Unexpected Consequences

by startabby

Summary

This is the story of how two lost souls find new hope after living the most tragic of lives.

aka How Albus Dumbledore was so busy looking at the Greater Good that he forgot about lives of the individual.

Notes

In which we are introduced to our protagonists.

Prepare yourselves… The Angst is Coming…
In the darkness of his dank prison cell on Azkaban Island, Sirius Black frowned in confusion. At least, that’s what he thought his name was; it was what the guards yelled when they bothered to come by and insult him. He, on the other hand, couldn’t remember a thing about himself before he was captured and thrown into his cell.

Oh, he could remember other things. For example, spells that he had mastered, books that he had read, or even historical events all came to mind when needed. However, all personal details of his life before the prison were gone. Upon his original arrival on the prison island, he had been plagued by this strange feeling of guilt and an urge to tell everyone something. Specifically, he had the urge to declare ‘I killed them, I killed Lily and James.’

As the years went by and the duration of his stay and interactions with Dementors increased, the compulsion faded to nothing. However, in all that time his memories failed to rematerialize. There were moments when he began to feel the hint of an emerging memory, especially when he first awoke in the mornings. Unfortunately, as soon as the next Dementor came by his cell the hint of memory that he’d built up was consumed and he returned to his amnesiac state.

The lack of memories had an interesting side effect, though. Their absence made him unappetizing to the Dementors. When the creatures passed by his cell on their rounds all he felt was a vague sense of sadness and cold without the flashes of memory that the Dementors savoured. To their voracious appetites, visiting Sirius was like eating bland porridge, easing hunger but not particularly satisfying. So they limited their visits to brief encounters during the course of their regular patrols.

As a prisoner locked in solitude in the maximum-security wing of Azkaban, Sirius had available to keep him sane. All he had to distract him from his miserable state was the gossip that he heard from the guards stationed at the entry door into the wing or on one of their infrequent patrols and the screams from the prisoners around him. According to the accounts that he heard, he was known to be a follower of a Dark Wizard named Voldemort. That Dark Wizard had terrorized the country for over a decade before being vanquished around the same time that Sirius had been captured.

Another thing he overheard was that he had betrayed his former best friends. Those friends, James and Lily Potter, had been murdered by Voldemort right before their young son defeated the villain. As he listened to the stories, one thing confused him. His emotional responses on overhearing various tales didn’t match what he would have expected given who he was supposed to have been according to the stories. He felt a deep sorrow and anger tinged with guilt when he heard about the death of the Potters. On the other hand, the tale of the vanquishing of Voldemort brought him a sense of fierce joy.

‘Perhaps,’ he thought one day, ‘I was undercover in the Dark Wizard’s camp, and my contact with the government died or was unable to prove my innocence, landing me in this cell unjustly.’

‘Then again,’ his pessimistic side argued, ‘maybe I was just looking to supplant my former boss and was happy that someone else had taken care of things for me.’
Besides the peculiarities of his emotional responses to stories of his past crimes, Sirius also had a second set of odd urges. Deep inside his core, he felt an almost subconscious pull tugging away continually. This pull told Sirius that there was someone important, someone to whom he was bonded, who needed help. Occasionally the pull would spike, as if the danger or injury to that person was increased. It never fully went away.

On this particular night, Sirius was laying on his simple pallet of rough wool, the only furniture present in the twelve-foot square cell that held emaciated form. The walls of the cell were constructed of large stone blocks, with a small barred window embedded in one wall providing both a small amount of light from the waning moon that could be seen through the bars and a cool draft. On the wall opposite the window, a door of barred iron hung, providing a clear view of the empty corridor outside the cell. The space between the bars also allowed Sirius to hear the cries of the other prisoners in the wing and the gossip of the guards as they stood their shifts at the entry door to the wing.

Laying quietly in the dim light, thankful that it was summer and thus a moderately warm night, Sirius was struck once again by his irregularly scheduled guest. He grimaced and thought, ‘Why is that omnipresent pull crying ‘help me’ spiking again?’

As he lay there, his thoughts continued to run free. Then he sat up in surprise.

‘Wait, why is there suddenly a direction associated with the spiking pull?’

The pull crested in increasing waves and Sirius started frantically seeking a way out of his cell. He grew more and more agitated, pacing between his cell door and the lone window as if debating which one was more likely to help him break loose.

Finally, something snapped and he knew one thing for certain. ‘Harry needs my help!’

With a gasp, his body shuddered and shifted into the form of a large dog. The dog was pitch black in colour with large, luminous silver eyes that glowed in the dark. It started howling and slamming itself against the cell door. The noise was loud enough to alert the nearest guard, standing outside the entry door to the maximum-security wing.

Given that it was the middle of the night, the man was drowsy and distracted. This meant that when he approached the cell and caught sight of the dog he let out a panicked yell of “Grim!” before fainting with fear.

Unfortunately for the guard, one Adalbert Fawley, when he fainted he collapsed right beside the cell’s door. Proximity and the gaps between the door’s bars allowed Sirius to reach through and pull the unconscious guard over to his side. From there, the shaggy dog transitioned back to a human almost absently. ‘I guess I’m an animagus, then.’ Sirius thought as he extracted the guard’s wand and ring of keys from the pockets of his robes.

To ensure that Fawley remained unconscious, Sirius cast a quick Stupefy on the slumped guard. Afterwards, he reached between the bars and unlocked the cell door with the confiscated keys. Once the door was unlocked, it easily swung inward, allowing Sirius emerge.

Pulling the guard inside his cell, Sirius swapped their clothes with a quick switching spell, tucked his long messy locks inside the collar of his new robes and used the grime of the cell to coat the visible parts of the unconscious guard and disguise his features. To finish the task, he hexed the man. The specific hex Sirius used was a Babel curse. This curse prevented the victim from speaking anything
other than gibberish and remained in place until the appropriate counter-curse was applied.

Sirius’ goal in all this activity was one of subterfuge. His hope was that with the swap in place the other prison guards would remain unaware of his escape for an extended length of time. He knew that both the Wards of the prison, as monitored by the Warden, and the Dementors were not aware of individual magical signatures. Instead, they registered the presence or absence of ‘warm bodies’ in the cells. The lax monitoring meant that his escape could only be discovered by means of a physical inspection, an event that in his experience happened very rarely.

Knowing how lazy the Azkaban guards could be, Sirius hoped that the combination of the makeover and the Babel curse would be enough to disguise Fawley’s identity from a cursory inspection. This could further delay discovery of his escape. With all those details in place, as long as he wasn’t spotted while leaving his escape would remain unknown for a long time.

Locking the cell door behind him, Sirius placed the Ministry provided Dementor repulsion pendent that he’d stolen from Fawley around his neck. From there, he straightened his shoulders and moved down the corridor and away from his long-standing ‘home’.

Once he left the maximum-security wing, the rest of the prison was quiet. After all, it was the middle of the night, when a minimum crew of human guards stood watch. They counted on the Wards and the Dementors to do most of the work. Guarding the maximum-security wing was a punishment detail, as it was the task that brought an Azkaban guard into his closest contact with the monstrous creatures. In comparison, the rest of the prison was much calmer. The minimum-security prisoners were allowed more freedoms and they and their guards rarely saw a Dementor but merely felt the brief brush of their presence on the edge of their awareness. The Dementor patrols focused on the exterior of the prison and the maximum-security wing.

Thanks to the time of night, Sirius was able to descend several flights of stone stairs and make his way through the corridors on the main floor of the prison fortress without catching a glimpse of another person. It was only when he approached the entrance wing, where the guards’ barracks were located, that he finally caught a hint of a pulse. There, a guard stood watch over the door that Sirius needed to pass through. From what he remembered of his arrival on the island, the ramp on the other side of the door led down to the dock set near the base of the prison fortress.

Placing a silencing charm on his feet and clothing, Sirius then cast a series of echo charms to convince the guard to move. These charms worked like the old Muggle trick, throwing stones to convince the listener that someone was approaching from the direction opposite to the one where the caster was hidden. By carefully directing his spells, Sirius managed to lure the guard far enough down the corridor away from the door where he stood that the escaping Wizard was able to slip through unnoticed.

The ramp on the other side was smooth enough that Sirius had to walk slowly and carefully to avoid slipping and attracting attention. As he proceeded down the ramp and emerged into the outdoors, Sirius glanced back to see if there was any sign of activity in the windows of the fortress visible from that exit. To his relief, there were no lights or movement visible in the minimal light provided by the waning moon and stars visible in the clear sky above.

The dock present at the base of the ramp was made of rough wood and designed to withstand the harsh seas of the North Atlantic.

Despite its coarse appearance, it was sturdy and reinforced with stone to ensure its survival in times of rough weather. During normal business days, the dock was where the ferry to the Scottish mainland was secured for loading and unloading. By explicit design, the ferry was the only way on or off Azkaban Island. Some of the Wards placed on the fortress were anti-apparition and anti-
portkey Wards that had been carved into the foundation of the structure. These Wards extended for some distance out beyond the coast of the island. That, plus the Dementor patrols having permission to attack any humans not wearing one of the Ministry pendants within the same zone of influence made any attempt to invade the prison from the outside problematic.

However, Sirius had already identified a solution to escaping this region as well. The ferry was not only used for passengers, but was also the method of transporting goods to the island. Since his former cell had a window overlooking the pier where the ferry docked, he had observed a useful fact about the most recent supply run. One of the supplies dropped off by the ferry was a stack of fresh lumber. Presumably, the lumber was meant for the guards to use in improving the facilities, but for Sirius it provided an opportunity.

Despite his weakened shape and poorly matched wand, Sirius’ skill in transfiguration was sufficient for him to build a simple boat out of some of the available lumber. Of course, he used only a very small fraction of the available lumber in his creation in order to avoid the guards noticing the theft at a later date.

Once the boat was complete, he glanced back up towards the prison fortress for any watchers. Seeing that there was still no sign of movement, he placed his transfigured vessel in the water and clambered aboard.

Sitting in the centre of the boat, and facing away from the island Sirius pointed the wand back towards the water behind him. He then cast a high volume, continuous Aguamenti. A jet of water emerged from Sirius’ temporary wand and collided with the ocean water behind the raft at a roughly thirty-degree angle. In accordance with the laws of physics, the action of the water jet induced an equal and opposite reaction, propelling Sirius and his craft forward. In this way, the craft moved much like a Muggle motor boat, with the wand replacing the propulsion system.

Sirius made no attempt to target a particular destination with his improvised vessel, merely directing it to distance itself from the island’s shore as efficiently as possible. Since his wand was busy on propulsion, he had to rely on the ambient light to guide him. Fortunately, the clear sky made this effort feasible. The seas were choppy under his little craft, and salty spray soaked Sirius thoroughly, but still he persevered.

Eventually Sirius felt that he’d travelled far enough to escape the anti-apparition bubble of the prison Wards. He ceased the Aguamenti, carefully climbed to his feet, and stood in the centre of the rocking vessel. With determination and deliberation, he focused on his destination and apparated to the barely visible shoreline before him.

Appearing with a loud crack of displaced air, Sirius stumbled to his knees on the rough ground where he landed. Despite his exhaustion, the need that he felt from Harry kept Sirius moving. He followed his inner compass leading him south and east towards the pull he felt so sharply.

Far away from the dreary isle of Azkaban, another lost soul sat in darkness. Like Sirius, the occupant of this prison had no memory of a time before he had been held captive. Unlike the other, this prisoner’s lack of recall was not due to a spell, but rather the natural consequence of his very young age.

For a child he was, this young prisoner, held captive by those who he had been told to call Aunt and Uncle. His prison was not a cell, but the cupboard under the stairs. His crimes were not violations of the law, but rather the fact that he existed and was different from his ‘family'.
Unlike Sirius, he had not been granted the knowledge of his name. Instead, he had been called many things: Boy or Freak or, only very rarely, Harry.

The young prisoner spent most of his time locked inside his cupboard. He was only allowed out once a day to use the bathroom unless he was needed to do chores. Of course, he was never permitted outside of the house, for fear of the neighbours finding out that he was there. Instead, Aunt had him do the washing and the cleaning and in exchange fed him scraps of food left over when the family with whom he lived finished eating their meals.

Boy almost preferred to stay inside his cell, because when he was out he was fair game for his much larger cousin and Uncle to hit.

Besides the casual violence, Boy also received extra ‘punishment’ whenever Uncle had seen something that he termed ‘freakish’. This occurred regardless of whether or not Freak had been responsible. So, Freak wished as hard as he could. ‘Please make the freaky things stop happening around my family.’ After that, for the most part, they did.

Then came that day, that fateful day when the status quo in Aunt and Uncle’s home broke down. It was one of the hottest days of the summer and Freak had spent most of the day locked in his cupboard. As a result, he had become extremely dehydrated as well as suffering from heat stroke. When Aunt came to fetch him to clean up from supper, he was unable to get up from his pallet. This made her panic. She knew that if her nephew died there would be consequences. Thinking that all he needed was water, Aunt forced water down his throat until he vomited and passed out.

When he awoke, she checked to make sure that he was breathing okay. Then she left the door to the cupboard open for a while to circulate the air. Once she felt that he’d cooled down enough, Boy was once again locked in his cupboard.

Late that night, Freak woke screaming from a nightmare. Despite the thorough training that he had received at the hands of his Uncle, what he had dreamt overtook his control. He screamed loud enough to rouse his Uncle. The fright was also bad enough that when Uncle opened his cupboard, the dark force from his dream burst out of him in a wave. The green in his eyes disappeared as blackness filled his vision.

Uncle flew backwards and slammed against the hallway wall hard enough to make the plaster crack and stun Uncle for a moment. Startled, Boy curled into himself and the dark force within pulled back and disappeared. By the time that Uncle stirred, all he could see was Freak curled up into a ball on his pallet.

“Look what you’ve done, Freak,” he panted as he got up. “Made your Aunt clean up after you, woke me up with your screams, hit me with your freakish ways.” As he spoke, he let out kick after kick at the curled figure for emphasis.

“I’ve had enough.” Uncle ripped two strips from the oversized shirt that Boy wore. He used one to bind Boy’s hands roughly behind his back and the other to gag him, before shutting and locking the cupboard door.

“Now you’ll stay quiet,” he huffed as he lumbered back up to his bed. Behind him, Boy kept his legs tight against his chest even as he struggled to breathe through the gag and snot clogging his airway. Unseen by any observer, his body struggled to maintain integrity as it pulsed between its human form and that of a dark cloud. It was, in fact, the same dark cloud as the one that had slammed into Uncle earlier.
They say that the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

In a room as different from the dark and possibly dank cells of our two prisoners as possible, an old man slept in state in his lush apartment in the Headmaster’s suite of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, Hogwarts’ Headmaster, holder of far too many titles, was enjoying his night sleep untroubled by any thought of the possible suffering of others. After all, things were working out for the Greater Good. That poor, misguided boy, Tom Riddle, was temporarily vanquished by the child of prophecy, the young one christened the-boy-who-lived. Now he had free reign to nudge the Wizarding World at will in the right direction, towards perfect integration and secret dominance over the weaker Muggles.

Young Harry Potter was safe and happy, living with his beloved aunt and her family behind the Fidelius that protected him from the disruption of fame. If no one knew that the Harry Potter who lived at Number 4 Privet Drive, Little Whinging was the-boy-who-lived, then what could possibly harm him? Secure in his belief that all was well, Albus Dumbledore slept on. He was unaware that something had happened to disrupt his Fidelius and the various Wards and monitors that he had placed on the boy.
Confrontation on Privet Drive

Chapter Summary

In which Sirius deals with THINGS.

Chapter Notes

The term steamrolling feels appropriate here. Like a freight train coming at (YOU) full steam ahead.

Down in the dungeons of Hogwarts, a spiteful former spy eyed his arm with distaste. Was the pain that had kept him awake a sign of his former Master’s return?

By the time the sun rose over Britain, Sirius Black had managed to make it as far south as Surrey. Sirius had used a series of chain Apparitions, each one directed by his internal compass pointing towards Harry. Of course, using so much magic after such a long period of inactivity had exhausted him. Despite that fact, the pulsing sense of ‘need’ that pulled on his heart drove him onwards.

When he finally landed in Little Whinging, the milkman and paperboy were already out doing their rounds. At the same time, the rest of the neighbourhood began to wake. Transforming to Padfoot, his Grim form, Sirius followed the internal compass that had led him all this way. This time it pointed him towards a house that to normal eyes looked no different than any other in the area.

To the senses of a Grim, however, the house looked anything but normal. As a Grim, Sirius could see Magic, including the tattered threads of a blood-based protection Ward. The state of the Ward was pathetic. It was barely enough to irritate a competent wizard, even one with the worst of intentions. On the other hand, he could smell layer upon layer of dark emotion emanating from the house. It was as if the entire place had been doused in hatred.

Layered on top of it all, Sirius spotted the waves of a dark Magical presence whose rate of expansion and contraction matched the pulsing ‘need’ that had brought him here.

A thin woman with a long face and pinched expression opened the front door of the house to fetch the milk and morning paper from the step. With Sirius’ sharp hearing, he could just barely catch the sound of laboured breathing from behind her. The pull on his heart told him the source of that breathing was the one that he sought.

To say that Petunia Dursley was shocked by a large black dog bowling her over, knocking her out of the way as he barrelled into her home, was an understatement. She didn’t have time to scream before the dog transformed into a man, thin and pale with long black hair and stormy grey eyes. Then, with a few decisive strokes of the wand in his hand, the man shut her front door, bound her with magical ropes, and silenced her without a gag.
Over her inaudible protests, he then moved to the latched cupboard beneath the stairs. Pulling it open roughly, he gave out a growl that sounded like it came from the beast that he’d been rather than the man whose form he currently held. For a brief moment, he stared at the sight before him.

Then, without another word, Sirius sprang into action. First, he fell to his knees to better access the small space. Second, he removed the gag and bindings from the child. Third, he lifted the trembling child into his lap, extracting him from the tiny space where he’d been lying.

Paying no mind to the still pulsing darkness that flowed from the tiny form, Sirius began murmuring soft words of encouragement. At the same time, he conjured bandages for the multitude of cuts and bruises that littered the boy’s tiny body.

“It’s all right, little one, I’m here. No one is going to hurt you ever again. Not if I can help it.”

The child whimpered at such gentle care being shown to him before trying to speak. When nothing came out due to the dryness of his throat, he coughed instead. Seeing this, Sirius summoned a glass from the kitchen and filled it with water.

“Slowly,” he murmured as he helped the child to drink. “It’s not going anywhere. If you drink too fast you’ll just throw it back up.”

Recognizing the truth of the statement, the child stopped trying to gulp the water. Instead, he contented himself with small sips.

“My poor pup, you’ve suffered so much,” Sirius continued as he rubbed the small back that he held up.

“Who?” The boy stuttered before continuing. “Who are you?”

Sirius smiled grimly. “I… I’m your guardian angel, but you can call me Paddy,” he replied, unconsciously giving the boy the very name that he had once been called. He still couldn’t remember exactly who the boy was to him. All he knew was that the boy, Harry’s, protection was paramount.

“Now then,” even the grim smile disappeared as Sirius turned his attention from the boy in his arms to the bound figure of the woman at the other end of the hall. “I believe someone has a great deal of explaining to do.”

“Don’t bother trying to scream,” he added nonchalantly as he raised his wand. “I’ve sealed the area so that neither your family upstairs nor anyone outside will hear you. You will not speak except to answer my questions, and you will answer those questions as completely as possible.”

With a wave, Sirius cancelled the silencing charm he’d placed on Petunia. “Now then, who are you and what is your relation to the child?”

“Why you freakish…”

She stopped as he raised his wand again.

“I am Petunia Dursley and that…” Sirius could tell that Petunia wanted to use some nasty words but she swallowed them at his look. “That boy is my nephew Harry Potter.”

“I see…” Sirius said, and his voice grew implacable. “And how do you explain treating your own family in such a way?”

“The boy deserved it…” was as far as she got before he stopped her again. Swallowing the insults,
she adjusted her explanation and continued.

“That CHILD was left on our doorstep four years ago with only a note to say that we had to take him in. My sister,” you could hear the adjectives that she swallowed here, “and her husband having died, the man who left him insisted that he was our responsibility as next of kin.”

“We didn’t want such freakishness in our home, so we did our best to stamp it out.” She huffed, forgetting her audience for a moment. “I mean look at him, polluting the very air around him with his darkness.”

At that, Sirius growled again, shutting her up. “That darkness, as you call it, is a direct result of your actions and no fault of young Harry’s. You should be grateful that your nephew has so much control despite your abuse. In his place I wouldn’t have the self-control to hold back the Obscurus that you’ve grown in him and keep it from destroying you and your family.”

Boy looked up at the man holding him in awe. He said that Boy was being good and that Aunt was bad.

“Ob…obscurus,” the woman stuttered. “What’s that?” She’d never heard the term before, but it sounded freakish and bad.

“It’s what happens when you abuse a magical child past the breaking point,” Sirius snapped. “Their magic lashes out in response, trying to defend itself and its host from those who hurt it.”

He cocked an ear, tilting his head upward. “Sounds like the rest of your family is waking up. I’ll just go take care of them, shall I?”

Sirius silenced Petunia once again before moving her body away from the bottom of the stairs. He then leaned Harry’s frail form against the wall opposite the cupboard. At the same time, he refilled the glass of water for Harry to drink.

“I want you to sit here and drink this while I go make sure that the rest of your relatives aren’t able to bother us. I have a few more things I need to work out with your Aunt and will have no disruptions while I do so.”

Staggering for a moment as he got to his feet, Sirius made his way up the stairs to the bedrooms. Once there, he bound and silenced first Harry’s Uncle Vernon, and then his Cousin Dudley. The bonds were placed such that they couldn’t move from their beds.

From there, Sirius made his way back downstairs. He carried Harry to the kitchen, where he fixed the two of them a light breakfast, all the while ignoring the incarcerated, mutely protesting, Petunia.

Eating for the first time since he’d left the prison was heavenly, and Sirius moaned in appreciation as the first forkful of eggs reached his mouth. Harry giggled for a second at the sight, before freezing in fear. When all that happened was a grin in response, he relaxed and with Sirius’ active encouragement bent his head towards the task of filling his own belly.

After far too little food for an adult male and a growing boy, both stomachs were filled to their current limit and Sirius and Harry found themselves yawning. Given the activities of the previous day, their understandable exhaustion pulled at them.

“I believe we could use a nap,” Sirius smiled at the boy beside him. Harry whimpered for a moment, not wanting to be sent back into the dark cupboard.

“Oh no Harry, not the cupboard,” Sirius said reassuringly as he picked up the boy once more. With
Petunia’s bound form levitated in front of them, Sirius and Harry headed upstairs.

Dropping Petunia off next to her husband, Sirius reinforced the Incarcerous on both adults before checking and doing the same to a clearly frightened Dudley. He carried Harry into the Dursleys’ guest room, where the two lost souls curled up and slept peacefully for the first time in a very long time.

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*Justice may be blind, but those who administer it are rarely so noble.*

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Sitting in a cell in Azkaban prison, Adalbert Fawley was convinced that somewhere out there was a god of justice laughing his arse off.

While he had never been a Death Eater or an overt supporter of the Dark Lord Voldemort, as a young man Adalbert had been sympathetic to the villain’s stated goals. He had even attended a meeting or two before deciding that the level of violence practiced by those active in the movement was beyond his tolerance. Instead, he had settled for merely looking the other way when needed. He didn’t report to his superiors when he saw suspicious activity among those suspected as Death Eaters.

After the Dark Lord’s disappearance, he had allowed himself to be willingly bribed into standing as witness for a couple of the former Death Eaters, including one of his cousins, who needed proof of their Imperius defence.

Then Amelia Bones was named to replace Bartemius Crouch Senior as Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement (DMLE) and Adalbert knew that his career was about to take a hit. Amelia had a deep, abiding hatred for all things Death Eater after the murder of her younger brother Edgar Bones and his family in an attack. Given that his identity as a witness in the Death Eater trials was a matter of public record, Adalbert knew that he would be painted with the same brush by the indomitable woman. So it was hardly a shock when, less than a month after she took office, he was reassigned to do a stint in guard duty in Azkaban.

Among the DMLE, it was a well-known fact that the worst punishment detail given to their members was the assignment to serve at Azkaban prison. While most of the security on the island was handled by the Dementors, there was still a need for human guards to handle the administrative side of the prison. Administrative responsibilities included prisoner intake and extraction, visitors, supplies, infirmary duty and caring for the Kissed. Since house-elves’ magic was incompatible with the Dementors, the guards also had to handle kitchen duty for both themselves and the prisoners. This was the main reason why the only meal that the prisoners received was a rough gruel served twice a day. Given such an environment, plus the effect of the Dementors’ aura, the guards of Azkaban were lazy and ineffective, with little care for each other or the prisoners.

Now Adalbert was the one suffering from this neglect. He overheard from a pair of guards passing ‘his’ cell that it took nearly a week before anyone even noticed his absence. Even then, most people believed that he was merely the latest guard to have a breakdown and run away. After all, such an event was practically a tradition among the guards of Azkaban.
Can You Help Us?

Chapter Summary

In which a refuge is reached.

Chapter Notes

I’ve left it to the readers’ imagination the details of the journey. I have my own version, but I wanted to jump directly to the next significant event without being bogged down in the details.

Ensconced in his study, an old War-horse frowned at the disruption. The Wards indicated the approach of a stranger coming up the drive toward his well-protected home.

Sirius Black walked up the front walk towards a large ranch house with Harry held tightly to his side. The journey to this isolated spot in rural West Virginia in the United States of America had been long and arduous. Now, however, they had finally made it to someone who Sirius hoped would be able to help.

“Up, Paddy,” Harry begged, needing the comfort of his guardian’s arms. His Obscurus aura pulsed beneath his skin for a brief moment, and then subsided.

“It’s alright, pup,” Sirius soothed as he lifted the boy onto his hip. “I believe that this man can help us.”

He reached up and knocked on the front door with two sharp raps, then waited. Before too long, the door swung open just enough to reveal the face of the man behind it.

The man who’d opened the front door was old and grizzled with short grey hair and clean-shaven face. The tips of a set of white scars peeked out from above his shirt collar. Dressed in conservative casual Muggle clothing, he bore a wand like one who had done battle. Beside the door, Sirius caught a glimpse of a well-used cane.

“What do you want?” he barked, keeping his wand directed at the pair.

“Sorry to bother you, sir, but we’re looking for a Mr. Newton Scamander,” Sirius replied as he shifted the boy on his hip and tried to look as unthreatening as possible. Despite six weeks of proper meals, Harry was still far smaller than he should be given his age. He preferred to be held rather than stand at Sirius’ side whenever the pair was around strangers. “The folks at the village said that I could find him here.”

“And what do you want with Newt?”

Sirius went to reply, but before he could say anything, the man continued.
“Don’t bother lying now, I may be old but I am well versed in reading people.”

“Sir, I… I mean we,” he shifted Harry again. “We need his help. I read somewhere that he’s handled something like our problem.”

“Problem?” the man raised a single eyebrow. “What problem might that be?”

“I can’t… I mean,” Sirius straightened up. “That’s something I can only speak to Mr. Scamander about.”

He muttered under his breath. “Anyone else might just try to hurt him.”

Having caught both parts of Sirius’ response, the man finally cracked a small smile. “Sounds like something for Newt, alright. You both may as well come in while I fetch him.” He continued, leading man and child into the front sitting room. The man kept his wand at the ready, and used his cane to help him as he walked. “And you can call me Percival. Now, what do I call you?”

Sitting down on one of the sofas, with Harry still glued to his side, Sirius hesitated, and then spoke. “I’m Sirius, and this little one is Harry. Can you say hello to Percival, pup?”

Since Sirius was looking at Harry rather than the other man, he didn’t notice the brief stiffening of Percival’s spine when Sirius spoke his name. By the time Harry and Sirius looked up, Percival had forced his body language to relax again.

“Hello, little one,” Percival nodded abruptly but without malice. Then he sent a messenger Patronus out to fetch his friend. His visitors only caught sight of a flash of silvery-white mist before the still forming shape disappeared out of the room.

“Newt’s somewhere out on the reserve, so it might take him a while to get back here. Would you like some tea while you wait? I know you Brits love it.” When Sirius looked up in surprise, Percival tapped his ear and added, “Accent.”

Sirius nodded, and Percival called for a house elf. The house elf brought out a full tea tray, including biscuits, setting it down on the table between the sofa where Sirius sat and the chair that Percival had settled into.

“For the little one,” the house-elf explained, gesturing to the biscuits before disappearing.

“Thank you,” Sirius said to Percival as the being vanished. He turned to Harry and offered him one of the biscuits, which Harry grabbed quickly before hiding his face again in Sirius’ side.

“I’m afraid that Harry’s a little shy,” Sirius admitted.

Before either man could do anything else, they were disrupted by a tiny black Crup bursting into the room, barking, with its two tails wagging enthusiastically. Behind it, another man came in, stumbling as he crossed the threshold. Of late middle age, this man was tall and lanky with his wild ginger hair liberally streaked with white. He was missing the last two fingers of his right hand from what looked to be an old wound.

He also bore a scar that appeared to be a long healed swipe from a set of claws down the left side of his face. Dressed haphazardly in trousers and a collared shirt, his sleeves were rolled up to expose forearms covered in freckles and pocked with a wide variety of burns, cuts, and other scars. His brightly blue eyes sparkled with excitement as he dropped himself into the chair beside Percival.

“Percy I think the Ryuda’s going to hatch soon,” he started before noticing Sirius and Harry.
“Oh yes. Our guests.” He studied the pair before him for a moment, focusing most of his attention on the child. There was something oddly familiar about him.

“Newt, this is Sirius Black and Harry Potter.”

Sirius started as Percival smirked. “Don’t bother trying to run, son. I activated the Wards. Even if you were to knock Newt and I out, you wouldn’t be able to escape the house.”

“Now then, I didn’t introduce myself properly. Percival Graves, retired Director of Magical Security for the Magical Congress of the United States of America, or MACUSA for short, at your service.”

Sirius slumped back in the sofa, “How did you know?”

“When you said your first name I recognized you from the bulletin that went around after Britain’s little war with all the known Death Eaters pictured. From there it was a simple matter of asking myself: ‘what young boys named Harry might be of interest to such a man’. There was really only one who fit that description, Harry Potter, Britain’s famous boy-who-lived.”

Newt smiled proudly at his companion as Sirius slumped even further down. Seeing his guardian’s worry, Harry climbed into his Paddy’s lap and gave him a big hug. “Okay, Paddy?” he asked.

“Don’t worry, I haven’t called for help yet,” Percival continued before Sirius could respond to Harry’s question. “I must admit that I am curious; how and when did you manage to escape from Azkaban Prison and why did you snatch Harry and bring him to Newt. That is, I assume that really is why you’re here.”

“It’s alright, pup,” Sirius said absently to Harry as he collected himself. “I am indeed here because I’m hoping that Mr. Scamander can help Harry. As for the rest, well… that’s a little more complicated.”

He paused for a moment in thought before continuing. “Tell me, Mr. Graves, have you ever heard of a curse which wipes a person’s memory and implants a belief in the reality of a specific sequence of events instead?”

“I have,” Percival agreed. “But that level of memory alteration is usually temporary and only lasts a few days.”

Sirius laughed darkly. “Yes, well, has anyone ever considered what may happen if someone is locked up with Dementors while under such a curse?”

Seeing the looks on his audience’s faces, he nodded and continued. “To all practical definitions, my personal memory starts right before I was captured by the Aurors immediately after the fall of Voldemort. Upon my arrest, I felt a compulsion to proclaim that the Potters’ deaths were my fault. Naturally, given such a proclamation, the Ministry of Magic didn’t bother holding a trial but rather sent me directly to Azkaban less than a week after I was captured.”

Sighing, Sirius went on. “Given that I had regular visits from the Dementors, any time even slightly positive memories started to resurface they were consumed before they had a chance to fully form. Curiously, the cursed memories and compulsion were also consumed. In some ways, I’m thankful for the curse, because my lack of personal memories made me less appetizing to the monsters. I believe that is why I’m still relatively sane after four years in that hellhole. Since I escaped my memories have been allowed to actually return, but they’re still limited to faded hints combined with sudden flashes of insight. I’ve managed to piece together the bare outline of my life story, but no more than that.”
Percival sympathized. When Grindelwald had imprisoned him all those years ago, he’d been left with severe memory damage. The damage was caused by the ritual that the dark Wizard had used to mimic him so perfectly. To this day, there were gaps in his memory that had never been filled. He had lost parts of his life during the time he spent as a captive.

“What about Harry?” Newt asked softly, when Sirius seemed disinclined to continue.

“Yes, Harry. That is the more important issue,” Sirius admitted. “Have either of you ever heard of the Guardian godparent ritual?”

Percival frowned, confused, but Newt stared at Sirius in shock. “He’s not?!” he asked, startled.

Sirius nodded, “he is.”

“Newt?” Percival asked.

“It’s an old custom among some of the ancient pureblood families in Britain and other parts of Europe,” Newt explained. “When a child is born in a time of conflict, they are linked to one or both of their godparents for protection.”

“In doing so, the godparent makes the defence of the child the first priority in their lives, above any cause, any spouse or children, even above their own survival. The ritual also boosts the magical power of the godparent, so that they can better serve as Guardian.”

“Given the high cost to the godparent, the ritual is rarely performed. In fact, as far as I know there hasn’t been a true Guardian godparent in over a century. Percy, if Sirius really is Harry’s Guardian Godfather there is no way that he could have betrayed the Potters.”

“Right,” Percival sighed. “I’ll add that to the list of things to check on.”

“I take it that something happened to Harry that pulled you to him?” Newt asked, kindly.

Again, Sirius sighed. “You could say that. From the beginning of my time in Azkaban, I could feel Harry’s need pulling at me. Since I didn’t have my memories I had no idea what was the cause. The sense of need was a constant throb at the base of my skull, and would occasionally flare up as if the person I was sensing was in especial danger. Then, one night about six weeks ago, something happened.”

“I was sitting in my cell when suddenly I felt my sense of this unknown need vanished for a moment then spiked even as the sound of a charm snapping echoed right on the edge of my hearing. Following the snap, my sense developed a clear direction, like a compass pointing towards the North Star. I also felt an expanded drive to reach the person behind the link. With this new drive, I managed to break free of Azkaban, doing it in such a way that I’m honestly not sure they’ve even discovered I’m missing.”

Percival grinned at that. “If they have, they’re keeping it quiet. I still receive security updates from my friends at MACUSA and they would have said if something as big as your escape was being broadcast openly.”

Newt laughed. “Yeah, my wife has never been shy about discussing things like that.”

Sirius looked confused; he had thought the two men were together based on their body language. “We’re a triad, you see,” Percival explained. “Tina and Newt are officially the married ones for the sake of the children, but our real relationship is an open secret among our friends and family.”
“Huh, good for you,” Sirius replied. “Sounds like a better deal than I remember most bent wizards getting.”

“We’ve made it work,” Percival agreed with a smile. “But back to your story.”

“Right, well when I escaped I stole the wand of one of my former guards and used it to chain Apparate to the source of the pull that I felt. When I arrived I found this little one,” here Sirius looked down at the child in his arms, who’d dozed off during their discussion and his face went grim.

“I found my pup locked in a boot cupboard; dressed in rags, abused, malnourished, beaten, bound and gagged with a dark aura pulsing out of him.”

His audience blanched. That any child could suffer such abuse was horrific, but for it to happen to the boy-who-lived was unimaginable. Then Sirius’ last words struck both men. “Dark aura?” Newt asked.

Sirius nodded. “That is why I came to you. I believe that Harry is on his way to catastrophic failure as an Obscurial.”

Sometimes even as the door remains closed, a window opens.

While Sirius was busy having his discussion with Newt and Percival in America, back in Britain a discovery was made. Remus Lupin, childhood best friend to both Sirius and James Potter, had been searching for his unofficial godson since he’d heard the news of the Potters’ death. He had originally tried to get Dumbledore to reveal Harry’s location, but when that failed Remus went hunting. He knew the terms of his friends’ will, so he started his hunt with those who’d been named as potential guardians.

Sirius, the first choice, was obviously out as he had forfeited his right by his betrayal. As Alice Longbottom was Harry’s godmother, she and her husband were next on the list. However, given the family’s tragic circumstances Remus was unsurprised to find that Augusta Longbottom was only caring for her grandson and not his godbrother. Family was next, but as neither James nor Lily had any close family still alive that was a bust, Remus thought. He didn’t realize that the Fidelius Dumbledore had placed had made him forget about Lily’s Muggle sister and her family.

Over the next four years, starting with their closest friends and working his way outward, Remus checked nearly every family in Magical Britain for any sign of Harry with no success. Then, on an otherwise ordinary morning, he woke with what he thought was a new memory. Didn’t Lily have a Muggle sister who she used to complain about? What if Dumbledore had decided to hide Harry in the mundane world?

Remus began searching, but with nothing more to go on than Lily’s name and former hometown, it was slow going. He eventually resorted to hiring a Muggle Private Investigator. The PI was eventually successful in finding Petunia (Evans) Dursley and her family. While the PI only found evidence of one child living in the Dursley home, Petunia’s son Dudley; there were rumours of a second child having been there at some point.

When he received the report from the PI, Remus resolved that confrontation would be the best way to get some answers.
Suffer the Little Children Come

Chapter Summary

In which Sirius learns of others like Harry.

Chapter Notes

I’ve made ups some wild head-canons here for my historical record. I was particularly inspired by the Obscurial!Arianna concept that I’ve seen floating around.

Up in the heights of the Woolworth Building, a recording appeared at the desk of the Director of Magical Security. There had been an incident in her home, which her partners wanted her to observe.

“Obscurial,” Newt repeated, stunned.

Sirius nodded. “From what little I can remember, when I was a child I was fascinated by the idea. I read all the records that I could find, including the accounts from the incidents in New York. Nothing else matches what I saw in that cupboard. I called it an aura, but it was almost more of a cloud. In the brief moment before I intervened, I saw my godson cycle between boy and monster. In addition, there were markings on the sides of the cupboard that looked reminiscent of the pictures of Obscurus damage that I recalled from my readings.”

“Then, I remembered reading in an article that you had encountered multiple Obscurials before, plus you spoke more of the loss of the children than of the damage done by the beasts. That gave me hope for two reasons: I hoped that you might be able to help Harry and I hoped that you would be sympathetic to my desire to protect him and not simply destroy the Obscurial. So, I decided to track you down and bring Harry to you. The rest is, you could say, details.”

Sirius paused and the three men were quiet for a moment.

“Well,” Newt finally spoke. “I’ve encountered a couple of Obscurials in my youth, it’s true. They are extremely rare in these modern times. You’ve heard about the one in New York, that was how I first met both my wife and this numbskull.” Newt nudged his partner, who looked lost in thought. “Or rather how I met who I thought was Percy. I didn’t meet the real Percival Graves until much later.”

“The New York Obscurial was a young man named Credence, Credence Barebone. He was far older than the typical Obscurial found in the historical record, and as such was much more powerful as well. Tina could tell you more of the details, as she was the one who actually met him, but Credence was the adopted teenage son of an abusive Muggle woman. She was the leader of a movement called the Second Salemers. Their goal was a return to the witch trials of our past. The woman was a horrible monster who didn’t just preach wicked things; she also physically and mentally abused her children, especially Credence.”
“Initially Credence had enough control to hold the Obscurus in during the day, but in his nightmares would let his subconscious run free, releasing the beast. He caused significant property damage over a period of several weeks, culminating in a final attack that nearly exposed the Wizarding community to mundane New York. Sadly, he was killed during the attack by MACUSA Aurors.”

Newt looked over at Percival, who was staring into his now empty cup of tea. “The severity of the New York incident, and my failure to save poor Credence, was the direct result of interference by Gellert Grindelwald. This was back when Grindelwald was seen as a terrorist rather than a war leader. He’d read about the first few incidents and, recognizing that they were caused by an Obscurus, came to investigate. Apparently, Grindelwald had encountered an Obscurial in his youth and was fascinated by the amount of magical power that they possessed.”

“Anyway. He infiltrated MACUSA’s Department of Magical Security by kidnapping Percy and taking his place using extensive memory charms and Polyjuice potion. This allowed him to take lead on the investigation into the ‘beast attacks’ that were ravaging the city. As far as we can tell, he secretly ‘befriended’ Credence, not realizing due to his age that Credence was the Obscurial. When he eventually revealed his true colours to Credence during a moment of high stress, the boy shattered and went on the rampage that led to his death.”

“I happened to be passing through New York at the time, and was pulled into the mess along with Tina. We were both nearly killed by MACUSA during Grindelwald’s manipulations, but escaped and helped both with the unmasking of the villain as well as the repair of the damage to the Statute of Secrecy.”

Percival took up the tale from there. “While he was in MACUSA custody, Grindelwald was convinced to reveal where I was hidden. I had suffered considerable damage while imprisoned, but eventually I managed to recover enough to work my way back up the ranks to my old job at MACUSA. I had been mentoring Tina before the incident, and she ended up becoming a close friend and support in helping me through my recovery. I officially met Newt when he came through New York a few years after the incident. He was visiting Tina like he’d promised at the end of their first meeting. Everything grew from there.”

“But, that’s a story for another time,” Newt interrupted. “Getting back to the topic at hand, the other Obscurial I encountered actually came first. I was in the heart of East Africa, having just rescued a Nundu cub that’d been stolen from her mother by poachers, when I heard rumours of a mysterious monster doing damage in a remote village in the Sudan. Believing that it could be some mysterious beast that I’d not yet encountered, I decided to go check it out.”

“Like in New York, many of the buildings in the village showed signs of damage and the villagers spoke of a dark cloud with white eyes attacking them at night. Most of them believed that they were plagued with a demon. It took several nights, but I eventually caught sight of the so-called demon. It was an awesome sight, a black cloud streaking through the streets, leaving scars of simultaneous scorching and freezing behind on the walls. Those who came in contact with the cloud felt the same, ending up with frosted burns.”

“After my first encounter, I started tracing where the damage could be found, as well as tracking new incidents. Eventually I traced them to one of the poorest families in the community. There, locked away in the back room was a tiny little girl. When I asked about her, I was told that she was ‘no one’. Apparently, at the first sign of accidental magic her parents believed that she’d been ‘possessed by a demon’ and locked her away to protect the village. They’d taken her name and withheld all forms of affection from that point onwards.”

“By the time I found her she was wasting away on little food and less attention. Despite my best
efforts, her transformative fits continued and increased in frequency. With each transformation, she came back in worse shape, as her body was literally falling apart from within. Finally, after one particularly brutal transformation she was hit with simultaneous organ failures. Her heart and lungs just stopped working. I tried to revive her, but her body collapsed as the Obscurus separated from her and started to dissipate. I tried a containment spell, but all it gave me was the remains of the Obscurus.”

“The last Obscurial we know of in recent history was one which neither of us observed directly, but rather a story we heard from one of our colleagues during the Grindelwald War. You see,” Percival explained, “the two of us spent a great deal of time on the front with an international team. I had both my experience in magical combat and a unique perspective on Grindelwald’s thought processes thanks to my stint as his prisoner, while Newt’s expertise in magical creatures was useful in dealing with the beasts that Grindelwald’s forces threw at us.”

“As often happens in war, we would go through cycles of action and down time as the various sides regrouped. On one such occasion, the topic turned to Obscurials and one of our colleagues mentioned that he’d known one in his youth.”

“The story he told was heart-breaking for a different reason. That Obscurus wasn’t the result of familial abuse, but rather was caused by a single unfortunate incident with No-Maj bullies. Apparently, the child, a young girl of five or six at the time, was doing accidental magic in the garden of her home when a group of teenage No-Maj boys saw her. Their response was to torment the child in an attempt to ‘get her to do it again’, which we all know in the case of accidental magic is nearly impossible.”

“Their actions and her response did significant permanent damage to the girl’s magic, making it unstable at best. What was worse was that it incensed the girl’s father to the point that he magically tortured the boys who’d harmed his child. Because he was unwilling to explain his reasoning, he ended up sentenced to life in Azkaban for Muggle Baiting. Rather than seek help from others, his wife moved with her child to a new place where no one knew them. There she kept the child locked away in the home ‘to protect her’. Our colleague didn’t say, but I’m sure that the mother at least subconsciously blamed her child for the losses that the family suffered.”

“Mother and child lived together in seclusion for many years, with the girl suppressing her magic other than occasional outbursts which apparently became more powerful and more like those of a normal Obscurus with time. Eventually, in one such outburst, the girl’s mother was accidentally killed. While trying to decide what to do about her care, her brothers and replacement guardians fought. During the fight, she was accidentally killed by a deflected hex. She was only thirteen years of age at the time.”

Percival paused there, allowing Sirius to absorb the information before adding one final piece to the story. “Apparently Grindelwald knew the child and had seen at least one of her outbursts before her death. This was what inspired his later interest in Obscurials and led to the New York incident.”

“And now here we have Harry,” Sirius finished. “A potential Obscurial in the making. He has the childhood abuse from his Muggle relatives to match both the Barebone boy and the child in the Sudan, and the single traumatic incident of his parents’ murder to match the British girl’s attack.”

He shuddered and went on, hugging the still sleeping Harry in his arms. “I refuse to let my godson be just another sad story. Will you help us?”

Percival and Newt looked at each other, and then nodded as one. “In any way that we can.”
In nature, a cornered honey badger is at its most dangerous.

Director of the British Ministry of Magic’s Department of Magical Law Enforcement (DMLE), Amelia Bones sat in her office rubbing her temples in an attempt to ward off an incipient headache. Dealing with the transition to the new Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge, had become a trial of epic proportions. He was demanding updates about all cases that could influence his public approval rating. He was also interfering in the placements of several of her Aurors. Not to mention the fact that one of his new ‘best friends’ was Lucius Malfoy, a man everyone in her department well knew only escaped being tried as a Death Eater due to the chaos following Voldemort’s death and the careful placement of significant bribe money.

Meanwhile, Fudge had decided that as part of his ‘inauguration tour’ of the Ministry’s holdings he needed to visit Azkaban and personally witness all the prisoners held there. He’d told her to arrange it for late October as he intended to discuss it as part of his speech at the Gala celebrating five years since Voldemort’s defeat.

‘And make sure that the place looks up to snuff, wouldn’t want the press to get a bad impression,’ he’d told her in that condescending tone that made her teeth ache from how tightly she was gritting them. Apparently, he was planning to take at least one reporter along with him on his visit. Why was she not surprised. The man seemed incapable of doing anything without what he considered a proper level of publicity.

Speaking of Azkaban, she really should have someone working on closing out the case of the missing guard, Adalbert Fawley. Amelia agreed with the general consensus that he’d probably just fallen prey to the typical Azkaban breakdown, but she couldn’t close the case without someone completing a proper investigation.

“Rufus,” she called as she decided that making the greatest thorn in her side take responsibility for this particular problem seemed ideal. She handed the thin file to the sombre man who made no secret of his political ambitions. “Take charge of this investigation. I need it closed before the Minister’s visit to Azkaban next month.”

Amelia picked up another folder that lay on her desk. This one was more puzzling than anything. From the Director of Magical Security over at MACUSA, it asked for the files of all known Death Eaters, specifying some of the more well-known ones by name. She read the letter that accompanied the request. ‘For use in helping to solve a number of recent pureblood supremacy based attacks on our soil,’ the note read. Apparently, their investigators believed that one or more of their villains were either former Death Eaters or trained by them and were hoping that the files the Ministry had would provide insight.

With no hesitation, Amelia stamped her approval and passed the request down to the archives. Filling such a request was both easy and sensible in her mind, both in terms of what was right and in terms of what was politically beneficial. If she could build a rapport with MACUSA, it would give her an ally to help with some of the idiots in her own government.
Under Observation

Chapter Summary

In which Sirius and Harry settle in while Newt and Percy make discoveries.

Chapter Notes

I had fun choosing the right animal to use here, so I went back and re-read my copy of the Fantastic Beasts textbook.

*Imprisoned in his own former fortress, a Dark Wizard found himself ruminating on the sins of the past. One thing he regretted, never truly learning the secrets hidden under the tragedy of the Obscurial.*

To Sirius’ surprise, he and Harry settled into life on the reserve quite quickly. Like many abused children, Harry was comfortable around the Magical creatures in a way that he wasn’t around other human beings.

That first afternoon, while Sirius was discussing Magical Theory and Obscurials with Newt and Percival, Harry had climbed down onto the floor next to the couch where Sirius sat. Once there, he settled in to play with the Crup puppy who had accompanied Newt into the room. The innocent enthusiasm of the pup helped Harry to relax despite the presence of strangers and the unfamiliar location. This, in turn, helped to keep him calm when Sirius informed Harry that they would be living there permanently.

“What do I have to do?” was the first thing Harry asked. Confused, Sirius asked what he meant. With a little effort and help from Percival and Newt, Sirius was able to determine that Harry believed he had to ‘pay’ for everything provided to him. After all, this was what he had always been told back in his old home. The many, many chores that he had been expected to do there were meant to cover the cost of the things that he ‘received’ from the Dursleys. The chaos of their travel to the reserve was the only reason that Sirius hadn’t encountered this issue before.

“You don’t have to pay, Harry,” Sirius argued. “That’s my job to handle.”

Seeing that Harry wanted to protest, Newt suggested a compromise.

“What do you know what we do here?”

“No, sir,” was the quick response.

“Well, Percy and I run a special kind of zoo. Do you know what a zoo is?”

Harry nodded. He had heard about them when Aunt read stories to Dudley. “It’s where the animals
“live.”

“That’s right, Harry. This kind of zoo is for animals who are hurt. It’s a place for them to stay while they work on getting better.”

“Like a ‘spital?”

Newt chuckled. “Yes. Like a hospital. Just like in a hospital, the people who work here take care of the animal visitors. If you want, you can work by helping me when I go out to take care of the animals. Would you like that Harry?”

“Paddy come too?” Harry asked, unsure about going with a stranger.

“Yes, Sirius is welcome to join us.”

“Okay.” Harry nodded, wide eyed.

“But not tonight,” Newt added. “Tonight we’ll stick with dinner and getting you both settled in. We’ll get you started with a tour in the morning.”

Newt climbed to his feet with a peck on Percival’s cheek. “Perce, I’m going to go do evening rounds before dinner. Would you get Sirius and Harry settled in one of the guest rooms for me? I’ll let the rest of the staff know that we have visitors so they won’t drop by unexpectedly.”

Percival nodded, giving his partner a smile that softened his craggy face.

It turned out that Harry loved helping Newt in his rounds. The Scamander Reserve was a sort of halfway house for magical creatures rescued from abusive situations. The reserve had an arrangement with the DMLE of multiple countries to take in magical creatures found during investigations. Newt also had a large network of friends and fellow magizoologists who dropped by with creatures on occasion.

This meant that there was a constant rotation of creatures coming into and out of the reserve, each with their own special needs. Newt found that Harry excelled at providing reassurance for frightened beasts. His ability to read animals and determine when they were truly scared versus merely acting out made the three adults wonder if he was a budding empath or legilimens or if his relatives’ abuse had simply made him very good at reading body language.

In fact, something about Harry made even the most aggressive of the beasts behave. Newt nearly had a heart attack the first time he went to check on the female Wampus Cat that they were rehabilitating and found Harry curled up with her. The poor thing had lost an ear and one of her legs when Muggle hunters had shot the young beast; believing her to be a mundane mountain lion. A pair of altruistic young wizards from Ilvermorny, out camping in the woods, had found her. After bringing her to the reserve, they had christened her Sera – after the legendary former MACUSA President Seraphina Picquery.

Sera had tolerated Newt’s visits to her enclosure as long as he stayed at a distance, but snarled when anyone else approached. Yet there lay Harry, asleep beside the watchful beast with no hostility in sight until Newt started to draw near the pair. Aware that Sera could kill the boy before he had time to snatch him, Newt instead settled down, wand in hand, until Harry awoke.

Man and beast sat in silence, watching each other, for what felt to Newt like forever but was probably no more than an hour before Harry stirred from his nap. Reaching over, the boy patted his
new friend and thanked her for ‘watching for me’ before getting up and walking over to the
beckoning Newt. Moving slowly and carefully, the man led his charge out of the enclosure before
collapsing on the floor in relief.

“Merlin, Harry, you scared a year off my life; and I can’t afford to lose any,” he said with a smile.

“Why’s that, Mr. Newt?”

Newt gave a weak chuckle. “Because Sera could have hurt you and I wouldn’t have been able to
stop her.”

“Oh, Sera wouldn’t do that, Mr. Newt.”

“How do you know that, Harry?”

Harry shrugged. “She told me, in my brain.”

Unsure if Harry’s tale was just a fanciful wish, Harry’s magic acting out, or the innate talents of the
beast itself, Newt just nodded. After all, Wampus Cats were rumoured to have mental magics.

“Okay, Harry. But since Sera doesn’t talk to me or your Paddy or anyone else it looked scary. Now,
I need to ask you to do something for me, Harry.”

“What?”

“I need you to only say hi to Sera from outside the enclosure from now on.”

Harry frowned, honestly confused. “Why?”

“Because…” Newt paused as he considered how to adjust his argument to fit his audience. “Because
your Paddy would be scared and he could hurt Sera or she could hurt him on accident.”

The argument was enough to sway the boy, who was as protective of his ‘paddy’ as Sirius was of his
charge.

“Now then, let’s head back to the kitchen and have a snack.”

While Sirius and Harry were settling into the reserve, Percival and Newt also began their work in
observing the Obscurus that was attached to the pair. This process was aided by the irregular attacks
that Harry still suffered, despite his removal from the Dursley home.

The Obscurus attacks came in two distinct forms. The first, more predictable attacks were caused by
Harry’s frequent nightmares. In fact, the night after the pair arrived marked the first such attack to be
witnessed by the older Wizards. In the nightmare, Harry dreamed that a mysterious figure had taken
Sirius away and forced him to go back to Privet Drive and his relations. Harry later described the
figure to Sirius as an old man with a long white beard and sparkly clothes who told him that it was
‘for the greater good’ while pushing him into the cupboard and locking the door.

By the time Sirius managed to wake him, Harry was screaming ‘no’ while his body pulsed in the
same way that it had in all previous Obscurus events, cycling between a solid and amorphous form.
The event gave Newt and Percy their first live look at Harry’s unusual condition.

For good or ill, this incident was wrapped up quickly. Once he was awake and ensconced in Sirius’
arms, the pulsing stopped. Harry returned to his child state, sobbing quietly but otherwise unharmed
and apparently normal. Disoriented by waking from a sound sleep, the other adults were unable to get any additional data about Harry’s condition due to the briefness of the attack. However, the incident did demonstrate the truth of Sirius’ tale from the afternoon.

The second variety of attack was both more and less frightening. These occurred when Harry perceived someone – usually Sirius – in danger and included a bit more control. At least, control in the initiation of the attack, anyways. Once the attack began, Harry was taken over by the Obscurus until Sirius managed to pull him out.

The first example of this type occurred several days after they had arrived. Sirius had asked Percival to help him assess his Magical strength in the aftermath of his time in Azkaban while Harry was off with Newt.

“I doubt that I’ll ever be an Auror or Hitwizard again,” Sirius commented as the two squared off, “but I want to know my limits in order to be the best Guardian for my godson that I can.”

Percival was testing Sirius’ ability to sustain a shield by firing spells at it when Harry distracted them. As had become common practice, the boy had snuck in to check on his godfather, only to see him ‘under attack’. In a panic, Harry had started hyperventilating and rocking in place crying ‘don’t hurt paddy’. At the same time, his body had begun pulsing.

Sirius immediately stopped what he was doing and raced over to the child, while Percival, who had his mage sight active for their duel, took the opportunity to observe the pair. What he saw stunned him; Sirius’ godparent bond was acting as a leash on the Obscurus. Each time the shadowy magic tried to push out of Harry, the bond reeled it back in, preventing the parasite from doing damage to either Harry’s core or their surroundings.

“Shh, it is okay, Harry pup,” Sirius soothed as he held his godson in his arms. “Mr. Percy’s not going to hurt me, we’re just practicing.” He had learned during their long trip to the reserve that once Harry had latched onto him as protector any danger to Sirius was a severe trigger for the boy.

“P-practicing?” Harry stuttered, confused. The duel was the first time that he’d seen magic used in a combat context.

“Yeah, pup. Mr. Percy is helping me practice some of the spells I haven’t used in a long time.”

“Oh,” Harry said as he slumped and relaxed. “No hurt Paddy?”

“That’s right, chid, just like when Mr. Newt has you practice taking care of the creatures.”

Percival’s mage sight view of the incident matched his partner’s long-held hypothesis; namely that the Obscurus was in fact a beast, a magical parasite that latched onto an unshielded magical core and used it to fuel its power. The Obscurus could only interact with the outside world when the natural shielding that all magical beings possess was lowered in its host due to mental trauma. The question remained; could the parasite be removed entirely or was the host, the Obscurial, doomed to carry the burden until it finally overwhelmed them?

Newt and Percival certainly hoped the former was the case, but in the meantime, they needed to address the times when Harry went from Obscurial (dormant) to Obscurus (active) state. There were two primary elements in the men’s strategy. First, identify the triggers that caused the Obscurus to emerge and work to avoid said triggers. Second, develop a rapid response technique for stopping a manifestation when a triggering event occurred.

_Blood may be thicker than water, but friends are family (blood) that you’ve chosen._
Remus Lupin was waiting in line to pass through Customs in New York City, having just landed. He had used Muggle transportation to fly to the United States. His confrontation with Petunia Dursley the week before had revealed her family’s actions as well as the ‘kidnapping’ of young Harry. Already disillusioned by Dumbledore’s unwillingness to let him contact Harry, Remus’ confidence in the man had plummeted to near non-existent levels with the realization that he’d either allowed or been oblivious to the abuse the boy had suffered.

He was concerned that Sirius, for he’d recognized the man’s magical signature, was the one who now had Harry. However, the actions that Petunia described were those of a caring guardian, not a villain. She complained that Sirius had held the Dursley family hostage over a day, eating their food and using their house to sleep and clean up before stealing clothes from her husband and son as well as all the cash that they had in their wallets. Besides the magical bonds that he’d apparently used to hold them hostage, the only other magic that he’d done to the Dursleys was a minimal Obliviate to obscure his features in their memories.

Given what he’d observed, Remus decided that he wanted to confront Sirius himself before he got anyone else involved. He needed to hear from his ‘packmate’ what had happened. To that end, the werewolf set out on his investigation, following the trail left behind by Sirius and Harry. He had the greatest likelihood of success of anyone thanks to three factors: One, Sirius was one of his best friends so he knew how the man thought. Two, since Sirius and Harry were both part of Moony’s pack, he could locate even the smallest hint of their physical and magical ‘scents’. Three, he’d spent the past several years practically becoming a private detective through his search for Harry.

Remus had managed to track the runaways as far as the docks in London, where he determined that they’d stowed away on a container ship bound for the Americas. This was what had led him to New York, the first port of call he’d identified.

“Next,” the Muggle customs agent called, and Remus stepped forward.

The agent looked at his passport, and entered Remus’ name into the database. To Remus’ surprise, his name was flagged. A second agent was summoned by the first.

“Don’t be alarmed,” the second agent tried to reassure Remus as he escorted him to a side door. “We just have a few routine questions to ask you.”

As he passed through the doorway, Remus subtly released his wand from the holster on his arm in preparation for defending himself if needed. On the other side of the door, Remus was surprised to see Wizard dressed in similar clothing to his escort but clearly carrying a wand.

“Mr. Lupin,” the Wizard spoke. “You have been identified as a Magical resident of the United Kingdom and as such are required to pass through MACUSA’s customs rather than the No-Maj ones despite travelling using mundane transport. If you will follow me?”

He turned and escorted Remus to a small room just down the hall from where he’d entered, removed a form from the box beside the door, and followed him inside. Sitting down across a table from Remus, the American Wizard pulled out a pen and began filling out the customs form using Remus’ passport, which had been passed to him by the previous agent.

“Now then, what is the purpose of your trip, business or pleasure?”
Bureaucracy is a funny thing, a werewolf mused. Everyone hates it until they find a way to use its intricacies to their advantage.

Sirius wasn’t sure what woke him up: the sun streaming in through his open window or the movement of his charge, lying beside him in the comfortable bed. Yawning, he stretched out his arms before cuddling up next to the warm form beside him.

“Morning pup,” he murmured into Harry’s messy mop of hair.

In response, Harry rolled over so that he was facing Sirius. With a sunny smile he replied, “Hi, Paddy!”

Despite having been at the reserve for several weeks, the soft bed and plush comforter were still a novelty to both inhabitants. This meant that neither was in a hurry to emerge. Eventually, however, the rumbling of Harry’s stomach forced them up. Climbing out of the sun warmed covers; they slid their feet into slippers and padded down the corridor to the kitchen.

As had become habit, Harry automatically grabbed Sirius’ hand as they left the room. Even though his head knew that they were safe here, his subconscious wanted the reassurance of a physical hold whenever possible.

When they entered the kitchen, they were greeted by Newt. The older man was standing in front of the stove cooking up some breakfast. The sun shining in through the window caught the residual red and orange in his hair, making it sparkle almost like he had a halo.

“Good morning, sleepyheads. Did you have a good night?”

“Uh huh,” Harry nodded as Sirius expanded. “No one woke up in the night with a nightmare, always a good thing.”

“There’s tea at the table, Sirius. Oh, and before you panic, we have some friendly visitors joining us this morning. They’re at the table with Percy.”

As one, Sirius and Harry poked their heads around the corner, where, sure enough, two strangers sat beside Percival Graves at the table. One was a severe looking woman who looked to be around the
same age as Newt. The other was a much younger man, whose appearance poked at the mists of Sirius’ lost memories.

When she saw Harry, the woman’s face softened into a gentle smile. In contrast, the man’s features froze in an expression that contained both extreme joy and immense sorrow at the same time.

“Sirius, Harry, won’t you join us?” Percival asked, as he got to his feet.

Harry ducked back behind Sirius’ legs, so the animagus bent down and picked him up. Holding Harry, who had buried his face in Sirius’ chest, he took the chair that Percival had pulled out for him.

“Thanks, Percy,” Sirius said as he sat down awkwardly while accommodating the clinging child in his arms.

As he poured himself a cup of tea, Percival made introductions.

“Sirius, this is our third, Porpentina Goldstein Scamander,” he said, gesturing at the woman.

“Pleasure,” she nodded. “Call me Tina, please. I’ve heard quite a bit about you and young Harry there from those two.” She indicated Percival and Newt with a nod. “I’ve been looking into your case and it’s a real travesty of justice what happened to you. As far as I can tell, you never got a proper trial in the chaos after Voldemort’s,” here both Sirius and the yet to be introduced wizard flinched while the others didn’t do the same.

“Right, interesting reflex there,” she commented mildly. “Residual of the Taboo, I suppose. Curious that you retained that reaction despite your memory issues. Where was I? Oh, yes, since you never got a trial before spending over ninety days in prison you are eligible to apply for asylum under MACUSA’s extradition treaties with the British Ministry of Magic. I’ve filled out all the appropriate paperwork; it’s just waiting on your magical signature to make it official.”

She watched to see Sirius’ reaction and showed pleasure when he smiled at her. “Bureaucracy can be useful when you know the right tricks.”

“As on the longer term, I’m looking into getting you an official trial: either through the ICW or by working with my counterpart at the British DMLE. Given the new evidence you’ve provided, the lawyer I spoke to is confident that he could gain you a not-guilty verdict in the right court.”

“Interestingly, I’m not sure that the Brits have realized that you’ve escaped. They handed over your case file with no comment. Care to explain?”

Sirius gave a small smile, and then told her about the switch that he’d made with the guard while escaping.

“I never thought the ruse would hold this long,” he added. “I just wanted to give myself a decent head start.”

The rest of the group started snickering, as Harry calmed down enough to ask, “Paddy, what’s funny?” He also climbed out of Sirius’ arms and into the chair tucked between him and Percival.

Percival smiled at the boy, pleased to see him relaxing. He reached over, tousled Harry’s messy locks, and commented. “Nothing important Harry, just your Paddy played a very clever trick on the bad people who hurt him.”

“You always have been far too good at tricking people,” the strange man added with a smile.
“I’m sorry, but, who are you? You look and feel so familiar, but I don’t remember you.” Sirius interrupted. “I assume that you already know about my memory issues.”

“Oh,” the man blushed. “Siri, I’m so sorry.” His eyes brightened with unshed tears. “Um, I’m Remus, Remus Lupin. You and I have been friends since we were eleven, along with Harry’s father James. We shared a dorm at Hogwarts.”

Sirius’ eyes clouded over as memories pushed their way forward. “Moony?” He said, vaguely.

“Pads,” Remus choked. “You remember?”

“A few fragments only,” Sirius replied, shaking his head. “Something in relation to my other form and an old wreck of a house?”

Remus gave a watery smile. “The Shrieking Shack. You and James and our other friend Peter became animagi to help me on the full moon.” He looked at Percival and Newt. “I assume that since Madame Goldstein, sorry Tina, is aware of my creature status you are as well?” When they nodded, he continued. “I’m a werewolf, have been since before we first met as children.”

He then added. “We were notorious pranksters in school, the four of us boys. James was usually the mastermind, but you always had a gift for improvisation. I’m not surprised that it helped you in your escape.”

Sirius smiled briefly, and then frowned as another thought crossed his mind. “If you were such good friends with James, why didn’t you visit Harry?”

Remus winced. “That’s actually how I ended up here.” He explained the story of his search, concluding with his arrival in the United States. “I was pulled aside by Tina’s Aurors while going through customs in New York because she recognized my name from your file.” He shrugged, and then continued.

“I was pretty panicked at first, because no one told me why I was meeting with the Director. I assumed that I was in some kind of serious trouble.”

When the older folks eyed him curiously, he explained. “Given everything with Sirius and Harry, plus the fact that I’m a werewolf and subject to some pretty nasty prejudice in Britain, my experiences with Magical law enforcement in the past have not been pleasant.”

Newt winced as he came over to the table, a collection of serving platters floating in his wake. “The werewolf registry system was supposed to help with all the new wolves that were made in the Grindelwald mess, but it has turned into something ugly.”

“Breakfast is served everyone,” he added, gesturing to the platters, which had settled onto the table. There were scrambled eggs, rashers of bacon, sausage, toast, fried tomatoes, and beans - the full English breakfast.

“That’s quite the spread you’ve got there,” Percival teased as Newt took a seat between him and Tina.

“Just like when the girls are all home for a visit,” Tina added. “Our daughters,” she explained when the rest looked at her quizzically. “They’re all off with families of their own, but whenever they visit Newt relapses into his old habit of cooking a big breakfast for everyone.”

“It’s a holdover from my travelling days,” Newt says with a wry grin. “I always ate a very large breakfast back then because the other meals could be hit or miss.” When he saw Remus’ confusion,
he continued. “I’ve already told Sirius and Harry some of the stories, but when I was a younger man I spent a great deal of time exploring the world to observe Magical beasts in their natural habitats.”

Percival snickered, “yes, observe. Oh, and free captive beasts whenever you found them, regardless of how dangerous they were.”

Newt poked his snickering partner as everyone else started eating. While Sirius and Harry’s stomachs had finally expanded enough to eat proper sized meals, the variety available was still a novelty. Unlike many children, who were picky eaters at his age, Harry wanted to try everything.

Watching Sirius helping the boy serve himself, including cutting up food where needed, made his old friend smile. Given the horror story that he’d gotten from Tina and the truths he’d pulled from Petunia Dursley, he’d been afraid of what he’d find on his visit. The way that the pair interacted reassured Remus. Despite their rough past, it looked like they had managed to find some measure of happiness in each other.

As they ate, the group discussed plans for the future. Everyone agreed that keeping Harry’s presence in America a secret was for the best. Between Dumbledore’s manipulations and the British Ministry’s track record with Sirius, nothing good could come of making Harry’s absence from the Dursleys public. For that matter, as long as Sirius’ ‘escape’ wasn’t known, they would keep that situation a secret as well. Even with the papers for Sirius’ asylum filed, they could hide his presence in America from everyone except those who needed to know.

“We can continue to work on getting Sirius Black getting a trial in absentia via the ICW without revealing our knowledge,” Tina said.

Instead, Tina was going to arrange for official papers for the pair as Patrick Sirius Grim and his son Harrison. The story they came up with was as follows. Patrick (Paddy or Pads) Grim was Harrison’s biological father, who had only recently learned of the boy’s existence. Harrison’s mother and stepfather (James and Lily, with alternate names in the relevant documents) had died when he was a baby. This had led to Harrison being placed in the custody from his maternal Aunt and her family, who’d abused him. When Patrick discovered Harrison and his condition, he had immediately claimed the child as his own.

Using Sirius’ status as a Wizard under asylum, Tina would also be able list Patrick and Harrison Grim as dual citizens of both Britain and the USA. For the rest of their needs, Newt offered a permanent place at the reserve.

“We often have workers cycling through, and you and Harry have already proven yourselves capable of helping out around here. You can stay here in the main house, or we can open up one of the workers cottages.” When Sirius tried to protest, he held up a hand. “No Sirius, after all that you’ve been through, you deserve a little help.”

Newt then turned to Remus. “You’re welcome to stay for a time as well. We have plenty of open habitats that you could use on the full moons. As long as you’re willing to help out around the reserve you’d just be one more worker.” Like with Sirius, he refused to let Remus protest that it was too dangerous. “Many of our workers have been werewolves. The reserve has been a good halfway house for those who are newly bit. They are able to adjust to their new instincts and give their wolves the space to run. In fact, the local pack often uses our facilities for their full moon runs.”

“Pack?” Remus asked, curious.

“Yes, we have a number of our former workers who have settled down nearby. They’ve gone back to other jobs and careers, but have built a kind of support network for themselves. We call it a pack,
for that is what it resembles.”

With respect to their finances, things were a little murky. Legally, when the Ministry sealed the Potters’ wills they put the estate in limbo. It should have been only a temporary measure. However, without someone of sufficient clout protesting, they would remain that way indefinitely. Given that the estate was in limbo, Gringotts was also in a holding pattern. Harry, through his custodial guardian of record at the Ministry, presumably Dumbledore, would get access to his trust vault at eleven regardless of the status of the rest of the estate. Until then, all the Potter vaults were sealed and the investment scheme in place at the time of the Potters’ demise remained intact.

Sirius’ finances were a little easier to handle. His personal vault, which is stocked mostly thanks to his inheritance from his Great Uncle Alphard Black, was sealed when he was arrested. However, he could unseal it and link it to his new identity and residence in the states via a letter containing his magical signature. Since the goblins hold themselves neutral in ‘Wizard conflicts’, they would not reveal his escape or current location. From what Remus can recall of what Sirius had told him before his memory loss, the man's personal vault is quite large. In fact, it should be large enough to give him and Harry a safety net in case of an emergency.

As they wrapped up their discussion over the remains of breakfast, Tina collected the various documents that they’d prepared and/or signed during the course of the discussion. Packing everything away in a neat travel case, she kissed both her partners before climbing to her feet. Then she extracted a medallion from around her neck, placed her thumb on the centre, and stated ‘home office’.

In a moment, her form shimmered as if it were being compressed into a single central point while spinning. Then she vanished entirely.

“The Director’s personal portkey,” Percival explained. “It is one of the inherited privileges of the position. The enchantment on it is more robust than the average portkey. It’s capable of transporting the director and up to three other persons to any of the main MACUSA offices from anywhere in North America.”

“That’s simpler than the route we had to take to get here,” Remus commented. He and Tina had Flooed from the New York office to the branch office closest to the reserve: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a couple hundred miles to the north of their current location. From there, Tina had side along Apparated Remus to the house as she had permission from the Wards and the exact coordinates needed to reach the main house.

“Yes, well, that’s the nature of portkeys. We don’t have any keyed directly to the Reserve; it’s far too expensive and risky. Instead, we advertise a public Floo address for communication and maintain a public Apparition point for visitors and suppliers to use that’s located outside our Ward line.”

“True enough.”

“Now then, Remus, let’s get you settled into your new residence. Pads,” Sirius looked at Percival questioningly. “Getting you used to your new name. Pads, we’ll put Remus in the room next to you and Harry. How about you show him where it is, and then I bet Harry here could help give a tour.”

Everyone smiled at Harry’s excited grin. He loved to show off the reserve and the animals.

“But you need to go get dressed first, pup,” Sirius reminded as he tousled the boy’s hair. When he went to get up, Sirius added. “Now, what do you say?”

“Excuse me,” Harry chimed as he pushed back his chair and climbed down.
Laughing, Remus and Sirius followed suit. When they went to help clear the breakfast mess, Percival shook his head. “Go on, the house elves will cover it. You know how they are.”

“Shall we, then, Pads,” Remus said, offering his arm like a young man to his girl.

“We shall, Moony,” Sirius replied, linking arms in what felt like an old habit. The two strolled off together as the older men chuckled behind them.

*They say that absence makes the heart grow fonder. Well, that only occurs with the right initial conditions.*

Despite finally being rid of her horrid nephew, Petunia Dursley was less than thrilled with her life. Things just weren’t working out the way that she had expected once the freak was gone.

For one thing, there had been several uncomfortable visits that the family had received. The first, from the Police, after they’d been held hostage by the other freak, had been fine. They’d even been able to report a home invasion thanks to the money that he’d stolen. The second, from Child Protective Services, was less comforting. The woman who showed up had asked far too many questions about a second child living in their home. Fortunately, Petunia had already disposed of all sign of the freak’s presence. Still, it was the first time that they’d ever had someone questioning them about her dratted nephew.

Unfortunately, the uncomfortable attention didn’t stop there. Her poor Vernon was under investigation at work. ‘Not that he didn’t deserve it,’ her conscience whispered. She knew that he had been dealing under the table for years. Meanwhile, she had become the latest source of gossip. Rumours had spread that Dudley wasn’t even their son.

Then there was her poor ickle Duddikins. Ever since that horrible day, he’d not had the same energy or appetite. He had lost large amounts of weight and often refused to eat, even when offered his former favourites. On top of that, he’d just been advanced from nursery school to primary school, and things weren’t going well. He was constantly bringing home bad reports from the school, for everything from fights, to missing homework, to poor grades. She was at her wit’s end. To make matters worse, with Harry gone, her husband was starting to eye their son with the same disfavour that he used to show to the boy.

The final straw came when the latest freak showed up. At first glance, he looked like another one of those government types, though the scar poking above his shirt collar hinted at something more dangerous. He had asked so politely about her family history that she had allowed him to come inside for tea. Her generosity had backfired. Not only was man a freak, he was old friends with her freakish sister and her husband (and, her mind shuddered, the OTHER ONE).

Despite her outrage, he forced her to tell him everything that had happened. The worst of it wasn’t when he used his freakishness on her; it was the look of disappointment when she admitted how she had treated her sister’s son. In that moment, she was reminded of that moment when she first learned of Lily’s death. She had let her husband’s dislike of the ‘freaks’ and her own jealousy lead her down a terrible path to abusing her poor nephew.

Of course, that moment of remorse didn’t last long. By the time that the man - Lupin - had left, she was once again the same bitter, spiteful woman that she had been before his visit.

This meant that when her husband suggested that perhaps it was time to move away from Privet Drive, she was more than happy to agree. With little fanfare, Vernon and Petunia Dursley, along
with their son Dudley, decamped from Little Whinging bound for parts unknown. They left their house and all its furnishings in the care of Vernon’s sister Marge, who was happy to arrange for someone to lease the property. The Dursleys faded from the memory of the neighbourhood.

Even old Arabella Figg, who had lost track of who she had been charged with watching during the breaking of the Fidelius on Harry, took little notice. In her confusion, she had managed to latch on to one of the neighbourhood boys, Piers Polkiss. From that point onward, her letters to Dumbledore described the adventures of that ratty little boy instead of her original charge.
Epilogue: Discovery

Chapter Summary

In which an escape is revealed.

Chapter Notes

Unlike the other chapters, this main story here is told from the point of view of non-major characters, while the ‘bonus scene’ follows our protagonists.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

_It was once said that the sun never set on the British Empire, and that attitude of innate superiority had not faded from the Ministry of Magic as it had from its mundane counterparts._

As he strode through the halls Azkaban Prison in the wake of Minister Fudge’s train, Lucius Malfoy hid a shudder. In the aftermath of the Dark Lord’s defeat, he’d been one of the lucky ones. Unlike many of his peers, he’d managed to keep his nose relatively clean. This had been thanks to his role as the political face of Voldemort’s cause. Between that fact and a series of significant bribes to the right people, he’d managed to avoid a prison sentence.

Still, visiting Azkaban reminded him how close it had been, especially when he caught sight of old colleagues. Straightening his shoulders, he set himself to the task at hand.

Several months before, he’d been wakened from a sound sleep beside his wife Narcissa when the Dark Mark on his arm began to burn. It flared with heat once, then twice, and then once more before fading back to its original state. While nowhere near as painful as the night the Dark Lord had vanished, it was similar enough to trouble him.

The next morning, still feeling a low ache in his arm, Lucius set out in search of answers. Sending discrete messages to some of the others who had escaped prison confirmed that he wasn’t the only one who felt it. Further investigation over several weeks had yet to reveal any of the marked who hadn’t shared in the pain.

The investigation had led him here, to Azkaban, to check that those who had certifiably proven their devotion to the Dark Lord also shared the same experience. Having spent a great deal of time and money acquiring the new Minister’s ‘friendship’ Lucius had managed to solicit a spot in the company visiting the prison.

Now he was just waiting until they reached the maximum-security wing so that he could sneak away to talk to one of the imprisoned Death Eaters. Lucius hoped that he wouldn’t be stuck with Bellatrix, his sister-in-law. She had been insane before her imprisonment; he doubted that had improved in the years since then.

Ahead of him, the Warden was opening the heavy iron door to the maximum-security wing, making
some inane comment to the Minister about how the door helped keep the screams from the prisoners inside being too loud. Despite himself, Lucius shuddered. Only a sadistic man could survive as Warden in this place and it sounded like the man ahead fit the bill.

As the group moved forward, the Warden pointing out the various prisoners like they were exhibits in a zoo, Lucius stopped at the first cell in the block. He crouched down to get a better look at the figure seated in the far corner of the cell.

To his relief, it belonged to one of the more intelligent members of the Death Eaters locked in Azkaban, Augustus Rookwood. However, once he got a better look at the filthy man behind the bars he reared back involuntarily at the change in his old ally. The once handsome and polished researcher was now a skeletal figure babbling to himself and rocking in place.

“Gustus,” Lucius whispered, being careful not to draw attention. “Gustus, it’s Lucius Malfoy.”

Slowly, the rocking figure paused and looked up. “Cius? Is that really you?” The man gazed into Lucius’ eyes, his own deep pools of black with only the barest edge of rich brown encircling his dilated pupils. “Or is this just another trick?” The eyes dropped and the rocking resumed. “Nothing, there’s nothing, my Lord is gone and we’re abandoned.”

“Gustus,” Lucius tried again. He decided that just asking might be the best option. “Gustus, did you feel it? Did you feel the pain in your mark a while back?”

“Pain, pain, always pain,” Rookwood mumbled to himself. “Did I do something wrong, Master, that you punish me again?”

Taking the man’s rambles as confirmation, Lucius paused. As he tried to determine his next question, he was startled by the outcry that suddenly erupted further down the hall.

Getting to his feet rapidly, he strode up to the nearest member of Fudge’s entourage.

“What’s going on?” Lucius hissed.

Distracted, the man took no notice of the fact that Lucius should have been with the others and began babbling. “We got to this cell and the Warden said that it belonged to the infamous Sirius Black, only…”

He paused, gasped for breath and then continued. “When the Minister looked inside he commented that the man had the wrong hair colour. ‘Aren’t the Blacks famous for their BLACK hair,’ he said. Sure enough, man inside had hair that even coated in the grime of prison living was more brown than black.”

“The Warden started arguing that no, it must be Black, and no one had ordered a prisoner transfer. Then the man back there caught sight of us, came to the front of the cell, and started yelling. Only he wasn’t really yelling, just making loud nonsense sounds.”

The hissed whispers were interrupted when one of the guards accompanying the tour pushed forward and cried out. “Hey, wait a minute, the Minister’s right, that’s not Sirius Black. That’s old Bertie Fawley, the guard. He went missing months ago. We were sent here together. Bertie, whatchoo doing in there?”

Adalbert’s yelling became more pointed and even less intelligible. Suddenly Lucius was struck with a thought.

“Minister, I recognize that poor man’s condition. He’s under a Babel curse. If I may?” He moved to
Fudge’s side smoothly. “I know the counter.”

“Of course, please, Lucius,” the Minister blustered, confounded by recent events.

When the hex was removed, the man’s yelling became much more comprehensible. Unfortunately for those listening, between the Dementors’ effects and the concussion that Fawley had received that night, he retained no real memories of what had happened. In the midst of his yells, he cried out something about a ‘Grim’. Those listening to his tale dismissed it as a manifestation caused by fear and the Dementors. Still the fact remained, Sirius Black, infamous mass murderer and suspected second-in-command to You-Know-Who, had escaped from Azkaban. Worse, the escape had occurred months before their visit.

In an effort to protect himself and the Ministry at large, Fudge immediately classified the escape as an official secret. Fudge knew that if word of this escape got out it would taint his administration and decrease his personal power. Therefore, he had everyone who had been present at the discovery either Obliviated or placed under oath not to reveal the secret.

As for the guard turned prisoner, Adalbert Fawley. Well, it was clear within hours of the discovery that he had suffered a psychotic break due to his experiences. Since Fawley had no close relatives or friends, the Fudge Administration claimed that Fawley’s condition was the result of a short-term stay in Azkaban as a prisoner. Fawley’s own actions made this tale extremely believable. In his delirium, he was prone to ranting about Grims and Dementors. Upon his arrival at St. Mungos from Azkaban, he told the orderlies that he was ‘being punished for his sins’. Just in case he ever regained his senses, Fudge had Fawley remanded to the custody of St. Mungo’s long-term care ward. Once there, Fudge arranged for Fawley’s expenses to be covered out of the Ministry’s discretionary fund and had his records sealed.

Now all Fudge needed to do was to make sure Black didn’t show up unexpectedly and expose his lies. He decided on a two-fold strategy of protection.

First, he ordered the head of the DMLE, Amelia Bones, to begin a quiet investigation into the escape. Furious at the lies but constrained by her oath to the Ministry, she warned him that they were unlikely to find anything under these conditions. He waved her off with a claim that Black had probably drowned.

“We’re just covering our bases, here, Amelia. No need to panic anyone. Just have one of your Senior Aurors conduct a discrete investigation. If you find anything let me know immediately.”

Second, with Lucius Malfoy’s help he hired a couple of bounty hunters to track the escapee using less legal methods. Oath binding them to keep the identity of their target a secret, he indicated that he didn’t care about Black’s condition upon retrieval, even hinting that dead was preferable. Lucius was happy to go along with this scheme. He was convinced that if Sirius was deceased and he played his cards right, then he could parlay Draco’s mother’s connection to the Black family into political and/or monetary benefit.

Despite Fudge’s best efforts, rumours of Sirius’ escape did quietly spread among those with influence in Wizarding Britain. When Albus Dumbledore learned of the escape, the first thing he did was check was on his various schemes for protecting young Harry Potter. “After all,” he thought, “young Mr. Black was intimately connected to the boy.”
“Let me see,” he murmured to himself as he eyed the whirring silvery instruments standing on the shelf behind his desk. “Health Monitor? Reading stronger than the last time that I checked on it. Security Wards at Privet Drive? The readings indicate that they are holding steady. Letters from Arabella? Ah, yes, received one just last week.”

“She says, ‘The boy appears to be thriving with his Aunt and Uncle, even calls them his parents from what I’ve overheard.’ It is a shame that she has been unable to get closer to the boy, but perhaps that is for the best. We would not want to have her accidentally break the Fidelius, now would we? It is fortunate that Arabella is willing to keep watch over a boy without knowing why it is required.”

“I suppose that young Mr. Black has decided that escape is more important than his Master’s last orders.” He shook his head in memory. “I never would have thought that boy would betray his best friends. Still, perhaps he can find some level of redemption out in the world.”

Dumbledore heaved a sigh, and then dismissed the whole affair from his mind. After all, he had much more important things to do. He was shepherding the Wizarding World towards a better future. It was for the Greater Good.

What Dumbledore failed to realize was that all of his stratagems for watching over Harry had failed. The monitor and Ward had been detached from Harry during the first Obscurus manifestation. The manifestation had acted like a pair of shears, cutting through all links to Harry’s magical core. This included the Guardian bond with Sirius, the remnants of his mother’s protection, Dumbledore’s tap powering the monitor, Ward and Fidelius, and even Voldemort’s Horcrux.

The reactions of the various links matched with their intent. The Guardian Bond with Sirius, being driven outward by Harry’s core, immediately snapped back into place. It was this Bond being cut and reformed that drove the cycle that Newt and Percy and the others had observed.

Similarly, the residuals of the blood sacrifice that Lily Potter had made also returned to Harry. The first time this occurred, Dumbledore’s work in manipulating the protection by tying it to the Wards on the Dursleys’ house was destroyed. After that, the protection merged with Harry’s own Magical core in such a way that it remained with the boy through all future Obscurus cycles.

Dumbledore’s tap, also being blood-based but driven from outside, immediately sought out the closest matched magical core. Ironically, that core belonged to Petunia’s squib son, Dudley. While the boy did not have enough Magical strength to manifest accidental magic, he did have enough of a core to provide anchoring for Dumbledore’s work. Given that the Fidelius was set to hide the identity of the child anchoring it, that charm also transferred with no problem.

Despite Dumbledore’s instructions, it had never really been clear to Mrs. Figg who she was supposed to watch. This was thanks to the fact that Vernon and Petunia kept Harry’s existence hidden from everyone. She had latched onto the child most similar to the description that Dumbledore had provided, which was in fact Dudley. Then, when the Fidelius was reset, Arabella was Magical enough to be affected. In the disorientation of losing her memory of Dudley, she reset her watch to another boy in the neighbourhood without qualm.

Finally, and this is where Lucius and the other Death Eaters enter the story, when Voldemort’s Horcrux was detached from Harry’s core it was actually destroyed. This was due to the nature of a Horcrux, as without an anchor the soul piece had no reason to remain on this plane of existence. The Death Eaters’ marks, being tied to Voldemort as they were, felt the destruction. The man’s disembodied wraith was also disturbed, slowing its progress rebuilding itself. It was still trying to reach the point where it could successfully possess another and thus begin the slow climb back to life.
Time went on for our friends in America with little impact from the events in Britain. Patrick and Harrison Grim became a permanent part of the Scamander Reserve, along with Patrick’s best friend Remus Lupin. Remus took on the business aspects of running the reserve; managing the finances, ordering supplies, coordinating the workers. Old Percival Graves, who’d been stuck with the job when his partner Newt first opened the reserve, was thrilled to find a replacement so that he could retire properly.

Patrick, on the other hand, found peace in caring for the beasts themselves. As Harrison’s Obscurus attacks declined in frequency and intensity thanks to time and therapy, the Guardian Bond relaxed enough for Pads to find time for his own interests. While most of his happy memories from before Azkaban remained lost, he did manage to recover enough to piece together the framework of his life. He also rediscovered an old interest in Magical Creatures, taking up an apprenticeship with Newt to work towards a Mastery.

As for Harrison, he bloomed under the attention of his Paddy, Remy, Grandpa Percy, Grandpa Newt, and Granma Tina, along with a host of other extended family and friends. He still suffered the occasional nightmare, the residual of his experiences with the Dursleys. The nightmares would frequently result in an Obscurus flare-up. Similarly, Obscurus flare-ups during the day could be mostly prevented through the development of a careful routine. However, unexpected stressors being introduced into Harrison’s environment would occasionally result in a flare-up.

The team had developed a paired meditation routine for Harrison and Patrick that allowed them to regain control more quickly after a flare-up and decrease the toll on Harry’s body. Despite their best efforts, the team had yet to find a way to prevent Obscurus attacks in their entirety. Still, they continued to research and hope.

Maybe one day Harrison would be free of his curse. Until that time, they were going to live.

‘And they all lived happily ever after, until the end of their days.’ Well, at least that’s what we hope.

Chapter End Notes

This is the end of Part 1 of Obscure Guardian. Up Next: A time jump... then on to Part 2.

However, that story is still in rough draft stage. This means that there will be a bit of a delay before posting as I prefer to only post once I have the entire story done except for minor edits.

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