related incidents is a tiny, dusty room squished in the farthest corner of the floor that also holds the wand permits office. The attending wizard looks grumpy, has probably misstepped in another department and been transferred here as punishment. Very few witches and wizards go through all the bother of becoming an animagus. Percival didn’t, and he has never shied away from anything that has the potential to make him a better Auror.

“I wish to register as an animagus,” he tells the wizard behind the desk briskly, when the other man doesn’t seem in any hurry to stop blinking at him dumbly.

“Uh, Director Graves! This is unexpected, um, register you said?”

Percival bites back a sigh. “Yes.”

The wizard fumbles with some pages on his desk, then finally draws out a pen, clearly seeking refuge behind well-rehearsed actions.

“Name?”

Percival raises an unimpressed eyebrow. The other man clearly knows who he is. “Percival Fintan Graves,” he says nonetheless, and only just stops himself from adding Prestor in there as well. Newt keeps insisting it’s another middle name now, but it’s not on his official paperwork and he doesn’t want to confuse the already rattled wizard further.

The man nods, scribbling industriously.

“Supervising instructor?”

“None.”

The pen halts. “Sir, there has to be a supervisor, as per law.”

“I’m assuming you don’t have ‘doused with an illegal potion by Gellert Grindelwald’ as an option then?” Percival asks dryly. The other wizard swallows, suddenly looking a little faint, and Percival relents. “Just put it down as ‘special circumstances’.”

“We’re supposed to ask a superior before using that – ”

Percival leans closer over the desk, eyes flinty. “Have you heard any rumours about me lately?”

“Uh, yes?” the wizard quavers.

“So will your superior. Just put it down. I have a meeting to get to.”

He should probably be more compassionate, but this entire business already has him on edge and he has never liked the kind of pencil-pusher who seems to make it a goal never to make any
independent decisions on their own. They waste time.

The last resistance crumbles and the pen starts scratching again.

“Um, animagus form?”

This is the bit Percival had really been dreading. While the files of the animagus registration office are sealed and can only be accessed with special dispensation, it is still him going on record. About, apparently, being the first magical creature animagus in recorded history. He sighs. “Wampus.”

The pen’s scratching stops. The wizard looks up, mouth half open in surprise but his voice entirely steady for the first time. “Excuse me?”


The clerk looks like he dearly wants to ask again, or possible perform a hearing check, but one look at Percival’s stony face has him writing down the answer.

“I, uh, have to see your animagus form. To note down distinguishing physical characteristics.”

Percival almost winces. The thought of changing in front of a stranger is uncomfortable, on several levels. The transformation feels private, like baring a part of his soul and he hasn’t even voluntarily been changing for long.

“It’s procedure,” the wizard says, gaze firmly on the piece of paper.

“Of course,” Percival says. If he waits any longer he’ll make a scene, and that would be even worse. The change is as instantaneous as ever, and the clerk’s startled gasp hardly surprises Percival. He is, after all, rather big and intimidating for an animagus.

Fortunately, the other man has dredged up some professionalism and after a bit of aimless staring starts writing again. It only takes a few minutes until he gives Percival a nod.

“Thank you, Director Graves, that’s all.”

He changes back with a distinct sense of relief, the weight of his wand in his arm holster as reassuring as the familiar form and the coat draping over his shoulders. When he looks down to see, he finds that the clerk has written: black coat with silver fur around the ears and speckled throughout, silver eyes. It does describe Percival’s Wampus form, but is also generic enough that he relaxes a little.

Finally the man puts a stamp at the bottom of the document, signs it, and hands a duplicate to Percival. He looks like he wants to say more, but Percival heads him off with a curt offering of gratitude before quickly leaving the room. He is not keen on chit-chatting about his form with a stranger.

Predictably, Theseus has disappeared from his office when he makes it back, but the sound of raised voices from the bullpen gives him a good idea of where he went.

“ – and then he jumped out of the trench and charged at the German wizards who outnumbered us five to one.”

Percival rather hastily decides to stop loitering in the shadows and head this off before Theseus gets to the part where they both needed their asses saved by their backup because the ten wizards had only been an advance troop.
“Telling tales, Scamander?” he says, stepping into view. Some of the newer Aurors flinch, but Theseus only sends him one of his patented shit-eating grins.

“Just making sure your Aurors fully appreciate your heroism, Graves.”

Percival scowls at him. Theseus knows full well that he doesn’t talk about the war, much less in front of his Aurors. If he didn’t know better he’d think that this is some kind of half-baked plot to a) rub their noses into the fact that they didn’t notice Percival’s disappearance and b) try to head off something similar happening again by giving them far more private information than Percival ever would. He narrows his eyes at Theseus. Theseus looks innocent, which is as good as an admission of guilt.

“Get back to work people,” he growls, taking Theseus by the arm. “That potions ring case isn’t going to solve itself.”

He ignores the chorus of ‘awww, boss’, mostly because they are all turning back to work.

As soon as the door to his office falls shut behind them, Percival rounds on Theseus. “What the hell are you doing, Thes?”

Theseus’ usually warm eyes are hard. “They didn’t notice you were gone for a month. I know you probably forgave them all already because that’s who you are, but I’m not that kind.”

“You are where it matters,” Percival says quietly, thinking of all the times this visit that Theseus had reacted with understanding and sympathy rather than aggression and pity. “How is telling them stories of my reckless youth going to help?”

Theseus’ mouth remains a firm line. “They need to understand that you are a person, with feelings and a past. A person that they failed. Respect doesn’t excuse how little they seem to have paid attention to you. If it also makes something like this happening again less likely so much the better.”

Percival sigheds, draws a distracted hand through his hair that now curls around his fingers. “Grindelwald is very good at what he does, Thes. You shouldn’t blame them.”

Theseus doesn’t keep protesting out loud, but the hard cast to his features remains. He is protective of the few he takes into his heart. Percival doubts that he will be able to change the man’s mind, so he lets the matter drop.

“Any other reason you accompanied me today?” he asks, settling down in his chair and glancing at the small pile of paperwork that had accumulated over the weekend.

Theseus sighs. “I’ve got a meet and greet with President Picquery in an hour.”

Percival raise a brow. “I thought you were on vacation?”

“When the Minister heard where I was planning to go, he told me he would fire my ass if I didn’t at least do some schmoozing. He wouldn’t, of course, but I’ll suffer through one meeting if it keeps him happy with me.”

“Seraphina would be delighted to hear how much you look forward to seeing her,” Percival says dryly.

“Oh, shut it. I know what your face would look like if you had to make nice with the higher-ups while technically on vacation and ‘thundercloud’ would only be the half of it.”
Percival can’t really argue with that. Theseus has always been the more patient of the two of them.

The next day, Theseus tags along to MACUSA once again. He doesn’t seem keen on letting up on his not-so-subtle campaign any time soon. Percival would be irritated if his presence wasn’t a comfort – especially when half the department is called into the field to deal with the potions ring they’re finally cracking down on. While technically allowed to go into the field once more – he re-took all of the relevant tests after all – Seraphina gave him a very pointed look when he brought it up and told him to reserve it for emergencies for the time being.

She probably didn’t expect there to actually be an emergency.

The insistent paper rat scrabbling at his sleeve belies that assumption. It reads, in Tina’s cramped handwriting – situation at the docks, cause unknown, number of suspects unknown, request backup before entry.

Percival curses under his breath. However much he wants to get out of the office, he doesn’t want it to be at the expense of the safety of his people. Tina went out with Junior Auror Jordan, who’s still as green as they come. According to the official rulebook, a ‘situation unknown’ calls for another two-Auror team and while he would rather be safe than sorry, the department is currently empty enough – with those left behind either on emergency standby or busy with their own cases – that he’d rather not take anyone else.

When he looks up he finds Theseus watching him with sharp eyes.

“Fancy a trip to the docks? Could be dangerous.”

Theseus’ grin is full of teeth. “As if I’d let you go alone. I haven’t had a good workout in a while.”

Already beginning to scribble out instructions for the ranking Auror left in charge during his absence, Percival raises an eyebrow. “And what would you call duelling me?”

“Fun,” Theseus says, with an exaggerated wink.

Percival only shakes his head.

Tina and Jordan are waiting for them at the edge of the dock district.

“Sir,” she says, holding on to her hat in the stiff breeze. “Green smoke, definitely of a magical nature, is billowing from one of the warehouses. We’ve cleared the area of No-Majs, but the warehouse itself is heavily warded. Homenum revelio didn’t work.”

Percival nods. “You did the right thing calling for back-up. Show us.”

Tina leads them to a warehouse, identical to the ones on either side except for the smoke. ‘Green’, is in fact a bit of an understatement. The smoke is a virulent emerald colour.

“Any idea what the smoke is?” Theseus asks. He is crouching next to Percival, all of them ducked behind some crates in order not to tip off whoever is in that building more than they probably already are.

Tina shakes her head. “It hasn’t seemed to affect anything and diagnostic spells come up clean. If it’s
dangerous it’s unconventional.”

Percival exchanges a look with Theseus and knows they’re both thinking the same thing: trap. For whom and for what purpose remains to be seen.

He raises an eyebrow at Theseus, who shrugs in response. Then he turns to Tina and Jordan. “We’ll go in to investigate, but be wary. This might well be a trap.”

They both nod and follow quietly in Percival’s wake while Theseus brings up the rear without Percival even having to say anything. He does so love to work with the man.

The back door to the warehouse is conveniently unlocked and unwarded – one more indication that something fishy is going on, especially given the layering of wards he can sense everywhere else – and Percival remains alert as he starts moving into the gloom beyond. At first glance the room is empty of both people and danger. Some boxes are stacked haphazardly against the far wall, and there’re a few tables and chairs scattered around, but mostly the warehouse is empty.

“Sir?”

Jordan’s voice halts him in his perusal of the empty boxes. The young woman is kneeling on the floor in the middle of the free area and when he steps closer he can see the grim cast to her features.

Percival looks down at the symbol carved in the dirt floor and bites back sudden nausea. It’s not surprising – Grindelwald’s fanatic supporters have been stirring up trouble intermittently ever since their leader’s arrest, but seeing that hated sign here, in his city makes him angrier than perhaps it should.

As if on cue, additional shimmering wards spring up all around them, seamlessly melding into the pre-existing wards, now barring all the exits. Percival stiffens, spine going rigid. He knows the feel of this magic. Grindelwald isn’t here, Grindelwald can’t be here because he’s in Azkaban and though he has little faith the prison will hold him, the British would at least let them know if he escaped, but Percival is absolutely certain that Grindelwald has had a hand in creating this trap.

He raises his wand, considers, and then decides it’s worth a try. While there are wards that prevent all spells from passing through, if these ones are mainly meant to entrap, perhaps their attackers had been lazy. The blazing white form of his Thunderbird patronus bursts forth from the tip of his wand and heads right for the wards. A heartbeat goes by, then the patronus passes through the glimmering shield of light. He doesn’t know yet if they’ll really need backup, but alerting MACUSA is the sensible thing to do.

A moment later spells start flying, some from the rafters above and some from beyond the wards, passing through just like his patronus did. His instinctive shield charm is bright enough to illuminate the rafters, showing two wizards crouched on crossbeams. As the light fades again, he sees a jet of red take out one of them, the second one apparating as his comrade falls. Percival steps backwards until he finds Theseus, firing spells at the nearest warded door as he goes.

Back to back with Theseus, he is as safe as he’s ever going to be in a firefight, but the wards that trap them in the room are seriously starting to cramp his style, and in the long term might well cramp more than just that.

“Standard anti-wizard wards?” he asks Theseus in between blocking a nasty violet hex that he’s pretty sure would’ve sliced off his arm and stopping another hex from impacting into Theseus’ back. He’s pretty sure of his assessment, but a second opinion never hurts.
“Yes,” Theseus agrees, coat flying as he blocks a barrage of spells from the other side. “Overload?”

Percival takes a moment to think about it. Between him and Theseus they can probably funnel enough power into spells that the wards will fall, but they’ll leave themselves open in the meantime. While Tina and Jordan are holding their own for the moment, he doesn’t think they would be able to cover him and Theseus as well.

An idea sparks in the back of his brain.

“Let me try something else,” he calls, indicating with his free hand that Theseus should start watching his own back again.

Then he clears his mind, tucks his wand into the holster, takes several running steps towards the warded doorway, and changes mid-stride. The wizards hunkering down behind the wards clearly did not expect a man-sized Wampus cat to burst through their protection. The first goes down with a satisfying *thunk* as her head impacts the ground, and a second follows a moment later, his wand splintering beneath Percival’s claws. The third’s wand, however, is pointed straight at him when he looks up, and he side-jumps a bolt of blue, shifting to land on two feet once more. One hand conjures a shield charm while the other goes for his wand. His opponent isn’t quick enough to keep up with this rapid change and ends up securely bound a moment later.

More attackers are clustered around the other entries to the warehouse in which Theseus, Tina, and Jordan are still trapped. Shifting back to Wampus form eats the distance to the next door, with the added bonus of catching those wizards and witches by surprise as well.

He’s having *fun*, Percival realises, shifting back and forth in answer to the demands of the battle. While Theseus and the others keep their enemies’ attentions, Percival methodically picks off the distracted Grindelwald supporters until all doors are cleared. The green smoke has long since dissipated, but a quick glance doesn’t reveal any spectators lurking so Percival has no qualms in bringing his magical powers to bear on the wards, while the other three do the same from the inside until they fall. No cobbled-together wards can stand against the combined force of several powerful wizards when they aren’t constantly being reinforced.

“Very efficient,” Theseus says approvingly, stepping over the prone form of a witch with a bound wizard trailing along in his wake. “Was that your first battle-test?”

Tina is staring at Percival, wide-eyed. “Was that, are you… are you an *animagus* now?”

“Indeed I am, Auror Goldstein,” he replies. Soon, far more people than he is entirely comfortable with will know anyway, since it’ll have to go into his mission report. He would’ve preferred keeping his new ability as an ace up his sleeve, but realistically that was never going to happen – not when he’s the Director, and supposed to be above reproach.

She shakes her head, muttering something that sounds suspiciously like ‘only you, sir’.

Several pops herald the arrival of back-up and Percival sighs to himself. Time to clean up the mess. They have plenty of prisoners to question, but he doubts they’ll get any useful answers. Grindelwald isn’t the type to share his plans with underlings.

That evening Percival sinks into the sofa with a relieved sigh. Theseus is rummaging in the kitchen, and comes out with a pot of steaming tea a moment later. Percival isn’t much of a tea-drinker, usually, but when the other man insistently pushes a cup into his hands he takes it without protest.
The brew is warming, at least.

“So, I distinctly remember your patronus being a mountain lion. When did it change?” Theseus asks, sipping at his own mug.

Percival sighs. He’d been hoping for an evening off from serious conversations, but apparently Theseus wants to do this now. Given what he has likely deduced about Percival’s change of patronus, he isn’t very surprised. “When do you think?”

Theseus’ eyes narrow. “See, if it were a Wampus the answer would be obvious.” When Percival doesn’t say anything, he sighs. “Newt was always very fond of Thunderbirds. Hippogriffs and Phoenixes too. Anything that could fly.”

Percival can feel himself twitch. “Do you really need me to spell it out for you, Thes?”

Theseus raises an eyebrow, dare written in every line of his face and for a moment Percival wants nothing more than to keep his mouth shut and not take the bait. But Theseus is Newt’s brother and one of his oldest friends, and he deserves to hear out loud what they both already know to be true.

“Newt has saved my life several times over,” he says baldly, as if there isn’t a deep well of emotion hiding just below the surface, rippling at the mere mention of Newt and his role in Percival’s life. “His was the first face I saw after weeks in that hellhole and he freed me. You don’t know how much you can crave even scraps of kindness until it’s taken away from you. But Newt…” He shakes his head, mouth curled up wryly. “He’s irrepressibly free and every day with a new creature is an adventure. How could I not?”

He’s hardly making sense and in any other situation it would’ve bothered him, but Theseus only nods, lips twitching into a fond smile.

“That he is.”

And that’s that.

Popping into corporeality in the Woolworth building’s portkey station, Newt doesn’t exactly expect his arm to be grabbed by a determined-looking Tina Goldstein mere seconds after arriving.

“What – ” he starts, but Tina shushes him in a manner that’s eerily reminiscent of Percival. Bewildered he lets himself be dragged along, until they end up in a small, unoccupied office.

“Did something happen?” he tries again, watching Tina pace around the cramped room.

“Well, yes, a few things, there was a raid” – she catches sight of Newt’s paling face and hastens to add, “but Mr. Graves is fine, nobody got seriously hurt, but what I wanted to ask… Newt, do you not… trust us? I mean, us Aurors?”

Newt frowns, first at Tina’s truly concerned expression, then at the drab walls. “I don’t really know most of the Aurors that well, but of course I trust you, Tina. What happened? Did I do something? I probably didn’t mean to.”
Tina relaxes minutely, her shoulders not quite so tense anymore. She stops pacing. “So you didn’t ask your brother to come and look after Mr. Graves while you were away?”

His brain skips right over the first part of that sentence and gets hung up on the rest. “Theseus is here?”

Tina’s strange behaviour is starting to make sense. His brother bears grudges like nothing else, and if he has decided that the entire Auror department is due blame for Percival’s ordeal than he probably hasn’t made their lives easy. He wouldn’t have done anything truly suspect, Newt knows – especially given how not-so-secretly fond Percival is of his team of Aurors – but Theseus is a master of pointed remarks and threatening not-smiles. Newt has long since decided that, in fact, Theseus is the one who would have a Hippogriff animagus form, rather than Newt himself – proud, intensely loyal, and weak to good manners and beak scratches. It describes Theseus to a T.

Tina is squinting at him. At least she has let go of his arm. “You didn’t know?”

“I’m hardly my brother’s keeper,” Newt says, with some private amusement. Once upon a time Theseus thought that would be his role in Newt’s life. That phase lasted for about a month until Newt set him straight. In this, as in everything, Theseus had accepted defeat with surprising grace. Tina is still frowning, so he adds, “He probably told Percival. Theseus has better manners than just to turn up without warning, usually.”

“Oh,” Tina says and visibly deflates from the mild state of upset she’d worked herself into. “That’s all right then.”

Newt tries for a reassuring smile. He’s still slightly worried about the raid that Tina mentioned, and if he’s entirely honest with himself he’d really like to get going. Tina is lovely and he likes seeing her, but it’s Percival he has really missed.

On the other hand, though not nearly as wound tight as she had been a few minutes ago, Tina still doesn’t look relaxed. Her lips twitch worriedly and she’s looking at him as if she’s expecting him to do something unexpected. Given that Newt has no idea what else she might be concerned about, he finds her demeanour a bit startling.

“Is there anything else?” he ventured, shifting his grip on his suitcase out of habit to check that the latches are still firmly shut.

Tina bites her lip, clearly torn about something, then says rapidly, as if afraid the words will explode in her face if she stops to take a breath, “Tell me yes and I’ll never mention it again, but, Newt, do you know what you’re doing here? Not so long ago Mr. Graves, Percival, was a Wampus you cared for and now you’re in a relationship and I just don’t want anyone to get hurt.”

Newt raises his gaze to her eyes, knows that he sounds as firm as the floor underneath when he says, “Yes.” Tina takes a deep breath, still slightly red, and Newt gentles his expression. “Both Percival and I are well aware of the past, Tina, but the truth is that he makes me happy and I think I make him happy too. What more is there?”

For a long moment she scrutinises his expression, eyes searching, but then a smile breaks out on her face, honest and real.

“I’m glad,” she says quietly, then darts forward to give him a quick peck on the cheek. “You both deserve to be happy.”

That, Newt really doesn’t disagree with.
As soon as Newt steps over the threshold, a Niffler-shaped blur speeds across the floor, up his trouser leg and squeezes into the case.

“He missed his nest,” a familiar, warm voice informs him, and then Percival is there, close enough for their arms to brush and Newt leans into him without any input from his brain.

Foreheads resting together, Newt breathes in Percival’s presence. Newt has never met anyone who’s as solidly real as Percival.

“You did say to keep him away from the growing sapling.”

Percival’s chuckle vibrates in his chest. “I said try. It was never going to happen for long.”

If left to their own devices they might just have stayed like that, but then Theseus says loudly from behind Percival, “Miranda owes me ten galleons. You really are a soppy mess, Perce.”

He only grins in the face of their twin glares and comes forward to give Newt the kind of all-encompassing hug that only family and Percival have ever got away with.

“It’s been a while, little grasshopper,” he says into Newt’s hair, and Newt smiles at the old nickname. He pokes Theseus in the chest. “Well, someone has been very busy with ministry work.”

“You seem quite unconcerned about finding your brother squatting here,” Percival observes, leaning against the wall with one shoulder and a half-smirk.

Newt shrugs. “Tina warned me. Apparently he’s conned the department into thinking he’s your bodyguard.”

Percival’s eyes sharpen, clearly suspecting that there’s more to that statement than Newt’s saying, even as he draws himself up indignantly at the very thought of needing a bodyguard. Theseus only grins, entirely too self-satisfied.

Later, Newt mouths, and Percival nods.

“Have you had dinner?”

At Newt’s shake of the head, Percival claps his hands and disappears into the kitchen, presumably to cook something in the name of his campaign to make sure Newt ‘doesn’t starve’. Or perhaps he just wanted an excuse to absent himself so that Newt and Theseus can catch up. It’s exactly the kind of understated considerate thing he would do.

Theseus seems to have come to a similar conclusion and leads him to the guest room, closing the door behind them.

“He never used to cook this much,” he says, brow furrowed.

Newt shrugs. “You haven’t seen Percival for more than a couple of days here and there for a while.”

Theseus tilts his head in acknowledgement of the point, but his eyes remain sharp. “I don’t think it’s that. But that doesn’t matter right now. How have you been? Your last letter barely told me anything beyond Percival’s new role in your life.”

Newt winces. He does have the tendency to forget about things like writing home occasionally when
he’s knee-deep in his work and travelling. While he had sent off a message a few weeks ago after things had calmed down with Percival, he hadn’t taken the time to go into detail. If Percival hadn’t reminded him, he probably would’ve neglected ever sending it, too. He smiles at the memory and looks up to find an uncommon amount of softness in Theseus’ expression.

“I’ve been good. New York has been considerably more exciting than expected.”

“New York, or the people in it?” Theseus asks dryly, but doesn’t call Newt out on the flush that spreads over his cheeks.

“I take your point. Please tell me you aren’t angry that I didn’t give you more details. Things were a bit complicated for a while. The transformation was… unexpected, to say the least.”

Theseus shakes his head. “So Percival told me, and you already know I think he’s a good man. I’m not here to interrogate either of you about your relationship. No, this is about me having to hear from the Minister that you were nearly sentenced to death and then went head to head with an Obscurial and Grindelwald. Even when you finally did send a letter you didn’t exactly mention any of this.”

“Ah,” Newt says, and winces. He probably should have written about that, truth be told, but at the time he’d been more than distracted by the horribly injured Wampus newly in his care. “I’m sorry, Theseus. There was so much going on I just forgot. You know how I get.”

Theseus sighs. “I do know. Just… try to remember next time? We worry about you.”

Newt nods, then has to shake his head to get his fringe out of his eyes. He should probably ask Dougal to cut his hair again soon.

“So how is Mum?”

Theseus gives him a Look, well aware that Newt is trying to change the topic, but concedes to his wish anyway. The next half hour is spent with tales of happenings at the Scamander country home, which Newt enjoys immensely, mostly because Theseus knows him well enough to concentrate on how all the individual Hippogriffs are doing.

Percival knocks on the door in the middle of a rousing tale involving Blackfeathers and the chimney to announce that dinner is ready. Dinner also happens to be delicious, a pasta bake that, while not Irish in the least, looks and tastes like it’s the result of a recipe perfected over many years. The evening only gets better from there, until Newt feels almost drunk from the good company and cheer. Theseus will have to leave soon, he knows, so he makes the best of what he gets – besides Theseus and Percival in one room and mildly inebriated is always worth the price of admission. The smiles and laughter of that night stay with him as he drifts into a happy, dreamless sleep, curled around Percival.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

x. Fulfilment

(Epilogue)

It’s only after Theseus has left for England that they find time to truly talk. They both wanted to enjoy his presence while he was there, especially Percival, who has so few people around whom he doesn’t turn into his usual grumpy-about-social-interaction self. Then Newt had been too tired the first night to do more than snuggle up to Percival and fall asleep, and Percival had ended up sleeping in the Nundu habitat in his animagus form the second night because Addie had threatened to throw a tantrum if she didn’t get to spend some quality time with her odd adopted cub.

It’s over dinner after another long workday for Percival that Newt finally says, “Theseus tells me I should ask you about your patronus.”

There are other things he wants to know, details about the raid Tina mentioned, and how Percival had spent his weeks, but Theseus’ hint has been niggling at his curiosity for too long to be put off any longer.

Percival stops in the middle of ladling another spoonful of stew. “Theseus is incapable of leaving well enough alone.”

“True, but not the point.”

Percival sighs and sets down his spoon with a quiet splash. Newt doesn’t quite expect the seriousness in his dark brown eyes and finds himself tensing in an unconscious mirroring of Percival’s posture.

“Until a few months ago my patronus was a mountain lion,” he says, fingers laced together on the table. Newt nods for him to continue. “It changed after you rescued me.”

Newt frowns, still unclear on what the issue is supposed to be. “It’s hardly unprecedented, after going through major trauma.”

Smiling slightly lop-sidedly, Percival reaches one hand over – an invitation that Newt is happy to indulge. Percival’s hands are a strange combination of rough and smooth, far harder wand calluses than Newt’s, yet less used to manual labour, though he does his fair share in Newt’s case now.

“My patronus didn’t change because of the hell Grindelwald put me through, Newt,” he says, still smiling, though there’s something almost sad lurking in the corners of his eyes. “But because of the one who delivered me from it.”

Air rushes into his lungs, dizzying. Sometimes Percival, everything that he is, that he is to Newt, burns so brightly in Newt’s chest that it almost hurts.

“You’re saying the Thunderbird is... is because of me?”

It’s the motion of Percival’s thumb drawing gentle circles into the back of his hand that keeps Newt
tethered to reality. He focuses on the feeling, amid all the wonder and confusion.

“Is that so hard to believe?” Again, sadness laced with amusement. Newt is starting to get the sneaking suspicion that Percival is sad on his behalf, not because of him. “You must be aware by now that I care for you deeply, and what you did for me… it can never be repaid.”

Newt lets that one slide, because he’s starting to understand what Percival means when he says *repay* and it has absolutely nothing to do with money and value and worth.

“But a Thunderbird?” he squeaks.

Percival’s lips pull into a wider smile, his eyes glinting in the low light. “Free as a bird in the sky, the adventurer, traveller, majestic and powerful in their own right, and” – and here he *winks* – “with a nose for danger.”

Newt stares at him, the rock-steady sincerity written all over Percival’s face, and thinks *oh.*

“I love you too,” he says, the world tinged with sudden warmth, and the corners of Percival’s eye crinkle even as his grip on Newt’s hand tightens.

“Took you a little while,” Percival murmurs, and takes up his spoon again with his free hand. Then he mutters a gentle heating charm for both their bowls because the stew has gone cold. “Now eat your food, Newton.”

Newt’s answering smile is helpless, like a moth caught in the wing turbulence of a phoenix.

They’re almost done with the evening rounds, Dougal trotting along behind them and Percival with a Bowtruckle in his hair because Pickett has finally stopped hiding every time the man comes near and is now overcompensating, when Percival asks quietly, “Where are you planning to go next?”

Newt halts mid-step, heart suddenly stampeding in his chest. This is the final thing he’s afraid of, where Percival and their relationship are concerned. Few humans would be content with a partner who leaves them to travel the world on a regular basis. And yet here Percival is, asking where he’s going to disappear to as if he doesn’t blame Newt at all.

“There’re still many places in America I haven’t been,” he finally gets out after slightly too long a pause. “I shouldn’t add anything to the current edition, not now that it’s nearly ready, but I want to write a second book to include creatures from the Americas. There’re just so many I didn’t find the space for in the first edition.”

Percival’s gaze has sharpened, flitting over Newt’s face as if searching for the reason behind the pause. “I shouldn’t add anything to the current edition, not now that it’s nearly ready, but I want to write a second book to include creatures from the Americas. There’re just so many I didn’t find the space for in the first edition.”

Percival’s gaze has sharpened, flitting over Newt’s face as if searching for the reason behind the pause. Then, all of a sudden, his expression softens. “I’m not angry about your travelling, Newt,” he says, and this time Newt doesn’t manage to hide his shocked look as his eyes fly up to meet Percival’s. “Don’t get me wrong, I’d love for you to be always here, but I know it’s in your nature not to stay in one place too long, and you love discovering new creatures far too dearly for me to get in the way of that.” His lips turn up, a little sad, a little dry, but also fond. “I would not cage a Thunderbird so.”

All the pent-up tension that weeks of trying not to think about this very question accumulated leave Newt in one big rush of air. It’s not that he honestly thought Percival would… what, try to keep him here by force? Make him feel guilty for pursuing his life’s dream? No, Percival wouldn’t have done any of that. But perhaps Newt hadn’t quite been certain that he would still look at Newt the same way once the realisation that his partner would be gone as often as not truly sank in.
He steps forward, takes the bucket of feed from Percival’s grasp and drops it onto the ground. Then he draws Percival into a tight hug that makes Dougal chitter happily and Pickett complain loudly.

“You’re too good to me sometimes,” he whispers and feels more than sees Percival smile.

“Never.”

When he draws back, the soft look in Percival’s smile is tempered by seriousness. “Just promise me you’ll always come back to me. And to stay for a while in between trips.”

Newt nods. “That I can do.”

It’s not like he wants to stay away from Percival for long anyway. It won’t be easy still, he knows, but they will try and do their best, and according to Theseus the best of Percival Graves and Newt Scamander is something to be reckoned with indeed. Besides, neither of them are going to work forever – there would be time later.

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For some reason that Percival suspects is related to Tina’s increasingly guilty looks, his Aurors have become obsessed with getting him to shift into his animagus form. But instead of asking outright, they resort to progressively convoluted schemes that leave him more amused than anything else because they clearly have no idea what would be enticing to a Wampus – his current favourite involved dead rodents and fake squeaking sounds. Besides Newt always laughs when he relays the attempts and Percival is rather fond of the other man’s laughs. Then one of them finally proves their competency by noticing his new preoccupation with sunny spots and he comes in to work to find their entire damn department flooded with sunlight. His cat instincts are practically purring in bliss at the warm wash of light, but he ignores the sudden compulsion to stretch out on that table right in the sun and take a nap with ease.

Percival halts just outside the bullpen, eyes narrowed. His entire lot of Aurors are currently pretending to be engrossed in work while also sneaking glances at him every few seconds and frankly, the whole showing is pitiful if they’re trying for subtle.

“Have you lot decided you would rather have offices on the roof?” he asks pleasantly, grinning inwardly at the suddenly pinched expressions of the more canny Aurors. With a flick of his wand, the rays of sunlight disappear, replaced by a shroud of clouds drifting along the ceiling.

“Well, we did think it’s a bit gloomy in the department,” Johnson offers, smiling nervously. “Thought it could do with a bit of brightening up.”

Percival’s eyebrows twitch. “Did you now.”

A low roll of thunder sounds from the clouds above. Johnson swallows.

“While I congratulate whoever one of you noticed the change in my habits,” Percival says, slow and measured, but with a hint of steel underlying his words, “I want all of you to think about why what you have been attempting to do is inconsiderate, foolhardy, and potentially dangerous.”

His gaze passes over every Auror, all now openly focussing on him.
“Given all the rumours that must be swirling around about my new nature, I would think you would be a bit more careful about finding out first-hand what exactly I can do now.” He smiles wryly. “Especially since you could’ve just asked.”

With another flick of his wand the clouds overhead disappear, leaving the department looking just like it always does. Before he can continue to his office, Tina pipes up, “If you knew what we were doing, why didn’t you stop us before?”

He nods at her in acknowledgement of the valid questions. “I wanted to see how long it would take you and what you could come up with. Given that I was the target and I am very well aware of my limits and reactions, I deemed it safe enough, but I don’t recommend trying this on anyone else. Understood?”

A chorus of yes sirs follows him to his office. Though he wouldn’t guarantee that they will never try a trick like that again, he does think they’ll at least think about it beforehand next time. Still, perhaps a demonstration is in order.

Percival waits for a few days, until the episode has drifted from immediate memory and any alertness on his Aurors’ parts has slackened, before putting his plan into action.

He comes in early, when the department is still empty and clears himself a space on one of the central desks. Then he shifts, six feet landing on the floor with a muted thump. It’s an easy jump, in this form, to get onto the desk, where he loosely curls himself up as to fit onto the space. Then he settles in to wait, half-lidded gaze trained on the entrance.

The first one through the door is Tina – perhaps he needs to have a talk with her about the difference between a good work ethic and driving oneself into the ground – who only blinks at him before nodding once. She settles at her desk as if nothing out of the ordinary is happening, which suits him just fine. Due to a shared habit of swinging by the cafeteria to get a coffee before work, when the door next opens it admits a whole gaggle of Aurors, chatting animatedly. It takes a moment for them to register that there’s a huge Wampus lounging in the middle of the bull pen. The reactions are everything Percival expected – silence, some desperate lunges for wands, but mostly just shocked stares.

Percival flicks his tail lazily, keeping an eye on those who have their wands out, but much to his satisfaction no one actually seems to be wanting to hex him. Whether that’s due to general prudence or the fact that they’ve remembered that their Director can turn into a Wampus he isn’t entirely sure, but either way the result is pleasing.

The door opens again and Akecheta steps through. She halts, keen eyes sweeping across the scene, then grins rather terrifyingly and moves past him towards her office with a respectful nod. Percival dips his head in return. His ears twitch, picking up on a strained sound and when he turns to Tina, finds her staring determinedly at her desk and not at the group of gob-smacked Aurors near the door, face red with the effort not to laugh out loud.

Percival huffs his own version of a laugh and smoothly levers himself up onto his paws. Standing on a table as he is, he towers over everyone else in the room. One of the Aurors takes an unconscious step back.

Then he hops off the table, changing mid-jump and lands as a human. His smile is full of teeth when he looks over at the cluster of Aurors.

“I trust this is enough of a demonstration,” he says, and leaves for his office before anyone can say anything else.
Only once the door has closed behind him does he allow himself a grin. Their faces truly had been inspiring.

Unfortunately, the day doesn’t remain as pleasant. As the hours pass, unexplained tension starts to accumulate along his spine, accompanied by an itch at the back of his mind that he can’t scratch. By the time Seraphina sweeps into his office with a grim look on her face, he is wound so tight that it almost comes as a relief. At least now he’ll hear why he’s feeling so off today.

Seraphina looks him up and down once, as if judging his capability to hear what she has to say, then says without preamble, “Grindelwald has escaped from Azkaban. The British Minister just flooed me. They don’t know how he did it or where he went, but the island is secured again.”

All air leaves him in a flood, until only the pounding of his heartbeat rushes in his ears. There’s a wealth of emotions he still hasn’t quite managed to cast aside, and for a moment he has to scrabble desperately to hold onto the numbness instead of letting fear edged with anger that shades into something uncomfortably close to true hatred overwhelm his mind.

To expect something is coming is not at all the same as knowing that it has happened.

“I see,” he says, and he must look as blank as he feels, the fear now far away and deep down, for Seraphina’s expression twists into worry.

“You can take the rest of the day off if you need it,” she offers, and that is what shakes him out of his state.

“No,” he snaps, knuckles suddenly white around his pen. He would not let himself be coddled because of Grindelwald’s escape. He would not cower because of that man ever again. Even if part of him wants nothing more than to go home, find Newt, and not emerge from his arms for the rest of the day.

Her eyes narrow at his tone, but she accepts his decision with a nod. “As you wish. I’ll leave it up to you to inform your department. There isn’t much we can do unless he returns to the States, but we should be prepared.”

“I will see to it,” Percival says, eyes flinty and words tinged with a bitter edge. They would not be caught off guard by Grindelwald again. He would make as sure of it as one man possibly could.

Seraphina knows that too, and grants him a real, if fleeting, smile before leaving him to it.

When he goes out to tell his Aurors ten minutes later, his head is held high.

The moment Percival sees the expression on Newt’s face as he manoeuvres through the door his shoulders sag.

“You know.”

Newt nods, mouth a tight, unhappy line. “Theseus fire-called. He wanted to tell you, too, but the Minister had already flooed Picquery.”

He doesn’t say anything else, just allows Percival to press in close and drop his head on Newt’s shoulder. They have done enough talking about Gellert Grindelwald.
Newt disentangles himself from Percival’s naked form with some difficulty, suppressing a yawn. The other man is lovely in the dim, glittery light of the stars above, skin almost glowing, and for a moment Newt just watches the play of muscles as Percival shifts in his sleep, as if unconsciously seeking for Newt’s warmth. The urge to draw his fingers through silver-black hair is almost overwhelming, but he doesn’t want to wake Percival, not when the other man is finally sleeping peacefully in his own bed. Well, last night’s activities maybe helped with that a little. Besides, if Percival wakes up now Newt can’t surprise him with breakfast from the bakery.

He spares a fond glance for Hugo, who lies curled around the Niffler’s Fancy yet again – he seems to divide his time fairly equally between his nest and the plant these days, though Newt suspects that the evening cuddle sessions with Percival are partly responsible for that – before tiptoeing out of the room, his clothes in his arms. Leaving Percival’s bedroom is always a little like leaving a fantasy-land and entering the real world. He gets dressed in the living room where no one will wake if he jumps from one foot to the other to get his trousers on, then grabs his worn blue coat.

He hasn’t seen Jacob in a while, between his trip, a suitcase full of creatures who demand his attention, and worrying about Percival – not that the man in question would thank him for it – and realises with a bit of a guilty stab that he doesn’t even know whether Jacob has been ‘allowed’ contact with Queenie. Percival mentioned something about looking for a loophole a while ago, but Newt has no idea if he was successful. He really hasn’t been a very good friend lately.

And yet, when he enters the bakery, Jacob looks up with the biggest smile on his face, so clearly sincerely pleased to see Newt that he feels even more like a heel.

“Hello, Jacob,” he says softly, gaze stuck somewhere around the till, even as the other man already bustles around the counter to head for the Niffler buns.

“Hiya, Newt. Back from Canada then?”

Newt looks up in surprise before he remembers Queenie. She must’ve told him. “For a little while. It’s good to be back.”

It’s the honest truth, no matter how unlikely past-Newt would’ve thought it.

“Missed your fella, did ya?” Jacob winks at him. “Do you want a Wampus pastry too? Your Mr. Graves seems to like those.”

“Yes please,” Newt tells him, absurdly pleased that Percival apparently took the time to let Jacob know that he enjoyed the pastries. He shifts a bit, mind returning to his recent absence. “I’m sorry I haven’t been around lately. Things must’ve been... complicated after we showed you the suitcase again.”

Jacob looks up from bagging the pastry, brows furrowing as he takes in Newt’s expression. “Hey, hey, you have your own life, Newt. I understand that. Besides I’ve got Queenie to keep me company now.” He grins. “You’re my friend, Newt, but I gotta tell you, you don’t measure up to her.”

Newt can’t help but smile back a little, feeling lighter. “I’m so glad for you two. Does that mean Percival found a loophole?”
Jacob shrugs. “I don’t know what he did, or if he did anything, but a couple of weeks ago Queenie came in babbling about squips or something and apparently everything’s now all right. I wasn’t gonna question it. She didn’t say anything about Mr. Graves, but I reckon it must’ve been him. No one else would’ve cared.”

That sounds very much like Percival, to work to make someone’s life better and then not take the credit. A rush of fondness accompanies the thought, and suddenly Newt wants nothing more than to be back at the apartment and in Percival’s arms.

“Yes, I do think you’re right,” he says, and picks up the bag of pastries, but not before depositing some small change on the counter. Jacob keeps trying to give him food for free, but it’s the least Newt can do. It’s not like he has much use for muggle money anyway. “Give my best to Queenie.”

“I will,” Jacob assures him, and waves cheerily as Newt turns for the door. “And tell Mr. Graves thank you, yes?”

Newt’s nod is only slightly distracted.

Percival is still in bed when he returns, having deposited the pastries in the kitchen, and watches Newt with a content, half-lidded gaze as he steps back into the room.

“Where did you go so early?” he asks, voice still sleep-rough. As soon as Newt is close enough he stretches out his hand and pulls him back onto the sheets, not that Newt puts up a fight. Now that Percival is awake he can run his hand through his hair to his heart’s content.

“To see a friend,” he murmurs, moving closer to the comfortable heat of Percival’s body. “Jacob says to thank you.”

Percival clearly knows what Newt is talking about, for he smiles a little. “I barely did anything. Just pointed Tina in the right direction.”

Newt pokes at his nose in mild retaliation. “You still cared enough to make it happen. You’re kind-hearted, Percival.”

Percival grumbles something under his breath, nose scrunching up, but Newt isn’t going to apologise for telling the truth. Then Percival perks up again. “Does that mean you brought pastries?”

Newt stifles his laugh in Percival’s shoulder. “Yes, I brought pastries. They’re in the kitchen.”

Percival’s soulful brown eyes clearly convey that he considers the kitchen to be unacceptably far away. So does the tightening of his arms around Newt’s waist.

“There’s coffee there too?” he tries, and delights in the quirk of Percival’s lips.

“Well, if there’s coffee too,” Percival says dryly, but leans in to kiss Newt anyway.

They don’t make it to the kitchen for a while.
Newt’s hand on his arm is warm as they appear just outside the wards around the Graves estate. Percival himself could have apparated next to the house, but the wards would have kept Newt out. To remedy that, Percival steps right to the boundary, points his wand at Newt and murmurs *tutela accepto*. The spell is simple enough, but it only works for those who are already accepted by the wards. Newt holds still as yellow light washes over him, then steps through wards.

They are still at the edge of the estate, but one look at Newt’s curious gaze roving over trees and bushes is enough to decide that they might as well walk.

“Are there any creatures living on your grounds?” Newt rather predictably asks when a nearby bush rustles. “It’s certainly a big enough area for them to live undisturbed, for the most part.”

Percival slants him an amused glance. “Not as big as the Scamander estate. I don’t think a herd of Hippogriffs would have enough room to roam here.”

Newt only shrugs. To Percival’s eyes, both he and Theseus are very blasé about their inheritance and heritage. Their family is an old one, not a member of the Sacred Twenty-Eight, but with ties to them and nearly as rich as most of those venerable families. A talent for extension and concealment charms also seems to run in the family, which contributed to their large land holdings.

“There are some forest nymphs and we used to keep Granian horses, but the last one died of old age just before I started attending Ilvermorny. At the time my parents were too busy to consider raising new ones.” He shrugs. “If there are any other creatures, I don’t know about them.”

Newt is now eyeing their surroundings with undisguised interest, probably looking for the myriad of small hints of creature habitation that only he could ever spot. Or maybe he’s just weighing the possibility of letting some of his creatures out to frolic outside the case for a change. Percival wonders what his parents would’ve made of a fully-grown Nundu roaming the grounds. His mother would’ve laughed, he thinks.

When he looks at Newt again, the other man is studying him, rather than the surrounding nature.

“Why did you bring me here?” he asks, voice curious yet neutral.

It’s been almost a year since he was trapped in Grindelwald’s basement-cum-dungeon, in chains then behind bars, well on his way to madness. Even now the memories sometimes tug at him, try to drag him down into a darkness he hasn’t felt in months – it’s Newt who helps the most, sometimes consciously when he notices Percival struggling, but mostly just by being there. By being Newt.

Percival could’ve taken Newt to the estate earlier, but something had always held him back. Now it feels right.

He remains silent for another few steps before he answers. “I haven’t been here much for a long time, but this is my home, more so than the apartment in the city will ever be. I suppose I thought you ought to at least have seen it.”

Newt hums, low in his throat. Whether he understands the significance of what Percival is trying to say is hard to tell.

“I never felt particularly attached to any place,” Newt says, eyes distant as he looks into the past. “People and creatures, yes, but not the place itself.”

Percival sweeps out his hand to indicate the trees all around him. “Part of it is familiarity. I could probably find my way through these woods blind-folded and not stumble once. Part of it is the memories, both good and sad. And part of it is the magic.”
Newt is looking at him again, eyes once more keen below his messy fringe of hair. “I can feel it settled all around you. Your magic calls to the land and the land calls to you.”

Percival nods. It’s not exactly the terms he would’ve used, but at the core Newt understands what he means, even if magical theory doesn’t. Scholars have tried to understand the bindings between wizards’ magic and long-held strongholds for a long time and have yet to put forward any particularly convincing theories.

“It would be a good place for you to run free,” Newt adds, proving once again that though he may claim not to understand human beings particularly well, he certainly seems to understand Percival.

Percival’s smile is a little lop-sided, so well aware of his own fears and shortcomings. “I thought it would be easier to take that last step here.”

Originally he’d thought to show Newt the house first, but now that he thinks about it, there’s little that would hold Newt’s interest there. The grounds are another matter entirely, though, and under Newt’s expectant gaze Percival finds it easy to change, to let the Wampus rush through him until he stands on six legs and can throw his head back to roar silently at the sky.

“I’ll be right behind you,” Newt promises, wand out in preparation of apparition.

Percival nods at him and lets his legs propel him into a trot, then a sprint. He doesn’t need to look to know where he’s going, just lets his paws carry him where they will. Newt was right – it’s different out here, in natural surroundings that weren’t created by a wizard, however talented that wizard may be. There’s a certain freshness in the air, a crispness in all sensory input. With a burst of sudden joy he realises what he’s feeling.

Percival Graves traverses the paths of his childhood, finally completely and entirely free.

Chapter End Notes

So here we are, at the end. My sincere thanks to everyone who has read this far, especially those who have left comments and kudos to feed the author.

Perhaps I’ll play in this verse a little more in the future, but for the moment I’ve started working on another fic, a fae/selkie AU. Because apparently I have a thing for writing a Percival Graves who isn’t quite human. Who knew?

End Notes

Any comments and kudos are very much appreciated. Continuing thanks to hamelin-born for input and TheSilverQueen for betaing.
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!