### Green Meadows, Dark Skies

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by [edelweissroses](http://archiveofourown.org/users/edelweissroses)

**Summary**
It was just a butterfly.

A pretty, ivory-colored butterfly gently resting against his knuckles.

For half a second, Credence’s heart skipped a beat. There was a witch on this ship. A witch that knew who and what he was…A witch that had deliberately sent this abomination—...

He froze.

If the paper butterfly was an abomination, then what was he?

He turned to search for the witch or wizard who sent this and found—...

No one.

No one was there.

But, Credence suspected, that he was not alone.
Credence didn’t know what he was doing here.

Actually, by all accounts, he didn’t know what he was doing alive.

He didn’t know how he’d survived what happened and he didn’t know how — or when — he’d arrived on this massive ship leaving New York. His memories were just… gone. Poof! Filled with nothing except raging wisps of darkness until, suddenly, he found himself staring at the setting sun disappearing behind the horizon. He didn’t know much. But, what he did know was this:

He was on a boat.

A boat leaving New York.

A boat leaving America.

A boat taking him God knows where.

Nausea bubbled wickedly within the pit of his empty stomach. Had one of the witches from the subway transfigured it into a cauldron? If they had, surely they must have been brewing something evil.

Credence had never left American soil before. He’d never even ventured outside his own neighborhood.

And the only ocean he knew? It wasn’t the Atlantic.

No. It was that greedy parasite that had somehow burrowed within him without his knowledge, suckling on his magic like a newborn babe. It suffocated him. Drowned his body, his mind, his soul underneath a swirling sea of endless night with no escape. Down there, Credence had nothing — no one — but himself.

Credence swallowed.

And he wasn’t exactly pleasant company, was he?

He averted his gaze, catching his reflection staring back up at him from the old leather of his shoes.

He nearly laughed. How was it that these worthless hand-me-downs were in better condition than the tatters that were his own life? Credence was homeless. Penniless. He had no friends that he could rely on and his mentor had betrayed him. His family had been torn apart and his mother—

Credence gripped the ship rails tightly, focusing his attention on the receding skyline and not on— Not on that.

Instead, his thoughts wandered in the direction of something far less disturbing: he had nearly died.

Well, if he was being perfectly honest with himself, a part of him had died. He was a monster amongst monsters. A creature that even the wicked feared.

A pathetic whimper nestled in his throat alongside his despair. His eyes closed, tight enough to see stars flickering on the backs of his eyelids. His knuckles turned bone white.
Credence loved magic.

Loved it like nothing else in this flawed yet astounding world. He knew that it was sinful. Knew that it was wrong. Knew that it went against God’s ineffable design.

And yet… something had pulled him in the direction of witches. A feeling that couldn’t be named let alone explained had taken him by the arm and underneath Mr. Graves’ guiding hand. Credence had been content with becoming a member of the Damned. Why? The answer was simple: because he had been happy. He had had purpose. He had belonged.

But, he didn’t, did he? Belong.

He didn’t deserve to be a part of such wonders. He was the Devil’s Spawn: an unholy demon forged in the fiery depths of Hell. His only purpose? To spread death and destruction to everyone that crossed his path. There was no magic in his world.

The ship rails cracked. They bent. They snapped. But, most of all, they contorted into shapes unattainable by mortal hand underneath the sheer weight of his raw power.

New York disappeared behind the horizon.

And Credence didn’t know what to do.

It wasn’t often that Newt Scamander found himself speechless.

Breathless? Of course.

Many times.

He often found himself enraptured by his magical creatures to the point where his lungs ceased to function and his legs gave way from underneath him. There were even times where his tongue glued itself to the top of his mouth. But he still had his hands. He still had his thoughts. He could still speak… well, so to speak.

But, shocked so hard to the core that the only thoughts swirling around his head were just… gone?

Today was the first for that.

Newt tightened his grip around his suitcase and stared. His mouth hung agape. There, on the ship’s edge—

_Credence._

It wasn’t much of a surprise _per se_ that the poor, unfortunate Obscurial that was Credence Barebone survived. Back underneath that wretched subway, something… peculiar had happened. A curious wisp of gray, reaching towards the clouds. It was small. It was easy to miss. It was most assuredly nothing. So, Newt had held his tongue. Even though he knew, most assuredly, that it wasn’t.

He didn’t know how it was possible. The Obscurus had all but been obliterated and yet… somehow, he just knew, somewhere deep down in the darkest recesses of his bones, that this wasn’t going to be the last time he saw Credence.

He just hadn’t expected to find him _here_.

But if Newt had learned anything from his creatures, he knew that now was not the time to approach.

So, Newt pivoted on his heel and forced himself back downstairs.

But just before he could return to his cabin, something caught his eye. A grin spread across his features. He had an idea. A wondrous, fantastically splendid idea. Even though he knew that he couldn’t — shouldn’t — approach Credence… not now, so soon after what had happened… perhaps he could send something his way that could—

Well, it wouldn’t fix anything.

But maybe it would make it just a little bit better.

Credence was falling apart.

He cried for everything that had happened to him. He cried for everything that he had done. But, most of all, he cried because he didn’t know what was to come next. He was alone. There was no one left to tell him what he should do.

He had never had that type of freedom before. Or was that freedom a curse?

The rails further warped underneath his grasp. They twisted. They curled. They screamed and they shuddered until they resembled a piece of abstract genius more than they did as a part of the transatlantic ship.

His magic extended forward. It rippled the water underneath the propellers, boiling the ocean and causing the ship to rock and churn so violently that Credence nearly tumbled overboard.

The Obscurus slithered. It reacted to his pain and feasted upon his despair.

A small part of him realized that he needed to calm down lest he do something rash. Something… destructive.

But he didn’t know how to do that either.

So, he prayed. Maybe not for God to have mercy on him. He had long since abandoned that hope. But maybe the Almighty, in all His kindness, would have mercy on the people whose lives Credence was just about to wreck and strike him down before he could.

But thunder and lightning didn’t flutter across his fingers.

It was just a butterfly.

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Overboard and Overhead

Chapter Notes

Greetings, my loveliest lovelies and darling-iest darlings! I'm the author, Frankie, and I'm honored to present to you my very first fic on Ao3! I'm incredibly excited to be here and to be a part of this wonderful community.

So, I'm a University student finishing up my Junior Year. That's all fine and dandy, but instead of enjoying my Winter Break like all my friends, what do I do? I thought to myself all naively, "Hey, I don't have any plans and visiting family is out of the question since I'm poor as hell. Why don't I get ahead in my French Degree and take an online class on Caribbean Lit? I already know the professor! It'll be fun!"

Ha!

Don't get me wrong: the class is wonderful (really!) and I enjoy the coursework. But, I've already read three entire books back-to-front, written three lengthy essays on each one, and made three discussion posts w/ responses so far. Tonight, I submitted a 1000+ word essay.

And how do I celebrate, you ask?

With more writing, of course.

Because I'm a sadist.

So, without further adieu, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The transatlantic ship The Wailing Whirlwind was neither ridiculously large nor small — perhaps 500 by 500 feet with no more than 200 passengers and 250 crewmen on board at all times. The magnificent vessel was built to withstand the open ocean and long, tedious journeys; therefore, whatever space that wasn't being used to carry people and packages, were dedicated towards completing their passage as safely and efficiently as possible.

The engine room, adjacent to the sweltering hot boiler, was filled with soot-covered men in grease-stained overalls and scuffed leather boots worn for so many years that not even the best shoe shiners could bring back its luster. A damaged piece of ship railing, somehow escaping pre-departure inspections, had been brought down by one of these hard workers and discarded in the far corner while a replacement was being searched for.

The service deck was located above. The workmen's cabins were absurdly compact however, the nearby laundry room was huge and the medical quarters matched it in size. There was even a little morgue situated beside it in case some tragic workplace accident occurred or, more likely, one of their elderly passengers passed away in the middle of the night.

Taking up the other half of the ship was the cargo hold, containing hundreds — if not thousands —
of shipping containers. They contained a little bit of everything: from processed wheat and preserved corn to scrap metal and typewriter ribbons.

The upper levels contained the passenger cabins which connected to the top deck through six separate stairwells.

The topmost deck was absolutely magnificent. Grander than any simple ferry or private yacht departing New York’s famed ports. There was a bustling gourmet kitchen swarmed with foreign chefs and waitresses that served a moderate range of cuisines. Adjacent to it was a dining area connected to an open ballroom where the on-board singers and bands played day and night.

There were little stores too that dotted the area. Some sold toiletries that may have been carelessly forgotten by passengers prior to departure. Others advertised fine jewelry — diamond necklaces and sapphire earrings — that well-off husbands were pressured into buying by eager salesmen for their landside beaus.

Fine examples of capitalism and consumerist culture aside, a small library and other places of entertainment to keep the passengers from going stir-crazy were also located nearby.

Credence wished he could have weaved through the refined crowds above.

To have been caught laughing over a bottle of bubbling champagne. To have dined upon freshly steamed seafood, fine imported cheeses, and decadent mille-feuilles. To have been conflicted over whether to select a golden ring or a silver one for his patiently waiting paramour. To have charmed foreigners and listened to their fantastic tales. To have thumbed through the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Mary Shelley and conducted intense discussions afterwards amongst his peers.

Credence wished to have danced and laughed and to have lived any type of life except the one he had.

No, instead he found himself within the laundry room, huddled within a cabinet.

His knobby knees pulled against his chest and his scarred hands covering his mouth. Something painfully digging into his back. His broad shoulders aching. His feet slowly going numb. Tears burning his eyes.

The paper butterfly vacated his lapel and fluttered around his face.

Credence had only just summoned the courage to vacate his sleeping quarters that morning. It was nothing more than a cramped storage closet full of bottled chemicals and spare uniforms that made him sleep more upright than not, but it suited his purposes just fine. He wasn’t picky. However, when he had just finished untangling his legs from the business end of a mop, one of the laundresses burst in unexpectedly with a large bundle of stained sheets.

Credence’s entire life passed before his eyes.

And it looked strangely like an entourage of middle-aged women.

They swarmed the laundry room with carts and arms full of fabric and linen needing to be washed, granting Credence enough time and chaos to stuff himself into the nearest cabinet and remain unnoticed.

An hour had already passed and the pandemonium was only just beginning to simmer down.

The sound of footsteps neared.
Wood creaked as someone leaned up dangerously close against his sanctuary, switching on the faucet above. Water whooshed through the pipes, managing to drown out the sound of Credence’s heart beating rapidly behind his eardrums. A treacherous whimper nestled deep within his throat, waiting patiently like a coiled snake for the right moment to strike.

Credence pressed his trembling hands tighter against his mouth. Ice-cold fear pierced through his fingers and evaporated into even colder darkness.

He was going to be discovered. This was it. This was the end. Any moment now, they were going to throw open the door and drag him in front of a wave of cheering spectators, whipping him half to death with his own belt before throwing him overboard.

He wasn’t ready to die again.

The butterfly perched itself upon his knuckles, rubbing its paper legs soothingly against his skin.

Credence closed his eyes and wished that Modesty was here instead to hold his hand.

But she was never going to do that again, was she? Modesty was gone. From the moment he’d watched New York disappear with the sunset, he knew then that she’d be forever beyond his reach.

No, that wasn’t true.

It was from the moment he’d watched her shrink away from him, screaming in fear. He was no longer Credence, Modesty’s big brother. He was Credence, the monster who had murdered their mother.

The footsteps passed.

Credence didn’t breathe. He still wasn’t in the clear yet.

To imagine that three days had already come and gone since Credence first found himself aboard *The Wailing Whirlwind*.

Since he obviously hadn’t purchased a ticket (although he checked his pockets, just in case), he didn’t possess a cabin of his own. Thus, not even an hour into his journey, Credence had begun his adventure figuring out how to become an efficient stowaway.

Thankfully, Modesty had been a street rat.

Her blood family couldn’t keep track of how many kids they had and, at times, Modesty would be locked out of her own home after everyone had went to bed or collapsed into a booze-induced coma. It was part of the reason that led up to her being given away for adoption. A couple of good Samaritans had spotted her sleeping underneath a dirty metro bench and had escorted her to the police station.

Credence remembered being brought there with Ma to meet his new sister, handcuffed to a desk and scowling after her latest escape attempt.

When they became close, she talked more and more about her life before the Barebones.

And Credence remembered her three steps on how to survive on your own.

    Step 1. Find a safe place to hide.

There were always workers sweating in the engine room so, he couldn’t exactly hide down there.
While peaceful and quiet in the evening, the upper deck was usually filled with chattering travelers during the daylight hours which didn’t exactly bode well for someone wishing to go about their day unnoticed. The cabins were also out of the question. They were already filled.

The cargo hold had seemed tempting enough; but, as it turned out, the area was surprisingly well-guarded with armed men stationed at every viable entrance. Perhaps the heightened security was to prevent stowaways?

Ha!

So, Credence had ended up exploring the service quarters. He had tried the janitorial closets and miscellaneous storage areas at first, but they were used all too frequently. He had recently moved into the laundry room, but clearly that situation wasn’t working out. Stepping foot into the overworked medical bay would only spell out disaster which meant—

The Morgue.

The last of the exhausted laundresses exited through the door.

Credence waited a few extra minutes in case someone had forgotten something behind. Then, with bated breath, he cautiously opened the cabinet.

The paper butterfly returned to his lapel.

Looking around the clean sheets, towels, and table linens, Credence determined that he was completely and utterly alone. He pulled himself out of the cramped cabinet, rubbed his sore back, and stretched his aching muscles.

Then bolted towards the door.

He flew down the halls, surprisingly light and silent on his feet for a man of his considerable height, and dashed into the empty Morgue.

Barely anyone used this room. It was too unsettling, too creepy. The faintest chill hung in the air and the foul stench of death permeated the floor; but it was close enough to the stairway leading up to the passenger cabins. It was close enough to escape.

Credence slid down the wall adjacent to the closed door and stared at the human-sized filing cabinets. A shiver ran down his back at the mere thought of what, or who, could be contained in there.

Had Ma been put into one of those things? Stuffed away and forgotten to the darkness with nothing but cold steel and stagnant air for company?

Credence turned away his gaze.

In the farthest corner he could spot the faintest outline of a spiderweb filled with hollow cocoons of victims already sucked dry.

All of a sudden, a tiny green lizard wandered blindly into its path.

Credence watched with disgusted fascination as the pale, spindly arachnid descended upon the creature, trapped before it could know what was going on. The lizard fought and struggled for its life, but only managed to entangle itself further and further until it too was trapped in a silvery cocoon.
Credence closed his eyes tight and pulled his legs back up against his chest. Revulsion crawled up his throat. Whenever there was time later, he’d have to find a broom or something from one of the supply closets and knock that nasty thing down.

The paper butterfly fluttered across his knuckles.

Credence slowly flipped over his hand and watched as the butterfly delicately crawled back and forth across his scarred skin. It rubbed its tiny feet over the harsh ridges, soft and soothing. Curious little thing it was trying to comfort him.

“Stay close to me,” he whispered, stroking a gentle finger down its back.

He cast a cautious glance towards the spiderweb.

“I don’t want you getting caught up there, okay?”

The creature rubbed its face with its tiny paper legs in response.

Credence almost smiled.

But he hadn’t done that in years; perhaps, he had forgotten how.

So, he merely stroked down the paper butterfly’s back again and murmured, “Cute.”

That was until his stomach clenched.

Step 2. Find Food

Credence hadn’t eaten properly in days.

Scavenging food from kitchen scraps was proving far more difficult than he’d initially expected. The area always seemed to be in constant use and, most of the time, he was only able to find crumbs anyways. Perhaps a slice of vegetable or bruised pear here and there, but never anything of substance. Nothing that could satiate the growing pains inside his stomach.

Sometime soon he would have to venture upstairs and scrounge the bins for a meal.

Maybe this time he’d be lucky and find a sandwich crust.

Ultimately though, it didn’t matter whether Credence found anything or not. His comfort wasn’t a priority, only his survival. He had about four or five days left until he really started feeling the effects from starvation.

He knew so from experience.

To think that only a week ago, Modesty was sneaking up into his room with an apple stuffed underneath her skirts after Credence had been sent to bed without dinner. She’d kept lookout while he quickly ate. When they realized that they still had to deal with the core after, they’d plotted together to dispose of it during morning chores when everyone was still asleep and keep the evidence hidden within Credence’s shoe until then.

Credence flexed his foot. A heavy weight pressed against his chest, tears stinging his eyes.

He missed her so much.

The paper butterfly, as if sensing the direction his thoughts were traveling, flew off his fingers and
balanced itself on his nose.

It worried about him.

As ridiculous of a notion it was, it worried about him.

Could a creature breathed into life from magic instead of God’s will even feel such emotion?

The answer didn’t matter. Whether it did or did not, what Credence knew for certain was that the butterfly kept him from falling into an ocean of despair.

It was his companion: a source of light and pleasantness that kept the shadows from creeping in. It followed him wherever he went. Whenever he walked, it would settle upon his lapel into a makeshift, and rather peculiar, bowtie. Whenever he rested, it would crawl around happily across his marred hands.

The butterfly would flutter around his face whenever he was distressed. It would even brush its wings against his nose from time to time to wake him from a nightmare. In return, Credence protected it from getting squashed underneath wayward feet or drenched from ocean spray.

The paper butterfly was a godsend.

However…

Who and where was the witch or wizard that had sent it?

It frustrated and confounded Credence to no end. They must have wanted to meet him, otherwise why send over the paper butterfly at all? He would have fallen to his knees in gratitude if they only took the time to reach out to him. Surely, they must have possessed the ability to locate him within the orderly havoc of the ship.

Back in New York, Credence had quickly learned that Mr. Graves always had a method of seeking him out and catching him conveniently unawares. Credence had been frightened to the point of near-constant anxiety because of it. To be walking down the sidewalk, pamphlets in hand, only to be grabbed by the collar of his shirt and dragged into an alleyway.

Perhaps it was Mr. Graves who had sent the butterfly?

Nonsense.

His mentor had abandoned him. Cast him aside like a useless broken plaything he had gotten bored of. That was, until he discovered what Credence was.

Cold, malicious delight shuddered through him at the memory. He remembered that shocked look in Mr. Graves’ eyes as he realized his error and quickly rescinded all his cruel words in a last-ditch attempt to win back his favor.

For once in his life, Credence realized he had control.

And he’d wanted Mr. Graves to pay for what he’d done.

The paper butterfly swatted his cheek with its wing.

After the momentary shock had passed of realizing his life had reached the rock-bottom point of getting slapped by butterflies, Credence guided the offending creature back onto his finger and chastised, “That wasn’t very nice.”
The butterfly fluttered its wings and curtly turned its back to him.

“The cold shoulder?” Credence gently poked its side, “Really?”

The butterfly sat down.

“Mr. Graves definitely didn’t send you,” he ultimately decided and rested his head back against the wall, “He would’ve— Would’ve sent a dragon or something fearsome. Not a stubborn, little…”

Was the witch someone who had heard of the Obscurial’s exploits and admired his dastardly deeds from afar? Had they applauded the senseless death and destruction that he’d left behind?

Credence shivered. He hoped he hadn’t attracted a dangerous witch like that to him.

Perhaps it was someone from the subway incident?

No, everyone there had tried to kill him. Everyone except Miss Goldstein and—

Credence’s heart stopped.

“Him,” his voice warbled, “It was him.”

The man with the kind meadow green eyes.

The man who had spoken softly to him, who had asked if he could come over. The man who had looked upon him not with fear or reverence but concern. The man who had been a shining ray of hope that had momentarily pierced through the darkness. The man whose outstretched hand had almost helped pull Credence out of that ocean that was the Obscurus.

A sob ripped through him.

He quickly pressed his hand against his mouth, muffling his relieved weeping so as not to be discovered.

The paper butterfly crawled up onto his forehead, peeking its head over his brow and rubbing its tiny legs over the dark hairs.

“Him,” Credence repeated, his choked voice echoing through the silence of the morgue, “It was him.”

He looked up towards the butterfly, “Wasn’t it?”

His rescuer.

His savior.

His bonafide hero.

Him.

It had to be him.

But if it was… then why hadn’t the kind witch tried to talk to him? Why hadn’t he reached out to help him now? Where was he when he needed him most?

Credence swallowed and slowly stood up, determination settling in his shoulders.
Step 3. *Find help.*

When night fell, and all the evening festivities wrapped up, Credence ventured above deck to stretch out his legs. Sleeping the days away while exploring at night seemed to work best with him. It lowered his chances of getting caught. Besides, the peace and relative silence of the sea around him was... nice.

The salty scent of the ocean tickled his nose and the wind tousled his cropped hair.

The paper butterfly, avoiding getting swept away in the breeze, fastened itself tightly onto Credence’s lapel.

The only thing Credence hated was the inconvenient hour. The stars twinkled in the twilight sky and the ocean conducted a gentle melody of crashing waves. Sea-foam sprayed up the sides and slickened the floors. To anyone else, it would’ve been a picture-perfect portrait of serenity.

But to Credence, it was anything but.

It was too dark, too cold. It reminded him too much of the monster inside his heart.

Credence sighed and reached inside his coat, fetching a slightly bruised apple.

His mouth had watered to the point of nearly drooling when he’d spotted the shining scarlet skin nestled against the bottom of the waste-bin. He’d quickly snatched it up before any of the cleaning crew could spot him and bolted out of the kitchen.

He couldn’t believe his luck. If this was to serve as his breakfast, lunch and dinner for the coming day, he needed to savor every minute of it.

So, Credence settled himself at one of the outside benches and was just about to take a long-anticipated bite of his stowaway’s ambrosia when a sudden flash of blue caught his attention.

Credence dropped his apple.

“You,” he couldn’t believe his eyes and clutched his hands to his chest.

At the opposite end of the ship, the kind-eyed witch stretched his long, gangly limbs, much like a newborn giraffe awkwardly trying to stand for the first time after being born.

He hadn’t seemed to notice Credence.

No, the witch simply placed his hands on his hips and surveyed the endless black depths of the ocean. He stepped up to the rails, curiously peering through the missing section of bars.

The paper butterfly at Credence’s lapel fluttered its wings excitedly.

That was all the confirmation he needed.

Anxiety pierced Credence’s heart.
It wrapped its fiendish claws around him and squeezed until every fresh breath of air contained within his lungs disappeared. His hands trembled at his sides. His vision blurred, threatening to spill over at a moment’s notice and choke his throat with disgusting snot.

His savior was here.

But he wasn’t ready for this.

Not to say that some large and hopeful part of him didn’t yearn for this meeting. Despite all the pain it caused him and the knowledge he now possessed, Credence still wanted nothing more than to be accepted back into that wonderful world of magic and fantasy. He desired it. He wanted it more than anything else.

He wanted to cast spells and brew potions and fly on brooms and whatever else witches and wizards did. He wanted to see the world, not through the sorrow-filled gaze of an impoverished orphan, but through the wizened eyes of a skilled sorcerer. Credence wanted to live and to escape the wickedness of his heart and thoughts, desperately so.

But seeing the kind witch in person now, when the last time they had encountered each other was underneath that wretched metro station… Seeing him here when the last time they had met each other’s gaze was when Credence had nearly died.

In that instant, Credence no longer found himself on *The Wailing Whirlwind*.

The heavy scent of mold and noxious gasoline permeated the air. Credence pressed his knees against his chest, rocking anxiously back and forth, listening to the zap and crackle of electricity passing through the active railways. The walls seemed to be closing in, the distant *drip drip* dripping of a leaky pipe reminding him of everything he had done and the horror of transforming into the Obscurus on purpose.

He had just been so angry.

All this time, Mr. Graves had just been using him. Empty promises and hollow embraces that meant the world to Credence. But when his guardian angel had slapped him during his darkest hour, when he’d been begging for help, he’d realized that they were all lies to find the toy that he desired. Mr. Graves had never cared about him. He’d never intended to save him, a useless squib.

Until he and Mr. Graves discovered that the elusive creature that they’d been searching for had been lurking inside him all this time. Mr. Graves had been ready then to accept Credence back with open arms.

However, Credence was not the type of man to forgive and forget.

Credence had wanted Graves to hurt. To lose all hope. To make him feel the betrayal in his heart and the fury in his bones. Credence hadn’t wanted to be Credence anymore.

He had wanted to become a monster.

And a monster he had become.

*Oh God Above, what had he done?*

Credence wanted to scream, but no sound came out. He went to press his trembling hands over his face, however when he saw his Ma’s blood dripping down his fingers, he found that he could only stare in horror instead. The darkness started washing over him again. Ice-cold hands pulling him
down, down, down—

Just when Credence thought himself lost for good, the kind-eyed witch had appeared. He had come to his rescue.

Not for the Obscurus. Not for the power.

He had come for him.

Credence whimpered. The paper butterfly fluttered anxiously before his face and landed on his nose.

Within an instant, he found himself back on the ship.

But the kind-eyed witch was still there.

No no no no—

Credence ran his shaking hands over his face and buried his nails deep into his scalp. A searing pain pierced his skin, grounding him further in the moment. Something warm and thick and wet stickily dripped down the side of his face.

He needed to run.

He couldn’t do this.

What if he was wrong? What if the witch was like all the others that wanted to hurt him? What if he was like Mr. Graves and wanted to use him? What if? What if? What if?!

It wasn’t as if Credence possessed a good judgement of character.

He jumped to his feet.

He needed to return to the morgue — to his sanctuary — at once. To hide himself where he could be safe and where no one could hurt him.

What was he thinking? Fooling himself with wishful thoughts that he could find help and be accepted back into the magical community with open arms? That somehow this witch was different from the others (except for the wonderful Miss Goldstein) that had only wanted Credence for his power or to have him destroyed?

Stupid, Credence, stupid. That optimistic heart would only get him into trouble.

He couldn’t trust anyone. Not anymore. He was better off alone, wasn’t he?

He took one step forward to flee, when the kind-eyed witch suddenly stepped through the gap in the railing.

And fell overboard.

“Shh, Mummy’s here. It’s alright, sweet one. Everything totally, completely alright.”
Newt treaded the water, clutching the bleeding creature to his chest.

“Oh, you precious boy—” he paused and recounted the number of tentacles, “Girl. You precious girl. This ship is far too big for you to crush, darling. What are you doing all the way out here anyways, hmm?”

Kraken hatching season was upon them, certainly.

But hatchlings weren’t supposed to venture out this deep into the ocean this soon. It was nowhere near time for migration to start and the waters were far too cold to sustain an infant. It was a puzzling mystery (although, poachers were the likely and, frankly, disheartening answer) and Newt intended to solve it.

Well, whenever he figured out just how to get back on board the ship first.

Typical scatter-brained Newt Scamander at your service.

What was he thinking?

Diving overboard without bringing some sort of rope to hoist himself back onto the deck was a death sentence especially at this relatively advanced hour. Although, Newt had had half a mind about him to discard his coat and scarf first before jumping into the freezing ocean. He thought he deserved a pat on the back for that one.

Now, if only he hadn’t carelessly left his wand in his coat pocket…

Cradling the Kraken infant against his chest, Newt floated along the quiet waves beside the ship.

The ship that was slowly coasting along without him on it.

What a mess you’ve gotten yourself into this time, Scamander.

A mysteriously flickering light on deck pulled his attention. Proving enough of a distraction that he didn’t notice how the gentle seas rapidly grew into a roiling tempest.

The ocean angrily foamed and the once-delicate breeze transformed into a howling squall. It crashed Newt against the metal underside of the ship, forcing seawater into his lungs in place of breath. He quickly pivoted his body and shielded the frightened creature between his arms. Blood gushed rapidly from his nose and, just as he thought he was about to be pulled under, the waves dragged him back out to the open sea.

That was, before repeating the entire process all over again.

Newt scrambled at every chance for air. His legs paddled furiously underneath him, struggling to keep himself upright and afloat. He may not have been the strongest of blokes, however he’d always had impeccable endurance; and right now, as he was tugged every which way, he was bloody thankful for that.

A large shadow hurriedly crossed the platform, running as if the Devil himself was nipping at their heels, and stopped right around the area where Newt had jumped off moments ago.

Wait.

Did that mean…?

“Ah, yes! Hello!” Newt called up to the dark figure above him, unable to make out their features due
to the late hour, the height, and the fact that the roiling sea was currently trying its best to drown him, “Could you, by any chance, lend me a hand and pull me up?”

Silence came as his only answer.

The growing ocean waves thrashed violently and threw him up against the hull once more. Newt tasted copper in his mouth now.

Had the person not heard? Perhaps he hadn’t shouted loud enough?

The Kraken wrapped its tentacles around his neck… and his waist… and around each of his legs. Oh, this poor creature was definitely no older than a week if it had already reached the size of an average human man.

“Quickly please! A rope or anything to pull me up if you could,” he shouted desperately, “I need to get back to my cabin. Urgently. I have an injured creature that needs immediate attention!”

The figure disappeared.

Newt’s heart sank.

But right when he started theorizing whether an infant Kraken’s suckers were strong enough to climb up the side of a metal ship with a bumbling wizard in tow, a life preserver was thrown overboard.

Newt shuddered with relief. Or was that from the cold? He couldn’t tell.

The churning waves rapidly died down when Newt latched onto the yellow ring and lifted it around himself. He tugged on the rope, showing that he was safe inside, when a sharp jerk suddenly started hoisting him up.

“It’s alright, sweet one,” Newt gently cooed to the young Kraken, “Just a moment in the cool air and then Mummy will get you somewhere safe, don’t you worry. I’m here to help.”

He just needed to reach inside his coat, laying carelessly abandoned above deck, and to his wand before erasing that poor, well-intentioned Muggle’s memory first. Such a pity that a good deed had to be paired with such a fate.

They reached the edge of the deck.

A scarred hand stretched out. Newt quickly accepted it, the coarse bumps feeling sensational against his palms, and stared into the impossibly dark eyes of his savior.

"Credence."

Chapter End Notes

Another day, another chapter finished! We’re progressing smoothly along into our first adventure with the boys. I had initially intended for this chapter to be longer, but it just felt right to leave it where it was. And, if I’ve learned anything from my writing, I always gotta follow my gut. I promise that, in the next update, Newt and Credence will have an actual conversation!
Please leave your comments and constructive criticism below. All comments, big and small, are welcome here! How am I doing? Is there anything that I should include more of? Less of? I tend to get really wordy in 99.99% of my writing so, for this piece, I've made a valiant attempt at cutting it down. Is it alright or should I embrace the wordiness?

Until next time, my darlings!
“Credence.”

The kind witch remembered his name.

Nothing separated them — Credence standing on the wooden deck and Newt hanging just off the ships edge, linked together by their entwined hands. With just those few inches between them, Credence could finally get a good, long look at his savior. Better than that split-second moment in New York before everything had went horribly, disastrously wrong.

Newt’s tawny brown hair, hopelessly drenched after that midnight dive, clung onto his tanned forehead like glue. Little iridescent droplets of seawater dribbled down his freckled face. A few of them caught against his eyelashes, reflecting rainbows in the meadow green of his eyes.

Credence almost smiled.

A thread-bare cotton shirt clung to his chest, the soaked material betraying the galaxies of freckles and scars that laid underneath. The over-sized arms and loose collar of the garment reminded Credence of the clothing worn by the Victorians a couple decades ago or, perhaps, the Colonials a few hundred years prior. It was old-fashioned yet, suited the wizard perfectly.

Brown tailored trousers hung at his hips. Leather boots fastened tightly at his feet. Credence could faintly spy mismatched socks peeking out over the laces — one canary yellow and the other smoky gray.
Even when drenched to the bone and shivering from the freezing cold, Credence thought that Newt was gorgeous.

He possessed a supernatural sort of beauty. Comprised of nymph-ish oranges and woodland fae greens and sunset pinks. It reminded Credence of the fairy tales and fables he’d once read underneath his bed when he was younger and when he was more rebellious and willing to challenge his Ma.

And that smile.

Heaven be damned, that smile.

Perfect teeth stained with scarlet blood, yet still somehow shining as if he had just bitten off a slice of pure sunlight.

God help him, this enchanting witch remembered his name.

Credence would’ve reveled in this wondrous moment had Newt been safe on board instead of currently being attacked by a—a giant squid?!

“I—,” Credence’s tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth, “… uhm… you have—”

Why couldn’t he say anything?

And, perhaps even more importantly, why wasn’t Newt panicking? He looked positively giddy! As if he had just witnessed the second coming of Christ himself.

“Yes?” Newt waited patiently, still beaming that glorious, perfect smile at him.

“…s—squid.”

“Scamander actually,” Newt tilted his head, perplexed, “Newton Scamander. However, I much prefer Newt, if you wouldn’t mind.”

His confusion must have showed because Newt’s eyes widened a moment later, his smile dropping into a small, sheepish ‘o.’

“Ah right, you must mean this wonderful girl,” he pulled himself fully onto the ship, releasing Credence from his grasp. Newt smoothed his hands tenderly down the creature’s vermilion skin, as if he were cradling a newborn babe instead of a creature of the deep, and frowned at the tentacle that hung limply around his shoulder.

“I believe she got that leg right there caught up in one of the propellers, the poor dear,” he said, “Thank Merlin the females of her species produce this wonderful anticoagulant solution secreted from their skin. You see those tiny little dots that look like freckles right there? They ooze out this clear goo that—ah, never mind. Wouldn’t want to bore you with the details.”

Newt leaned closer, face-to-face with the squid in his arms, and practically cooed, “But, a baby has no business being out here trying to crush ships 100 times her size. In a couple years? Perhaps. But now? Certainly not! Oh, but, she’s such a beautiful little creature, isn’t she?”

Newt knelt down onto bended knee and rummaged through his discarded coat. It seemed to be a little difficult balancing the GIANT SQUID attached to his body; but, with an exclamatory, “A-ha!” the witch pulled out his wand.

Credence jolted backwards.
This was all too much for him to handle.

Newt. The Giant Squid. And now, having a wand inches away from his face? The last time he had seen one up so close, it had been pointed at him.

The butterfly, prudent as always, distracted him right on queue.

Paper and water didn’t exactly mix, so to avoid getting splashed by Newt’s exaggerated gesturing, the butterfly fluttered off Credence’s lapel and landed on the back of his neck. Credence twitched and stepped further backwards.

The tiny paper legs tickled.

He reached around and beckoned the butterfly onto his finger, choosing to shield it with his hand instead.

“I’ll need to expand the aquarium and transfer the Kelpie eggs into a smaller habitat. Been meaning to do that anyways. Do I have enough fish to feed her until we reach port?” Newt continued obliviously and cast a heating spell over himself to dry his clothes.

He slipped on his coat and looped his scarf around his neck.

“I did pack an emergency supply in the event we encountered rough waters,” he hummed, “On that note, I need to readjust water temperatures and salinity appropriate for a growing—" 

Credence couldn’t follow everything that he was saying. However, after a quick flick of Newt’s wand, the giant squid was suddenly hovering mid-air, encased inside a bubble of sloshing sea water.

“Oh, sweet one. Will you give me your permission to harvest just the teeniest vial of your healing essence? There’s this associate of mine down at Mr. Mulpepper’s Apothecary who would love to get his hands on it. You see—"

Newt continued to babble nonsensically to the giant squid. With the floating bubble obediently following behind, he descended the stairs towards the passenger cabins and left Credence… alone.

Whatever way Credence expected their reunion to go, it certainly wasn’t like this.

The wind picked up.

A sudden chill passed through Credence’s body. Wrapping his arms tightly around himself for warmth, he shifted his weight uncomfortably from foot-to-foot. Nauseating doubt creeped into his heart, uncertain about the witch’s intentions towards him.

The paper butterfly anxiously tapped its feet against his knuckles, trying their best to distract him.

Twice Newt had seen him on this ship and twice he had turned away from him. Back in New York, he had extended his hand towards him and said that he had wanted to help. That heartbreaking sincerity in his voice had given Credence just the tiniest glimmer of hope that maybe… maybe he could be saved. Enough that he had found himself reaching out towards him until everything had went horribly, *horribly* wrong.

Had he lied?

Or had he sent the paper butterfly and considered that good deed as good enough?

“Credence.”
He blinked through tears.

Swallowing thickly, Credence lifted his head.

Newt was standing on the top step of the stairwell, a puzzled expression pulling his lips into a frown.

“Aren’t you coming?”

Credence blinked.

“Oh, I mean… erm…” The confidence and ease that Newt had displayed seconds ago had disappeared completely.

Quiet hesitation entered his voice in its place.

“...if you need more space, that’s perfectly fine. After what happened in—” Newt winced and started twirling a strand of his hair, “Well, ah… Being alone is probably what you want right now, isn’t it? I can just continue keeping my— my distance and whatnot. Please take all the time you need. I’m not going anywhere.”

Newt paused, his eyes downcast.

Credence’s heart thumped anxiously in his chest.

“I meant what I said, you know. I’d like to help you, Credence,” Newt smiled, awkward yet genuine, “If you’ll let me.”

Newt had thought that he had wanted to be left alone.

That was the reason why he had steered clear of him this entire time. He wasn’t avoiding him or taking back his offer or considering the paper butterfly as aid enough. Newt was giving Credence the freedom to approach him whenever he was ready. Instead of forcing his help upon him, he was letting Credence—

A lump formed in his throat.

He was letting Credence make that choice.

How would he have really reacted had Newt come sprinting down the ship deck the day they’d left port?

After finding himself on The Wailing Whirlwind, without memory or any recollection of what transpired after the subway incident, Credence had crumpled to pieces.

Had Newt approached then, Credence probably would have run away or jumped into the ocean himself.

Granted, he had also just thought of fleeing back to the morgue moments before Newt had flung himself overboard. But panic attacks could do that to a man. Fool himself into believing his doubts and anxieties, sending him running in the opposite direction from what he desired most out of fear of it all going wrong.

Under more normal circumstances, Credence couldn’t function without someone else holding his hand.

Perhaps that was one of the many reasons why he had remained living with his Ma for so long.
Credence was no good by himself. He needed people to tell him what to do and what to think. To take him by the arm and guide him upon the right path. Otherwise, he’d just be pathetic and worthless. Stuck wide-eyed and afraid on endless roads of possibilities.

Hesitating for just a moment longer, Credence took a tentative step forward.

And made his first decision.

“Can… I join you?”

Newt beamed with all the light of the rising sun.

“Why I can’t think of a more fantastic idea, Credence.”

Progress.

Wonderful progress.

When he had sent over the paper butterfly that first day, Newt had been of the reasoning that Credence didn’t need or require the meddling interference of the wizarding world so soon after—well, after what happened. Newt hadn’t wanted to overwhelm him or potentially scare him off. So, he had thrust off the decision to approach off his shoulders and unto Credence’s. He had reasoned that Credence would come find him if, or when, he was ready.

But, during their second night at sea, that wicked seed of self-doubt had burrowed itself inside his heart.

Newt had found himself lounging on his bunk, twirling the frayed edges of his Hufflepuff scarf around his fingers, and wondering whether what Credence really needed wasn’t space at all.

The boy was bound to have questions. This was a new and frightening world that he had found himself in. In Newt’s experience, when Muggles like Jacob found themselves exposed to wizarding society, they either rejected it for their own reality or looked upon it with awe and wonder. That was, until they were obliviated.

But Credence… he was different. He had power, and no idea what to do with it.

Perhaps, all that he needed was a friendly hand upon the shoulder to help him rise to his full potential and control the Obscurus inside him.

Newt had scrambled into his suitcase at the thought and put on the kettle, scalding his throat with a boiling cup of tea that hadn’t the proper time to cool.

Newt wasn’t Grindelwald.

He didn’t want to be yet another wizard forcing his thoughts and opinions upon Credence. How pompous would he have to be to claim to know what was best for him when Newt barely knew what was best for himself?
And yet, Newt had to acknowledge that Credence had no one to fall back on. No one to reach out to for help.

Credence had done horrible, horrible things as an Obscurus. He had killed people and placed countless others in unspeakable danger. The destruction and mayhem wreaked upon New York within those last few days would forever leave a wicked scar on those witches and wizards unlucky enough to have witnessed it firsthand. However, as tragic and stomach-churning as those crimes may have been, they were still things that Credence had little control over — if he had even known about them at all.

Credence was blameless. He wasn’t entirely faultless since it had been his hand, knowing or not. But blaming Credence for his actions would be akin to blaming a witch or wizard for whatever dastardly deeds they had committed underneath the influence of an Imperius. Absolutely unthinkable.

To make matters worse, the one person who had taken Credence underneath their wing amongst all that chaos had been Gellert Grindelwald.

Credence had suppressed his true self for nearly two and a half decades, surviving twice as long as any other documented Obscurial in all of wizarding history. He had to have been practically on his hands and knees, begging for anything or anyone for help. Then, to be finally introduced to the world of magic by the darkest wizard of their time and manipulated for his power…

It was heart-breaking.

Dealing with the consequences of not only his actions but the actions of others, Credence could easily become lost underneath the weight of it all. Any person would.

Newt felt horrible for not coming to Credence’s rescue sooner. He should have suspected something strange afoot. Should have put the clues together and come to the only logical conclusion, no matter how impossible it seemed. Surely, there could have been something he could have done.

But there was nothing he could do to change the past. All that he could do was focus on agonizing about the present.

Newt shook his head.

With a flick of his wand, he quickly finished putting the final touches on the aquarium he had been magically constructing for the Kraken hatchling.

He transferred over thick forests of softly swaying seaweed and conjured pieces of coral that he had been saving for a moment like this: dusty pink brains, pale yellow branches, and magnificent taupe pillars. Constructing a jagged cave of limestone and sparkling treasures, Newt welded the coral reef together until a large habitat suitable for a growing Kraken emerged before his very eyes.

Newt brought the floating bubble of seawater closer and carefully transferred the Kraken into the aquarium.

“There you go. I know, I know. It’s not as big as what you’re used to,” Newt cooed when the adorable little Kraken, exploring her new home, stubbornly twirled around her tentacles, “But, I’ll get you back to your brothers and sisters as soon as I can. I promise. Magizoologist’s honor!”

He raised his palm in the air and grinned.

The Kraken stared, silently judging him.
Newt puffed out his cheeks.

“Rest that leg of yours now, darling,” Newt slipped his wand into his back pocket, “I’ll be back to check on you shortly.”

Newt returned to his cabin. He climbed up the ladder, exited the suitcase, and closed the clasps with a loud click.

He placed his hands on his hips and surveyed the messy room: the notes crammed everywhere and anywhere, the trousers thrown carelessly over the port window, all that endless clutter.

Newt pulled down the pair of trousers and folded them, setting them aside.

Make it somewhat sensible in here and whatnot before he brought Credence in.

As much as Newt wanted to show Credence that not everything about the wizarding world was bad, taking him down into his private sanctuary now was far too soon. It had been different when it was Jacob. The lovable Muggle was harmless and the situation at that particular moment in time had called for it. But Credence—

Oh, Credence.

Who knew what could happen if he became frightened in the suitcase, surrounded by all new sights and sounds? What would his reaction be when coming face-to-face with miraculous creatures found only within myth and legend? Or by all the other creatures that he had never even heard of?

Newt had an unquestionable duty to Credence, but he also had an obligation to keep his creatures safe. He couldn’t endanger either.

Thus, Newt had asked Credence to wait outside his cabin for a few minutes while he brought the young Kraken to her new home.

Nervously adjusting his coat, he cleared his throat, “You can come in now, Credence. Whenever you’re ready.”

A minute passed.

And then another.

Newt fiddled with his scarf, twirling the frayed edges between his fingers. He worried that Credence might have headed off, disheartened by how much time he had taken or something or other, when the door to his room slowly creaked open.

Merlin’s Beard.

For a man of his remarkable height, Credence possessed a gift for making himself look half his size. His broad shoulders slumped, his head bowed and his haunting black eyes quickly shifted downcast when he noticed Newt staring.

He reminded Newt of a frightened unicorn: power and grace melded into one. The subject of endless fascination by Muggles and Wizards alike, yet easily frightened by the slightest of sounds.

“Please,” Newt coughed, “Make yourself comfortable.”

Credence flinched backwards.
“Sorry,” Newt inwardly winced and rubbed the back of his neck, “Feel free to move anything, by the way. I don’t mind. I know it’s a bit of a mess. Inspiration struck and I’ve spent the last couple days locked in here writing. Haven’t had the time to tidy up.”

He awkwardly grinned.

“I was just taking a break, actually, when I went up deck and found— well, you.”

Credence didn’t respond.

Quiet as a mouse, he closed the door behind him. Credence hovered for a moment, every movement small and calculated as he made his way through the path of least resistance, before finding a somewhat clean spot on the bed for him to sit.

The poor soul was stiffer than a new riding broom, fresh from the shop.

Credence clasped his knees in an alarmingly tight grip. His back remained hunched over and his hollow eyes were now trained to the tops of his weathered leather shoes. Smudged old blood, browned and flaking, stained his ear.

“Credence.”

He sharply flinched.

That was twice now and scarcely a minute had passed.

It was like Credence was expecting to be hit for any wrong move and was perpetually bracing himself for impact. Newt’s heart lurched. What sort of miserable life had he known?

“Does it hurt?”

Without moving an inch, Credence cast his gaze over.

“Your ear,” Newt gestured awkwardly, “I can heal that for you, if you’d like. It’d take one moment —”

He reached around for his wand but quickly stopped as Credence’s eyes widened in unmistakable panic and returned his attention back down.

“But not,” Newt dropped his hands to his sides, “That’s fine too. It’s your decision to make.”

Silence bloomed between them.

He was so not good at this.

Newt seated himself at his desk, running his hands through his hair. Credence barely responded.

“So, I— uhm,” Newt swallowed thickly and loosened his scarf, “I wanted to thank you for earlier. For pulling me back on board. You were a genuine lifesaver, Credence. Well, technically, the lifesaver was the real lifesaver— but, uhm, never mind that.”

He fidgeted around with the fringes of his Hufflepuff scarf, braiding and twisting the soft fabric.

“What I’m trying to say is: I don’t know what I would have done without you. Thank you,” Newt twirled around in his chair, causing it to loudly squeak, “Although, I really hadn’t pictured seeing you again while cradling a Kraken hatchling in my arms.”
Credence’s head whirled up. He stared at him with startled wide eyes, mouth opened just a smidgen.

“A-ha!” Newt happily clasped his hands together, “A reaction!”

Although, it really shouldn’t have come as much of a surprise considering how he was raised.

“Merlin, that’s right,” he muttered to himself and returned to fiddling with his scarf.

“Krakens… exist?” Newt donned a lopsided smile, “Normally, the little ones would be swimming around the Italian coast during this time of year. I don’t know what she was doing so far away from home. But I’d wager she’d escaped from poachers trying to slice off her ivory beak or remove her healing glands. Sell them for a high price on the black market.”

The thought made Newt sick to his stomach.

“I’m what you’d call a Magizoologist. I study and help magical creatures whenever and wherever I can,” he leaned forward, “Even jumping off moving ships into icy water apparently.”

Silence.

Credence continued staring at him with those haunting, skeletal eyes of his.

Eyes as dark as the ocean outside and filled with just as many mysteries.

Newt clasped his hands together and sighed, averting his gaze.

“Look. I’ll be perfectly honest with you. I— I’m not as good with people as I am with my creatures,” he admitted tentatively, “I don’t know if keeping my distance from you these past couple days was the right decision. I figured that if you wanted my help, you would come and seek me out. If I chose poorly, then I am truly sorry.”

For better or for worse though, Credence had sought him out. Of course, it had been to his rescue and was a decision stolen entirely out of his hands, but he had come to him and stayed. That had to mean something.

“And I want to help you, Credence,” Newt’s lowered his voice, soft and sympathetic, “I very much do. But only if you want me to. The choice is entirely up to you.”

Credence absolutely needed help.

He was a monster, a villainous freak. He was a stone-cold killer who had taken the life of his own mother, and in front of his little sister no less. He didn’t know what was happening to him or how he could possibly control it or whether he really wanted to. Did someone like him even deserve salvation?

The only person who had ever believed that he deserved better was Mr. Graves.

And all he’d ever done was lie.
“What… am I?” Credence asked quietly, needing to know the truth, “Am I… evil?”

The kind witch’s eyes softened.

“No, Credence.”

A breath of relief.

“I think…” Newt continued fidgeting with his scarf, “I think… you’re a very good person who has experienced some very bad things.”

“I’m not though,” Credence blurted, eyes widening and mouth running dry as he realized what he said, and yet, he found himself unable to stop, “A good person, I mean. My Ma—She’s… dead because of me. I killed her. I got angry and I—I killed her.”

The kind witch fell silent.

Oh God Oh God Oh God

Credence ruined it. He had tasted salvation and he ruined it because he couldn’t keep his blasphemous mouth shut. He was going to be tossed out the door any moment now and he’d have to return to the morgue, scrounging the bins for food. Maybe if he hurried, he could find the apple he’d dropped up deck.

Newt pulled his chair over, not stopping until he was inches away from the bed.

“Did you intend to?”

“I—I don’t know.”

He knew that wasn’t the right answer. That was reserved only for an incredulous ‘of course not!’ and turning his head away, offended by the insinuation. But there had been… moments. Times when he would lay awake at night, his muscles aching from the latest beating, wondering what it would be like if Ma just… disappeared.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry,” Credence automatically reached for his belt, tears filling his eyes, “I’m sorry —”

“What—what are you doing?”

He turned in enough time to watch Newt look away. Yet, even though the witch couldn’t meet his eye, his face remained etched in such genuine worry and concern that it gave Credence pause.

“I’m being sinful. Don’t you—” Credence swallowed, uncertain, “Don’t you need to punish me?”

“No, Merlin’s Beard, no,” Newt’s eyes widened, still not looking at him, “Credence, there’s nothing that needs punishing. Even if there was, which there isn’t, hurting you isn’t—that isn’t a part of my philosophy.”

Credence’s hands fell to his sides.

“I don’t… know you very well. I don’t know what you’ve been through,” Newt said quietly after a moment, “But I don’t keep the company of dangerous creatures. That includes people.”

“If I’m not dangerous… then, what am I?”
“A wizard.”

He shivered at those words.

“However,” Newt awkwardly cleared his throat, “Something happened when you were young. You probably didn’t realize it, but your magic ended up… contained. Suppressed. Whenever wizards keep their innate talents from developing like that, it’s usually because it’s acting as some form of protection and temporary. But… you see, there’s this parasite called an Obscurus that feeds off magic. And when they come across a situation like yours…”

Credence gripped his knees.

“You’re a wizard and an Obscurial, but you’re not the Obscurus. Whatever it does insinuates nothing about your character. All that happens is that, when you become angry or upset,” he paused, “All of that repressed magic is unleashed and the Obscurus takes control.”

“Like with Ma,” Credence glanced back at him, “Like with you.”

Newt leaned backwards, startled.

“With me?”

“The subway,” Credence quickly averted his gaze, “I—Mr. Graves was hurting you. I wanted him to stop. And then I—I…”

He couldn’t finish.

Newt slowly rose from his chair, causing it to squeak, and knelt down before him.

“Thank you, Credence,” a sincere smile crossed his expression, “You’ve been helping me since the very beginning, haven’t you?”

Green eyes met black for a split-second moment.

Until Newt tapped his chin with the back of his thumb and looked away.

“Remarkable,” he hummed thoughtfully, “You, I mean. You’re remarkable. Every known Obscurial in wizarding history was a child plagued by tragedy and misfortune. All documented occurrences resulted in death by the time they were 9, maybe 10.”

Sorrow flickered across Newt’s face, but it was quickly dispelled with a sharp shake of the head.

“But you? Yours is a story entirely new. I’ve never heard of anyone surviving to your age,” he looked at him in awe now. “I dare say you’re almost as old as me! What are you? 24? 25? I don’t know what it is, but something about your magic proved enough for the Obscurus. What you are isn’t dangerous or evil. What you are is a miracle.”

The ship suddenly jerked to the side.

Credence turned ghostly white.

Tremors coursed through his icy veins and the bruising grip on his knees turned painful. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, the paper butterfly pushed off his lapel and fluttered before his face worriedly.

Mr. Graves had thought him special too.
Exceptional. A genuine miracle.

After recognizing that swarming mass of power trapped within his pathetic, malnourished body, Mr. Graves had accepted Credence with open arms. In those last few minutes together before everything went wrong, Mr. Graves had made him feel incredible. For just one blissful moment, Credence had believed that he was... someone important. Someone worthy of attention and love instead of the useless, sinful, good-for-nothing freak that he knew himself to be.

Tears burned his eyes and blurred his vision. However, much to his horror, he found that he could still just make out the small tendrils of black smoke rising from his hands.

Credence whimpered in fear.

No.

Not now.

He didn’t want this; but who in this world ever chooses to lose control?

Credence curled around himself and clung onto his head, eyes wide and unseeing as he plunged down into the darkest darkness imaginable. He shook, unable to stop himself or stop this thing, as he drowned underneath an ocean where he couldn’t breathe or cry out for help.

Look at him. What a freak.

He was a monster. Worthless. Pathetic. No better than the gum stuck underneath a park bench or a garbage bag full of rotting trash.

He was nothing.

Nothing at all.

He was—

“Credence.”

A light pierced through the darkness.

“Credence, it’s me. It’s Newt.”

Newt.

The kind green-eyed witch.

That’s right. He had just been sitting beside him talking about—

Talking about what?

“I’m going to touch your hands now, Credence,” his voice seemed closer, “If that’s alright with you.”

A few seconds later, something rough and surprisingly warm enveloped his scarred hands. Angels above, if only his Mother could see the blaspheme that Credence was now. Openly associating with witches. Seeking out their help and comfort. Relishing in their soothing touch.

“Credence, it’s okay. I’m here. Breathe with me. In and out. Can you do that for me? In and out.”
“Good. That’s right, Credence. Keep breathing.”

“In.

“Out.

“You’re doing wonderful. One more time, Credence. In and out.”

“In.

“Out.

“Excellent, Credence. You’re doing fantastic,” Newt’s calming voice soothed, “I’m here. You’re not alone. There’s nothing — absolutely nothing — to be ashamed of. No one is going to hurt you or judge you or take advantage of you here, you have my word. You have complete control, Credence.”

The darkness faded.

Dazzling eyes as green as spring meadows waiting for their flowers to bloom and amber freckles dotting warm skin like stars and their constellations took its place.

Mother once told him that freckles were angel kisses. If that were true then Newt, a witch of all things, must have been revered by the Heavens.

“There you are,” Newt smiled and Credence’s heart skipped a beat, “Just keep breathing with me, okay? Can you do that?”

Credence slowly nodded.

“Excellent,” he squeezed his hands, “I’m so sorry, Credence. This was my fault, not yours. If there’s anything you need, anything you want me to do or not do, tell me and I’ll follow it. No questions asked.”

He was safe. He was secure. He had nothing to be afraid of.

Not when his savior was here.

“... special,” Credence swallowed thickly and stared down at their entwined hands, “Mr. Graves—He used to call me special. He said that I was his miracle.”

Newt stiffened.

Credence whimpered, fearing that he had said something wrong and was about to be slapped for it—but, the kind witch quickly relaxed and gently squeezed his hands.

He forced himself to breathe.

It was okay.

Newt was different.
“All these years…” Credence spoke barely above a whisper, “Ma warned me that the Devil was charming. That he would tell you all the things you wanted to hear. I knew and yet— yet I still fell for it anyways. I just… wanted to be seen and he gave me that.”

Credence squeezed his eyes tightly shut. Shame feasted upon his soul, coloring his flesh burning scarlet.

“I sinned over and over and over again just to hear his praise. So that he could pat me on the back and tell me good job. I worshiped him. Devoted myself to him just to feel like I was—” he swallowed, “Like I was worth something. That I wasn’t a freak.”

But Mr. Graves has only desired an eager, unquestioning servant to fulfill his own selfish needs. He had never cared for Credence.

How could he have been so foolish?

“A wicked wizard took advantage of an innocent person who just wanted to help and do good. You didn’t do anything wrong, Credence,” Newt said quietly, “He did.”

Credence almost smiled.

Wouldn’t that have been nice to believe?

Chapter End Notes

Woot woot! They've finally had a real conversation, folks!

I've always imagined that autistic Newt doesn't know how, exactly, to be around other people. So, he ends up either extremely awkward or talking a lot about his creatures. But he's a quick responder in emergency situations.

Without further ado, please leave your comments and constructive criticism below! Is there anything in my writing that I can improve upon? Anything that you'd like to see more of? Less of? What did you enjoy about this chapter? All comments, big and small, are loved and cherished in this house!
Newt buzzed around the cabin, energy filling his veins as much as rumpled clothes and papers filled his arms.

He could hear Mother’s exasperated voice patiently chiding in his ear. He had known that a guest was coming over. He’d invited them, so he should have tidied up before they arrived, not after. But Newt had never been much of one for foresight. Besides, he hardly figured that Credence would’ve minded if he cleaned now.

However, Newt’s definition of clean had always been rather… peculiar.

If someone could walk across the floors without breaking something important underneath, then Newt considered it a job well done. Therefore, it didn’t matter that his desk was becoming so congested with papers, clothes, and sketches that they reached the cabin roof.

The floor was spotless!

Yet, wherever his creatures were concerned, Newt deviated back towards more acceptable standards. He knew exactly which creatures needed to be fed daily or by the month. He knew which ones needed special treatment. He knew which creatures could be rehabilitated back into the wild and the ones that needed a more stable environment. He had calculated every last bit of habitat maintenance down to a science. Newt thrived off his schedule and despaired whenever real-world obligations interfered with it.

As a magizoologist, Newt was like a god of cleanliness and organization.

As a wizard…

Newt was like a tsunami within a tornado within a hurricane. He could destroy a room within a manner of minutes.

Newt gathered the last of his remaining notes together and turned around. He squared his shoulders, a sense of pride swelling inside his chest as he took a nice, long look around the cabin. Nothing except his suitcase remained on the floor.
It was officially clean.

However, as he surveyed the small room, Newt realized that he had overlooked a glaring problem.

There was only one bed.

Obviously Newt had booked himself a single cabin. Never in his wildest dreams had he expected to run into Credence here of all places; but, by *Merlin’s Long and Graying Beard*, that didn’t mean that he was going to turn the boy away.

Newt wasn’t going to fail another Obscurial.

And, just like that, the energy running rampant within him extinguished like a water-logged candle.

Newt looked down at his notes. Charcoal-smudged eyes and scratched lettering stared back at him. So many creatures encountered during his travels. Even more lives saved because of him and his efforts. Newt had brought so much *good*, so much *happiness* into the world.

But who was he kidding? Newt could bury himself with work until the day he died. He would *never* forget about the girl he’d failed.

“M—Mr. Scamander?”

“Please,” he lowered his notes and smiled, “Call me Newt.”

Credence stood hunched over before him. The paper butterfly had abandoned his lapel and was now crawling around his shoulder, inspecting a piece of white thread sticking out from Credence’s jacket.

“Oh. I’m—I’m sorry…”

“Nothing to apologize for,” Newt assuaged, leaning back against his desk, “Was there something you wanted to ask me?”

Credence hesitated and glanced behind the wizard. The mountain of papers and clothes loomed precariously over them.

“I—I couldn’t help but notice that you write a lot.”

An amused smile crossed Newt’s face.

“And I was wondering,” Credence wringed his scarred hands together, “What is that you’re holding?”

“Mermaids.”

The paper butterfly raised its head, flickering its antennae.

“Pardon?”

Beaming brighter than the afternoon sun in summer, Newt gestured Credence back onto the bed and thrust the wrinkled papers into his hands. Newt hopped onto the mattress, which smelled faintly of mildew and definitely had a broken spring somewhere, and crossed his gangly legs together.

“Mermaids are fascinating creatures. They’re one of the rare universal magical beings that can be found in every continent and ocean around the world,” he reached over to point out a smudged charcoal drawing, “You see this one right here?”
Credence nodded.

“She lives around the Great Barrier Reef,” Newt traced around the flared fins, elaborate enough to have resembled the finest French lace, “If I hadn’t misplaced my pastels, I would’ve colored her in. Her skin was the brightest shade of crimson that I’ve ever seen.”

“She’s beautiful,” Credence whispered, quieter than a shadow, “You’re very good at drawing.”

“Oh, I—uhm, thank you.”

Newt wasn’t used to compliments.

He retracted his hand and tapped his chin with the backside of his thumb.

“I’m particularly fascinated by saltwater mermaids. I’ve studied freshwater colonies all across Europe and parts of Southeast Asia, but they’re all so different from their oceanic cousins. I’d dare to classify them as different species altogether,” he said thoughtfully, “Saltwater mermaids can sing and speak above land. All others can only do so underwater.”

Newt had learned that the hard way when he’d tried befriending the ones in the Great Lake as a first-year.

“They do have this rather nasty pastime though of drowning people.”

Credence’s dark eyes widened and promptly tore his gaze away from the illustration to stare at Newt, “How did you survive meeting one?”

A cheeky grin spread across Newt’s face.

“I offered her half of my roast beef sandwich.”

Credence stared. The paper butterfly wriggled its antennae. But when it became abundantly clear that Newt wasn’t going to elaborate further without a little pushing, it hopped off from Credence’s shoulder onto his.

“I’m sorry,” Credence apologized yet again and leaned forward, “I’ll get her.”

“It’s quite alright,” Newt guided the paper butterfly onto his finger and brought her up to eye-level, “She just wants to hear more of the story, don’t you?”

The paper butterfly pranced around his finger happily in response.

“Well, aren’t you charming?” he laughed and gently ran his finger down her back, “And what about you, Credence?”

Credence furrowed his brows.

“Pardon?”

“Would you like to hear more?”

A flicker of surprise crossed his expression, as if he hadn’t even considered that he had a choice in the matter. Credence lowered his gaze, chewing the corner of his lip.

“I’d… like that.”
Newt leaned forward, placing the paper butterfly back on his shoulder.

“A couple months ago, I was in Cairns to investigate what the locals were calling their ‘Drop Bear problem.’ People were getting scared out of their homes and the town was hanging in shambles. No one knew what to do. I was there a month, but couldn’t figure out if there was a creature behind the attacks or a rabid Koala. So, I’d contacted a colleague down in Melbourne to come and take my place. But, ah, that’s not important,” he wrinkled his nose, “Anyways, there I was having tea along the coast when I saw her.”

No one ever believed his stories. Theseus indulged him. Mother always wore a patient smile. But Newt knew that they thought his travels and experiences were all the results of a fanciful imagination instead of reality.

Credence though…

He listened intently.

Expressions of disbelief only by the magnificence of the tale instead of in question of the truthfulness. He seemed to hang onto Newt’s every word, unspoken questions filling his gaze like an eager student not wanting to disrupt their professor.

*Like an eager student.*

“Watching me on my little pity picnic with a mouthful of mustard, roast beef, and rye,” the corner of his mouth quirked, “Crumbs across my face. Clothes stained with sweat.”

Credence’s mouth parted.

“She asked me to sing for her,” Newt continued, tapping his thumb against his chin, “They love it when sailors sing songs and shanties for them. But I can hardly hold a note, so I gave her the rest of my lunch instead. In return, she let me draw her.”

His eyes widened in sudden realization.

“And, I supposed,” he said slowly, “Let me continue breathing.”

Coastal mermaids were notorious, after all, for drowning and dining upon the flesh of those that sang for them.

“Oh, I really should’ve thanked her for that,” Newt rubbed his hands over his face, embarrassment coloring his cheeks, “Do you think it’s too late to return to Australia?”

Newt's handwriting was ghastly.

Sweeping punctuation and cramped lettering abounded the pages and had no determinate beginning or end. It was to the point where Credence couldn’t determine whether the observations scrawled across the parchment paper were written in English or another language entirely.

Credence wished that he could strap a pencil around a chicken’s leg and let it run rampant. He was certain that the results would resemble Newt’s handwriting perfectly.
God, it was so atrocious.

And yet, for a man with such incomprehensible penmanship, Newt’s drawings were truly— well, a work of art.

The charcoal mermaid, with piercing black eyes and shadowed plates of coral seemingly growing out of her shoulders and up her face, was so lifelike that she seemed to breathe. To move. To smile. Credence swore that, at any moment, she would reach out from the pages and drown him in the waters below.

Another sailor meeting an unfortunate end.

“You’ve lived an extraordinary life,” Credence thumbed through the pages in quiet appreciation, reverence pouring through his fingertips and bringing life to its contents, “It’s incredible.”

Mermaids dove off their rocky perches into the shadowy abyss.

“I don’t know about that,” Newt shifted awkwardly.

They swam across the pages. Beautiful yet deadly creatures harvesting anemones, sucking marrow from jagged femurs, and picking their serrated teeth with daggers decorated with glittering, jeweled hilts.

“I think it is…”

Here Newt was, a man who had proudly proclaimed to be somewhere around his own age, traveling the world and having fantastic adventures. Newt regularly saw what no one else had ever seen before. He gathered tales and stories and memories more extraordinary than the next.

It was a sin. He knew it was a sin.

But he envied Newt.

Credence had never stepped foot outside his own neighborhood.

The only adventures he had ever been a part of were through books, and that was only when he was brave enough to sneak into the library instead of handing out pamphlets on the street corner like he was supposed to. Credence would bolt to the adventure section and run his scarred fingers across the cracked spines like sacred texts.

He read Jack London and Zane Grey, devoured Alexandre Dumas and L. Frank Baum. He waited excitedly for each new tale of Hopalong Cassidy to come into the library in the form of secondhand dime novels and faded pulp magazines. He had gripped the pages in awed wonder when Buck Rogers first hopped aboard his rocket-ship and flew into space.

There wasn’t anything that Credence wouldn’t give to roam the wild, wild west alongside Pecos Bill. To sail the seven seas amongst the swashbuckling pirate crew of Long John Silver. To creep through the tropical rainforest, carrying the bags of Allen Quartermain.

He wished that he could live as freely as Newt did.

“Mister—Newt,” Credence corrected himself mid-sentence, “You said that you—”

His fingers trembled, shaking the sketches. The charcoal mermaids ceased their harvesting and ghoulish revelries, gathering around to stare up disapprovingly at Credence’s pathetic visage.
He placed them face-down against his lap, unable to withstand their judgement, and forced himself to breathe.

In and Out.

He was in control. There was nothing to be afraid of.

The paper butterfly fluttered to his knuckles and paced back and forth.

“You said that you wanted to help me,” Credence finished the sentence and asked, “Did you mean that?”

Newt stopped fidgeting and looked up at him.

“Yes, I did.”

“Then…” Credence swallowed and glanced at the witch through the corner of his eye, “Could you… take me with you?”

Newt’s brows furrowed.

“To London?” he ran his hand through his hair, following along a wavy strand and curling it around his finger, “Yes, of course. I thought that was the plan.”

“No—I mean—What I meant to say was—” Credence averted his gaze, “I was just wondering if I could… stay. With you, I mean. Uhm…”

Whatever confidence he had withered more and more by the second.

“That is until we return the—the Kraken,” he continued, “How—how is she doing?”

_God, that was pathetic._

He could barely string along two sentences together let alone attempt to make a somewhat reasonable request. Why did he even bother?”

“I’m so glad you asked,” Newt brightened, the deep green of his irises becoming three shades lighter.

“She’s doing wonderfully,” he answered, “Her anticoagulant secretions are doing what they do best. Her leg was patched up quicker than you could say _Expelliarmus!_”

Newt gestured wildly, the biggest of smiles stretching across his face. He ran his hands through his hair, forming the tangled mess into even more of an untamable mane.

The man shined like the sun.

And Credence admired it.

“She is a bit cranky. But I suppose that’s to be expected. The aquarium is smaller than—well, smaller than the ocean that she has no doubt gotten used to,” Newt tapped his chin with the back of his thumb, “I’ll need to adjust the Expanding Charm I cast to build her a more suitable habitat when she starts growing. What we have now, though, is more than enough to last through the night—Wait.”

Newt sprang up unto his feet with such force that he had to re-balance to keep himself from falling. He crossed the room in a leaping bound and peered outside the porthole.
“Oh bugger, that’s right. Night. It’s nighttime. The hour for *sleeping*, not *talking,*” Newt groaned with sudden realization and rubbed the side of his neck. He looked sheepishly back towards Credence, “I’ve kept you awake, haven’t I?”

No.

Credence had reveled in his company. He wanted to hear more of his incredible stories and wanted to learn more about that curious witch that was, by all means, his savior.

“Sorry. Sometimes I get so carried away that I— never mind,” Newt continued obliviously and strode across the room. He knelt down and opened the clasps to a leather suitcase, pulling up the lid, “I have my own cot inside. You take the bed up here, I insist. And I— Well, I suppose that I’ll see you in the morning?”

He looked up to Credence, who dumbly nodded, before stepping down into the suitcase.

*Well, wasn’t that a surprise.*

However, Newt stopped partway through and looked back at him. He opened his mouth several times as if to say something before donning a firm, unwavering expression.

“Credence, you can spend as much time with me as you like,” he said softly, “To England, to Italy, to wherever the road takes us.”

Newt smiled a little.

“I’ll see you in the morning.”

He pulled the top of the suitcase closed.

Credence looked down at his hands, the overlapping crescents of his scars staring right back up at him. The paper butterfly nestled sweetly between his fingers and Credence—

Credence wanted to smile.

But couldn’t.

Newt couldn’t believe what he was seeing.

The cabin… was *clean.*

He pulled himself out completely from the suitcase, one leg at a time, and snapped the lid shut. Newt turned around in a full circle, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. He had to have been dreaming. There was no other explanation.

Because the cabin was *clean.*

The bed was made to meticulous perfection. The starched linen sheets and periwinkle blankets were so crisply tucked and folded that Newt couldn’t spot a single wrinkle. That mildewy stench, which
somehow always reminded Newt of the color green—a swampish yellowish-green, had miraculously disappeared, replaced with a freshness that Newt couldn’t quite pinpoint. And the pillows—

Oh, the *pillows*.

They were fluffed to three times their original size.

Newt threw himself on top.

He couldn’t just stare at those pillows and *not* rub his face against it. Not only did they feel like a dream, but they smelled heavenly too. Like clean laundry and morning walks along the shore.

Newt rolled over and tossed his arm over the side, his fingers grazing against the hardwood floor. *Great Merlin,* it had been swept and mopped with such finesse that it felt like gloss.

His curiosity piqued.

Pulling himself away from pillowish bliss, Newt rose to his feet and explored the rest of the cabin.

He rubbed his fingers across the top of the bolted down dresser. Not a speck of dust remained. He pulled open the drawers with feverish excitement and found his clothes cleaned, pressed, and folded. Even his socks had been carefully matched.

Yellow with yellow.

Gray with gray.

Newt darted to the porthole and pressed his hands against the glass. The window shined and sparkled, the glass catching the morning light in iridescent prisms of color. With newfound clarity, he found himself watching the roiling ocean waves for a solid minute.

Saving the best for last, Newt approached his desk.

The previous night, his notes had been crammed atop the small wooden desk in a chaotic mountain of crumpled parchment and ink.

But now?

Now they were sorted into six neat stacks, the paper lovingly smoothed out to quality crispness. Thumbing through them, Newt vaguely recognized that they were organized in alphabetical order.

Newt absently pulled out the desk chair, sat down, and read. He read and read and read some more. With his notes and illustrations all put together like this, his beloved research was beginning to look more and more like—well, like a book.

With this in his hands, he could imagine a future where children—not just at Hogwarts, but at wizarding schools around the world—carried his life’s work to their classes and learned about everything that magical creatures had to offer. Enclosed with their acceptance letters would be *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* by Newt Scamander.

He could imagine a world where people were no longer scared of his creatures, but were curious about them instead.

A world where no one laughed when they proudly proclaimed that they wanted to study dragons.
A world of curiosity and knowledge instead of hate and fear.

A faint smile spread across his lips and he ran his fingers against the smooth parchment.

Newt could only hope for a future like that.

Credence stared at the back of Newt’s head.

Frowned upon the rumpled bed.

Winced at the smudged porthole window.

Positively cringed at the dresser drawers left often.

He wrapped his arms around his waist and hovered in the doorway, having only just returned from stretching his legs.

The sun had just risen above the horizon when Credence had emerged from the stairwell. It had been the perfect weather that morning for a quick stroll around deck and early enough that none of the other passengers would have been awake yet. The paper butterfly had taken advantage of that rare opportunity to fly just a little ways ahead of him as he walked around, watching the calm ocean waves curl and crash in the distance.

Credence had wondered what sorts of magical creatures lurked underneath.

He had imagined Krakens.

Fully grown ones. Proper beasts belonging to tales of myth and legend where petrified sailors, knowing the terror which lurked below, scrawled the warning “Here be monsters” across ancient cartographs in swooping calligraphy.

Krakens with midnight-black eyes larger than the moon itself and vermilion tentacles stretching further than the vast expanse of the Grand Canyon. Credence imagined being wrapped up in one of them, the ivory suckers pulling at his face and skin.

He had imagined mermaids.

Not the beautiful and terrifying ones combing through their silken hair, singing enchanting melodies and drawing unsuspecting men from their shore-side sanctuaries. No, Credence pictured the unseen merpeople of the deep. Larger than two automobiles stacked on top of each other. Serrated teeth poking through shredded lips, perfect for ripping apart prey. Gray scales, white underbellies, and sharp, sweeping fins designed for speed.

Credence had imagined kelpies. A combination of horse, whale, and seaweed fused together into a strange, oceanic chimera. Sunlight catching its scales and reflecting off colors unknown to man like a living jewel of the ocean.

He had imagined a serpentine leviathan curling defensively around its latest shipwreck. Its dragonesque body twisting through holes ripped into the hull and its large jaws chomping the mast in
half, destroyed English sails floating down onto its back making it resemble its winged counterparts.

And yet… the thought of such creatures existing hadn’t brought him fear.

It made the world all the more magical. He could only imagine what remained undiscovered.

Credence had leaned up against the rails. In that moment, the salty breeze had seemed sweeter, the sun warmer against his skin, his body lighter and free.

He had always known about the existence of witches thanks to his upbringing; and yet, he couldn’t help but wonder what he had blissfully ignored in favor of keeping his eyes to the ground and his heart closed off. What had really been the price of hiding his true self for all those years?

Well, that wasn’t a mystery.

The paper butterfly landed on his nose.

Credence almost smiled.

He knew the price of keeping his magic suppressed. He knew it quite well. And yet, despite the havoc he’d waged and the lives he’d destroyed, light had still somehow managed to break through the surface and lend him a helping hand.

And now, here Credence stood, watching Newt reading the notes he’d alphabetized.

Credence had always been an early riser. He had had many chores over at the New Salem Philanthropic Society and more that he had collected over the years from his sisters. It had often taken him hours to complete them all before all the homeless children they’d taken under their wing started filing in for a hot meal and a new set of pamphlets.

So, when he had woken to catastrophe that morning, it had been only a natural response to start tidying up.

Credence had stripped the bed of its sheets and brought them down to the laundry room. The second Newt had accepted him with open arms, Credence had been transformed. No longer was he a stowaway hiding in cabinets and morgues. Now, he was an eccentric member of the ship keen on doing his own laundry.

He had hauled supplies from the janitorial closets that he had once slept in. He had promptly mopped and waxed the grimy hardwood floors. He had shined the foggy porthole window and wiped down the filthy dresser. He had even taken the time to match Newt’s socks.

After everything else was done, Credence had gathered the pieces of parchment together into six neat little piles on the desk and took the next couple hours organizing them.

It was only after he had finished that he had realized what he’d done.

He had handled the property of a witch without permission. He had touched his work—his life’s work—and intruded upon him in the most heinous and intimate of ways.

God in Heaven Above, he had touched the witch’s socks.

Credence’s heart dropped.

Quietly closing the large cabin door behind him, Credence stepped into the room and focused his eyes to the ground.
“Are you mad?”

A sudden crash and a high-pitched yelp came as his answer.

Credence flinched backwards into the wall behind him and looked up, fearing the worst.

Only to find Newt sprawled out on the floor, gazing up at him with wide eyes from underneath a terribly disheveled mop of tawny hair. Did he even own a comb?

“Credence!”

He blanched and quickly went back to looking at his shoes.

“Sorry! Sorry!” Newt repeated himself, dropping his voice to a more agreeable tone that comforted Credence just the tiniest bit, “Just gave me a bit of a fright. That’s all. You must tell me how you’re able to move about like that one of these days. Quieter than a shadow, you are.”

Newt slowly lifted himself off the floor and rubbed his nose between his fingers.

“Me? I’m about a clumsy as a newborn foal. I’m nowhere near your level of expertise,” he said, “It’s amazing, I tell you. And—wait.”

Newt squinted curiously at him.

“Why would I be mad?”

Credence shrank further into himself, bringing his hands up to his chest and squeezing his eyes tightly shut.

Several seconds passed.

A hand touched his shoulder.

Credence whimpered, trembling now. Newt was going to hit him. He was going to request his belt and slap him across the knuckles for daring to invade his privacy. That was a five-lashing sin right there. Or was it a six? It didn’t matter. Credence deserved this. He deserved to be punished—

“Sorry,” Newt quickly withdrew, voice quieter than before, “Didn’t think. I’m… going to take a couple steps backwards now, if that’s alright with you. I won’t get any closer unless you say otherwise.”

Credence couldn’t find the willpower to answer.

The paper butterfly migrated to his knuckles, crawling about and anxiously fluttering her wings.

An uncomfortable silence blanketed the room, thick enough to choke upon. The paper butterfly jutted her head underneath Credence’s thumb, demanding attention. He opened his eyes just a smidge and trailed a finger down her back.

The paper butterfly bucked into his touch, fluttering her wings in rapid appreciation.

“It’s curious,” Newt’s thoughtful voice broke through the stillness, “I’ve never seen a charmed object with such a long lifespan before.”

Credence cautiously lifted his gaze.
Newt was exactly where he said he was: crouched on the floor, arms hanging over his knees and staring up at Credence. Or rather, staring up at the paper butterfly.

“They usually last an hour. A day, at most. I used a mild variation of a spell more commonly used to send memos through the Ministry,” the corners of his lips quirked, “Or passing notes during Potions when nobody’s looking.”

Newt stretched out his hand and the butterfly, drawn forward like a toddler to a parent, instantly flew down and landed in his palm.

“This one though,” he smiled properly now and scratched underneath her chin, “She’s extraordinary.”

Newt brought the butterfly towards his face for closer inspection and focused that beaming smile of his up at Credence.

His heart skipped a beat.

“Thank you for cleaning up this place,” sincerity shimmered in Newt’s meadow green eyes, “You didn’t have to do that, but I really appreciate that you did. Thank you, Credence.”

Newt wasn’t mad.

He thanked him, and he wasn’t mad.

Credence almost smiled.

“You’re welcome.”

“Come along, come along!”

Newt scurried down the docks of the Port of London, Credence quietly following behind. The sun was hidden away behind cloudy gray skies. The River Thames frothed with slithering eels and a repugnant stench, which Credence didn’t want to know the source of, permeated the air.

“You’ll love it here, Credence, I just know it,” Newt beamed over his shoulder, submitting his suitcase for inspection, “So much to do and so much to see. Oh, there’s nothing quite like London. I don’t know what it is, but there’s just something about it that always has you coming back.”

The luggage inspector okayed the contents and hurried them down the line.

“No time to waste. None at all,” Newt clasped the suitcase shut with a sharp click and led them onto the busy streets, “Need to book ourselves a room at The Leaky Cauldron before all the available slots fill up. Do we have enough time to stop off at the Post first? Really should let Theseus know that I made it back alright. Or maybe—”

The witch continued on his tangent as Credence silently followed, heart pounding in his chest.

Everything around him was new and frightening. His eyes darted everywhere and anywhere,
observing everything from the tallest church spires to the cracks in the sidewalk. Automobiles blared at jaywalking pedestrians and policemen whistled for the oncoming tourists to hurry along. People pushed and pulled past Credence, treating him like nothing more than a shadow.

Well, *that* wasn’t new.

Credence reached for Newt’s hand. He needed to ground himself. He needed to remind himself to breathe. But, most of all, he needed to ensure that he wasn’t left behind or forgotten.

But Newt wasn’t Modesty. He couldn’t ask that of him.

So, Credence kept his hands and his problems to himself.

He was just so nervous.

No, that wasn’t right. He was beyond nervous.

He was petrified.

Credence was in another country. He had stepped foot on foreign soil for the very first time, gone further than he’d ever been from home. Everything and everyone familiar were far across the ocean, just beyond his reach.

Having finally arrived at their destination and following behind the positively giddy Newt, Credence realized just how little he had and how unprepared he was. This was Newt’s territory. Not his. All that Credence possessed were the clothes on his back and the thoughts in his head. It was terrifying having nothing and no one.

“Isn’t she lovely? Just breathe in that wonderful fresh air—;” Newt inhaled deeply through his nose. And almost immediately broke out into a hoarse cough.

He patted his chest and held up a finger.

“Scratch that. Don’t breathe in the air,” Newt wheezed, “Smoke. Smog. Whatever it is the Muggles are spewing out into the sky nowadays. Definitely *not* a pleasant smell.”

So that’s what that odor was.

“But you alright?” Credence asked quietly.

“Yes, yes. Perfectly alright,” Newt coughed once more into his shoulder and offered him his hand, “Let’s get going, shall we?”

Credence stared at his open palm.

A thin, silvery scar glowed against his tanned skin, dragging down between his thumb and forefinger. Given how small it was and the peculiarity of its location, the scar was easy to miss; but not for Credence. His heart skipped a beat and, ever so slowly, he slid his hand into Newt’s.

Newt beamed and pulled Credence along with him down the streets of London.

Credence almost smiled.

He may have had nothing, but he was far from alone.
Newt had no idea what he was doing.

He pushed around bits and pieces of fried eggs and tomatoes across his plate. He and Credence had just managed to snag the last bedroom available for the week at The Leaky Cauldron so, to celebrate their luck, Newt had decided to treat themselves to a nice English breakfast.

But not even the most delicious beans on toast could distract him.

Especially since the source of all his worrying was sitting just across the table.

Helping the Kraken was simple. All that Newt needed to do was arrange safe passage to Italy and release her into the Mediterranean amongst her brothers and sisters.

Helping Credence though…

Newt didn’t know where to start.

Credence’s whole life had been upended. He was traumatized and scared which, as an Obscurial, presented itself with an entirely different set of problems that Newt was ill-prepared for. But that wasn’t all. Credence was a powerful wizard, and one in desperate need of training.

Newt wasn’t blind. Perhaps a little socially inept, but not blind.

Magic followed Credence wherever he went.

How was it that a portion of The Wailing Whirlwind’s rails, perfect when they had left the Port of New York, had become a marled piece of scrap metal after Credence had come into contact with it? How had the ocean become suddenly violent when Newt had jumped overboard into calm seas, only for it to mysteriously return to serenity after being rescued?

But the determining factor had been nothing more than a simple butterfly.

The charm was still going strong.

It seemed that Credence had become attached to the little creature and had unknowingly been feeding his magic into it to keep it alive. Wizards trained their entire lives to maintain sustained streams like that and Credence made it look effortless.

If Credence could be taught… If he could learn how to control his magic instead of being controlled by it, he could become one of the most powerful wizards in the world. Perhaps even reaching the ranks of the likes of Merlin himself. He would be nigh unstoppable. No witch or wizard his equal.

Newt didn’t care about power though. About fame. About fortune. About melding Credence into the greatest wizard who ever lived. If he wanted to become the next Seraphina Picquery or Albus Dumbledore, that was his decision to make.

Newt just wanted to make sure that Credence would live long enough to do so.

He leaned forward, twirling his hair around his finger.

“I’d like to make you an offer.”
Credence glanced up from his plate.

“I… need to be perfectly honest with you first,” Newt sucked in a deep breath, “I don’t how to help you.”

Credence’s eyes widened and his uneaten tomato burst in front of him, splattering scarlet skin and seeds across the table.

“Not to say that you can’t be helped or that I won’t do everything in my power to do so!” Newt blurted, “It’s just that I have no idea how long any of this is going to take. I don’t know where we’re going to start or if anything I propose is even going to work. I might… fail you. I’ll never stop trying, you have my word, but everything we do is trial and error moving forward.”

Credence’s shoulders slumped.

“It’s because I’m not a child… isn’t it?”

Newt frowned.

“What do you mean?”

“What I am…” Credence lowered his gaze, growing quiet, “You said… Obscurials aren’t supposed to live that long. Mr. Graves was looking for a child too. I’m—I’m not supposed to exist, am I?”

His lip quivered.

“I’m not surprised that you don’t know what to do with me… I’m sorry.”

“There’s nothing to apologize for.”

Credence looked up.

“Your existence is not a mistake,” Newt tapped his chin with the back of his thumb and offered what he hoped was a comforting smile, “And, if you ask me, it’s better that you’re older. I should be thanking you, really.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Remember when I said Obscuri were parasites?”

Credence gave a hesitant nod.

“Well, now—Now, I’m not so sure,” Newt gestured at him, “Because you’re not a child, and powerful as you are, it got me thinking… Maybe we’ve been going about this all wrong. All previous attempts at helping Obscurials have been focused on extraction. But maybe… maybe what we really need to achieve is symbiosis instead.”

“Like with shrimp and Goby fish.”

“Yes, precisely,” Newt said, surprised, “How did you know that?”

Credence lowered his gaze.

“I read.”

He smiled.
“Brilliant.”

Newt leaned forward, pressing his fingers against his lips, “What else do you know?”

Credence’s shoulders stiffened.

“You know more than I do, Mr. Newt.”

“I’d still like to hear what you have to say about it.”

Credence hesitated.

“I… I don’t know much about biology,” he started off slow, uncertain, “But, if the—the Obscurus isn’t a parasite, then it shouldn’t… hurt me. If it’s commensal then I would’ve never known about it since it wouldn’t’ve affected me either way but that’s not possible. So maybe—maybe it’s more give and take? Like Goby fish and shrimp?”

He looked up to Newt for confirmation.

“That’s right,” he smiled encouragingly, “Go on.”

“I don’t know what you want me to say.”


“I—I don’t know. I’m not sure, but I—I don’t think the Obscurus wants to hurt me,” Credence rested his palms within his lap, “It hurts… others. But it hasn’t hurt me. I think it just wants to—to keep me safe. So maybe… Obscurials don’t live that long because… other people hurt them or, because they’re little, they don’t have enough magic to keep them both alive? So maybe in those cases it’s a parasite but, in mine, it’s more… mutual?”

He paused, his head whirling up in realization.

“Does that mean I can control it?”

“That’s what I’d like to find out,” Newt beamed, “Credence, I’d like for you to be my apprentice.”

Credence’s eyes widened.

Something sharply cracked behind him.

“Of course, that’s all up to you!” Newt blurted out, waving his hands before his face as if trying to catch and retract his offer, “But I think we should start by teaching you how to control your magic. Just the basics at first to see how it goes. If we can manage that then maybe, since the Obscurus subsides on magic, we can… control… it?”

Newt wrung his hands together.

All the pieces were there. He just couldn’t see it until now. In this modern era, only certain pureblooded families preferred homeschooling over sending their children to prestigious institutions like Hogwarts and Beauxbatons. It was outdated, but still done.

This was how he could help Credence. This was how he could help reintegrate him into the world that had all but been dangled at his fingertips.

Most importantly though…
“And if something goes wrong—if something like New York happens again, I’ll be able to protect you this time.”

Credence inhaled sharply.

“What do you mean?”

“Ancient apprenticeship laws. Rule 221—oh whatever it is,” Newt explained, fidgeting with his hair again, “If anything happens, I’ll be the one handling the consequences. You’ll be protected.”

Newt looked away.

“You’ll be safe, and you’ll be able to learn magic,” he continued, unable to stop himself now that he’d started, “And I’d… appreciate the help in keeping my research in order. I’m clearly in need of it. I’ll give you a living wage too and, if you’re unhappy, you can leave whenever you want. Just say the word and I’ll—”

“Yes.”

By the way they both jerked back in their seats, it seemed that had caught both Newt and Credence by surprise.

“Yes?” Newt repeated, slowly.

“Yes. I— I accept,” he said, “I trust you.”

Credence swallowed thickly and met Newt’s gaze.

“I’ve been thinking a lot too… Wondering whether you’re being genuine with me or if I’m just being taken advantage of again,” he quietly confessed, “I’ve been watching you. Thinking over everything you’ve said and I—I’ve come to a decision.”

He squared his shoulders.

“You put others before yourself. You do whatever it takes to save them even if it means putting your life in danger. You—you offered me your hand when you didn’t even know who I was. You dove into the ocean to save an injured creature without thinking twice because it needed you. You’re a helper, Mr. Newt,” Credence looked down now, “You might not know what you’re doing, but I trust you’ll do everything you can to try. So… I—I accept.”

A moment of shocked silence passed between them.

“Well then, my apprentice…” Newt leaned back in his chair and smiled widely, “Let’s get started.”

Chapter End Notes

According to Google Docs, this one ended up being my longest chapter yet with over 10 pages! In total, we’re just over the 30 page mark— which is longer than anything I’ve ever written. I’m really really really happy that I’m taking this journey with all of you darlings and pushing myself past my limits as a writer.

Anyways… the boys finally reached London and Credence accepted Newt’s offer to
become his apprentice! Furthermore, we discovered that Credence has complete and utter faith in Newt, even though Newt apparently doesn't seem to have much confidence in himself. How will this impact their adventures together moving forward?

Tune in next time to find out!

Please leave your comments and constructive criticism below! How am I doing? Are you liking the story so far? Is there anything in my writing that I should work on improving? I love reading your comments and take all of them to heart!

Also, dearest readers, I have a question: I've been seriously reconsidering re-titling this work as "Le Papillon Papier" or "Casting Shadows." I'd love to hear what you think and, if you have any suggestions for a new title, please comment with them below!
A Cheese By Any Other Name

Chapter Notes

((CHAPTER EDITED: 2019))

Hello my loveliest lovelies and darling-iest darlings!

It's 12:39 AM where I am, so I'm just the teensiest bit tired at this very moment. Please forgive me if these Chapter Notes end up being a little short. I finally finished this chapter a few minutes ago and wanted to upload it as soon as I possibly could.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Mr. Newt, what is that?”

The creature on Newt’s shoulder pointed at him and squeaked.

It was early morning. The sun had barely risen over the horizon; or rather, if it had, not a single sliver of its rays managed to pierce the thick cover of smog blanketing the city. Ominous mist rolled through the streets, giving off a putrid stench. The ground squelched with every step. Every building seemed dull and gray. It comforted Credence, reminding him of New York. But unlike the city that never sleeps, London did.

They’d only passed three or four people since leaving the Leaky Cauldron, so Credence really shouldn’t be all that concerned with the creature possibly drawing attention. However, given that Newt was waving his arms back and forth, tone raising and dropping without any rhyme or reason, he wouldn’t be surprised if all three sets of eyes landed straight on them.

”Mr. Newt?”

Newt didn’t respond right away.

But Credence was used to this. So he just twiddled his thumbs together, gathering up his courage to try again.

He had learned rather quickly that Newt possessed a certain… predisposition when talking. Whenever he spoke about his creatures, he’d wholly devote himself to the subject to the point where the one-sided conversation, if not gently interrupted, could last for hours on end. There wasn’t anything unkind about it. On the contrary, whenever he realized what he was doing, Newt just blushed head-to-toe in embarrassment and looked away, muttering apologies.

Credence didn’t mind it though. He was naturally quiet anyways, and when Newt spoke… he could light up a dark room.

They turned a corner and another and another.

Ever since Credence had become his apprentice, Newt had dragged him all across London.
They’d bounced from store to store, stopping only whenever they needed to eat, before moving onto the next location. If Credence was going to be traveling with him, Newt had declared, then he needed some new clothes and a couple other essentials at least! During the past week alone, they had spent an *entire day* just picking out a new coat.

Not to say that it wasn’t a lovely coat.

That chilly Sunday afternoon, Credence had tried on at least a hundred.

Coats of every kind, all in different shades of gray and black. Some double-breasted, others with flared lapels and leather buttons. One with fur lining and another with belted straps. He’d slipped his arms into many different Trenches and Chesterfields, but all had met with Newt’s stern disapproval.

*It’s not just a coat, Credence—but a coat of adventuring. A coat that you can wear in Arctic snows, in Tropical rains, in Desert heat. A coat that doesn’t hold you back, but lets you be free to do whatever it is you want to do.*

Credence was on the verge of giving up when Newt had suggested trying something different. Perhaps a bit of color to change things up.

Blacks and grays and whites had been Credence’s wardrobe for so long that that was what he was automatically drawn to. He felt lost in coats of royal blues and muted browns, vibrant reds and blinding yellows.

And then, a flash of green had caught Credence’s eye.

Like a man possessed, he had slipped through the store and lifted the coat off the display.

Something electric had sparked through him as he slid his thin arms through the sleeves. He’d pulled down the cuffs, fastened the silver buttons at his waist, flattened the wide lapels and quickly found himself a mirror. His scarred fingers had smoothed down the glass, awed.

He’d looked like a wizard.

Newt had raised his brows at his choice at first, more amused than genuinely chiding.

*Slytherin green. Are you sure you don’t want Hufflepuff yellow?*

Moments later though, they had walked out of the store, coat in hand.

*It suits you.*

Credence hadn’t taken it off since.

He circled his thumb around the silver cufflinks to make them shine and looked back up. Only for the creature on Newt’s shoulder to suddenly narrow its eyes and wave its tiny green fist at him.

Credence had seen one of these creatures before. Or, rather, something quite similar.

An elderly gentleman by the name of Sir Walter Pensey the Third had collected insects and, yes, that was his real name. He would talk to Credence sometimes when he was out passing flyers. Thrust his wares in his face, trying to make sale.

Sir Walter would purchase them from some exotic vendor, pinning the butterflies and beetles under glass frames, and sell them in tourist alley out on King’s Street—right across from the Second Salemers’ home.
They’d caught Credence’s attention many times. Sometimes by choice whenever he was brave enough to slink through the marketplace, contraband books tucked away in his jacket. Most of the time though, it was by Sir Walter hooking him around the arm and dragging him to his shop, insisting that he’d see his newest finds.

Regardless of circumstance, the creatures were beautiful to look at. Fascinating in their own way. The iridescent wing casings, shining green or purple depending on the light. The flared feathered wings. The round, bulging eyes. The hooked legs and pointed stingers, ready to strike. None ever looked the same.

However, unlike Sir Walter’s beetles, this creature was alive and—

“Mr. Newt, he’s glaring at me,” Credence tried again, “Did I do something wrong?”

“Hmm?” Newt finally glanced at his shoulder, “Oh, that’s just Pickett.”

He plucked up the creature and brought it before his face, giving it a look of mock-exasperation.

“Never mind him. It’s nothing personal,” he said, “He’s just taking out his feelings on you. He’s been the teensiest bit grumpy with me ever since—erm. Well, it’s a bit of a story. One best saved for later.”

Newt grimaced, shaking his head.

“Nevertheless,” he recovered and pointed his finger at the moping creature, “You know better than to be climbing about in the open of Muggle London. We’ve talked about this. You get to be in the pocket as long as you stay in there.”

Pickett blew a raspberry at him.

“Bowtruckles,” Newt huffed lovingly and slid Pickett back into his coat pocket, “Now don’t you skulk around in there. We’ll be in Diagon Alley shortly and you can ride around on my shoulders as long as you like, okay?”

He froze, his eyes glazing over.

Credence recognized that expression.

Newt was getting an idea.

And, it seemed, it was a very good one.

Why hadn’t he seen it before?

The greatest introduction to the magical world and magizoology was starting off small, especially when the persons involved only had a minimal exposure to such things.

If Credence was truly to become his apprentice and a proper magizoologist-in-training, he needed to become well-versed in both. Learning the formal wand movements for casting an *Alohomora* and the right restraining techniques for bathing a reluctant Niffler.
Well, maybe not that.

Not even Newt liked doing that.

Nifflers aside, magical creatures were misunderstood beings. Wizards, much like Muggles, were ruled by fear over what they didn’t understand. No respectful witch or wizard would ever admit it, however, that didn’t mean that the truth wasn’t the truth. Sometimes the most fearsome of creatures possessed the gentlest of hearts. But instead of taking the time to understand them, to put in the slightest amount of effort, the wizarding world would rather slaughter them. Eradicate them without ever knowing their value.

So many beasts had already been hunted into extinction because of fear.

Newt ran his hands over his face.

Credence was already in possession of the paper butterfly. One was never far from the other. They needed one another. They cared for each other. But taking care of the butterfly wasn’t like taking care of a magical creature.

Not to say that it didn’t have the personality of one. It was already developing Credence’s more nervous tendencies. But the paper butterfly didn’t need food, didn’t need water, didn’t need shelter. It was alive, but not living.

Unlike Bowtruckles.

By having Pickett linger in Credence’s pocket for a little while, he could recover from their adventure in New York and Credence could slowly become accustomed to the presence of magical creatures. And, depending on how well he handled the responsibility, perhaps Newt would be able to let him into his suitcase sooner than he thought.

“Mr. Newt?”

Credence’s voice pulled him out of his reverie.

Right.

They had plans for day. Big plans.

Newt straightened his Hufflepuff scarf.

Credence’s insistance on formality was… certainly something. Newt had pushed him to use his name instead of calling him Mr. Scamander, but it seemed like he could only meet him halfway. Newt supposed that he didn’t mind though.

“Yes, Credence?”

“Forgive me for being so bold…” Credence twiddled his scarred thumbs together, “But are you… okay?”

Newt smiled.

What an impossibility he was. There Credence was: clothed in proud Slytherin green, yet hesitant with even the most casual turns of phrase. Skittish, yet always on the look-out for Newt’s well-being. He fretted over every little thing Newt did: making sure his notes were in order, making sure he ate, making sure he breathed.
Credence had endured the unspeakable—done the unimaginable—and it had made him kind.

“Couldn’t be better,” Newt rocked on his heels, patting his coat in search of his wand, “The real question you should be asking is: Are you alright?”

Credence’s brows scrunch together.

“P—Pardon?”

“Are you feeling ill? Tired? Bored?” Newt stepped closer, invading his personal space.

It wasn’t on purpose though. Newt had never understood personal boundaries, much less recognized that they were there, and often found himself leaning in to show his complete and utter attention. It was a habit Mother often reprimanded, but no matter how hard he tried, Newt just couldn’t break it.

“We finished our Muggle shopping,” Newt finally found his wand, slipping it out, “Now… we begin our Apprentice shopping. Are you up to the task?”

Credence’s eyes, darker than a thestral, widened until it seemed to encompass half his face. Newt had seen this look before. In fact, he had seen this look many times before.

Every child on their first day at Hogwarts had it.

He had had it when he’d first stepped foot into the Great Hall, wand in hand and cloak around his shoulders. Those were eyes filled with wonder. Those were eyes that were eager to finally start their magical education, but also afraid of what it entailed.

“I need to know if you’re feeling up to it, Credence,” he said softly, “We can hold off on it if you’re not ready. It’s fine if you’re not.”

He didn’t respond.

“Credence?”

Those dark eyes met his, firmed with conviction.

“I’m ready.”

Mr. Graves had always promised Credence that he would introduce him to the world of magic.

Much like Satan dangling the forbidden fruit just within Eve’s curious reach, Mr. Graves had lured Credence into temptation by offering him the world he both hated and desperately wanted to be a part of. Credence would never again endure the sting of a leather switch across his hands. Never thrown into a closet, locked away and forgotten. Never pushed down a dangerous ravine or burned over heated flame. He would have magic. He would do wondrous things.

All that Mr. Graves had asked in return was patience. He only required a little assistance first. Only once Credence had proven his worth would he be granted entry.

But Mr. Graves never kept his promise.
Newt, though…

Newt had only known Credence for a little while, and yet they had latched onto each other like magnets. Wherever one went, the other followed. The only exceptions were when Newt disappeared for a couple hours to take care of his creatures. It wasn’t so bad though. Sitting next to Newt’s suitcase, patiently watching for any sign that he would emerge, was company enough.

Credence couldn’t explain it. He should be wary. He had been wary.

But there was something inexplicable about the prisms in his eyes… a familiar warmth that Credence had only experienced once before with Modesty, and it had lowered his walls. Through his mere presence alone, Newt kept the darkness inside Credence at bay and maybe… maybe that was a good thing.

Because he wanted to trust. He wanted to believe that everything would be okay. Credence wanted to keep that little flicker of hope inside him alive, no matter the cost.

His desire to be around Newt was explainable, however Credence couldn’t understand why Newt wanted to be around him. His relationship with Modesty made sense. They were siblings. All they had were each other in that house of horrors. But Newt? He was bound to have friends and family out there supporting him. He had an amazing life, and one that Credence had only encountered before in books at that! Newt was an angel among men, a dashing hero of their time.

Maybe Newt really needed an apprentice. Or maybe Newt truly was a godsend.

Either way, Newt had done more for Credence than Mr. Graves ever had. And now he was bringing him into the wonderful world of magic.

Was he dreaming?

Newt raised his wand into the air and tapped a few wall-stones in no particular order.

The bricks opened up.

And then…

They stepped out from the dismal alley into a street of wonders.

Credence stumbled backwards into Newt and a choked sob ripped from his throat as if he had been struck; and yet, no tears filled his eyes. He… didn’t know what he had been expecting. Perhaps everything and nothing at all. Anything except this.

Mother would have turned in her grave.

She had beat her beliefs into Credence for as long as he could remember. Witches were wicked beasts that feasted upon the flesh of children. They danced – naked as the day they were born – through forests and the dangerous underbellies of modern cities. They fornicated with the Devil in wicked orgies of lust and debauchery. Witches were demonic heathens that had turned away from the face of God and traded their blessed humanity for hellish power.

It didn’t make sense.

By all accounts, Credence should have seen children’s milky-eyed corpses hanging from their toes in butcher shop windows. The streets should have run red with blood. He should have seen every deadly sin fathomable gallivanting around with fiendish fervor: gluttons gorging on human flesh,
lustful predators stalking their oblivious prey, greedy gamblers betting life and limb with every throw of dice.

At the very least, a gingerbread house.

So why… was their world so beautiful?

“Credence.”

He could barely speak.

The sky was bluer—clearer—than he had ever seen before. The air remained untouched, not even the faintest snippet of industrial gas polluting it. Credence inhaled deeply, committing to memory the scent of citrus, jasmine, and a subtle trace of rain wafting through.

Raspberry-cheeked children chased chocolate frogs down the streets, shrieking with laughter whilst their parents chatted over tea. There were teenage witches on their first dates, holding hands and shyly giggling. Old witches hobbled down the cobblestone paths, looking exactly what Credence pictured in fairytales, but their smiles were kind and wizened instead of sinister smirks.

There were stores dotting the lane too.

Oh! So many stores!

Credence could just barely make out the elegant calligraphy of the Magical Menagerie, the swooping meadow green curls and curves moving of their own jurisdiction. Witch familiars slithered and stalked behind its wide windows: black cats, toads, snakes, white rabbits, even owls! There were so many peculiar shops dotting the cobblestone streets, each more dazzling than the next.

There were shimmering silver instruments that made Credence dizzy by looking at them for too long. Ancient globes spiraled gold dust into the air while laborers carted barrels of something called butterbeer behind a busy café. Peddlers selling their wares lined the corners. Everything that Credence dreamed of and more could be found on their colorful quilts: gold-tipped quills made of phoenix feathers, dragonscale boots promising to never lose their luster, copper cauldrons and self-heating kettles.

His dark eyes darted from store to store. Madam Malkin’s Robes for All Occasions. Flourish and Botts Bookstore. They even had an ice creamery.

“Credence?”

Newspapers were being sold at the cart nearest to him. Moving pictures and script floated across the paper. Actual moving pictures! A salesman called into the square announcing the fastest broomstick ever made and the recent capture of—

Green and auburn filled his vision.

Brows creased with worry. Thin lips pressed tight.

Newt.

“Credence, are you alright?” Newt’s hands were upon his shoulders, his face learning dangerously close, “Let’s find you somewhere to sit down, shall we? I’m so sorry. This is my fault. I thought that maybe since Jacob handled magic so well that, erm—”
“Mr. Newt,” Credence softly interrupted.

The witch paused and stepped backwards.

“Yes, Credence?”

What was this feeling in his chest? Credence felt lighter than a feather. If he jumped right here and now, he swore that he could fly higher than the tallest mountain, disappearing into the clouds above never to return to the ground.

He was happy.

So very happy.

Credence smiled. The paper butterfly fluttered at his lapel.

“Could we go to the bookstore first?”

He must have done something right.

Newt lounged in the back corner of the bookstore, perusing an old volume of Madame Camembert’s Cantankerous Cabaret where Madame Chantilly Crème uncovered her husband, Monsieur Cheddar, in the midst of an illicit affair with Mademoiselle Brie. Newt had his guilty pleasures. Ones that he most certainly did not feel guilty about, no sir! And yet… not even the unfolding paperback drama distracted him from the one single thought replaying itself again and again and again like a broken film belt.

Newt ran his hand through his hair.

Credence had smiled.

A genuine one at that.

It had thrown him so off guard that when Credence had asked, ever so politely, to go into Flourish and Botts… Newt had just noddled dumbly and led the way. His fingers had itched for a piece of charcoal, a sheet of parchment, and the feeling only doubled when they stepped inside the shop.

Credence’s eyes were mesmerizing.

They were nothing like he had ever seen before: the blackest black imaginable, achieved only by pressing charcoal to paper until the vine smoked and sparked like a crackling candlewick, and yet glowed with cosmic intensity the moment Credence laid eyes on the leather-bound texts filling floor to ceiling. His happiness was like a galaxy, lighting up the stygian skies. If he looked close enough, Newt could even pinpoint the moment of supernova.

He had directed his new apprentice to the first-years textbooks next to the children’s section, intended for those who manifested their magical abilities early. It was awkward standing amongst titles like A is for Animagus and Managing Mischievous Munchkins, especially since he had read those very same books when he was four; but, almost immediately, Credence had lost himself
amongst the shelves. Fingers gliding across the gilded spines, thumb pressed against his lips, those
dark eyes flickering back and forth.

In a world all his own.

So, Newt had found himself the comfiest corner available and left Credence alone.

He didn’t understand him.

The most insignificant gesture could send Credence spiraling into tears and terrified apologies; and
yet, instances where Newt thought could overwhelm, Credence rose triumphant—if not completely
overtaken by unquenchable curiosity. Credence was a genuine dichotomy, and his reactions to magic
were certainly no exception. It made moving forward difficult. Newt never knew what might set him
off or bring forth a new wave of confidence.

“If only there was a book on that…” Newt murmured to himself, half-amused. Perhaps Madame
Merriweather’s Beginner’s Guide to Apprenticeship would help.

“Credence?” Newt stretched before rounding the aisle where he had last seen him wander off to,
“You just about all set over there?”

“Oh y—yes… I was just—I was wondering if you had any books about magical creatures?”

Newt froze.

“It’s just…” Credence was talking to one of the tellers, an astounding pile of books gathered in his
thin, wiry arms and his dark eyes trained to the floor, “I searched and searched, but turned up empty.
Are they in a different area?”

“Hmm.”

The teller leaned over, resting his muscular arms against the countertop. Newt thought he looked like
the stereotypical strongman: scarred eye, balding head, and a frankly impressive orange mustache.
The only things missing were a set of barbells and P.T. Barnum announcing him to the stage.

“You looking to exterminate anything in particular?” he asked.

“What?” Credence’s head shot up, looking alarmed like he’d just received the news that his
childhood dog had been run over by the aging widow next door, “No, sir. I—I want to learn about
them. Aren’t there any books on magizoology? How to uhm… care for magical beasts?”

The term seemed to spark the teller’s interest and, in that instant, he spotted Newt lurking in the
background.

Ah. So, it was Marcus on the main register today. He’d grown taller and more mustachioed since
he’d last saw him.

Newt attempted to shrink himself three sizes smaller underneath Marcus’s unwavering scrutiny and
fell silent.

“Oh, I see,” Marcus laughed, his entire frame shaking as he did, “Has the crackpot been harassing
you? One word and I’ll have him thrown out. Don’t care what the manager says. Should’ve banned
him last time with what he did.”

He leaned around Credence, making eye contact with Newt.
“Ya here that, Scamander?” Marcus leered, “Banned.”

Newt found the tops of his shoes all the more appealing.

“I—I don’t…” Credence slowly repeated, “What do you mean by… crack…pot?”

“Oh yeah, you’re not from around here are you? Y’see that little pest over there? He used to come in here when he was a first-year — you’ve got first-years over at Ilvermony don’t you? — asking about beasts and monsters, bothering everyone with more important things to do,” Marcus snorted, “Get this: he asked the boss once to sponsor a manuscript he’d been working on. Can you believe it? The first book about helping magical creatures, he says! Nobody wants that.”

Newt’s hands twitched, quickly finding the edges of his scarf and twirling them around his fingers.

He didn’t want to be here anymore. The nearest bookcase could spontaneously spark to life right now, gobbling him up whole, and Newt would probably thank it and invite it over for tea at this point. This was the moment where Credence was going to find out he was a laughingstock. He was going to regret becoming his apprentice. He was—

“Shame he ain’t more like his brother.”

Credence would be so much better off with Theseus as his mentor.

“Credence,” Newt said quietly, hoping that the heavens shined down upon him and that Yvette was manning the second register today. She had never judged him like this, or at least, had enough decency to never say so to his face. “Let’s just pay for your books and go.”

But, Credence wasn’t finished.

“Am I not a person?”

Marcus quirked a bushy brow and crossed his bulging arms over his equally bulging chest, “Excuse me?”

“I asked you for a book on magizoology because I wanted one,” Credence’s eyes smoldered with fire and brimstone and yet, his jaw was set in unmovable, unbreakable stone, “I do not want books on how to kill magical creatures. I want books about what they are. I want books on how to take care of them. So, if nobody wants a book like that, am I not a person?”

Newt had never seen him like this.

Granted, they’d also only known each other for a week. But still.

Wow.

“I’m sorry, sir,” Credence bowed his head in polite dismissal and slid the books he’d wanted across the counter, “But we’ll be leaving now. Excuse me.”

“What did you just say?” Marcus’ nostrils flared, “Why you little—”

“Actually!” Newt butted in with an awkward laugh, quickly grabbing Credence’s books from the counter and nodding his head frantically in the opposite direction, “We’ll just check out over there. Terribly sorry for bothering you. We’ll just, uhm, leave you be now. I like your mustache.”

Credence’s face flushed in embarrassment.
“Or… we’ll just do that,” he stepped backwards, shoulders slumped and hands trembling, “I’ll be right outside. Excuse me.”

“Oh… wait—”

But, he was already through the door.

Newt looked back to Marcus.

And grinned.

“That’s my apprentice.”

Credence was mortified.

He didn’t know what had come over him. The rage. The offense. The venom spewing to life within his throat. Hearing that wizard talk about Newt like that… No. Seeing Newt knocked down by the salacious slander hurled his way, not even once rising to his own defense as if he was accustomed to such vicious degradation… It had sparked a fire flaring through Credence’s veins, burning through all his walls and safeguards, so that he could rise to the occasion and come to Newt’s rescue.

This wasn’t like him.

Acting without thinking was always more of Modesty’s thing. Whenever people like Henry Shaw called Credence a freak or treated him lower than dirt, he would watch her eyes ignite with flame, restrained only by their entwined hands and Credence’s soft words. Otherwise, she’d just run in guns-blazing.

Like he just had.

Oh God, what had he done?

Credence glanced over at Newt. He hadn’t spoken a word since they’d left the bookstore, trudging down the cobblestone street without explaining what they were doing or where they were going. He must have been so disappointed in him.

“I’m sorry,” Credence said quietly.

Newt slowed to a stop and looked back at him, a question swimming in his meadow green eyes.

“I… shouldn’t have done that,” Credence’s hands twitched towards his belt buckle. It was habit now. He would do something he shouldn’t have, his Mother would request his belt, and then he would be cleansed from his sins. That’s how it always went. That’s how it has always been.

The paper butterfly fluttered down to his hands.

Newt was different though. Newt would never hurt him like that.

“I shouldn’t have treated him with disrespect. I don’t—I don’t know why I did that. The way he just dismissed you like a… a freak made me—It made me angry,” Credence averted his gaze, “I acted without thinking and I’m—I’m sorry.”
It was stupid. *Stupid stupid stupid.* He never should have been so bold. He really was an irresponsible, no-good sinner ruining everything he touched.

“Credence, you—you were perfect,” Newt’s breathless voice broke through the darkness, “No one has ever… really… stood up for me before. Well, it doesn’t happen all that often.”

Credence spared a cautious glance.

Newt was pacing, but without the enthusiastic vigor whenever he was on one of his babbling frenzies. This was more… uncertain. Hesitant. Credence didn’t know what to make of it.

“This may come as a bit of a shock to you…” Newt forced an awkward smile, “But I don’t really have many… friends. So, I’m glad you were there, Credence. I mean it. Thank you.”

A moment passed between them.

Each staring at each other without moving, without speaking. Neither knowing what to do or say. Until Newt eventually coughed and pulled at his collar. He turned back around and surveyed the area.

“Let’s get moving, shall we?”

This time, when he glanced over his shoulder back at Credence, there was a genuine smile instead of a strained one.

“I need to put in an order at Mr. Mulpepper’s Apothecary. I was thinking about grabbing something to eat after setting up an Apprentice’s Account over at Gringotts and then, time permitting, stopping off at Ollivander’s to get you fitted for a wand?” Newt held out his hand, “Sound good?”

A wand.

He would finally be getting a wand.

By the grace of God, Newt was *so* much better than Mr. Graves had ever been.

Credence slipped his hand into his and smiled, just the teeniest bit.

“Sounds good.”

---

On second thought, bringing Credence to the apothecary was a *bad, bad, bad* idea.

The instant they entered, Newt became all too aware of the barrels of frogs brains and preserved bat wings filling the wooden shelves. Eyes of newt floated inside large jars. Crocodile skulls and twinned herbs and bouquets of rabbit feet hung from the ceiling. A tarantula stepped forward on a nearby table, raising its front legs in greeting.

It wasn’t his finest moment but, Newt had practically shoved Credence outside and stuttered out that he should probably wait out there instead.

“Ah, my favorite consumer of Babbling Beverage,” came a boisterous laugh, “What can I do you for?”
Klaudius Kaganovitch, current owner of Mr. Mulpapper’s Apothecary, lounged in the furthermost corner of the shop. He leaned back in his quilted chair, a pipe between his teeth and leather boots propped up on an ancient stained mahogany desk.

Long ebony hair hung in thick waves around his large ears, but not a single strand grew on top of his head. Sunken yellow eyes glared out from underneath bushy brows, yet nary a wrinkle creased his tanned face. He was strong in stature and tall enough to claim distant giant ancestry, yet he remained permanently hunched over like an old man.

A glass jar was set upon the desk, the yellowed sign labeled Guess My Age in looping script fraying at the edges. It was filled to the top, overflowing with knuts and sickles and the rare galleon.

“Very funny,” Newt mumbled and tossed in a coin, “Fifty-four?”

Klaudius snorted.

“Not even close,” he took out his pipe and puffed a smoke ring into the air, “How’ve you been, Newt?”

“Oh, you know… same old, same old,” Newt searched his coat pockets before procuring a small piece of parchment, “I need these potions. Double batch. Enough to last me a month or two. Ah, better make that three just to be safe.”

“Separated into quarts?”

“Ounces this time, actually. I’d like to take them out in the field.”

“That’ll cost extra,” Klaudius grunted.

“I know.”

Klaudius opened out his hand and Newt slipped the paper over. The shopkeeper pulled out a pair of crooked, wire-framed glasses and brought the list up close to his face. “Burn-healing Paste and Fire Protection Potion. Didn’t I just fill up an order of those?”

“Funny story,” Newt shifted sheepishly from foot-to-foot, “Dragons in Egypt made me run out of that one.”

“And you’ve got… Essence of Dittany, Murtlap, and Star Grass,” Klaudius peered over his glasses and tsked, “Again?”

“Gryphon hooked me in the shoulder. Used up the last of my stock.”

“Calming Drought too?”

“Ah,” Newt suddenly found himself occupied with counting the cracks on the ceiling, “That’s… just in case of emergency.”

Klaudius gave him such a scrutinizing look that it could have burned holes in Newt’s coat. The young wizard rubbed his shoulder and gave an awkward grin, “Oh, don’t give me that look. I keep you in business.”

“You’re one of my more… entertaining customers. I’ll give you that. But, the amount of healing potions you go through by the month brings me worry,” Klaudius huffed, taking another puff out of his pipe and blowing smoke rings into the air, “Come back tomorrow morning. Everything will be
“Perfect!” Newt beamed, “Is Octavius opening?”

“No, he’s been moved to evenings. Hortencia’s working the morning shift now.”

“Oh,” Newt responded, and a respectful silence passed between them at the mention of her, “How’s she doing?”

“The leg still gives her trouble, but she’s up and walking,” Klaudius clucked his tongue, “But just between you and me: Don’t mention the cane or she’ll whack you with it.”

“Understood,” Newt nodded and headed for the exit, glancing over his shoulder back at the ancient-young shopkeeper, “Thank you. I owe you one.”

Klaudius snorted, “You got that right.”

A howling scream shattered the windows.

Newt had just enough time to throw up a shield before being thrown forward into the door-frame, digging his nails into the cedar to keep himself upright. The ground beneath trembled with unbridled force. Pickett squeaked loudly from inside his breast pocket, no doubt vexed from being jostled around.

Another sorrowful scream sent the glass flying back out into the streets.

*Credence.*

What happened? Who’d hurt him? Newt should’ve never him outside alone. This was his fault. It was all his fault.

The ground quivered again. Frightened shouts and screams echoed from outside. A jagged crack sliced through the storefront wall, creeping across the ceiling and stopping right over Klaudius’ head.

“Well,” Klaudius pulled the pipe from his lips and cackled as Newt bolted out the door, “Now, I guess you owe me two!”

---

“Credence? *Credence!*”

The world shook.

Shadows danced through the air. Every window, shattered. It was like a Category Five Hurricane made of magic and darkness had overtaken the area, traveling overhead and uprooting everything that had the misfortune of coming into contact with it.

As magical as the wizarding world was, they were still caught within the aftermath of a war. Gellert Grindelwald *WANTED* posters were still plastered across most storefront windows. But, it seemed that Credence hadn’t noticed the posters.

He had noticed the *newspapers.*
And that was exactly what he held in his hands now as the Obscurus spiraled out of control around him.

_Bugger. Bugger. Bugger. Bugger._

“Credence!”

Newt slowly approached him, the sheer magnitude of Credence’s power forcing him backwards. Pickett cautiously peeked out of his pocket, squeaked, and quickly ducked back inside.

Newt pulled out his wand, tightly gripping the handle, and cast a Sticking Charm to his shoes to keep himself from being knocked off his feet. He trekked forward as if weights were suddenly attached to his ankles, linking him to the Earth.

Newt clenched his teeth together.

Credence could only have been a few feet away, but it felt like they were miles apart.

It was loud, and it was frightening. His ears were _screaming._ Newt wanted nothing more than to run back inside the apothecary and hide inside the dark, cold storeroom amongst the dried herbs and bottled rarities. He wanted to press his hands against his ears and beat his head against the stone walls. Anything to escape this _agony._

But he couldn’t leave Credence behind.

So, he trudged forward and ripped the newspaper from the Obscurial’s frozen fingers.

“Oh, Credence…”

The front page of _Wizarding Weekly_ declared the end of the war. Details of Gellert Grindelwald’s impersonation of an American Auror and subsequent capture in New York was splattered across in printed ink. Percival Graves had been discovered in ill health, but was expected to make a full recovery.

Grindelwald’s scowling figure was shown being carted off by MACUSA, his hands bound in unbreakable charms and his wand confiscated.

Photos of Graves—the real Graves—being escorted from Grindelwald’s apartment where he’d been imprisoned all this time was displayed alongside it. It had been only a block away from MACUSA headquarters. A blanket was draped across his bony shoulders. His eyes and lips both bruised and swollen. His cheeks, hollowed. Traumatized, no doubt. Yet his eyes blazed with vengeance.

The war was over.

But the haunted expression splattered across Credence’s face made Newt feel like it had only just begun.

“Credence? Credence, can you look at me?” Newt soothed. He reached out to touch Credence’s trembling shoulders but hesitated last moment, uncertain whether he’d appreciate the contact. “If it’s alright with you, Credence, I’m just… going to touch your shoulders now, okay? Don’t be afraid. It’s just me. It’s just Newt.”

Eyes shimmered white.

Patches of skin peeled off Credence’s face, layer after sickening layer, disappearing into shadowy
wisps of darkness. He was falling apart, quite literally. Breaking down little by little with each and every passing moment.

The ground beneath them shuddered and cracked.

This was bad.

This was very bad.

“Credence, I don’t know what to do but I need you to trust me. I’m going to touch your face now, okay? I need you to look at me. Only me, understand?” Newt cupped Credence’s face between his hands and leaned forward, milky white eyes and tear-stained cheeks filling his vision.

“I’m Newton Artemis Fido Scamander. You are my apprentice Credence Barebone,” Newt pressed their foreheads together, willing every word into his body, “You are good. You are safe. And you can fight this. I know you can, Credence. I believe in you.”

The air coalesced around them, shrieking and shouting—almost human in its despair.

Newt didn’t falter.

“You’re my friend,” he added softly, “Let me help you.”

White eyes returned to black.

Credence slumped forward.

Shopkeepers peered out their shattered front windows. The witches and wizards of Diagon Alley, having hid anywhere they could to escape the blast, poured out of their refuges. Frightened children huddled underneath their parent’s robes, hiding their faces just in case the storm hadn’t passed just yet.

Newt wrapped an arm around Credence and quickly apparated themselves out of there.

Credence clung onto his shoulder as he struggled to stand. As powerful as Credence was, Newt imagined that releasing the Obscurus like this took a lot out of him. And it probably didn’t help that Newt had apparated with him for the very first time.

“Watch your step,” Newt murmured, helping Credence upstairs to their room.

Credence mumbled something underneath his breath.

Newt paused and leaned down to better hear him, “I’m sorry? I didn’t catch that.”

“Your middle name is Fido?”

Newt puffed out his chest, cheeks flushing in embarrassment.

“Oh hush.”

The day wasn’t supposed to end like this.
Credence was supposed to be curled up in bed, reading his new books. He was supposed to sit down with Newt and drink Butterbeer and sample other wizarding confections. He was supposed to visit Gringotts. He was supposed to have the honor of getting a wand. Something that he could call his own, that no one could take away from him.

He was supposed to enjoy this strange, new world he found himself in. Not destroy it.

Credence uncurled his hands.

And wished that the paper wings inside weren’t shredded.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is dedicated to the paper butterfly. May you rest in pieces.

So, Credence has finally been introduced to the Wizarding World and he is as mesmerized as he is frightened. What will the consequences be for what happened outside Mr. Mulpepper's Apothecary? Will Klaudius be mad that he ruined his window display? Just who is Hortencia?

Tune in next time on Green Meadows, Dark Skies to find out!

Please leave your comments and constructive criticisms below. What do you like about this story so far? This chapter? Is there anything about my writing that you think I should improve upon? As I move forward with the series, I'll likely return to previous chapters to clean up my grammar and add a few things here and there: so be sure to keep an eye out!
Green Meadows, Dark Skies Lore:

Runespoor's are African three-headed venomous snakes that typically grow 6-7 feet in length. Each of the Runespoor's heads serve a different purpose. The Left Head acts as The Planner and decides where the Runespoor is to go and what it is to do next. The Middle Head is The Dreamer and can often cause the Runespoor to remain still for days - lost within its daydreams. The Right Head is The Critic and, as the title states, criticizes the actions of the other heads. Newt's Petit Runespoor is 12 inches long and his Gigantic Runespoor is 18 feet in length. Both Runespoor's Right Head's have bite wounds and Newt is taking care of them until they heal.

Newt's favorite book series is: "Madame Camembert's Cantankerous Cabaret" where drama, murder, betrayal, and affairs plague the family of famous Cabaret owner: Madame Camembert. The series primarily revolves around Madame Camembert, her two children: Madame Chantilly Creme and Monsieur Roquefort, and their respective lovers: Monsieur Cheddar and Lady Provolone. Every character is named after a type of cheese. The Cantankerous Cabaret is an incredibly popular series across the wizarding world and sells millions of books each year.

Gloom saturated the room.

Ice crystals, swirling labyrinthine designs more intricate than the next, creped up the double windows fixtured above Credence’s bed. Shadows gathered—dragged against their will—to that miserable little corner, wrapping themselves around the bed and the sorrowful figure laying upon it.

Newt gazed upon his despondent companion.

Credence’s spine poking from his back, the rounded edges creating a neat row of tiny mountains curving down the cotton shirt. Juniper blankets were draped carelessly over bony hips. His defeated body was curled so entirely around himself that, as tall as he was, only a fraction of the bed ended up occupied.

“Credence?”

No response.

How many days had Newt gazed upon this exact scene, this living portrait of misery? How many times had he watched those dark shadows enshrouding Credence’s barely illuminated figure, evoking a sense of urgency and dread that seemed vaguely familiar? Why, Caravaggio himself could’ve painted such a scene. Splashed midnight pigment across a stark white canvas, his golden brush sweeping across the page, creating Credence’s image. A masterpiece of genius and horror.
“Credence,” Newt quietly pleaded and pulled up a chair, “Tell me what I can do. Whatever it is, anything at all. Just… let me help you. Please.”

Silence.

Wretched, never-ending silence.

“Was it something I did?”

A sudden flash of dark eyes over Credence’s shoulder. Something different within the portrait. Signs of life. Movement. _Hope._

Credence pulled himself up, linens gathering around his waist, and gazed listlessly into the distance.

No. Not hope at all.

Not within those clouded eyes.

“It wasn’t you, Mr. Newt,” Credence whispered and lifted his balled hands, revealing what was inside, “It was me.”

Shredded paper wings.

“Oh Credence,” Newt leaned forward, offering his hand.

But Credence shrunk away and returned to that miserable position.

“We can fix this, Credence. Someway, somehow,” Newt tried again, “It’s not your fault.”

But Credence no longer responded.

Newt’s shoulders slumped. He reached into his pocket and pulled Pickett out, “Keep an eye on him, won’t you?”

_I’m not the one that can help him here._

There were approximately 392 cracks in the wall and 643 across the ceiling.

1 deserted spiderweb abandoned in the corner.

3 empty moth cocoons.

The bed had 1,456 scratch marks and 4 carved initials into the wooden bedposts.

1 missing screw on the corner window.

8 pigeon droppings on the outside ledge.

18 shreds in the paper butterfly’s wings.

Days had blurred together.
Time became nonexistent.

The butterfly still hadn’t moved.

Prudence hadn’t moved.

Credence turned his bleary eyes towards the bowtruckle softly snoozing in his open palm, its tiny arms wrapped around his thumb.

The creature had warmed up to Credence since their first introduction, however long ago that was. Days? Months? Years? It didn’t matter. Pickett watched over him like an anxious guardian. Always sharing his fruit with him. Always hovering nearby and running over whenever he thought he was needed. He’d often just sit there on the bedside corner, patting his hands whenever Credence found himself close to tears. Pickett was a good bowtruckle.

But he couldn’t replace the companion Credence had lost.

Credence curled into himself and whimpered.

“Ma.”

But she was gone too.

What he would give to see her again. All he wanted was for her to hug him, to make him feel better, to run her hands through his hair and sing him sweet lullabies. Fa la ninna, fa la nanna. Nella braccia della mamma—

Granted, Mary Lou Barebone had never once done that in all the years that she had him and yet… Credence couldn’t help but yearn for the mother he never had. The one he had always wanted her to be.

But he would never get that, now would he? Because his Ma was dead. She was dead and it was all his fault just like poor Prudence.

I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m sorry.

Tears pricked his eyes.

I’m not worthy.

---

“Hello there, darling.”

Nothing brought Newt more joy or sense of purpose than spending time with his creatures.

The Petit Runespoor and the Gigantic Runespoor both had needed their latest dose of antibiotics; so, Newt had spent the better half of the morning carrying out that tedious process. Not only had he needed to get the middle head to cooperate, but also avoid getting bit by the first. Venomous creatures were always such a doozy to work with, must less three-headed ones.

But that was all over and done with.
Newt set down the bucket of fish he’d been hauling.

“Well, look at you,” he stepped closer to the aquarium and grinned, “You’re bigger than an Erumpent.”

No matter what challenging activities he had planned for the day, Newt still loved his creatures with all his heart.

None more so than the Kraken at this moment.

Her injury had stitched itself together into a sinewy scar on an otherwise healthy leg and, much to Newt’s delight, she had already grown twice in size since the day they’d met. Charting the growth development of an infant Kraken was a dream come true.

“By the time we get you back home, I dare say you’ll be even quadruple that!”

Newt stuck his hand inside the aquarium. There were no barriers here between Newt and his creatures. Perhaps a few protective charms here and there to keep everything safe, but nothing more. His creatures knew only freedom and Newt preferred to keep it that way.

The young Kraken swam over and wrapped one of her vermilion tentacles around his arm. The pale ivory suckers, as round and large as diamond rings, left purple marks on Newt’s skin as she squeezed him in greeting.

Krakens were rather emotionally sensitive creatures. Regardless of reputation, Newt found them to be one of the friendliest creatures of the deep. They were extraordinarily affectionate to members of their pod and often displayed as such through hugs. Many of the sunken ships trapped at the bottom of the Atlantic hadn’t truly been crushed out of any form of malicious attack. No, they were merely hugged to death in a classic case of mistaken identity.

“Mummy’s expanding your enclosure today, darling,” Newt tenderly rubbed against the length of her leg, “It’s about time I added an ocean habitat to the suitcase. A proper one. Lots more room for you to swim and explore, hmm? What do you think about that?”

The Kraken squeezed his hand in response.

“Wonderful! That’s just what I thought,” Newt retracted his hand and dried it against his shirt, “Go hide in bed now, love. It’s about to get noisy.”

The Kraken obediently swam away and hid within the bed of gently swaying sea kelp that she loved so much. Despite Newt having painstakingly created many places for her to hide and play, even going so far as building a literal treasure trove of a cave, she had decided that kelp was what she loved the most.

Typical.

Newt rolled up his sleeves and slipped out his wand.

As he extended the expansion charms and added various decorations to the added section, Newt’s mind wandered. And, much as it did nowadays, it wandered in the direction of Credence.

He worried him.

After what happened in Diagon Alley, Credence had only spoken once. He barely touched the food that Newt brought up to him from the pub downstairs. All that Credence did was just… lie in bed,
either sleeping or staring out the frosted window above it. Newt hadn’t even seen him move to use the bathroom.

The only sign that something—anything—was even remotely alright was Pickett.

Sending Pickett to Credence had been a moment of desperation for Newt. Having exhausted all other avenues, he didn’t know what he could do. He had done everything he could to help Credence. But, nothing had worked.

And now?

Little had changed, but Pickett had grown attached.

He napped in Credence’s cropped hair. He tenderly patted his scarred hands and used his thumb as a pillow. Once, much to Newt’s amusement, he had painstakingly pulled the blankets over his ward on one particularly cold morning all by himself. Of course, Newt had initially gone over to help the tiny creature, but that had only earned him a strong glare.

Credence was a mystery wrapped up in an enigma trapped within a paradox.

But Pickett? He could benefit from this. Perhaps instead of having someone take care of him 24/7, maybe all he had needed was someone to take care of. Maybe this way he could finally grow some independence and not have to be carried around in Newt’s pocket everywhere.

Not that Newt minded, of course.

Ugh, no wonder the other bowtruckles claimed him of favoritism.

“What am I going to do?” Newt sighed.

“Credence—you remember Credence, right?” he waved his wand overhead, adjusting the salinity to better suit the larger enclosure, “He was there the first day you and I met.”

Newt smiled.

“He’s a nice kid, all things considered. Kind. Considerate. Overwhelmingly helpful. Like ridiculously helpful, but he means well,” he continued between incantations, “And I’ve never met someone with such a flourishing curiosity before, let alone at his age. I went through two entire volumes of Madame Camembert’s Cantankerous Cabaret when we visited Flourish & Botts. Speaking of, I need to finish the latest book. Monsieur Roquefort just confessed his feelings to Lady Provolone and—”

The Kraken’s head popped out of the sea kelp, dark eyes piercing through Newt’s soul.

“Right. Off topic.”

Newt ran his hand through his hair and breathed deeply.

“I feel… helpless,” he confessed, “Credence is just so scared. All the time. I mean, Pickett used to be just as jittery, but I can’t exactly carry Credence around in my pocket all day.”

Although, given the right spell…

Newt finished the last incantation and surveyed his work. The makeshift ocean now ran a few nautical miles deep, in both width and length too. It wasn’t perfect and would need constant readjustment, but until they booked their passage to Italy, this would just have to do for now.
“Go ahead and try it out, darling,” he nodded over.

The Kraken slowly crept out from her sea kelp haven, trepidatious for only a moment before barreling forward through the water into depths unexplored. As Newt predicted, she went straight towards the wrecked pirate ship nestled sweetly against the sand-covered floor.

Krakens. Big huggers. Insatiable curiosity.

Newt placed his hands on his hips, brimming with accomplishment.

Tending to his creatures was easy. A mixture of intuition and experience benefited him well. Tending to people however…

He plopped down onto the ground and rested his head between his knees.

“For someone so easily frightened,” Newt continued despite no longer having an audience, “Credence is… well, he’s a natural at protecting others. Never would’ve expected it had I not seen it for myself.”

He scratched behind his ear.

“There’s this teller named Marcus. Worked over at Flourish & Botts ever since I can remember. He and I—” Newt grimaced, “Erm, well, we didn’t exactly get along that well when I was a kid. Ended up pushing him into a bookshelf once. Gave him that scar he boasts about so proudly over his eye. Claims he got it dueling a Dark Wizard—certainly not a scrawny Hufflepuff pulling one over him.”

His eyes fluttered shut.

He remembered it like it was yesterday.

Newt had been engrossed in a book, of course: La Chanson d’Oiseaux. It was a children’s fable intended for those far below Newt’s age about a wizard so enraptured by a greenfinch’s melody that he hadn’t noticed a fox making away with his wand. It was simple reading, however, Newt had been so enraptured by the colorful blues and greens and enchanting yellows of the cover that he couldn’t help himself but sit down and read it.

Besides, it was a bookstore. No one judged anyone for reading in a bookstore. He could have spent hours there losing himself between pages of parchment and ink. So, when a teenaged Marcus had crept up behind and yelled in his ear…

Well, needless to say that Newt responded appropriately.

By accidentally punching Marcus in surprise and crying back to his Mother.

Newt never claimed that it was one of his finer moments.

“He doesn’t like me all that much.” Newt sighed, “I took Credence there since they have the largest range of student texts. Hogwarts uses it as their preferred retailer whenever school starts up. We just happened to be there when Marcus was working and, of course, he started up with his usual antagonism. Nothing new. But—but Credence came to my rescue.”

He chuckled at the irony of it all.

“Funny. Here I am supposed to be helping him and he’s always the one doing the saving. Maybe I should be his apprentice.”
Newt paused, and lifted his head.

The Kraken floated in front of him. Her eyes, blacker than the inky depths of the Mediterranean Sea, kept watch of the pensive wizard.

“He’s... always the one doing the saving,” Newt repeated slowly, rising to his feet, “He’s always doing the saving! Brilliant!”

On sheer impulse, Newt thrust his head and upper torso into the aquarium, opening his arms to the Kraken. She swam into his arms without hesitation and affectionately touched her tentacles to Newt’s face, leaving behind round purple sucker marks against his skin.

Kraken hugs were really the best hugs.

“Reparo.”

How much time had passed?

An hour?

A day?

A week?

The light blinded his eyes, so it must have at least been mid-morning. Credence rolled over, cheek pressed into the feather-stuffed pillow, and watched Newt working on the opposite end of the room.

“Good morning, Credence,” Newt’s chipper tone and ever-present smile made Credence feel all the more horrible for weighing him down with his despair. He would be so much better off without him.

“I was just about to head downstairs for breakfast if you wanted to join me.”

Newt glanced back over his shoulder.

Credence looked away.

“Or I can bring you up a plate,” Newt conceded and smoothed out his coat across the small wooden desk situated between the two double beds, “I just need to touch this up a bit first. The Occamies have become a bit nippy lately and ah, well... I’m afraid my clothes are taking the brunt of it.”

Newt held his wand over the fabric. An atrocious tear had been ripped through the back, resembling more of a Maestro’s prominent coattails than the usual overcoat.

“Reparo.”

Like an orchestra conductor, Newt waved his wand with a careful sort of grace over his coat. Slowly, the tear began to mend itself. Seam after seam stitched itself together until the garment looked as good as new, if not better.

As good as new...
“There. That should do it!” Newt beamed and placed his wand upon the desk, slipping on his newly mended coat, “I’ll be back in just a moment, okay? The head cook mentioned the other day that he’d be trying his hand at Belgian Waffles and, I don’t know about you, but I’m eager to see what he has in store.”

He headed out the door, popping his head around the corner once to say, “I’ll bring some up and we can eat together,” before leaving altogether.

Credence sat up in bed for the first time in days.

The witch had left.

The witch had left… and he had forgotten his wand.

He had to return any moment. He had to remember that he had left something important behind.

But when he didn’t, Credence rose to his feet.

He didn’t know what he was doing. Credence knew on some level that he shouldn’t be invading Newt’s personal property let alone using it for his own selfish purposes. He imagined that using another witch’s wand without permission was akin to blasphemy. But—

*But…*

Gently, Credence pulled out the shredded paper butterfly from his pocket and placed it on the table.

Pickett climbed down from his shoulders and seated himself on the edge of the desk, giving him a disapproving look.

“Oh, Pickett… don’t give me that. I’m only borrowing it. Promise,” Credence said softly, “Just for a little while.”

He was just fixing his mistakes.

He didn’t even know if it would work.

Pickett blew him a disparaging raspberry and turned up his nose. It seemed that he wanted to play no part in this. Credence didn’t blame him, but still. He needed to at least try.

Newt’s wand slipped smoothly into his hand, as if it had always belonged there. The wood was lighter than Credence had imagined it would be. It was smooth and supple, springy yet strong. It fitted Newt’s personality perfectly.

He sucked in a deep breath and stretched out his arm.

The wand tip hovering over the paper butterfly.

“*Reparo.*”

Newt peeked around the corner.
Leaving behind his wand had been an agonizing decision, but a necessary one. It didn’t help though that plenty of things could go wrong. Credence was untrained and that alone could have spelled disaster, pun intended. If the wand refused to cooperate, or if Credence unleashed too much magic, everything could have exploded in his face and this entire endeavor would have been all for naught. That and Newt would’ve been out of a wand which was, y’know, not exactly ideal.

However, Credence’s cry of delight and the stunning flash of white paper wings that followed made it all worth it.

Credence cupped his hands together and the paper butterfly fluttered inside. He spun around, laughing and crying all at once.

“You’re safe,” he shuddered between sobs, “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. I’m never going to let anything happen to you ever again, Prudence.”

Credence had named it?

When had that happened?

“Pickett? Pickett, please look at me,” Credence leaned down, face-to-face with the stubborn bowtruckle, “Oh, I know I shouldn’t have done this but… I—I want you to meet my friend.”

Pickett continued pouting for half a second more before giving Credence a second glance, relenting with a tiny huff.

“Thank you,” Credence gleamed and raised his hands, placing the paper butterfly atop the desk, “Prue meet Pickett. Pickett meet Prue.”

“I hope they get along well,” Newt finally stepped back inside, “Pickett has always been a bit of a loner when it comes to creatures his own size.”

Credence jumped and spun around, eyes wide and hands clasped against his chest.

“Mr. Newt!” he backed into the desk and caused it to sharply jangle, of which earned a rather staunch glare from Pickett and a wicked fluttering of protest from Prue, “I—I wasn’t doing anything. I didn’t mean to—I just—I—I’m sorry.”

“Credence.”

He fell silent.

But Newt just glowed with pride.

“I think that congratulations are in order.”

“I—” Credence fumbled over his words, “What?”

“You cast your first spell! A flawless Reparo if I might add,” Newt stepped closer and offered the paper butterfly his hand, filling with absolute glee when it crawled happily inside, “I’m proud, Credence. Extraordinarily proud. The first time I tried to cast one, I caught the professor’s hat on fire instead. Lost my House 50 whole points that day.”

Credence looked flabbergasted, opening and closing his mouth like a gasping fish before squeaking out, “You… aren’t mad?”

Newt blinked.
“Why would I be mad?”

“I—I used your wand,” Credence nervously stuttered out, twiddling his fingers together, “I shouldn’t have. *I know I shouldn’t have.* It belongs to you and I shouldn’t touch other people’s belongings. I—I betrayed your trust and I—I’m so sorry.”

Newt didn’t know how to respond.

Even when Credence was doing well—*spectacularly* well—he was still plagued by crippling anxiety and fear.

“All the best adventures begin with ‘You shouldn’t have done this…’” Newt brought the paper butterfly to Credence’s chest, bemusedly watching it fly straight onto his lapel, “Even better adventures begin with helping someone else.”

Newt reached out and hesitated for a moment before patting Credence’s shoulder.

“You didn’t cast your first spell for yourself. You did it for—” his brows furrowed, “Prue, was it?”

“Y—yes.”

“Prue then,” Newt said, “You did it for Prue.”

Credence averted his gaze, wringing his hands together so firmly that Newt swore it would leave behind bruises.

“But I suppose… if you’re that worried over borrowing my wand, we’ll just have to get that fixed.”

Credence looked back up, a questioning look in his eyes.

Newt smiled.

“Let’s get you a wand.”

______________________________

“Mr. Newt, I don’t think this is such a good idea.”

Hundreds of narrowed eyes drilled into his skull. A thousand footsteps shuffled away. A million hushed whispers recounted the destruction he had caused just a few days prior. Shame colored Credence’s cheeks, the force of his sins weighing down his shoulders.

*How can he walk like that? Pretending that nothing’s wrong?*

*Doesn’t he know what he did?*

*Why wasn’t he arrested?*

*He should be ashamed of himself.*

*Don’t look at him, children. People like that should just stay at home.*
Credence closed his eyes and breathed.

In and out.

But the voices surrounded him, encapsulating him in a suffocating cocoon of scarlet spiderwebs. He couldn’t move. He couldn’t breathe. He was helpless as every word dragged through his chest like a knife, spilling wounds of sneers and snarls.

_I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m sorry._

Credence stopped.

Eyes of milky white stared up at him, a broken body on the floor.

_Ma._

“Why not?”

Light pierced through the darkness, opening his eyes to find a meadow of nothing less than kindness and concern.

“The sky is clear. The sun is shining,” Newt stepped closer and smiled, “It’s the perfect day for purchasing a wand.”

“Because of what I did…” Credence’s voice was hardly a whisper amongst the bustling crowd, “I shouldn’t be here, Mr. Newt. I did something… horrible and they all know it.”

“If that’s truly the case, then they’re gossiping about _me_. Not you.”

“I don’t know…”

“You’re my responsibility,” Newt said firmly, “As my apprentice, everything that you do is a reflection of me. Your burdens are mine to bear. Besides, it was only a crack in the street and a few shop-windows broken. Diagon Alley has dealt with much worse before.”

Credence twiddled his thumbs.

“But what they’re saying… What if they hate you?”

“What happened was an accident. What everyone else thinks about is their problem,” Newt offered him his hand, “I only care about _you_, Credence. So, how would you like to move forward from here?”

Always with the choices. Credence couldn’t think of a time where Newt had made any decision without consulting with him first. If he said that he never wanted to step foot in Diagon Alley again, Newt would turn around right now and walk with him back to safety—no questions asked.

But did he really want that?

The webs around him unraveled.

Credence breathed slowly, in and out, and slipped his hand into his.

“I would like a wand.”

“Well then,” Newt pushed open the door right beside them, silver bells chiming overhead, “Welcome
to Ollivander’s.”

Credence flushed, having not realized that they’d been standing in front of their destination the entire time. Newt cheerily stepped inside. However, when Credence hesitated over the threshold, he looked back questioningly.

“Credence?”

“Are you sure this is okay?”

“Why wouldn’t it be?”

“Am I…” he thought back to Mr. Graves, “…worthy?”

Newt frowned and opened his mouth to say something before closing it. After a moment, he asked, “What do you think?”

Credence looked away.

“I want to be,” he murmured, “But I—I don’t know if I am…That I’ve earned the right to be—to be a wizard. To be like you.”

His outburst had only reconfirmed his doubts. Credence wanted this, more than anything else but… if he couldn’t control his magic, then did he even deserve to have it? If he couldn’t use it to protect those nearest to him, then what even was its purpose? If all he did was hurt and destroy, then what was he even doing here?

Newt squeezed his hand.

“Do you trust me?”

Credence looked up, surprised.

“Yes.”

“Then let’s give this a chance,” Newt smiled, warm and kind, “I promise you’ll find your answer inside.”

Credence nodded and, slowly, stepped through the doorway.

The wandmaker’s shop wasn’t anything like what Credence imagined it to be. A thick layer of ancient dust blanketed the overstocked shelves, nearly bursting apart from all the thin butterscotch boxes shoved inside. Potted plants covered the front desk, the wild vines and fronds nearly obscuring it from view.

Newt reached over the side and rang the service bell.

A surprised shout came from the backroom, followed shortly after by a loud crash and sudden shuffling of feet. The door swung open and a man, no older than 40 or 50 with frizzy blond hair and an owl-eyed expression, stumbled inside.

“Mr. Scamander! I wasn’t expecting to see you here.”

“Garrick,” Newt greeted, looking down and shifting awkwardly from foot-to-foot, “Nice to see you again. I—”
“Wait, don’t tell me!” the wandmaker held up a finger, “13 ½ inches, reasonably springy, cypress wood… Dragon heartstring core, yes?”

“Your memory is astounding.”

“Not memory, my boy, but respect for the craft,” the wandmaker chirped and turned his immediate attention unto Credence, “And who is this? I don’t recall ever seeing you here, Mister…?”

“Barebone,” Credence answered quietly, stepping behind Newt and hiding in the comfort of his shadow, “Credence Barebone.”

“Pleasure to make your acquaintance, Mr. Barebone. I’m Garrick Ollivander,” he greeted him politely, as any proper shopkeeper should, “And how can I be of service today? Could I interest you gents in a velvet case or perhaps a wand cleaning?”

“Not today,” Newt declined, “Actually, we’re doing a little shopping for Credence here before hitting the road again, so we don’t have too much time to spare. He’s my new American Apprentice. But… you see, there’s this problem. Here we were, halfway across the pond when his wand turns up missing. Fancy that! Searched the deck high and low, couldn’t find it. And I thought that, maybe, since you’re the best wandmaker England has to offer, maybe we could, erm, pick up a quick replacement?”

“I’m glad that you thought of me, Mr. Scamander,” Ollivander beamed and clapped his hands together, “We’ll get started right away.”

“Perfect!” Newt released Credence’s hand and pointed back towards the front entrance, “I’ll be waiting right outside.”

Credence’s eyes widened. He quickly latched onto Newt’s sleeve, knuckles turning bone white, silently pleading not to leave him alone.

“Wand selection is a private affair,” Newt seemed to read exactly what was going through Credence’s mind and smiled reassuringly, “You’re in safe hands, trust me. Garrick’s family has been doing this for centuries.”

He reached over and tapped Credence’s lapel. The paper butterfly fluttered her wings in protest.

“Besides,” he said, “You have Prudence and Pickett. I may not be with you, but you’re not alone.”

That may have been true, but Credence still didn’t want to let him go.

But he did.

Because despite all his fears, despite all his doubts, he trusted Newt. So Credence just stood there, watching him head out the entrance and wave cheerily through the front window. Credence slowly raised his hand and awkwardly wriggled his fingers.

It was only once Newt was out of sight did Credence glance tentatively back over his shoulder. Owlish eyes locked with his within an instant. A shiver shot up his spine. Such a gaze was disconcerting. Not that it was malicious—far from it—but somehow… it felt like he was being picked apart inch by inch, atom by atom, until his naked soul was left bare within nothing more to hide behind.

He didn’t know if he was ready for this. Being around magic and learning about it in books were one thing. But to finally possess a wand of his own… it would signal the end of the chapter of his life
spent without magic. This would be the end of his old life, but also a new beginning.

All he had to do was turn the page.

Sucking in a deep breath, Credence turned around and faced the ever-watching wandmaker, “So…”

“So,” Ollivander repeated with an accommodating smile, “What was your old wand like, Mr. Barebone?”

Credence froze.

“Oh… uhm,” he swallowed thickly, “I suppose it was… brown with little carvings on the end?”

Those owlish eyes sparkled in amusement.

“You’ve never owned a wand before, have you?” Ollivander clicked his tongue and disappeared amongst the shelves, “I’ve been in the wand-making business for years, Mr. Barebone. My ancestors have served thousands of witches and wizards throughout history. Some good. Some great. Some who just wanted to be left alone. Mostly children though, coming in for their very first wand.”

Ollivander returned, carrying a cardboard box in hand. He blew across it, shaking off the dust, and carefully lifted off the top.

“I know those wide eyes. That awe and wonder are the same, regardless of age. I don’t know what your circumstances are, Mr. Barebone. I don’t know what you’ve gone through or how you came under the tutelage of our young Mr. Scamander, however…”

He presented Credence an ebony wand, the sloping handle reminiscent of crows flying through the creeping shadows of a moonless night. It was severe and powerful, but possessed an elegance that Credence felt unworthy of.

“…I would be honored to help you find your first,” Ollivander finished and offered him the handle, “So, let’s see if this wand chooses you, shall we?”

Credence’s heart pounded.

A wild thrumming coursed through his veins.

Something feral and ancient awakened the moment he touched the wooden handle. Magic summoned him and Credence, without a second’s hesitation, answered its call. He wrapped his hand around the wand and extended his arm towards the sky.

And felt like he was home.

Newt paced outside.

Any moment now, either Credence was going to come out with a new wand in hand and they’d be on their merry way to their next destination or he was going to be on the receiving end of one of Garrick’s lectures. He didn’t know why he hadn’t just come out with the truth. Newt hadn’t come with any intention on lying about why they needed a wand. It just… happened.
He chewed the corner of his lip.

Obscurials were just so rare. Even more so, unheard of in adults. Newt had just wanted Credence to have an authentic wand-choosing experience like everyone else. He didn’t deserve to be marveled at like some circus freak or shunned for what he was. He deserved to be treated as Credence. Just Credence. Not an Obscurial.

Silver bells and heavy sniffling signaled his apprentice’s reappearance.

Newt turned around, an apology readied at his lips, only to pause before he could utter a single word.

Because Credence, wide-eyed and sobbing, clutched a wand to his chest. He wobbled and, somehow, Newt managed to catch him in just enough time for his legs to give way completely from underneath him and buckle forwards. The pair landed in a crumpled pile outside Ollivander’s, Credence crying inconsolably into his chest and Newt wondering what in Merlin’s name had happened in there.

He swore that if Garrick had decided to reprimand Credence instead of Newt like how he deserved —

But before Newt could finish such a thought, Credence looked up at him.

And smiled.

“I have a cedar wand, Mr. Newt,” his hands trembled, “15 inches long. Still. And a—a unicorn hair core. It chose me, Mr. Newt. Me. I went through four—no, five different wands, and this one chose me. It chose me!”

If Credence’s smile stretched any wider, Newt swore that it would develop a life of its own and hop off his face entirely.

“I have a wand. It’s mine. Mine. And—and no one can take that away from me. I’m a wizard, Mr. Newt.”

Credence covered his mouth.

“I’m a wizard.”

Chapter End Notes

Wow! So much happened in this chapter!

Credence cast his first spell. He got his very own wand. He found a companion in Pickett AND the Paper Butterfly is back! Woo-hoo!

Tune in next time on Green Meadows, Dark Skies!

Please leave your comments and constructive criticism below. I live for it! What is your favorite scene? How is my writing? Are my chapters too short? Is there anything you'd like to see improved upon? I've been rereading my old chapters and I feel like I do a lot
more "telling" instead of "showing." What do you guys think?
Lore:

Hortencia and Newt have known each other since their first year at Hogwarts. Hortencia was placed in Gryffindor while Newt was sorted into Hufflepuff. Hortencia is deeply loyal, brash, strong as an ox, and seems like she cares about no one except herself; but, she cares deeply for her friends - although she'll vehemently deny she has any. Though they never really spent much time together unless they were alone in Hogwarts' hallways, Hortencia is protective over Newt and keeps an eye out for him.

During this period in time, Ollivander has recently taken over his father's shop and, thus, has been experimenting with different wand-making techniques for the past 20 or so years. He perfected the incorporation of hard-to-work-with wood and unique wand cores (such as Unicorn Hair and Dragon Heartstrings) into his wands. The generation of Hogwarts students before Newt were the first to have been chosen by Ollivander's wands.

“Intrigued.”

Ollivander had stood before him, a curious expression carved across his timeless face. His brows had arched high into his forehead, creating deep caverns into otherwise relatively smooth skin, and his hand had methodically rubbed the stubble of his chin. Up until that moment, Credence had gone through four different wands.

Potted plants had exploded into smithereens. Credence had been flung backwards into the shelves, toppling over at least a hundred boxes in the process. Poor Ollivander’s work-apron had been set aflame. *Twice.*

Everything they had tried had spelled nothing but disaster.

But this one…

It *sang* to him.

Credence had held out the wand, the twisted handle arching into his palm as if it had always been intended for his hands and his hands alone. It thrummed through him—embracing him, nurturing him, caressing him. He and the wand were one, an extension of the other. Together, they were complete.

“Very intrigued,” Ollivander hummed again, “It’s curious, really. I’ve offered up that wand to hundreds of aspiring witches and wizards that’ve walked through my door. None have ever garnered such a response.”

Ollivander tapped his chin before approaching Credence, offering his hand to take the wand back.
Credence’s grip on it had only tightened.

“I don’t understand.”

“The wandwood is flawed. The host tree I used for it was struck by lightning when it was a sapling. I imagine that it was only through sheer force of will that it survived. I thought it might make for a unique wand structure, so I experimented,” Ollivander smiled a smile that was wise beyond his years, “Unfortunately, it only made it extraordinarily picky.”

“I want it,” Credence had said.

“Oh,” he hummed sympathetically, “I’m afraid, my dear boy, it’s not a matter of what you want but what the wand wants. Come, come now. Let’s try another. There’s a new Holly model that might do nicely—”

Ollivander had made to take the wand, only for a tiny volt of electricity to shoot through fingers, enough that even Credence had felt it.

Ollivander stumbled backwards, eyes and mouth parted in surprise.

“I’m sorry,” Credence had pressed the wand against his chest, “I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to—”

“Interesting.”

“Sir?”

“Let me draw up the paperwork, Mr. Barebone. It’ll take scarcely a moment,” he had chuckled and went back to rubbing his chin as he disappeared into the backroom, “Not that picky after all.”

Credence couldn’t stop grinning.

A cedar wand, 15 inches, stiff, with a unicorn hair core.

He owned a cedar wand.

15 inches.

Stiff.

With a unicorn hair core.

Pure elation swelled within his chest and it was nigh unstoppable at this point, like a thousand floating butterflies caught in a warm summer breeze. That moment kept replaying itself over and over again in his head. Not so picky after all. God, was this even real? Credence swore that if he jumped right now, he would rise high above Diagon Alley and never come down, like a lost balloon free to dance amongst the clouds without a single care in the world.

He’d been chosen.

Hundreds of others had tried before him, but the wand had wanted Credence. Not them.

Unwilling to let his prized possession out of sight, Credence clutched the wand close to his chest, both hands protectively wrapped around the handle. These past few hours were like a dream. If he dared to put it away now—if he so much as placed it in his pocket…

…he feared that he would wake up.
Because surely this couldn’t be real.

Wands.

Wizards.

Magic.

Pickett.

Prue.

Newt…

These things just didn’t happen to Credence. Happiness had never been intended for him.

But, by God, Credence loved his wand.

Within an instant, Prudence ruffled her paper wings and climbed down his shirt onto his wand. He smiled. Who knew if she actually understood what it was and what it meant to him? Perhaps to her, the wand was just another cool branch for her to perch and preen on.

Soon even Pickett emerged from his coat pocket and climbed up onto his wrist. The curious bowtruckle inspected the warped wood, reaching out to touch it only for Prudence to scamper down the base and swat his hand away.

Pickett, ever disgruntled, blew a raspberry at her.

Credence snorted.

They reminded him of his sisters, especially when Modesty had first been brought home. She and Chastity had fought tooth and nail whenever Ma was out and, all too often, Credence ended up having to step between them before they got hurt. They’d pout in their rooms or refuse to speak to each other after, but it never lasted more than hour until one of them stomped over and hugged the other.

He wondered what they were doing now.

Pickett waved his arms at the paper butterfly, attempting to dismount her. However, Prudence nestled on the furthest part away from him out of pure and utter spite.

“Come on you two,” Credence chastised softly, more amused than genuinely upset, “I’m sure we can come to a comprise.”

Pickett wrinkled his nose. Prudence seconded it.

“Rude,” he shook his head in mock exasperation and nudged Prudence forward with his finger, “That’s fine though. That just means that I get to make the decision then and I say it’s Pickett’s turn to explore now. You can go back on later.”

Prue fluttered her wings like an erratic hummingbird in protest while Pickett smugly pranced in triumph. Credence couldn’t help but laugh.

That was… until he felt someone watching him.
Credence was a natural at everything he did.

How had a wizard as talented as him gone so unnoticed, so unappreciated for so long?

He had beaten the odds time and time over again. He’d survived an Obscurus draining the very life out of him twice as long as anyone ever had. He had seen through the guise of a master manipulator like Gellert Grindelwald and fought back against him. He had survived a full-fledged attack by the highest-ranking members of MACUSA. He had found Newt all on his own and had even ended up saving him on multiple occasion. He’d cast his first spell without consequence and—

He was a natural with magical creatures.

Newt had never been rendered more breathless by Credence than in this very moment.

Beaming down at Pickett and Prudence fighting over ownership of his new wand like children. Those impossibly black eyes of his, so normally filled with anxiety and sorrow, brightened with life and made Newt stop in his tracks. Credence cared for them.

Perhaps, even adored them.

But that life drained when Credence noticed him watching. That wonderful light extinguished, replaced by fear and doubt.

It was heartbreaking to watch.

What was it like to live with never-ending fear? Always wondering when kindness would turn into hate? Constantly fretting over every little thing that could be misconstrued as wrong? What was it like to see the world through his eyes, where danger lurked around every corner? To be afraid of those he trusted most? What was it like to be him?

Newt stepped closer to Credence. He flinched at every step.

Merlin, Newt wanted to embrace him and never let go. He wanted to reassure him that everything would be alright. That he had nothing to fear from him. But words could only do so much.

“Fizzle Whiskers.”

A moment passed.

Confusion replaced the fear in Credence’s eyes this time.

“Fizzle Whiskers,” Newt repeated more firmly this time, shoving his hands into his pockets, “That’s the word I’ll use when I’m mad or upset. That way you won’t have to wonder or be afraid of what I’ll do anymore.”

He glanced down the cobblestone street, unable to look at what emotion would be swimming in Credence’s eyes now.

“Not to say that you should be scared of me when I’m mad. The most I’ll ever do is lecture,” he smiled awkwardly, “Though if you take Leta’s word for it, you wouldn’t want to be on the receiving end of one of those either. Apparently they last, and I quote, bloody forever.”

That only would’ve happened, though, if one of his creatures got hurt.
But even then, whether it happened by ignorance or good intent, Newt certainly wouldn’t blame him for what went wrong. He would just fix the problem and give him advice on what to do instead in the future. It was in his nature to care, not to harm.

“What I’m trying to say is… I—I am not whoever hurt you. I will never hurt you. So please,” Newt sucked in a breath, “Don’t be afraid to smile. It’s not a crime to be happy.”

It took a few moments of them standing there in silence—neither party looking at each other—before Pickett looked between them and blew Newt a raspberry.

“I beg your pardon? What did I do?” Newt huffed.

“He does that a lot.” Credence murmured.

“He never used to. It was only after we ventured through New York that he started growing an attitude,” Newt leaned down face-to-face with the bowtruckle and wagged his finger, “Next thing I know, you’ll be throwing perfectly good tea into a perfectly good harbor, declare Revolution and ally with the French.”

Pickett began squeaking rapidly.

“You’re going to what?!” Newt’s eyes bulged and said in teasing exasperation, “That’s it. No more blueberries after dinner for you, mister.”

A small laugh, small enough that he wasn’t quite certain whether it was real or imagined, pulled Newt out of his argument. He locked eyes with Credence.

And found happiness swirling within them.

Newt cracked a tiny grin before they laughed together at the sheer ridiculousness of the situation.

“Does Pickett usually have blueberries for dessert?” Credence asked.

“Oh, he gorges on them! The little glutton,” Newt said cheerily, “I dare that Pickett is to blueberries as the Niffler is to shiny things.”

“The Niffler?”

“I’ll introduce you to him when we get back.”

A shy, uncertain grin crossed Credence’s lips, “Should I bring a quarter?”

Wait.

Wait a minute.

Did his ears deceive him or did Credence just make a joke?

Newt beamed and clasped his shoulders, leaning in exceptionally close. What was that that Mother was always telling him about personal space? Ah, no matter. It clearly wasn’t important.

“I—"

“In the name of Merlin’s saggy left—If it ain’t Newt Scamander,” a familiar voice droned from behind them, “If you’re gonna be blockin’ the sidewalk any longer than that, Arty, I should start chargin’ you rent.”
Credence flinched and pulled away from Newt’s grasp.

A curly-haired brunette with hardened brown eyes glared from the doorway of Mr. Mulpepper’s Apothecary. Her arms crossed disapprovingly over her chest, tanned biceps bulging with clearly formidable strength. She was far, far taller than either Credence or Newt—which was really saying something—and looked as if she could lift them up with just her pinky finger and not even break a sweat.

This woman was intimidating strong, and she knew it.

“Hortencia,” Newt greeted, turning around and rubbing the back of his neck, “Uhm, sorry about that. Have you met Credence yet?”

The woman—Hortencia—raised a brow.

Newt squirmed.

Letting out an aggravated huff, Hortencia grabbed the bronzed cane resting against her hip and hobbled inside. When he and Newt apparently didn’t move enough to her liking, she exasperatedly jerked her head for the pair to follow.

“Uhm... Mr. Newt?” Credence inquired hesitantly, “Would you like me to wait outside again?”

Newt paused from entering the entering the apothecary, holding the door open with one foot already inside.

“No,” he answered quietly at first before straightening his shoulders and saying firmly, “No, I think it would be better suited if you joined me this time around.”

Newt turned around fully and took on that reassuring tone of his that he usually used when introducing him to something new and, perhaps, the slightest bit frightening. So, basically everything.

“I should say... you might find it a bit strange in there,” he said, “Apothecaries contain potion ingredients and sometimes—sometimes potion ingredients are, erm, weird. Yes, weird. Weird is a good word. But, I assure you—No, I give you my word, the safest place in all of Diagon Alley is here.”

Credence looked down. Pickett and Prudence were watching him, as if trying to garner his reaction. But they didn’t need to worry about him this time though.

Because Newt wouldn’t lie to him. If he said that this place was safe, then Credence believed him.

He followed Newt inside.

If stepping into Diagon Alley was like stepping into a world of magic and wonder, then walking into Mr. Mulpepper’s was like stepping into its secret underbelly of odds and ends.

Within an instant, Credence was surrounded by peculiarities. Viscous green ooze swirled inside glass jars. Strands of garlic adorned the shelves. Containers of floating eyes, frog legs, and what appeared to be fingernail clippings rolled across the floor. Mysteriously glowing rocks trembled on a nearby table. A tarantula waved as they passed by.
Credence’s grip on his wand tightened.

“Klaudius has been waitin’ for you, Newt. He assured me that you’d pick up your order in the morning. So here I was waitin’, twiddlin’ my thumbs, makin’ repairs… and then I waited for two mornings. And then three and four… get where I’m going here?” Hortencia scoffed, rubbing her thigh, “Next time, be more specific on which morning you intend on stoppin’ by.”

When a pained hiss escaped her thin lips, Newt politely looked away.

“Someone important to me was in trouble, Orti,” he murmured as she limped behind the service desk and took a seat, “I wasn’t going to leave them alone.”

“Lemme guess,” she snorted, “An owl sprained their foot and you just couldn’t help but nurse them back to health.”

”Something like that.”

Credence sucked in a sharp breath.

No.

Newt had been taking care of him.

Back when time had blurred together, it had seemed to Credence that Newt had been keeping his distance from him. Newt had tried to engage him, of course. He brought him food and water and talked to him regularly despite receiving little response. For the most part, though, Newt had spent most of that time in his suitcase working.

But Newt had been putting his life on hold to keep Credence company. To make sure he was nearby if he needed him.

Credence suddenly found his shoes incredibly fascinating.

“Ugh, Merlin’s saggy Y-fronts,” Hortencia rested her elbow against the service desk, a surprising fondness in her expression that wasn’t anywhere near reflected in her tone, “You’re a bleedin’ heart, Arty.”

“Better than a stone-cold one, as I always say,” Newt said.

Hortencia turned her formidable gaze onto Credence.

He huddled further behind Newt.

“You’re the kid that cracked our window.”

Credence flushed, “I—I’m sorry.”

“Don’t apologize,” Hortencia ordered sternly. He clamped his mouth shut.

“Orti,” Newt, thankfully, came to his rescue, “Be nice.”

“Allright, alright,” she said, reaching underneath the table.

“What I meant to say was you got yourself a free pass, kid, since you’re such good friends with this imbecile. He put off coming here to take care of his injured owl,” she smirked and pulled out a bag, setting it on the table, “What’s your secret, hmm? I was watchin’ you two outside actin’ like two
peas in a pod. I’ve never seen Newt not stumblin’ over his words and tryin’ his best to slink away from casual conversation, just like he conveniently is right now.”

Newt stepped away from the tarantula, holding his hands in front of his face.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said innocently, “I was just saying hello to Eliezer.”

“Really?” Credence quirked a brow.

He was under the impression that Newt was just the opposite of the soft-spoken, awkward guy that Hortencia was making him out to be.

Hortencia scrutinized them closely, leaning over the counter-space to get a better look at the pair, “You must really like this kid, Newt.”

“He’s not a kid,” he corrected, “He’s my apprentice.”

“An apprentice,” she repeated and sat back, slapping her good knee, “Great gallopin’ gorgons, you must REALLY like him then!”

Hortencia’s laughter boomed through the room, shaking the hinges and rattling the windows. Well, maybe not that, but it would’ve been cool in a literary and badass sense if it did.

“Kid—Credence, was it?” she wiped her eyes, “Next time you need a rare ingredient or need to make a large order, just lemme know. First order is on the house for being our most valued customer’s good friend.”

“Most valued customer?” Newt perked up a little, “Does that mean I get a discount the next time I come in?”

“Don’t push your luck, Arty,” Hortencia pushed the bag of potions across the counter, “We’ll start givin’ you discounts when you start arrivin’ on time.”

“Fair enough,” Newt retrieved his order and gave her a little wave, “I’ll be back in… let’s say a month or two?”

“So, about a year in Newt time.”

“Sounds about right,” he smiled awkwardly.

“Where you headin’ off now?”

“Oh you know…” he shifted from foot to foot, “...here and there.”

“Oh, so secretive,” she drawled.

“You know I have to be,” he pivoted on his foot, « It was good seeing you, Orti.”

Hortencia smiled and, when Newt made to leave, gestured Credence closer. He hesitated, looking back at Newt’s retreating figure.

“Oi, I won’t bite you, kid.”

After a second more, Credence cautiously approached and leaned over the service desk when Hortencia gestured to do so. She pressed her lips against his ear.
“Take care of him for me, won’t you?”

Credence pulled back, looking puzzled.

“I know Newt. We might not have been in the same House back when we were kids, but the Hufflepuff has a right Gryffindor heart when it comes to them magical creatures, so he’s alright in my book. I guess you could say we were—” Hortencia wrinkled her nose, “We talked to each other.”

“You were friends?”

“Ew,” she clicked her tongue, “I don’t have friends.”

But the look in her eyes said differently. She rested her muscled arms across the countertop and grunted.

“Newt’s our most valued customer, and because he’s our most valued customer, that means I gotta look out for him. He’s good for business. So, be patient with him, okay?” she pointed a stern finger at him, “Time don’t mean a thing to him. He could stay awake for a full 24 hours without batting an eye and still be surprised when the sun comes up. He’s a bit of a mess like that.”

Credence remembered the state of the cabin on the boat ride there.

“I’m aware.”

“Seen it for yourself, have you?” Hortencia smiled a little—just a little, “Arty loves his creatures. Likes them more than people. Well, he understands them more than people, so keep that in mind too, yeah? Oh, what else should you know? Ah! If he gets overwhelmed or frustrated, and trust me, you’ll know when it happens, just hand him his scarf.”

“His scarf?”

“He’ll tell you in his own time, but I trust you’ll take my word for it in the meantime,” she said, “You’ve got caretaking in your bones, Credence. I can feel it. So, I’m trustin’ you to take care of him.”

She leaned back and waved him off, “Be off with you now.”

She didn’t have to tell him twice. And yet… he still hesitated by the door.

“Mr. Newt isn’t—He isn’t a mess.”

“Excuse me?”

Credence breathed. In and out.

“Mr. Newt is just different from other people,” he rested his hand on the door-frame and glanced over his shoulder back at Hortencia, “What matters most is that he—he tries his best. At everything. I—I like that about him.”

Silence.

“Have a pleasant day, Miss Hortencia.”

He headed out the door to where Newt was waiting for him.
“Credence,” Newt beamed at him and closed the new bag of potions he’d been inspecting, “What were you and Orti talking about for so long?”

Credence blushed.

“N—nothing.”

A puzzled expression crossed Newt’s face before ultimately shaking his head.

“I believe you,” he grinned, “Let’s be off then, shall we? I have something I want to show you.”

Newt anxiously paced at the bottom of the ladder, his heart pitter-pattering like a bird staring down the loaded barrel of a hungry hunter’s rifle.

Merlin’s beard, what was he doing?

He’d invited Credence down into his private sanctuary, that’s what. No, not his sanctuary. His creature’s sanctuary.

Jacob had been different when he had brought him down to see his creatures for the very first time. Credence meant his creatures no harm, nevertheless, that didn’t mean that he didn’t possess the capability of doing so. Obscurials, no matter how sympathetic they were, posed a constant danger to their surroundings. But Jacob? He was a muggle. He posed no immediate danger to the magical beasts housed within his suitcase.

Newt twirled a strand of hair around his finger.

Jacob.

Sweet, lovable Jacob.

The Statute of Secrecy was a real pain in the arse sometimes.

A noise on the ladder startled him out of his reverie.

Credence had finally come down.

And he was clutching his hands to his chest like a frightened child leaving for their very first day of school. Pickett had already stationed himself on his shoulder and Prudence, having made temporary peace with the bowtruckle, followed suit.

He and Credence locked eyes and smiled at each other, both plagued no doubt with different types of anxiety and fear.

“I imagine…” Credence swallowed thickly, “…that this’ll be different from a walk around Central Park Zoo.”

Newt snorted and covered his mouth to maintain some semblance of dignity.

“Yes, I do think so.”
The corners of Credence’s lips quirked up into not quite a smile, but not quite a grimace either. He glanced around the small messy cabin and rubbed his hands together as if restraining the itch to start picking up clutter.

“Is there anything that could—uhm…” Credence trailed off meekly and turned his gaze down to the floor.

“Hurt you? Goodness no,” Newt shook his head quickly and gestured to the front door, “All of my creatures aren’t dangerous. They wouldn’t hurt anyone unless you threatened them first. They’re like—like—oh, bugger, what’s the metaphor.”

He lost himself in thought for a moment.

“Like Hippogriffs!” Newt snapped his fingers together, “Treat them with respect and patience and they will treat you with the same.”

But Credence only furrowed his brows, “Hippogriff?”

Oh.

Right.

“Oh yes, of course,” Newt played with the fringes of his scarf before taking it off altogether and flinging it onto a nearby chair. His coat soon followed. “Muggle upbringing. Forgive me. Why do I keep forgetting that?”

You’d lose your head if it weren’t screwed on, Newt. Do you need it stamped across your forehead in block letter before you finally remember?

No, what good would that do you? You’d have to use a mirror to look at it.

Newt grabbed a large bucket of fish out of the ice box and opened the door out into the creature sanctuary.

“There’s so much for you to learn, Credence,” he headed out the door without a second thought to check whether or not his apprentice was following, “All in due time though. I’ll show you our Hippogriffs after dinner. But first? The Kraken begs our attention.”

Once more, Newt charged headfirst into the unknown while Credence lurked behind in the shadows.

Credence hung onto the rickety old door-frame leading out into the sanctuary. His knees buckled underneath him, threatening to give out at any given second. This place… it was nothing like he had ever seen before. Diagon Alley had been a spectacular introduction to the world of magic. But this? This was on a whole other level.

No wonder Newt spent so much time in here. He had the very world at his fingertips.

He had deserts and mountains and flower-filled meadows. He had forests and hot springs and everything in between. The liberating smell of grass and dirt and seawater clung to the air, yet it was as warm and dry as a hot, sunny day. Everything was so strangely contradictory and perfect.
This was what heaven looked like.

And Newt carried it around in his suitcase.

Credence blinked away tears. He wasn’t worthy enough of this place. He was just about to wipe his face and head back inside when Pickett yanked on his thumb.

“Ow,” he looked down at the bowtruckle, “That hurt.”

Pickett stood on his hand, his arms crossed and foot tapping impatiently. When he was certain that he had Credence’s full attention, he pointed towards a section of the sanctuary. Credence didn’t understand what he was trying to say though and the confusion must have showed given how Pickett just blew an exasperated raspberry at him.

“Rude,” Credence mumbled underneath his breath and inhaled, surprisingly fresh air filling his lungs. Somehow, it was cleaner than the air in Diagon Alley and far, far cleaner than the air back home.

“Just…” he hesitated, “Just give me a minute.”

He breathed in once more. In and out.

His fingers left the door frame slowly, one by one. He took a tentative step forward, and then another and another until he was few feet away now from the cabin.

He was here.

He was actually here.

“Where do you want me to go, Pickett?”

The bowtruckle led him forward.

They wandered past a bog with floating green lights that seemed to follow their every move. They walked past a forest where feathered serpentine creatures poked their heads, one by one, out of their nest. They passed by a dirt-covered hidey-hole filled with shining, shimmering gold where curiosity got the best of him.

Credence looked inside.

And an angry platypus filled his vision and shooed him away.

“You must be the Niffler.”

The creature greedily gathered a pile of gold coins around its body.

“Oh, no. I’m not gonna take it,” Credence reassured and searched his pockets for anything remotely shiny that he could offer it, “I have…erm—I have a nickel?”

Credence held out the coin between his thumb and forefinger and tried to look as nonthreatening as possible. The small creature looked between him and the coin before snatching it out of his hands and stuffing it deep within its pouch.

Credence beamed.

So, of course Pickett just had to pinch his thumb and ruin it.
“That’s not very nice,” Credence complained, waving goodbye to the Niffler as they set back down their path, “It was nice meeting you. I’ll bring, uh, a silver button the next time I come down here.”

The Niffler perked up and stuck his head out of his hidey-hole, waving goodbye.

“See? Why can’t you be like that?”

Pickett glared up at him and squeaked.

“Rude.”

Credence continued through habitat after breathtaking habitat until they finally stopped in front of a large tree.

“Bowtruckles,” Credence said, surprised, counting at least four climbing down the branches. He pulled Pickett off his shoulder and held him out to one of the lower-hanging limbs, “Is this your— your family?”

Pickett climbed onto the tree and bashfully hid behind the trunk.

“Pickett, I’m touched,” Credence smiled, “You have a lovely home.”

Not wanting to be ignored, Prudence flew up into the branches and explored the tree herself.

When one of the other bowtruckles started harassing her, Pickett climbed up the branches faster than Credence had ever seen him climb before and shoved them. The two argued amongst themselves for a moment, full of furious squeaking, until Pickett and Prudence were left alone to their own private branch.

“I’m surprised,” Newt’s voice declared unexpectedly close.

Credence flinched and turned his attention to the witch.

Their cheeks were nearly touching. They were so close together that, in that moment, Credence realized that Newt’s eyes weren’t completely green at all. Flecks of vibrant gold dotted across his eyes, as if they contained the very sun itself.

God almighty, his smile was even more blinding up close.

“Pickett rarely ventures out here anymore,” Newt breathed, genuinely awed, “He usually prefers lounging in my pocket. I have to admit. I’m a little jealous.”

“I’m sorry,” he automatically apologized.

“What for? You helped Pickett come out of his shell,” Newt turned that blinding smile onto him and grabbed his hand, tugging him along, “Come. I want to show you something.”

Credence glanced worriedly back over his shoulder.

“But Pickett and Prue—”

“We’ll come back for them in just a second.”

Helpless, Credence stared at the back of Newt’s head as he was dragged across the sanctuary. They passed a wintry wasteland and an African watering hole, beyond a depthless lake and a noxious swamp until they finally slowed upon reaching the aquarium. They passed section after section of
large, dazzling creatures more beautiful than the next until—

Credence froze, his hand slipping away from Newt’s.

She was beautiful.

The Kraken’s vermilion legs stretched out below her, moving and swaying in such a manner that denoted power. Her eyes, once small and beady, had grown as wide as dinner plates and as black as Credence’s. She’d doubled—no, tripled in size and was still growing.

“She’s getting so big,” Credence breathed.

“By the time we get her home, she’ll be as big as barge.”

“Really?”

“I have no idea,” Newt grinned, “Would you like to name her?”

Credence blinked.

“Excuse me?”

“I don’t really make it a habit naming creatures that are here for only a little while,” Newt explained quickly, rubbing the back of his neck, “Pickett and Dougal will always be with me since they can’t be rehabilitated back into the wild. But creatures like the Erumpent? The Kneazles? They all leave at some point or another. It’s just the way it is. So when they have names… it’s harder to let them go.”

Credence didn’t understand.

“Then… why ask me to name her?” he softly inquired.

Newt averted his gaze.

“Because she’s the creature that brought me to you.”

Time stopped.

He didn’t know what to say. So Credence decided to think instead. What would be a name worthy enough of this moment? Ma used to name her children after the heavenly virtues. Credence, Modesty, Chastity. Even if they’d been called something different before, they would be re-baptized to herald in their new life under the Good Lord and signal their new beginning…

“Hope.”

“Hmm?” Newt looked back up.

“I—” he said, “I think we should name her Hope.”

“Hope,” Newt repeated and tapped his chin with the back of his thumb, “I like it.”

Credence rubbed his shoulder, ears tinged pink.

“I like it a lot;” he repeated more enthusiastically this time and raised a finger, “Did I ever tell you why Pickett is named Pickett? You see, bowtruckles are really quite famous for being extraordinary lockpicks.”
He donned a Cheshire grin.

“Hortencia threw her shoe at me when I told her. You get it, don’t you?” he asked, “Pick-ett? Pick it? I thought it was quite clever.”

“You’re not allowed to name anything ever.”

Newt laughed, but Credence was horrified.

“I’m so sorry,” he quickly apologized, hiding his face, “I don’t know what came over me. I didn’t—I didn’t mean—”

“You’re probably right,” Newt said though, wrapping his arms around his waist to control his laughter, “Mum’s told me the same thing ever since I named my first owl ‘Owl.’ Original, isn’t it? And after Owl died of old age, I named my second one Not Owl because I felt like he couldn’t replace him.”

“I don’t understand.”

“You see, I named him Not Owl because—”

“Not that,” Credence interrupted and flinched because he definitely shouldn’t have done that either. God, he was already in so much trouble. “I’m—I’m your apprentice and, as your apprentice, I shouldn’t… talk back. Not like that. You’re the one that’s supposed to be telling me what to do, not the other way around.”

He looked down at his shoes.

“I’m sorry.”

“Oh, Credence…”

He closed his eyes, waiting to be punished.

“It’s because you’re my apprentice that you should talk back to me.”

That wasn’t supposed to happen. Credence looked up, confused, and found Newt smiling at him.

“And even if that were true, teaching like that… that’s not my way and it never will be. You’re funny, Credence, and intelligent. I like it when you ask me questions. I like it when you make me think. And I especially like your making fun of my ghastly name-giving skills,” he clasped his shoulder, “Keep it up. You’ll learn better if you allow yourself to be you.”

The light caught his eyes, illuminating the gold specks within them.

“Shall we, then? I think we have a boat to catch.”

That’s right.

They had an adventure to begin.

“I think we do.”

Chapter End Notes
I'm about a week late since midterms were last week; so, for being so patient with me, here is TWICE the amount of content that I normally put out! Over 20 pages on Google Docs!

Credence and Newt are finally departing on their adventure and things will only get better from here. Twists, turns, love, and heartbreak all have a beginning and these past seven chapters have been it. I hope you're looking forward to flailing along with me on this wonderful adventure that's yet to come.

Tune in next time on the next chapter of Green Meadows, Dark Skies!

I've been reading and rereading all of your lovely comments and they always bring a smile to my face. They are what keeps me and this fic going!

So, how am I doing? Comments? Critiques? Concerns? Is there anything about my writing that I should work on improving? Is there anything you'd like to see happen in this fic in the future? Predictions on what is going to come?
“So,” Credence swallowed, “I met the Niffler.”

“You did?” Newt stepped onto the docking bridge as the passenger line moved forward but quickly gave Credence his full attention, “Did he steal your belt buckle? Your buttons?”

He wrinkled his nose and glanced down at his oxfords, suspicious, “Don’t tell me he resorted to stealing the metal tips of your shoelaces. He’s been known to do that.”

“No,” Credence almost snorted, “I gave him a nickel.”

Although, he glanced down at his shoes to check. Just in case.

“Oh,” Newt said, “Well, you did say that you were going to give him a quarter the other day.”

“You’re right,” his eyes widened in realization and placed a hand against his cheek, “I need to amend this at once.”

“Credence, you don’t have to—”

“I’m a man of my word,” he affirmed, though, and turned his attention to the ocean waves splashing against the dock underneath them, “The only problem is... I don’t have a quarter. I suppose I’ll just have to give him something shiny every time I see him in the meantime until I do.”

Credence glanced at him out of the corner of his eyes, adding softly, “If that’s alright.”

Newt stared at him for a long moment before a small smile quirked at the corner of his lips, “I think he’d like that.”

Credence looked back at the water, pleased.

Fluffy white seafoam floated along the edges like grounded clouds plagued to an eternity on the ocean. The faintest outline of fish and rusting bicycles could be spotted lurking underneath the murky waves. That pungent smell of seawater and industrial smoke that had greeted them when they first arrived still hung in the air, painting a dismal picture for the day instead of the brand-new start of an adventure.

Credence shifted his suitcase between hands. He was struggling with it, and his only contained clothes. Newt’s held an entire world and he handled it with perfect ease, as if it were lighter than a feather. Who knows? Maybe it was. There was no telling the limits of what magic could do.

“How many creatures do you have in there?” he turned his attention back to Newt, “If you don’t
“I don’t mind at all. On the contrary, I encourage it,” Newt responded. He looked pensive for a moment, fingers rising to his lips and twitching every so often while he mentally counted. “Around… 400 species and 1,064 creatures. No, wait. 1,065. I almost forgot our new addition.”

“How is that possible?” Credence breathed, awed.

“Well as you could see, it’s much bigger on the inside…” Newt lightly teased and nudged his shoulder to indicate as such.

His green eyes were so bright—always gleaming with the ferocity of a solar flare whenever he started talking about something he was passionate about. Nine times out of ten, it was about his creatures. But sometimes… Newt would talk about books he’d read, or his time in school, or all the adventures he’d had.

To think there were schools—actual schools—for witchcraft and wizardry! Credence had never had the pleasure of a normal education, having been homeschooled for the most part, but knowing that there were genuine schools out there with tests and homework about magic? That was the most amazing thing he’d ever learned about this world.

He only wished that he wasn’t too old to attend one.

But this way, he was able to tag along with Newt and that wasn’t so bad at all, now was it?

“I run on a tightly knit schedule. It’s why I’m down there so much,” Newt said, “You see, every one of my creatures are there because they’re either endangered, being rehabilitated, or can no longer survive in the wild. Everything I do revolves around their well-being.”

He suddenly paused, that light in his eyes flickering.

“I—” Newt swallowed, “I released a Thunderbird in New York recently. That’s why I was there, you see. I had hoped to bring him all the way back home to Arizona but, I suppose, plans change.”

Plans change?

Newt didn’t seem like the type of person that would settle for an excuse as simple as plans change when it came to his creatures.

“Why did you release him in New York then?” Credence asked.

Newt looked away.

“I found someone who needed my help more. And I couldn’t stay away.”

Oh.

Even before they’d been properly introduced, Newt had been putting his life on hold for Credence.

“Thank you,” he said quietly, “For everything. I—I don’t know what I would’ve done with you.”

“Oh, I’m sure you would’ve managed,” Newt replied, twirling his hair, “You’re clever, Credence. More than you give yourself credit for.”

He smiled a little.
“So, what’s the story on Pickett and his family?” Credence changed the subject, choosing not to dwell on the past a second longer, “Are they, uhm, endangered?”

“Fortunately no, not quite. Pickett has a terrible bout of anxiety and a propensity towards colds that makes him ill-suited to be returned to the wild. The others however…” Newt’s expression turned a bit sheepish, “They were used in a thieving ring.”

“And the Niffler?”

“What do you think?”

Credence pondered it for a moment. If bowtruckles made for excellent lockpicks and the Niffler loved pilfering shiny objects then—

“Was he part of the thieving ring too?”

“Go on,” Newt’s eyes shined.

“Was he…” Credence was more uncertain now, “…leader of the thieving ring?”

“As far as the Niffler’s concerned, yes,” he grinned, “He considers himself the mastermind of everything, devious little bugger. I’ll have you know, when I first came across him, I had to pry him away from a box of his masters’ Cuban cigars.”

“He smoked?”

“Like a chimney,” the line moved forward, but Newt remained shoulder-to-shoulder with him, “It took months to curb him of the nasty habit.”

“What about the birds—snakes? The creatures near him. The ones in the nest?” Credence flushed and clamped his mouth shut, “Sorry.”

He never could seem to break that nasty habit of his: asking too many questions. Ever since he could remember, it was always there getting him into trouble. It was just… like he was always searching for the answer to some grand mystery, always wanting to know more and why things were the way they were. The world was so large and vast, and time so short, that Credence just wanted to know as much as he could before it all ran out.

There was a time when he’d asked Ma questions, but she would only answer with God or the Devil. God the Almighty created the universe and everything within it. He was the Great Designer and had a purpose for every living soul in His domain. He was benevolent and kind and entrusted humanity with His greatest treasures. The Devil, however, brought humanity sin, and witches were his corrupted followers that wanted to watch God’s world burn.

When he was a boy, Credence would always implore for more information. Why did God create the universe? If God created everything then did that mean that God created the Devil? If that was so, then wasn’t God who introduced evil into His world? And, if He was the reason that evil existed, then what was the purpose of evil?

But Credence would receive no answers. Just a lashing for his blasphemy and a day locked in the closet to learn the value of silence and deference in the name of the Lord.

Credence bowed his head, demure and meek.

But Newt—wonderful Newt—only continued to humor him.
“You mean the Occamies? Beautiful creatures, aren’t they? I hatched them all myself—well, almost all of them. Jacob had a hand in that,” Newt glanced down fondly at his suitcase, “One of them escaped back in New York. A couple creatures of mine did, actually. It was a whole debacle. Jacob, Queenie, Tina and I ended up having to go hunt them down.”

He twirled his hair around his finger.

“They take on the size of whatever container they’re in, you know. So, when one gets out of their nest, getting them back in can be quite a doozy,” he grinned a little, “We’d only just managed to catch them with a cockroach, a tea kettle, and a bit of clever maneuvering on our part. It’s curious, really. I’ve managed myself out of quite a few situations using a kettle—”

Newt continued on, but Credence only focused on one aspect of his story.

“You know Miss Goldstein.”

Credence remembered her from the subway. More importantly, he remembered when she’d saved him. Imagine that: his first encounter with a genuine witch, and she’d saved him. He remembered how Tina embraced him, how warm and gentle she had been. He remembered the faint smell of vanilla and pastry that wafted from her coat. He remembered her soft, soothing voice and the way she treated his lashes with such tenderness that Credence couldn’t help but cry.

He remembered the kindness of her eyes, the look of someone who wanted nothing more than to help. Eyes just like Newt’s.

Newt had brought him to the wizarding world, but Tina had been his first introduction to magic. Meeting her had stirred something long forgotten within him, something ancient and new altogether. It was the first time that he had thought in years that maybe, just… maybe, witches and magic weren’t so bad.

And later that day, the baker’s shop had been destroyed by a gas leak.

“Oh yes, Tina,” Newt interrupted his reveries, “She sort of, erm, arrested me my first day there.”

Credence gaped at Newt, who was giving him a sheepish, crooked grin.

“She—” he stammered, “She what?”

“The Niffler escaped and, of course, I just happened to be standing outside a bank,” Newt tapped his chin with the back of his thumb, “Come to think of it, that’s where I first met you.”

“We held a meeting there,” Credence realized, “You talked to Ma.”

“I was curious,” he admitted sheepishly, “Still have one of those flyers somewhere down in the cabin, actually. Stuffed it in my pocket when I realized my Niffler was up to no good. Poor Jacob got mixed up in the whole fiasco too. See, you’re not supposed to show off any magic to a Muggle and well…”

Newt puffed out his cheeks.

“Okay, to be fair, I did break the law when Tina got involved. But I was trying to fix it!”

“I can’t believe it,” Credence breathed, “I’m traveling with a criminal.”

“Credence—”
“I think I need to go back home now,” he ran a hand through his hair, “By any chance, does this boat stop off in America?”

“I—I don’t think so,” Newt stammered, “But, you don’t have to do that—”

“Maybe I can live with Miss Goldstein instead. She can teach me magic, right?”

Newt looked alarmed for a moment, saying, “I mean, if that’s what you really want.”

But Credence just smiled.

“You’re—you’re being funny,” Newt exhaled a deep breath, a startled laugh bursting forth, “I have to admit, you had me going for a bit there.”

“Did I?” he said, “Glad all those acting lessons finally paid off then.

“I beg your pardon?”

Credence grinned.

It took a moment before realization dawned on him.

“Oh you—you—” Newt wagged a finger at him, “Fool me twice, Credence, fool me twice.”

He laughed as the line moved forward and, this time, Credence joined him. However, it was short-lived.

“Miss Goldstein thinks I’m dead, doesn’t she?”

Newt opened his mouth to say something, but quickly closed it.

“You didn’t tell her?” Credence asked.

“Not without your permission.”

Credence looked away.

How many people thought him dead? What did Chastity and Modesty think, or the orphaned children they housed and fed? Did they think him dead? Or did they think him simply on the run for the murder of—of Ma? MACUSA obviously thought they’d taken care of him. Perhaps even Mr. Graves thought him gone too.

“Can I ask you a question, Mr. Newt?”

He looked back at him, sincerity in his eyes.

“Always, Credence.”

The waves churned underneath them, causing the ship to rock back and forth.

“What happened to Mr. Graves?”

Credence frowned and continued in a softer voice.

“I mean—I suppose his real name is Mr. Grindelwald, isn’t it?” he remembered looking down at that newspaper he’d found in Diagon Alley, the cold mismatched eyes staring back at him, “He’s a—a real bad man, Mr. Newt. And I—I helped him.”
“Yes, he is a bad man,” Newt responded softly “But you’re not.”

This was why he loved talking with him. Newt made him feel, for one precious moment, that he wasn’t horribly naïve for not seeing through Grindelwald’s lies sooner. Not once did his voice ever strike him with condemnation or sneer with disapproval. All that there was… was compassion and concern.

What had Grindelwald even wanted him for? Why had he wanted an Obscurial?

Why had he chanced crossing the vast ocean between them when everyone was searching for him? Why had he impersonated an Auror, instead of a secretary or a janitor that would’ve infinitely lessened his chances of getting caught? Why had he chosen to lurk about right underneath MACUSA’s noses? Why had Grindelwald taken so many chances just to get Credence on his side?

A warm hand clasped his shoulder.

“Credence, if you’re not ready to hear about him, you don’t have to push yourself,” Newt said softly, “Give yourself some time. It’s okay.”

The line pushed from behind them.

Credence gripped onto his suitcase, involuntarily whisked away until he finally stepped foot onto the ship surrounded by hundreds of other boarded passengers. His heart pounded in his chest. This was his new start as a wizarding adventurer and the first feeling he had was claustrophobia.

Wonderful.

“Mr. Newt,” he latched onto his hand, not wanting to get lost, “Can we send Miss Goldstein a letter?”

“Of course,” Newt said, until his eyes suddenly lit up like fireworks, “Unless…”

“Oh no. Is it too late to take back my question?”

“Yes,” Newt grinned and was already pulling him in the direction of their cabin, “Follow me.”

“Not much of a choice I have there,” he drawled, not serious, “Do I, Mr. Newt?”

“Oh hush.”

Flour coated Queenie’s arms. She kneaded a fresh batch of cinnamon-raisin dough across the kitchen counter, her brows furrowed in concentration and her pink tongue jutting out from between her lips. She sprinkled a bit more flour across the board and flipped over the dough, starting the process anew.

No-Maj baking.

Harder than it looked.

The first time she’d cracked open a No-Maj recipe book, she’d positively gaped at how much time it took to bake something like a batch of cookies or a single loaf of bread. Hours replaced minutes, preparation sometimes taking days in the making. With magic, all that Queenie ever had to do was
think of what she wanted and it’d appear seconds later, all hot and toasty. But the No-Maj way? Even with all that time and effort put into it, it wasn’t even guaranteed to turn out right.

But Queenie wasn’t no quitter.

Even if it was hard.

The Victrola Gramophone in the living room whirred to life.

“It had to be you, it had to be you
I wandered around and finally found, that somebody who
Could make be true
Could make feel blue
And even be glad just to be sad, thinking of you.”

A smile twinged at her lips.

Queenie dusted her hands across her apron and spun around, her rose-colored skirts whirling around with each and every step. She swayed with the music. Every beat, a step. Every note, an extension of her wrist. She hummed along to the tone, unable to keep herself from being taken completely away by the crooning voice dancing through her ears.

She closed her eyes, pretending she wasn’t alone. She pretended that warm hands slipped into hers, leading her along through all the steps. She imagined staring into honeyed brown eyes, being enchanted by the most beautiful smile she’d ever seen in the world. She imagined being spun and dipped, all romantic-like like in the movies and being kissed ever so softly.

She imagined being with a man that she never could.

Her smile faded, her steps slowed.

“For nobody else gave me a thrill
Will all your faults, I love you still
It had to be you, wonderful you
It had to be you…”

She placed her fingers against her lips, the ghost of Jacob’s lingering across hers. She could still feel him with her. His scent, his taste, his touch. Sometimes, she could even hear his laughter booming through the dining room and sending sparks shooting through her heart…

Queenie pulled out her wand and shut off the music with a sharp flick.

She leaned against the counter, hands pressed against her forehead.

“I was listening to that.”

Queenie blinked back tears as Tina stepped into the kitchen and quickly returned to the dough, pressing down into it with her palm.
“I’m sorry, Teenie,” she hummed quietly, having forgotten entirely about her sister’s day off, “I didn’t know you was here.”

Tina remained silent. Her thoughts, however, did not.

_I miss him too… But you and I both know he’s never coming back. He can’t come back. This has to stop, Queenie. I don’t want to see your heart getting broken again._

Queenie bit her lower lip.

“You know… I thought your baking was perfect before,” Tina ultimately settled on saying, “But I like it better this way.”

“Don’t cha?” Queenie beamed as she greased the baking pan, folding the dough neatly inside, “I like it too. I find adding that extra little bit of love really makes it shine.”

“Mmm-hmm.”

The atmosphere between them thickened, and it wasn’t because Queenie had just opened the oven.

“Honey,” she popped the bread inside and set the timer, “If you have something to say, please… just say it. It’s nothing that I don’t already know.”

Tina crossed her arms over her chest, leaning against the doorframe, “You bringing down another extra loaf to Jacob’s bakery today? Or you gonna go tomorrow morning?”

Heat rose in Queenie’s cheeks.

“You know about that?” she squeaked.

“You know that you can’t tell him anything, right? It’s important to me that you know this, Queenie. I don’t want you getting into trouble.”

Queenie looked down.

“I know.”

“Because I’m required by law to report any instance of no-Maj’s getting exposed to magic. And I mean, _any instance,_” Tina emphasized, “I know you care for him, but I don’t want to arrest my own sister.”

“I know, I know,” Queenie turned back around and leaned against the counter, “I just—I don’t know… I miss him. Jacob wasn’t like any man I’d ever met before, y’know. He made me smile. Nothing like the fake ones I give Wulfric down in Accounting. That dumb cheery sort of thing that all the boys love, not knowing I’m only doing it to make sure we get paid on time.”

“I know.”

Queenie shook her head, not wanting to dwell on the subject any longer. “Any news from Newt?”
“Ugh,” Tina huffed, “Why would I be keeping tabs on him?”

“Because he’s our friend, Teenie!” she wagged her finger at her disapprovingly, “It’d be nice to actually check in once in a while instead of staying up all night worrying about him.”

“I don’t stay up worrying over that man.”

“Uh-huh, sure you don’t.”

A strange sound sputtered in the living room, the fireplace suddenly sparking to life.

Both women looked towards it.

“If it’s Abernathy asking me to help him with his taxes again, tell him to go away,” Tina groaned and leaned back in her chair, “I ain’t doing that again.”

“You got it,” Queenie tittered, wavering her wand over her dress to make herself look more presentable as she made her way into the living room. She knelt down before the old fireplace and peered inside, jumping backwards at the familiar face flickering in the flames.

“Newt,” Queenie gasped, happiness outweighing her momentary shock. Tina’s head perked up from the kitchen. “How you doing, honey? Oh Teenie! Ain’t this a wonderful surprise! We were just talking about you, dear, and what do you know, here you are!”

“What did you do now, Mr. Scamander?” Tina groaned, rubbing her temples, “Don’t tell me more of your creatures escaped.”

“That was a one-time occurrence, I assure you,” Newt said, “One that I don’t intend on ever happening again.”

“Mmm-hmm, sure.”

“Don’t mind her, dearie,” Queenie chimed in, “We just didn’t expect you to make us a fire-call, is all. Is everything okay over there, honey? Did you make it back home all sweet and soundly?”

“Actually, this call isn’t for me,” Newt grinned awkwardly, “Although, thank you, Queenie. As a matter of fact, I did make it back home all safe and sound.”

“Glad to hear it, honey,” she tittered, “Now what’s that about this call not being for you? You got a friend over there or something, dear?”

“Can you keep a secret?”

Now Tina’s interest was officially piqued. She leaned dangerously over in her chair, inclining her ear to better hear the conversation over in the other room. “Newt, if you’re doing anything illegal, you know that I’m obligated to report it.”

“I’m not doing illegal,” Newt’s responded, chuffed, “It’s just... hard to explain.”

“Mmm-hmm, sure. What trouble are you in now, Mr. Scamander?”

“Just... one moment, please. This is something you need to see for yourself.”

When Newt’s face abandoned the fireplace, Tina shot Queenie an inquisitive – if not exasperated—look. But her sister merely shrugged in response, equally lost.
That was, until a familiar voice spoke.

“Miss Goldstein?”

Tina’s chair toppled over.

She bolted to the fireplace, falling onto her hands and knees.

_Credence._

Tina reached out to touch him, to reassure herself that he was real—that he was _alive_, but remembered at the very last second that that would be unwise. He was there, sure. His uncanny visage flickered in fire, but he wasn’t _here_. He wasn’t where she could hold him, touch him, protect him from the world. No, he was wherever Newt was and that was far, far away from her grasp.

“Credence…” she clutched her hand to her heart instead.

“It’s nice to see you again, Miss Goldstein.”

“Oh,” her voice warbled, “Sweetie, it’s nice to see you again too.”

Queenie looked between the face in the fireplace and Tina and politely excused herself. This was a private moment. One that she didn’t dare to intrude.

“Credence… honey, you’re alive,” Tina blinked back tears, “You’re alive.”

He looked so… vibrant and healthy. Granted, she could only see so much through the flickering flames, but the transformation from when she’d saw him last was astounding. He no longer had that gaunt, fearful look about him. Those dark eyes were no longer hooded and his hair, once cropped short, was starting to grow out.

But those eyes…

Oh, those eyes.

So bright and inquisitive. The ghost of the meek, traumatized boy he once was still lingered within them, but there was something more there now. Something that wasn’t there before. _Merlin’s Pants_, he was thriving. He didn’t look like on the verge of death’s door at all.

“How?”

Credence’s gaze turned sheepish.

“I don’t know, Miss Goldstein. I—I don’t remember after—after what happened,” his voice grew quieter. It stabbed like a knife through Tina’s heart. “The only thing I know… is that I woke up on a ship, watching New York disappear behind the horizon. I don’t know what happened or how I got there. I just… _was_. I was very lucky to find Mr. Newt there, otherwise I—I don’t know what else I would’ve done.”

Credence had been on _The Wailing Whirlwind_? Merlin’s beard, Tina had been on those docks! Did that mean that he was there, lost and afraid, while she was busy saying her goodbyes to Newt? Did that mean she’d been so close to saving him, but had just missed her chance? How many times was she going to fail him?

“Credence, I—I’m so sorry,” her voice cracked with all the shame, all the ‘what-ifs’ and ‘what-could-have-beens.’ If only she had done more to save him. If only she had been a few minutes
quicker. “I should’ve worked harder to help you. I should have been there. I—I should’ve done something, anything.”

“It’s okay, Miss Goldstein,” Credence’s voice dropped into such a soothing softness, one that she’d never heard from him before, that it caught her by surprise, “I know that—that you tried your best and that’s all that matters. That’s… all that I could have ever asked for. I’m thankful for all that you’ve done for me.”

And then, Credence did the most miraculous thing.

He smiled.

It was small, barely there even. But, Merlin as her witness, it was a smile.

Tina’s breath hitched.

“And then,” Credence continued after a moment, “If it wasn’t for you, I never would’ve found Mr. Newt. I’m—I’m his apprentice now. He’s really nice and I’m—I’m doing okay here, really. I have so many books about magic, Miss Goldstein. I’m learning so much about witches and wizards and everything. I have my own wand and I—I cast my first spell too! I didn’t even know I could do that.”

“You’re his apprentice,” she breathed, “Rule 221 B12, of course.”

“Rule 221 B12?”

“It’s nothing, Credence,” Tina smile, “Nothing you need to worry about.”

But it meant everything.

Credence’s continued existence was a major discovery—not just for Tina, but for MACUSA as well. Normally, after hearing something as enormous and consequential as this, she would’ve had to have immediately reported it to her superiors. An Obscure that they’d failed to eliminate, who had previously colluded with Gellert Grindelwald, and who had fled overseas necessitated as such. But now?

Newt had found himself a loophole.

He had made Credence his apprentice.

With the advent of wizarding schools, classic apprenticeship had fallen out of practice. Only a few pure-blooded houses or those found in poor, rural areas that had little other option continued the long-standing tradition of assigning an older mentor to oversee their children’s’ magical education. It was a practice that dated back to the times of Merlin—further, even. But now that only a handful of respected witches and wizards implemented such a teaching structure, it had gone largely unregulated. The laws rarely changed.

And so, for thousands of years, Rule 221 B12 had remained frozen in place.

No wizarding government anywhere in the world could take legal action against a formally recognized apprentice because, regardless of age and prowess, they were still technically learning magic. If they did something blasphemous or commit horrendous atrocities, it was seen as the fault of the master instead of the student. Therefore, the master would receive punishment on behalf of their apprentice while the apprentice would be forcibly reeducated in the right and proper ways on how to be a wizard. It was a bit barbaric and outdated however…
Credence was protected underneath this rule.

Obscurial or not, he was protected.

“There’s so much I want to say… so much I want to tell you. Most of all, I just want you to know that I’m so glad you’re okay,” Tina smiled into the fire, “Tell me more about what Newt had been teaching you. I want to know everything.”

For the next hour, Tina Goldstein happily listened to everything that had happened in Credence’s life since boarding *The Wailing Whirlwind* and finding himself apprentice to one troublesome magizoologist Newt Scamander. Meanwhile Queenie Goldstein danced merrily in the kitchen, working on another loaf of cinnamon-raisin bread while the other baked. Neither witch was aware of the extra presence lingering just outside the living room window.

An enormous crow with a milky-white eye and jagged feathers looked on, perched on the windowsill amongst the yellow flowers and slowly dying herbs.

It watched and listened, nothing escaping its notice.

It had been stationed outside the Goldstein residence for two weeks now. They were important people that needed to be monitored 24/7 because they possessed information or access to information that could be used for the greater good, whether they realized it or not. What they knew could turn the tides of war. They were the key to victory, the heralders of a brand-new world.

But for two weeks, the crow had seen nothing except two extraordinarily dull witches moping around.

Feeling sorry for themselves.

Pathetic.

Queenie Goldstein was distraught over the loss of her Muggle paramour. She would spend her days mindlessly baking treats and pastries the Muggle way and dancing in circles to various Muggle love songs playing on their Gramophone.

Tina, on the other hand, was shaken over the death of the Obscurial boy that she had failed to protect. She tossed and turned at night, getting no more than an hour or two’s worth of sleep before pulling on her coat and heading out Merlin-knows-where. She’d always return before sunrise, flopping tiredly onto the couch, bags under her eyes.

Two weeks of this madness and there had been nothing that the crow could use.

Until now.

Chapter End Notes

It's currently around 2 AM where I live but, I was determined to post this chapter before
I headed off to bed! Now that I've readjusted back to school life after Spring Break, hopefully everything will be regularly updated again about once a week.

So, the plot has been officially introduced here! Are you excited? I'm excited! I've already started writing the finale for Green Meadows, Dark Skies (even though it's a loooooooooooong ways away) and, trust me, it's going to be good <3

What are your theories on what's going to happen? Who is the crow? What is Grindelwald's big plan? Why does he want an Obscurus so badly?

Tune in next time on Green Meadows, Dark Skies!

Please leave your comments and constructive criticism below. Your comments give me life and, thus, fuel the continuance of Green Meadows, Dark Skies! I appreciate every single thing you guys write to me and I try to respond to them all within a timely fashion.

How am I doing so far? Is there anything that you would like to see improve? What do you enjoy most about the story?
Lore:

Magical creatures are incredibly different from magical beings. Magical beings, like centaurs and merfolk, maintain a certain level of intelligence and communication that the wizarding society views as akin to themselves. Thus, because of their similarity to the intelligence of human beings, magical beings are granted certain rights and protections that are not awarded to magical creatures. One of the most important laws recently implemented in the wizarding world is that magical beings are forbidden from being hunting. Because of their level of consciousness, hunting a magical being would be akin to hunting people and thus would equate to murder.

Newt's autism mainly manifests itself through babbling about his interests for hours, not knowing how to act around people, and not knowing how to read body language. However, he also has many sensory difficulties that makes him awkward in large places with lots of people which is why he often prefers being around his creatures inside his suitcase or out in the wilderness. His main sensory difficulties affect his sense of touch and hearing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“What are Occamies exactly?”

“Hmm,” Newt continued rolling up his sleeves, “Didn’t you already ask me that?”

“Yes,” Credence said, flipping through a handful of Newt’s notes that he’d brought with him, “I know about them, but I’m not so sure what they are. Bowtruckles are like—like insects and Krakens are a type of magical squid. The Niffler is obviously some sort of marsupial with a pocket dimension in his pouch, but Occamies? They’re feathered reptilians. They’re a bird and a snake, but also… not? Does that make sense?”

Newt hoisted the bucket of wiggling grubs he’d prepared earlier and headed out of the cabin towards the Occamy nest. Credence followed closely behind.

“You have a point there,” he mused, “I suppose you could argue that Occamies are more closely related to magical beings than they are creatures. Did you know that there are accounts, back when their numbers were higher than it is now, that they would talk with nearby witches and wizards and offer food in exchange for a warm kettle?”

“I didn’t.”

“Magical beings are different from magical creatures, Credence. They display advanced thought and reasoning. They can communicate outside their own kind. It’s because of this capability for intelligence that they’re awarded certain rights and protections that magical creatures would never even be considered for.”
Newt paused.

“Beings are also chimeric in nature. Take the centaurs or merfolk, for instance. You couldn’t classify a centaur as human, now could you? But the second you insinuate that they’re a horse, consider yourself kicked in the right shin,” he said, “The same could be said of Occamies. They’re not quite birds. They’re not quite snakes. They just… are.”

“Is that chimeric with a k or chimeric with a ch?”

“Chimeric with a ch,” Newt answered and peered around his shoulder, “Why do you ask?”

But he found his answer as Credence froze mid-note.

“I—I’m so sorry, Mr. Newt,” Credence stuttered out, “I should have asked. I’m sorry. I’m so—so sorry.”

Prudence fluttered anxiously at Credence’s lapel and disappeared into his breast pocket where Pickett, still half-asleep and yawning, emerged shortly after. They climbed up Credence’s vest together and wiped away the tears that fell down his cheeks. It seemed that Newt wasn’t the only one hurt seeing him this way.

“Credence,” he forced his voice to remain soft and calm, so as to not frighten him off, “Do you remember what I told you?”

“P—pardon?”

“What I said I would say if I was ever angry or upset?”

Credence stared at him like a deer in the headlights, blinking away tears.

“…Fizzle Whiskers?”

“Fizzle Whiskers,” Newt repeated, “And have I said that world?”

“N—no.”

“And that means?” he gently prodded.

Nothing would ever change unless Credence figured it out on his own: that he had nothing to be afraid of. Newt could guide him through recovery, helping him overcome his past and trauma. He’d do so gladly. But it was ultimately Credence and Credence alone who could help himself move forward.

“That—” Credence’s hands stopped shaking. “That you’re not… upset.”

“Precisely,” Newt smiled and continued down the dirt-covered path.

“I’m proud of you. I’m really glad that you’re writing these things down, adding observations that I’ve missed,” he said, “We can memorize facts and truths all we want, but they don’t really matter until we write them down and share them with others. That’s what magizoologists like us do.”

“Magizoologists… like us?”

Newt looked back over his shoulder.

“Yes,” he tapped his chin with the back of his thumb, “You’re one of us now, Credence. That is… if
you’d like to be.”

Credence looked down, but there was the faintest trace of a smile there that made Newt’s heart beat quicker.

“One of us…” he said quietly, “I like that.”

Once they arrived at the nest, Newt set down the tub of grubworms and wiped away the sweat that had gathered on his brow.

“Hello darlings,” he greeted the immediately curious Occamy nestlings. They slithered over and around each other, trying to peer inside the bucket that Newt had brought them. “Mummy has a special treat for you this morning. I know, I know. It’s been awhile.”

He scooped a handful of grubworms and tossed them inside. The nestlings acted like a hungry school of piranhas, fighting over each other for the fattest, juiciest treat.

“Careful,” Newt chided, “There’s plenty to go around.”

He tidied up their nest while they ate, patching up holes and cleaning up their droppings. Plucked feathers and anything of the sort could be left behind. It added padding to the nest, but he still wanted to ensure that it was sanitary enough for the nestlings. At least, by Occamy standards.

“Credence?” he asked, sweeping up a pile of sticks and leaves, “Could you come over here, please?”

A shadow loomed over him.

“Yeah, Mr. Newt?”

“Could you finish feeding the Occamies for me while I tidy up here?”

Credence clutched Newt’s notes against his chest, eyes blowing wide and nervous, “I—I don’t think you really want me to do that.”

“Of course I do. That’s why I asked,” Newt furrowed his brows, “Unless you’re squeamish around bugs? It’s fine if you are.”

Pickett stood up on Credence’s shoulders and squeaked.

“N—no, I like insects,” he looked down at the bowtruckle, “Honest.”

Pickett stared at him intensely before sitting back down with a huff.

“I just—I want to make sure,” Credence hesitated, “You really love your creatures, Mr. Newt, and I’m not exactly the best… y’know. Are you—Do you really want to give me that responsibility?”

Oh.

“Of course, I do,” Newt offered his hand, “You’re one of us now, right?”

Credence looked down between them and stuck Newt’s notes inside his coat pocket. He slipped his hand into his.

“Right,” he smiled shakily, “One of us.”

Newt beamed.
“I’m going to walk you through this, if that’s alright. If you change your mind, it’s okay to back out,” he brought him over to the bucket and knelt down, “Righty then. I’m going to have you dip your hand inside, but I don’t want you to grab anything. Squeezing these guys will only make them burst and then all you’ll have is juicy grub goo all over your fingers and a couple of hungry Occamies.”

“Wouldn’t want that,” Credence said softly.

“Right,” Newt continued, guiding his hand into the bucket, “So, you’re going to form your hand into a scoop. Gently lift it out…and then, throw!”

Grubworms cascaded from the air into the Occamies nest, the nip-napping creatures greedily devouring their meal within a matter of seconds.

“Wonderful!” Newt praised, genuinely meaning it too, and stood up, “Just do that until the bucket is empty. In the meantime, I’ll be back shortly. I forgot something in the cabin. I’ll only be a second.”

“What?” Credence’s head whipped up, alarmed, “Mr. Newt, are you sure you want me to—”

“Relax, Credence. You’ll do fine,” he smiled, “I trust you.”

“I trust you.”

Credence’s heart sang.

Newt trusted him. Perhaps even more unbelievable than that, Newt trusted him with the care of his creatures. Credence tossed more grubworms into the air to the famished Occamies and watched them absolutely devour each and every one until nothing remained behind. He threw handful after handful, until his fingertips touched the plastic bottom. Empty.

Once the Occamies realized that there was no more food to be had, all their eyes became locked onto Credence.

Prudence anxiously fluttered at his lapel.

“Don’t worry,” Credence softly assuaged and stood up, “I won’t let them eat you.

One of the Occamies squawked.

“You are not,” he repeated, more firmly this time around, “Prudence is a friend. Even so, she wouldn’t taste any good since she’s… y’know, made out of paper.”

With that being said, he reached down for the empty bucket.

Within a flash, the Occamy—the one that had squawked at him—slid up his arm. Credence froze. Feathers and scales together slithered across his skin, constricting around his neck. He didn’t dare move a muscle as the Occamy inspected him and the paper butterfly now fluttering rapidly at his lapel. That was until the Occamy let out a great big sniff, glaring at him in disappointment.

“Told you,” Credence breathed out in relief and went to pet the top of the creature’s head. However,
when the Occamy quickly tensed up, he dropped his hand instead underneath its beak so that it could see and inspect it.

“See? There’s nothing to be afraid of,” he said softly when the Occamy dropped its head and sniffed his wrist, “I’m not gonna hurt you.”

After a moment that lasted forever, it arched its head into his hand.

“The body of a snake and the feathers of a bird… but you have the entire personality of a cat,” he mused aloud, slowly running his fingers through the Occamies soft iridescent feathers. A beautiful shining mirage of color that warmed his heart and made him feel like… like home.

Prudence crawled onto his cheek.

“Okay, okay,” Credence leaned down, sliding the Occamy back into its nest, “I’m putting them down now, see? Don’t worry. You’re not going to be eaten.”

Right when he finally grabbed the empty bucket, a vibrant flash of light blinded him. Credence stumbled backwards and rubbed his eyes, but when he turned back around, whatever had caused it was gone. Weird. He shook his head and went to return to the cabin.

But he had scarcely taken a step when he noticed that Newt had returned.

He hadn’t announced his presence, so Credence wasn’t sure how long he’d been there. But there Newt was, sitting on the ground cross-legged, leather journal balanced between them. Huh. He’d never seen that one before, which was strange all-things-considered since Credence had become fairly accustomed with all things Newt. Well, whatever it was he was doing, he looked completely immersed in it. His brows had risen into his forehead, his lips pursed into a straight line, all while scribbling a piece of charcoal across the page.

It was nice seeing him like this. So quiet. So relaxed.

The way the sunlight reflected off his hair really illuminated the golden strands hidden within that untamable mop of auburn, enshrouding his face in a divine halo. He looked like an angel. Or rather, one trapped in human form. Normal at first glance, but ultimately unable to hide their divinity. It felt positively heathenistic to look at him for too long.

They locked eyes.

Newt slammed the journal shut with a loud snap.

“C—Credence!” he bolted up, “How long—how long have you been standing there?”

He looked like a kid caught with their hand in the cookie jar. And Credence should know, he’d caught Modesty doing it almost every night. That was, before she bribed him with half a ginger snap not to tell.

“What are you doing?”


Credence arched a brow.
“Dougal?”

“Yes, Dougal,” Newt gestured over his shoulder. “The Demiguise perched next to the Occamy nest?”

Credence looked behind him and found nothing but empty space.

“Mr. Newt,” he drawled, “Have you thought about glasses?”

“He’s invisible. Well… when he wants to be,” Newt puffed out his cheeks, “Dougal? Dougal, could you be a lamb and introduce yourself to Credence?”

Right then and there, a creature with drooping white fur and great, big golden eyes, appeared within an iridescent shimmer of light. It stared at Credence, slowly raising its hand and wriggling each of its fingers one by one.

Credence stepped backwards.

“Don’t worry. Dougal’s extremely docile, and gives the best hugs, if I might add,” Newt stepped beside him, twirling a strand of auburn hair, “He’s the acting nanny for the Occamies and I think… he was watching you feed them. I was just documenting his behavior, is all.”

“O—oh.”

Well, didn’t he look like the fool? His cheeks burned.

“Well then, if we’re all finished here,” Newt paid his embarrassment no mind and took the empty bucket from him, “Shall we move onto the next thing on the agenda?”

He grinned.

“How would you like to learn your first bit of magic?”

Newt had no idea what he was doing.

Funny how often that thought was becoming.

It wasn’t as if he wasn’t used to teaching magic. Oh no, on the contrary, he’d had years of practice with that. The only problem was that he had been the student. His half-finished education had been supplemented by testing out new spells while dragons breathed down his neck or after being chased by a pack of rampaging rougarou. He’d read through textbooks and practiced all that he could, sure.

But teaching himself was far different from teaching someone else.

“You’ve been consulting your Standard Book of Spells?”

“Yes,” Credence nodded, sitting all prim and proper in front of him, “Every night.”

“And?” Newt asked, “What have you learned?”

“I—I have my notes somewhere,” he frowned, looking over his shoulder, “I can get them—”
“Off the top of your head is fine,” Newt said with a smile, “This isn’t a test, Credence. I just want to know what you remember. It’s okay if you get something wrong.”

“Well… uhm…” Credence’s hands clenched and unclenched, “Magic is… It’s like a well. Every time we cast a spell, it’s like pulling up a pail-full of water. The well will eventually refill, but when you use too much of it all at once, it can be draining. But it’s also bad to not drink the water at all, which is why we use magic even when we don’t—when we don’t really need to… is that right?”

“That’s right,” Newt said, “And what’s the purpose of a wand?”

“If magic is like a well… then the wand is like a river,” Credence answered, more confident and sure of himself this time around, “Magic rises from inside the wizard and flows down the arm into the wand, reacting with the core, before being released.”

“And why is what the wand is made of important?”

“Because if the wand doesn’t connect right with the wizard then the energy can’t get through,” he said, “The spell will just backfire or explode.”

Newt leaned back on his hands.

“You’re very good at remembering things.”

Credence looked down.

“I just want to know everything I can…” he hesitated, “I have—I have a lot to catch up on.”

“I know,” Newt frowned, shaking his head, “You’re working hard, Credence. Harder than I ever did when I was a student. And it shows.”

He opened his leather sketchbook to the back pages, where he tested out colored inks and new cartons of pastels, and ripped them out. He set the parchment between them, tearing them into thirds.

“I have to give you credit. You did extraordinarily well on your first Reparo, but… you used my wand for it. Turns out you’re compatible with it, but next time you might not be so lucky. So, I highly recommend against using anyone’s wand except yours in the future,” Newt advised, “Watch what I do and repeat.”

He slipped his wand from his sleeve.

“Guide your wand through the air. Tell it what to do and trust that it will do it. Concentrate on the feeling washing through you and…” Newt pointed his wand at the parchment, “Reparo.”

The paper stitched itself together with a zap, looking exactly as it had been moments before.

“Your turn,” Newt slipped his wand back inside his sleeve, “Take it slow. It’s not about whether you can or can’t do it. You’ve done the spell before. I want you to focus on the feeling instead.”

Credence nodded and closed his eyes.

Newt watched him.

Inhale.

And exhale.
There weren’t many opportunities available to him to look at Credence this up close. The wizard liked making himself seem small, looking at the ground or trailing just behind Newt’s shadow. Not to say that wasn’t slowly changing as Credence became more and more accustomed with freedom. Oh no, not at all! In fact, he was making great strides – quicker than even he could have predicted. The point was…Newt hadn’t noticed until this precise moment that Credence’s hair was starting to curl.

“Reparo.”

The ripped pieces of paper that remained between them stitched themselves back together, but that was only the beginning. Dried ink and swatches of colored pigment lifted from the pages, its aged yellow appearance brightening to a crisp ivory until it looked as new as the day Newt bought it, however many years ago that was.

He’d used too much magic.

Credence opened his eyes.

“How did that feel?” he inquired.

Credence’s eyes shimmered with bottled moonlight, practically trembling with equal parts excitement and awe.

“It was… different. From before, I mean,” he answered, voice shaking, “Last time, when I was using your wand, I had to focus really hard to cast that spell. It was like… I was pushing past a barrier that didn’t want to give. But now… it didn’t resist at all, like the barrier wasn’t even there.”

Newt’s brows furrowed.

“And how are your magical reserves?”

“Not a drop missing.”

Newt sucked in a breath.

Normally, releasing that much magical energy to return something to that pristine of condition would’ve made anyone feel an effect. Merlin, even the great Albus Dumbledore would’ve at least felt a twinge. If Credence barely felt a thing… well, it was no wonder he had survived this long with an Obscurus. It could gorge itself to its hearts content and still have plenty left over.

A sudden gust of wind blew the parchment away.

Credence stuffed his wand inside his coat and rose to his feet, “Don’t worry. I’ll get it.”

However, Newt recognized the direction the pages were going and sprung up, “Credence, wait.”

But he disappeared behind the tent flap into the dark, winter terrain.

Credence stared into the swirling ball of captured midnight, papers in hand.

Something about it… Something about it sparked a feeling of familiarity within him. And it wasn’t because it resembled one of those crock-psychic crystal balls lining store-front windows downtown.
No, this was something… personal, intimate. The Obscurus clawed against his ribcage and squeezed his heart, begging for a release that Credence refused to give.

Newt quietly entered the tent behind him.

“That’s an Obscurus,” Credence surprised himself with the hollowness of his voice.

“…yes.”

“It’s smaller than mine.”

“Yes.”

“Is…,” Credence swallowed over the mysterious lump in his throat, “Is there a person inside there?”

“…no.”

His stomach turned. Vomit crawled up his throat. The Obscurus slammed against his bones, begging for freedom. It tore his muscles to shreds and eviscerated everything that came into reach of its claws. It wanted out out out—

But Credence endured it.

“You separated it,” every word was a chore, “But they can’t exist without each other. So that means—that means…”

Oh God.

“…I thought that if I used the right spell… then maybe I could save her. I was desperate. She was out of time,” Newt’s voice was so quiet that Credence had to turn around and face him in order to register what he was saying, “…I was too late. I failed. I—I failed and she suffered for it.”

“Is that what’s going to happen to me?” Credence asked and Newt jumped.

“Absolutely not!”

“But you don’t know for sure, do you?”

Newt didn’t answer.

It was true then. Credence had always known deep down that he was living off borrowed time, but it hadn’t entirely clicked until he was forced to face what could possibly be his future. Stuck in the cold, an eternity of rage and pain.

Alone.

As far as he knew, any day now could be his last.

“Am I going to die?”

Newt looked him in the eye.

“Not if I have anything to say about it.”

His voice held such strong conviction in it that Credence shuddered. Or maybe that was just the cold.

“I will help you, Credence,” he continued, “Even if it’s the last thing I do, I’ll help you figure this
out. I won’t let you die.”

The Obscurus quieted.

Credence stepped forward and took his hand.

“I know.”

Journeying from New York to England had seemed endless, but the trip from England to France? Well, now that was a breeze.

Credence thanked God for that.

The sheer compactness of the passenger ship had made him feel trapped—caged, even—and every little bump and twist made his breakfast crawl up his throat. When they’d briefly hit rough waters, Credence had found his refuge next to a bucket.

After that, he’d spent nearly every waking moment inside the suitcase. He peeled raw potatoes for Dougal, spared the occasional knut and sickle for the Niffler, and wandered out into the Mooncalves enclosure for no other reason than they were cute. He patched up holes in the Occamies nest, watched Newt dive into the Kraken’s tank to clean it up, and practiced magic.

And every night, before he went to bed, he wandered into the arctic terrain and spent time with the host-less Obscurus.

It’s just… there was something about it that sparked this agonizing sense of loneliness inside him. Every time he gazed upon that miserable, little orb, he felt like he would fall to pieces. He never wanted to see it again.

And it was precisely because of that feeling that he visited as often as he could.

Talking with it.

Telling it about his day.

Telling it about everything that he’d done.

Telling it about everything that he’d learned.

Telling it about the fear in his heart.

And he swore, it listened.

“We’ll be remaining here while I arrange for a couple of overnight trains going Southcoast,” Newt planned aloud, weaving effortlessly through the packed Parisian crowds, “Couple weeks here, couple days traveling. I think we’ll be able to make it before the winter chill comes in. That’d be ideal. Kraken hatchlings do most of their growing during summer and—”

Credence didn’t pay attention, struggling to keep up. Carrying his suitcase long distance rubbed his scars in all the wrong ways, making them grow puffy and red with irritation. He switched to carrying it with both hands.
“Laurent de Laurent owns a townhouse nearby. Used to stay there whenever I’d come down to visit —ah, that doesn’t matter,” Newt said, seemingly oblivious to Credence’s plight, “He rents out the front rooms as a bed and breakfast for Muggle tourists, but he reserves the backrooms for wandering wizards. Like us!”

He glanced behind him and looked thoughtful for a moment before offering Credence his hand, “We’re about to go down into the metro. I don’t want you to get lost.”

“I appreciate the offer,” Credence held up his suitcase, “But I can’t carry this with one hand.”

“Oh! Let me help.”

“You don’t have to do that—”

But Newt had already slipped his hand around the handle, lifting half the burden off of Credence’s shoulders. His scars still ached. That much remained the same. But having someone share the strain… well, that wasn’t so bad at all, now was it?

He smiled.

“Thank you.”

Meanwhile, a shadow within a shadow disappeared down the dark alleyways. There was flash of apothic green flame one second, and was gone the next.

All was well on the streets of Paris.

Rain pitter-pattered against the bedroom window.

Credence turned a page.

He’d already reached Chapter Four in The History of Magic, which was impressive considering that it had taken over 500 pages to get there.

Credence plucked up a blueberry from the bowl of fruit he’d brought to bed and raised it to his hair where Pickett quickly snatched it from him and gobbled it up quicker than you could say Fiddlesticks.

“You’re insatiable,” he laughed softly and plopped a halved strawberry into his own mouth, saying around it, “Take it slow, or you might bite my finger off next time.

Pickett blew him a raspberry.

“Rude.”

He turned another page and glanced over at Newt, sleeping in the bed across from him.

Newt often preferred sleeping in the cabin, close to his creatures. It was habit, Newt had said when Credence inquired why. He’d gone for so long living out in the field, where the only roof over his head provided was the one in his suitcase, that he’d just gotten used to the routine. That and he hadn’t wanted to pressure Credence with sleeping around a total stranger when his world was
already in such an upended state.

So, when Credence insisted that he didn’t mind at all, Newt… stayed.

He’d never seen him sleep before.

Newt cocooned himself in the threadbare quilt, his pinkened cheek pressed flat against his pillow. His lips parted and the faintest bit of drool dribbled down his chin.

The wind outside quickened, the rain growing louder and pelting the window like miniature water bullets.

Pickett pulled at his hair.

“Do that again,” Credence warned, “And I won’t give you anything else for the rest of the night.”

Pickett pulled at his hair again, harder.

“Alright, that’s it,” he carefully plucked the bowtruckle from his hair and put him down onto the blanket, “Off to bed you go.”

Pickett made a run for the bowl, but Credence was already one step ahead of him and grabbed it, holding it out of reach.

“I warned you, didn’t I?” he set it aside on the nightstand, “I’m not rewarding your bad behavior. When you can ask nicely, only then will I give you more berries.”

He stuck an emerald bookmark between the textbook pages and set it on top of the bowl, so that Pickett couldn’t get into it during the night. He quickly cast a quiet Nox, and slipped his wand underneath his pillow before finally laying down to sleep.

Prudence nestled next to him.

Lightning crashed, illuminating the bedroom.

Newt bolted up in bed, eyes as wide as dinner plates, and fell onto the floor.

“Mr. Newt?” Credence sat up, “Are you alright?”

Newt flinched and stumbled backwards into the dresser. He gazed from underneath the pile of arms and legs at Credence, as if suddenly remembering that he wasn’t alone. He opened his mouth to speak however, right at that precise moment, the thunder outside boomed and cracked, interrupting any possible answer that he might have received. Newt slammed his hands against his ears with a shout and buried his face between his legs, rocking back and forth.

Credence rose to his feet, alarmed.

“Mr. Newt?”

Newt hummed a tuneless song to himself, sounding almost like the static that came over the radio when the scheduled programming finished for the day. Was he trying to drown out the noise? Was he scared of thunderstorms?

Credence had been frightened of them too back when he was younger, before becoming responsible for others. Children from the orphanage had often found refuge in his bedroom from the howling winds and booming noise. He’d rubbed hundreds of shaking backs, whispering soothing words into
their ear and reassuring them that everything would be alright. There was nothing to be afraid of even if the sights and sounds were scary.

But this… this seemed different.

Credence’s feet moved on their own. He grabbed Newt’s scarf from the dresser and crouched down low beside him.

“…Newt?” he asked softly, “Can I come over there?”

Newt opened an eye, the fear inside palpable.

“It’s okay,” Credence lowered his voice even more, trying to be gentle and understanding despite not knowing what was going on. All he knew was that his friend was in trouble, and he couldn’t just stand by and watch. “I won’t come nearer if you don’t want me to. Whatever you need… I just want to help.”

Newt didn’t respond.

Instead, he stretched out an arm, and pointed at the bundle in Credence’s arms.

The scarf disappeared the second he held it out to him. Newt quickly wrapped the faded fabric around his neck, looping a second around his ears, making the end result look like a war-torn dental patient after four consecutive root canals but… he looked better. His shoulders relaxed and the humming stopped.

Until the lightning crashed again, louder and closer this time around. Newt jumped into Credence’s arms. He placed Credence’s hands over his ears so that he doubled—tripled if counting the scarf—his protection against the noise.

“K—Keep,” Newt breathed through his nose, as if every word was a struggle, “Keep those there. Please.”

“Of course,” Credence said quietly, “Anything.”

Every breath came out ragged and pained.

“I’m not—I’m not scared of thunderstorms.”

“I know. I figured as much.”

A smile. Small and quivering, but still there.

“Expected nothing less,” Newt murmured, “But still. This—this must seem strange to you.”

“Yes.”

“Then why aren’t you asking why?”

“Because you’ll tell me if you want to,” Credence responded, soft and genuine, “I’m not going to pry if you don’t want me to.”

Newt didn’t respond. Instead, his fingers tapped restlessly against the tops of his, the humming having returned anew. Everything about him screamed vulnerability. Everything about him cried out for—for something, anything to make whatever it was that he was dealing with stop.
It was in that moment that Credence realized just how human Newt was. Of course, he knew that. But, all this time, he’d been putting him up on a pedestal and looked up at him like some sort of god—a savior. He walked the shadows as Newt trailblazed forwards, not a care in the world. But he was just a person like everyone else. Even the strongest people needed help sometimes.

And right now, Newt needed him.

“If it’s alright with you… could we lay down? My bed’s right there,” Credence asked softly, “I—I can’t hold my arms up like this for too long.”

Newt emitted a low noise.

Credence furrowed his brows.

“I… don’t understand.”

“…Talking…” he said between clenched teeth, sweat dripping down his forehead, “…talking… hard…”

Oh.

“Tap once for yes, twice for no,” Credence said, “Can you do that?”

He tapped once against his knuckles.

“Perfect,” Credence beamed, pleased with his suggestion, “Is it okay if we move us backwards?”

Another tap.

“Oh, I’m moving now. Let me know if you change your mind.”

With immense difficulty, Credence maneuvered them onto the bed. The simple act proved harder than he thought, trying to walk backwards with his hands pressed against the sides of Newt’s face; but, they managed. When they finally laid down together, Newt’s eyes had slammed shut. Tremors coursed through him. He curled up into the crook of Credence’s neck, his fingers tracing the scars across his knuckles over and over in odd repetition.

“Is this alright?”

A tap.

“Is there anything else I can do to help?”

Two in quick succession.

“Oh, I’m here for you.”

Time stood still, or at least, it seemed like it. Nothing else existed outside of Newt’s repetitive caresses and the thunderstorm raging outside. It could have been an hour. It could have been five minutes. Either way, it seemed like an eternity when the rain finally stopped and was replaced by night’s silence. Credence could literally see the tension leaving Newt’s shoulders.

A collective sigh washed across the bedroom.

Newt remained there for a moment, still and silent. His labored breaths grew quieter and quieter. The gentle sweeping of his fingers slowed to a stop. Credence nearly thought him asleep and was self-
occupied with the thought on how to remove the blankets out from underneath them when Newt finally spoke.

“…I don’t take too kindly to loud, unexpected noises.”

Credence remained quiet.

“It’s… manageable when I have some idea of what to expect. Did you know that I actually like the sound of rain? When I had Frank, I’d sometimes go out to his enclosure just to listen to the sound of thunder. But when I don’t see it coming…” Newt grimaced, “It’s indescribable. The closest I can get is like a cross between a lightning strike and walking face-first into a spiderweb. And it just… doesn’t stop.”

“That sounds painful.”

“It is.”

Credence frowned.

“The scarf helps. A lot. When I rub it up against my ears, I can hear the scratching and I can focus on that instead. I usually like the feel of it too, but your hands—” he trailed off and finally opened his eyes, heavy with exhaustion, “How did you know to get it for me?”

“Hortencia.”


“It’s not strange,” he said softly, “Or peculiar. You’re just… you.”

Newt didn’t respond.

Instead, his eyes fluttered shut. He slowly slipped off his scarf from around his neck, gathering it up in his arms and tucking it underneath his head in a makeshift pillow. Credence took advantage of that opportunity to pull out the blanket from underneath them and drape it over.

He didn’t mind sharing his bed tonight. In fact, the moment Newt had stumbled out of bed and looked up at him with those wide, frightened eyes of his, Credence had all but resigned himself to it. He might have even preferred it to sleeping alone, if he was being perfectly honest with himself. He had shared a bed with Chastity back when they were younger. And, when Modesty came along, she’d often sneak under the blankets after a nightmare—either his or hers. Every winter, both sisters would bunk with him, gathering up their blankets to conserve what little warmth they had. Credence honestly couldn’t remember a time when he went to bed alone. Until now, that was.

But then again, he wasn’t alone. Not really.

“Credence?”

He looked down at him.

“Yes, Newt?”

“Hmm,” he smiled, half-asleep, “Finally dropped the Mister, have you?”

Credence flushed.

“I—” he pressed his face into his pillow, “I suppose. Friends don’t—they don’t address each other so
formally. If it makes you uncomfortable though—"

“No, I like it.”

Newt’s breathing grew softer and softer, beginning to doze off.

“Can I ask you a question?” he said.

“Anything.”

“What happened to your hands?”

Credence sat up.

“You don’t have to answer,” Newt murmured, his kind meadow green eyes opening only to flutter shut seconds later, “It’s just… you hold them a lot. And you—you shift your suitcase between them and… I like the way they feel. I like holding your hand. But if they hurt…”

The rain plinked against the windows, remnants of a storm that had all but passed.

“Ma would punish me whenever I did something bad,” he swallowed, “Or whenever I took the blame for my sisters so that they wouldn’t have to go through it.”

Credence slowly laid back down and tucked his hands underneath his cheek. Newt’s cheeks had grown pink again and his mouth hung open just the faintest bit. He wasn’t sure if he would remember this in the morning, whether this was a genuine inquiry or a sleep-driven conversation of the unconscious. But somehow… Credence didn’t care.

Because this needed to be said. He needed to acknowledge what had happened to him. Maybe then, and only then, could he move forward.

“She would hold out her hand and I’d—I’d remove my belt. We’d go upstairs to the balcony and I would—she would give me thirteen lashes,” he said quietly, “She said since the Savior endured the thirteen strokes of a whip, then I could too. Only this way could I—could I repent.”

His palms ached.

“The hands were to hold the weight of our sins. To remember what had been done, and how to learn from it,” he frowned, “They’re ugly, I know. And I know that I’m—that I’m weak. Pathetic. I used to get so… scared when I’d have to go up those stairs. I’d cry for hours and hours later.”

“Credence, your perseverance isn’t a weakness. Feeling fear doesn’t mean you aren’t brave,” Newt murmured, “You didn’t deserve anything that happened to you. But… it still happened. And you volunteered to endure something horrible so that your sisters would not. To be afraid and still push forward, knowing what is to come, isn’t a weakness, Credence. It’s a strength.”

Newt smiled a little, “I think they’re beautiful. Your scars. They show how strong you are. You really are amazing and I—I hope you know that.”

And with that, Newt was asleep.
Porpentina Goldstein’s footsteps—strong yet timid, holding distinctive power and authority yet reluctant to use it—resounded through the empty halls, echoing loudly even down in MACUSA’s supermax holding cells. Grindelwald had learned early on how to distinguish Tina’s footsteps from the others, long before he’d gotten caught. It’d been prudent to know when she was about to interrupt a meeting and annoy him.

Even if he had any doubt as to the footsteps source (which he didn’t), the pungent aroma of Coney Island hotdogs lathered in mustard and relish always followed her around like her own personal, stomach-turning perfume. He much preferred it when she smelled like vanilla or powdered sugar. That way, he could also expect Queenie to make her rounds around the office bringing everyone cookies and cupcakes.

He could devour an entire batch of strawberry ones any day.

The door to his cell opened.

A metal chair was dragged inside and his interviewer for the day (or would it be torturer?) situated herself in it, one leg crossed over the other.

He smiled charmingly and greeted her with a polite nod, “Ms. Goldstein.”

“Mr. Grindelwald.”

“I would normally prefer standing like a gentleman before the lady takes her seat but…” Grindelwald attempted to raise his hands, magical restraints quickly pulling them down back into position, “It seems I’m unable to rise to the occasion. I hope you don’t take my impoliteness to heart.”

“Hardly.” Tina rebuffed his charms and opened the files in her lap, “But if you really wish to repay me for your rudeness, you could start by telling me why you’re here.”

“I’m appalled by the state of your education system,” he tsked, “You see, when my mother met my father—”

“That’s not the question I’m asking, Mr. Grindelwald.”

“Is it not?” he arched his brows in mock-surprise, looking around the otherwise empty cell as if surveying an imaginary audience, “You asked me why I’m here. I’m merely giving you a response.”

“You know very well what I meant,” Tina droned.

“Do I now?”

“What made you come to New York?”

There it was. The big question. The one that all who entered his cell eventually asked.

“There was something that I could only find here,” he hummed, “An Obscurial. What was his name again?”

Grindelwald smiled, all teeth and no compassion. Much like the cat that caught the bird, playing with its dinner before going in for the final strike.

“Credence?”

Tina bristled.
You're fooling no one, Mr. Grindelwald. You and I both know that that plan was just too simple for a man of your caliber,” she flipped through the file, hands shaking in either rage or fear, “You wouldn’t bet everything you’ve worked so hard on for an Obscurial that wasn’t guaranteed to live for more than a couple days at most. You’re up to something.”

She met his eye, cold and unfeeling. It sent shivers down his spine.

“And I intend to stop it.”

“Clever, clever witch,” Grindelwald hummed, “What makes you think that?”

“You practically threw away your cover when we lost Cre—the Obscurial,” she said, “And you surrendered yourself to our custody far too easily. Don’t think you’ve pulled the wool over my eyes, Mr. Grindelwald, there’s no way you’ve given up the fight that easily—”

“No,” he leaned forward, leering, “What makes you think you can stop me?”

Tina froze.

What was MACUSA thinking sending her down here?

“As I said before, you’re a clever witch, Ms. Goldstein,” Grindelwald leaned back in his chair, looking at his nails, “I’m sure you can figure it out. You don’t need me to tell you what I intended. Now, where’s Reginald? I do believe he’s supposed to be coming around with lunch sometime soon.”

“I’m not finished here.”

“Oh, but I am,” he tutted, “You have all the answers you seek in that cute little file of yours there. All you need to do is look. Until next time, Ms. Goldstein.”

Tina ground her teeth together. She stood up, thanked him for his cooperation, and stormed out.

Moments later, a man arrived carrying a tray of food.

“Finally,” Grindelwald sniffed after the noxious scent of hotdogs disappeared, “I can breathe again. I’d be half-tempted to spill all my secrets if she only brushed her teeth after lunch. Blech. So, what do you have for me today, Hugin?”

“A bologna sandwich and milk, sir.”

“Always with the bologna,” he wrinkled his nose and remained still as Hugin removed his bonds, “Please tell me it has Mustard, at least. It’s been a while since we’ve had any of that.”

“Sorry,” Hugin rasped, “No Mustard.”

“Not even Strawberry Cream on the side?”

“No Strawberry Cream either.”

Grindelwald pinched the bridge of his nose. All of Tina’s efforts at getting information out of him had been fruitless, and now it seemed, so had his. If the lunchroom didn’t get any Mustard or Strawberry Cream soon, then he’d just have to withdraw his request altogether. What a pity.

“Hugin—”
“That isn’t to say, though…” he interrupted. His scarred lips pulled into a twisted smile as Hugin focused his gaze—golden in one eye, milky white in the other—onto him. “…that we don’t have dessert.”

Oh?

“Do tell.”

“I bring you a tale from the North,” he said, “A tale of Odin—God of All and True Ruler of Asgard—and his crows Hugin and Munin having caught sight of a demonic beast made of twilight and anger plaguing the good folk of Midgard.”

Another Obscurus?

Grindelwald leaned forward, “Go on.”

“I feel that I must forewarn you, sir, since this is a tale similar to one that I’ve told before,” Hugin seated himself in the chair that Tina had left behind. He swiftly unbuttoned his jacket, denoting all the refinement of a pureblood of wealth and fortitude, and crossed his legs over the other, “For the beast is one that Odin had faced before. A beast once thought lost, defeated.”

He steepled his hands together.

“But now travels along the shadow of a Beastmaster, growing in power.”

Credence.

Credence was alive. Not only that, he was thriving.

“Interesting,” Grindelwald reclined in his seat and tapped his chin, resembling more of a throned king with a crown and scepter in hand than a shackled prisoner, “Tell me more.”

Chapter End Notes

We’ve finally broken the hundred page mark on Google Docs everybody and we have our first official appearance of Gellert Grindelwald and the Animagus Hunin!

What is Grindelwald going to do now knowing that Credence is alive?

Tune in next time on the next chapter of Green Meadows, Dark Skies to find out!

Please leave your comments and constructive criticism below. What was your favorite part of this chapter? What are your theories on what’s going to happen? Is there any part of my writing that I should work on improving? Your comments keep this story going and I love reading and responding to each and every one of them! A wonderful few have even brought a tear or two to my eye!

I look forward to hearing what you think, my lovelies!
Hug Me, Save Me, Please Don't Leave Me

Chapter Notes

Lore:

Hugin and Munin are Grindelwald's prized spies. Considering their Crow Animagi forms and tendency towards lurking within the shadows - gathering information for Grindelwald - they rarely engage the public; thus, their faces have been largely kept out of the media. Only a few whom have encountered them before know that they are followers of Grindelwald. Hugin is an herbologist while Munin is a master duelist. They are fraternal twins that grew up in an orphanage. Before meeting Grindelwald, they were charity workers that traveled the world searching for other magical children abandoned by their parents.

Hugin is the wizard that leaked intel to Grindelwald about an Obscurial living in New York.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Good morning, honey.”

The portly baker’s jovial whistling halted. He hurriedly finished tying the twine into a neat, tight bow around the delivery orders scheduled to go out later that morning and whirled around.

Queenie’s heart fluttered.

Jacob - sweet, wonderful Jacob - merely wiped his hands on his flour-dusted apron and smiled widely.

Jacob.

Her perfect Jacob.

He seemed oblivious to the fact that his twinkling eyes conjured butterflies in her lungs and filled them up until she could scarcely breathe.

He seemed oblivious that his warm smile was like home. Like a softly crackling fireplace in a countryside cottage. Like the smell of freshly baked strawberry-rhubarb pie straight out of the oven.

He seemed oblivious that she loved the sight of his hands - wanting nothing more than to entwine his fingers with hers - and his rotund belly that was made to be hugged by her and her alone.

But, most of all, he seemed oblivious to the unquestionable, indisputable fact that she loved him.

Oh, how she loved him….

“Good morning, Miss Goldstein.”

“Oh, you silly goose,” Queenie giggled like a lovesick schoolgirl and rested her arms across the counter-top, leaning closer to her beloved, oblivious baker. A smitten smile crossed her lips and she
charmingly tilted her head to the side, “What have I told you before? Call me Queenie.”

“Oh, why I… I… I’d love to, ma’am,” Jacob stuttered and rubbed the back of his neck, “But, as the owner of this fine establishment, I need to retain a certain level of professionalism with my customers.”

“Oh hush now,” Queenie hummed, “You call all your regulars by their first name except me.”

Jacob looked like a frozen popsicle in the middle of winter.

“And, you know… a lady can’t help but wonder…,” she traced idle circles around the marble counter-top, demurely lowering her gaze, “That it’s because something’s wrong with her. I haven’t offended you have I? Oh dear, is it because I bring in my pastries from time to time?”

“No!” Jacob pressed his hands onto the counter, eyes wide with alarm, “I love your baking!”

Is she not going to bring in her cupcakes anymore? Or her raisin bread? God, I love her raisin bread. Oh no, what have I done? Stupid, Jacob! Stupid!

His thoughts washed over Queenie - all of the alarm and worry. And yet, she couldn’t help by pry.

“Then why?”

Because if I call you by your name, I won’t be able to stop myself from dreaming. That I could be more than just a baker serving the most prettiest, most wonderful customer in the world. That we could be more than what we are. I might be able to fool myself that I might just be worthy of your attention.

However, Jacob only stuttered, “W-Well, that’s because-…”

“You’re so cute, honey,” Queenie smiled sweetly and reached over, brushing away a bit of flour off of Jacob’s cheek. His skin was so soft and so warm...

And that rouge dusted over his cheeks made her heart ache with longing.

“I would really like it if you just called me Queenie.”

“Queenie,” Jacob repeated.

“Precisely.”

Oh, the thoughts swarming his head. Of self-deprecation and inner loathing… For someone so happy and who could bring so many people joy, his confidence in himself was so incredibly low. To think that Jacob - wonderful Jacob - thought that he didn’t deserve happiness.

If only he knew that he deserved that and more.

If only he knew that Queenie would gladly devote every moment of every second to him. That she could think of no better way than to spend her day kissing his worries away.

She missed Jacob.

She missed him so much.

Love at first sight belonged only in fairy tales; but, by Merlin, had Queenie fallen simply head over heels for Jacob when she first saw him in her apartment. The moment he had entered the room, it
was as if the sun had risen for the very first time.

She had never known warmth until she had seen him smile.

Oh, how she missed the smell of him: the scent of sweet honey and melted butter.

She missed his large hands enveloping hers and the nervous pitter-patter of his heart underneath his soft chest. Queenie wanted nothing more than to pull Jacob by the apron strings over the counter and to kiss him - to lay her head against his chest, listen to the song his heart sang, and to have him hold her.

But, instead, Queenie leaned back and pointed inside the glass display, “A dozen of your finest glazed donuts please.”

An exhausted, sleep-deprived Tina snored on the kitchen table. Her cheek squished against the wooden top and her arms spread apart like a pigeon about to take flight. Somehow, her chair had been scooted so dangerously far out from the table that it seemed like she was performing a circus balancing act rather than having a simple nap.

And her dreams…

Well, Queenie wished that they were filled with nothing but sugar plum fairies.

How funny that dreams acted much like thoughts.

Queenie gently set the box of Kowalski’s glazed donuts on the table, placed her finger inside her mouth, and promptly stuck it inside Tina’s ear.

Tina awoke with a shouting start - drool at the corner of her lips and her hair cow-licked. The precarious position she had been sleeping in caused her to tumble onto the floor with the grace of a newborn foal while Queenie howled with laughter.

“Rude!” Tina huffed and hoisted herself back up into her seat. She smoothed down her mussed up hair and wiped the saliva from her ear, cringing the entire time.

“Oh honey,” Queenie giggled and took the seat beside her, “You really need to start getting the proper amount of sleep.”

And not leave herself so defenseless to fun, sisterly attacks.

Queenie: 1

Tina: 0

“I get enough sleep,” Tina groaned and rubbed her eyes.

“Two hours a night is scarcely enough.”

“It is for me.”

“You work yourself too hard.”
“Yeah, yeah,” Tina yawned and stretched, cracking her neck and releasing the stiffness, “You got the stuff?”

“Of course!” Queenie declared cheerily and opened the pink-colored box, displaying the neat rows of glazed donuts, “Jacob even gave me a strawberry jelly donut.”

“And he didn’t give me a strawberry jelly donut?”

“You don’t like strawberries.”

“Hmm,” Tina pondered thoughtfully and shrugged, “I’ve always been more of a blueberry kind of a gal.”

“Mmm-hmm.”

Tina rolled her eyes and pulled out her wand, casting a silent spell to prepare her morning coffee. As the coffee pot whirred to life and the mugs flew out of the kitchen cabinets, Tina sighed, “Thank you, Queenie. I owe you one. We really need the pick-me-up - especially today of all days.”

“I wish you hadn’t accepted the job,” Queenie hummed softly, “It’s taking its toll on you. He’s taking a toll on you.”

“It’s taking its toll on all of us.”

“I know,” Queenie added softly and twiddled her thumbs together, “But, you’re especially close to… well, everything that happened.”

“Unfortunately, Queenie, we’re all too close,” Tina sighed again and rested her head in her hands. Silence fell between the Goldstein sisters. Grindelwald had entered their lives and wreaked havoc upon it. They rarely talked about it but, no one in the MACUSA wasn’t affected by his infiltration into their ranks, their government, their lives.

Tina gave a small, rueful smile. She shifted and now rested her rouge-tinted cheek in a single palm.

“It… helps knowing now that Credence is alive. And in good hands for that matter. Newt may be a scatter-brained, rule-breaking, careless fool but… he’s a helper and that boy deserves a helping hand.”

She fell quiet again for a moment. Her morning coffee, filled with so much cream and sugar that it could barely be called coffee anymore, floated over.

“If only I could have helped him sooner,” Tina took the stirring spoon and idly swirled around her coffee - the metal clinking against the porcelain mug, “Had I only been the witch that had reached out their hand to help him - to provide guidance - instead of Gellert goddamned Grindelwald.”

“I know, honey.” Queenie’s voice was soft and delicate - sympathetic to her sister’s plight. Even though Queenie had never truly met Credence before, hearing that an innocent boy (one that played such a major part in Tina’s life at that) had been used and manipulated by the Dark Wizard… And then destroyed by the very people who should have been protecting him for his naivety.

Needless to say, Queenie was glad he was alive too.

“I'll regret not doing more until the day I die,” Tina continued stirring her coffee.

“I know.”
Tina set the metal spoon aside, taking the mug into her hands and blew away the steam wafting up from it.

“But, Credence aside, we all worked with Grindelwald when he was impersonating Graves,” shame entered her tired eyes now - haunted by her obliviousness, “We have to look our colleague in the eye knowing that we let him down. For not seeing through Grindelwald’s guise. And who knows how many secrets Grindelwald heard as Graves? All the information that he had priority access to?”

“Mmm-hmm, and to think I made him my strawberry cupcakes too!” Queenie *harrumph*-ed and crossed her arms over her chest, “I feel so used!”

Tina raised a brow.

Queenie smiled sweetly.

“I can always count on you to lighten up the situation,” Tina chuckled and sipped her coffee.

“It’s my job, honey,” Queenie smiled lightly and stood up, smoothing out her dress, “So, you go out there and kick Grindelwald’s patootie! I’ll be here to sweeten your day when you get back.”

“With your strawberry cupcakes?”

“I was thinking more about blueberry.”

Plush velvet seats the color of scarlet lined the dining car. Crystal glasses set upon every table - filled with water or wine depending on the wealth of the individual. Some dined on Roasted Tilapia while others on Pasta Puttanesca or Chicken Parmesan.

Table-side windows glanced out to the vibrant countryside filled with fenced-in farms of cows and horses or vineyards of beautiful, juicy red grapes. The sun began to slowly set behind the snow-capped mountains in the distance.

Trains were wonderful ways to travel, in Credence’s humble opinion. He much preferred this than tumultuously rocking boats and salted air with nothing to see except four bare cabin walls. Trains possessed… a sense of refinement and adventure.

That he was departing onto an adventure into the magical unknown.

Newt glanced up from his dinner plate - filled with the most delicious looking spaghetti - and stared at Credence.

“Is this your first time on a train?”

“Yes,” Credence nodded eagerly, enchanted by the entire experience, “Mother didn’t like using the metro or anything powered by gas or steam or electricity. I snuck onto a bus once but…” He had never done so again after Mother’s punishment.

Funny how he had forgotten about that day until now.

Credence had been saving up his allowance for years and, on his 10th birthday, he had ventured out into New York. All that he had wanted was to buy himself a slice of buttercream-frosted cake at the
downtown deli.

Mother never celebrated his birthday. She thought birthdays were inherently sinful occasions: Bacchus celebrations that only the gluttonous partook in. Spoiling their child with needless toys and treats.

Credence had only wanted to be like the other kids.

To know the feeling of having parents sing to him. To present him with a home-baked cake inscribed with his name in blue icing. To blow out the candles and make a wish.

Sitting alone in that roach-infested deli, singing softly to himself and blowing out 10 imaginary candles, Credence had savored that slice of vanilla frosted cake and had wished for a simple wish.

A friend that he could play with.

Someone that could protect him from Mother’s lashings.

Someone that he could run away with.

Someone that he could be happy to be by their side - through rain, sleet, and snow.

Credence’s wish never came true.

Perhaps once he had come close. He touched the puckered scar hidden beneath his curling hair. But, that had ended in disaster. A taste of heaven before it had all been taken away.

He could still taste the gas and diesel Mother poured down his throat. Punishment for the sin of partaking in gluttony and envy.

He had vomited the vanilla-frosted cake back up later that evening.

“I remember my first train ride,” Newt’s voice broke through the ocean of his pain-filled memories like a lifeline, “The Hogwarts Express - no finer train in existence. Although, I spent the first hour locked in the bathroom.”

He smiled timidly.

“Was it the train whistle?” Credence asked, distracted from his thoughts.

“Loud, unexpected noises just don’t agree with me.”

“I can imagine so,” Credence hummed and rested his arms on the table, gazing out the window into the grass-filled countryside. They were now passing a sheep farm - their fluffy white coats looking like grounded clouds. “What else doesn’t agree with you?”

“Pardon?”

“I mean, as your apprentice,” Credence bit his lower lip and suggested, “I need to know when you’re prone to be indisposed?”

Newt hummed his approval and returned to his meal.

“Look at you. Thinking of things that I don’t even consider,” he clumsily spun his fork around the sauce-covered noodles, “I suppose… well, I don’t always notice things going around me. In particular when I’m reading or when I’m walking through a bustling city. I tend to focus on just
what’s ahead of me and rarely look back.”

Credence recalled when they first stepped foot in England.

“I’ve noticed.”

“Oh hush,” Newt brought his fork up to his mouth and chewed for a moment, “The other main thing that bothers me is that I don’t like being hugged. Touched in general.”

Credence turned away from the window, perplexed.

“You like touching me.”

Newt swallowed his pasta, “What?”

“Yes,” Credence rubbed the back of his neck, “So much so that I feel weird when your hands aren’t on my shoulders.”

“I haven’t noticed.” And given the genuinely surprised look across the wizard’s face, Credence was inclined to believe him.

“You’re always really close to me,” Credence continued, “Always grabbing my hand… I wouldn’t have noticed it until we visited Hortencia. You act… differently around her. Like you’re trapped in a bubble and refuse to let anyone inside lest it pop.”

“I suppose,” Newt wiped his mouth with his napkin and set it upon the table, “I just feel relaxed around you.”

Credence didn’t know how to respond to that.

“I… I don’t understand people that much,” Newt admitted slowly and looked anywhere except into Credence’s eyes, “But, everything comes naturally with you.”

Credence looked back out the window. A curious smile graced his reflection.

“I’m glad.”

The one thing that Credence didn’t like about trains were how small their cabins were. Boat cabins were cramped and French beds were ridiculously tiny but, this… this was different.

He could overhear every noise Newt made as he shuffled on his pajamas behind him. Their shoulders and elbows touched often by mistake and, once, Newt accidentally stepped on his heel.

Pickett and Prudence chased each other around the cot. Credence wasn’t certain what Pickett did this time but, Prudence wasn’t letting him off easily this time.

It was dizzying watching them chase each other round and round and round and round and round and round and round and round and round and round and round-...

Credence squeezed his eyes shut and shook his head.
He was just starting to button up his pajamas when the train suddenly jolted before coming to a complete halt, causing Credence to lose his footing and tumble backwards.

Straight into Newt’s arms.

Causing the both of them to bang their heads against the floor.

“That’s gonna leave a bruise,” Newt winced and rubbed the side of his forehead, hissing at the soreness, “Are you okay?”

“Yes,” Credence hurriedly sat up and buttoned his nightshirt, uncomfortable with the thought of what Newt could have seen.

The wizard was already asking questions about his scars and - if last night was any indication towards Newt’s curiosity - what remained hidden underneath his clothes was bound to manifest even more.

Credence carefully hoisted himself off Newt and looked around, worry creasing his forehead.

“Pickett? Prue?”

An annoyed squeak resounded from beneath Newt’s cot.

Credence peered underneath and discovered Pickett clutching onto Prudence - who fluttered her wings excitedly at the sight of him. They had both been knocked around a bit but, they seemed otherwise well.

Credence released a sigh of relief and scooped them up into his hands, placing the two creatures back onto the bed, “Are you okay?”

Pickett blew an indignant raspberry. Prudence waved a wing.

“Thank goodness,” Credence glanced over at Newt, “What about your suitcase?”

“My what?” Newt pulled himself up onto his feet and surveyed the room, cradling his forehead, “Oh, right. Suitcase. It’s charmed to adjust to the physics of the outside world. Otherwise my constant handling of it would jostle them around all the time.”

“What a relief.”

In perfect synchronization, the wizard and his apprentice plopped down onto each other’s cots and exhaled. They were all okay. A little bruised and dizzied but, they were all okay.

But, what happened in the first place?

Or rather, more importantly...

“Why….” Credence swallowed thickly and glanced out the small cabin window, “Why did the train stop?”

“I don’t know.”

“Is this normal?”

Newt hesitated. “No.”
The worry that entered his magnificent green eyes caused the anxiety taking hold of Credence’s chest to tighten.

“They haven’t come to take me back, have they?” Credence’s irrational fear choked his throat, “They’re… not here...right?”

“Credence,” Newt rose to his feet in alarm.

His fears were preposterous. Credence understood that. There was no possible way the MACUSA had tracked him all the way across the great, big ocean to finish what they started. It was ludicrous. Ridiculous. Unfathomable.

But, the cabin was too small. Too stifling.

The mysteriously stopped train too suspicious.

A train…

Much like the ones found in subways.

Dark, terrifying subways where a person could be killed if they weren’t careful enough.

“Credence.”

He heard Newt’s concerned voice calling out his name like a far-off echo trapped deep within a monstrous cavern. He could barely make it out but, Credence was alone here. His eyes unseeing.

Here there was nothing except a group of powerful wizards - masters of defensive arts - pointing their wands at him. Casting spell after agonizing spell. All shouting. All afraid. Here there was Grindelwald, still wearing the face of another man, and Newt pleading for them to stop. Here was Miss Goldstein’s horrified face gazing up at him - wind blowing through her hair.

“Credence!”

And the pain…

All that excruciating pain.

He had forgotten that horror. Blocked it out.

But, now, Credence wanted to scream - to shriek like a wounded banshee - but, nothing came out. He wanted to rip the skin from his face, to slip his fingers behind his eyes and tear them out, to douse himself in acid or plummet to the bottom of the ocean because nothing - NOTHING - could compare to this.

He would do anything within his power just to make it stop stop stop STOP!!!

“I don’t want to die,” Credence’s voice was hollow yet choked with hysteric, “I don’t want to die. I don’t want to die. I don’t want to die. I don’t want to die.”

I don’t want to die.

I don’t want to DIE!!!

God Almighty in Heaven Above, he was dying!
DYING!

Why won’t the pain stop?!
Why wasn’t anybody helping him?!
Why would nobody save him?!

Save him.
Save him.
Save him!!!

SAVE ME!

“Credence!” Strong hands gripped his shoulders.

Credence blinked through tears that he didn’t know he’d shed.

“Credence,” Newt repeated and squeezed his trembling shoulders in reassurance. “This is not New York.”

Another wave of tears cascaded down his cheeks. A violent hiccup ripped through his sore throat.

Pickett had climbed onto his shoulders and was hugging his ear. Prudence had fluttered onto his nose and trotted distractingly back and forth.

Eyes filled with green meadows and worry shrouded his vision.

“You’re safe, Credence,” Newt’s tender voice soothed and squeezed his shoulders again, “You’re safe and you’re with me. I’m here and I’m not leaving until you feel better, alright?”

“I’m... safe?”

“That’s right, Credence,” Newt encouraged with a little smile, “And you’re with me. And Pickett and Prudence too.”

“I’m...,” Credence swallowed thickly and closed his eyes, “I’m safe.”

But, was he really?

“Credence, tell me what you want me to do.”

“What?”

“Tell me what you want me to do,” Newt repeated - slower and softer this time, “Tell me what will help you. Let me help you.”

What would help him feel better? What would stifle his fears and reassure him that everything was alright? That there was nothing to worry about and that there was no one coming to get him.

“Can we go see why the train stopped?”

“Of course.”
Credence worried him.

Having crashed into the ground and having bruised his head had caused Newt’s brain to turn into mush. His thoughts transformed into indistinguishable static and stars blinked into vision.

But once the fuzziness dissipated, Newt realized that the stars weren’t just a figment of his imagination resulting from his brain literally bouncing against his skull.

Ghastly scars resembling constellations and magnificent, spiraling universes were mapped across Credence’s pale white flesh. Carved into his body. Sliced and pierced into his chest - mountains and crevices alike.

Credence - sweet, wonderful Credence that deserved more than the unfortunate hand life had granted him - had provided a glimpse into what he had endured the night prior.

But, it was evident that Newt had barely scratched the surface of his friend’s pain.

A type of terrible, wicked pain that he was unready to tell given by how quickly he had fastened his shirt.

Indeed, Credence worried Newt.

And yet…

Walking side-by-side in their pajamas and a Lumos at their wand-tips made him feel... well, it felt natural. Newt preferred being alone. He always had. But, being alone together with Credence was nothing more than sublime.

Although, he would much rather prefer having Credence... well, not terrified to the core.

That cataclysmic meltdown back in the cabin had been horrifying. Not because it frightened Newt but, because seeing Credence shaking so violently and crying - no, wailing - in absolute terror had shredded his Hufflepuff heart into tiny pieces.

When the faintest glimmer of white had flashed across Credence’s eyes, it had taken every ounce of his power not to gather Credence into his arms and hug all his troubles away.

Credence didn’t need to be coddled like that. He wasn’t a child.

No, what Credence needed was a strong hand to lift him up. To give him the resources to fight his battles on his own and, perhaps, to realize that he has the ability to save himself.

Newt continued down the corridor. Credence followed closely behind.

“It looks like everyone is asleep,” Newt noted.

All the lights in the overnight car were out. Silence pervaded the carpeted hall. Not even the faintest whispers of gossip could be heard.

But, neither could any snoring.

Or any signs of typical deep sleep life.
“Even the workers?” Credence glanced back and forth down the hallway, clutching his wand tightly in hand.

“They might be dozing off?” Newt offered an explanation - any explanation - that would assuage the knowing dread growing within the deep, dark pits of his stomach. Trouble was brewing and it wasn’t the spaghetti bolognaise that he had for dinner.

They crept through silent train car after train car - passing through the disarrayed dining hall and mysteriously empty servant’s quarters - until they reached their final destination.

“Newt,” Credence swallowed thickly, “Would the conductor just happen to be asleep too?”

Newt trepidatiously hovered his wandlight over the man’s face.

He found eyes frozen wide in horror. The faintest color of apothic green tingeing his skin.

The Killing Curse.

Used on a poor, innocent Muggle.

“Credence, get behind me.”

“Newt?” Credence’s already soft voice became even quieter, “What’s happening?”

“I don’t know,” Newt admitted and glanced behind his shoulder, searching for anything suspicious aside from the obvious corpse laying underneath his feet, “But, I need you to listen carefully.”

He turned back around and laid his hand firmly upon Credence’s shoulder, looking him in the eye, “I will protect you no matter what. But, I need you to trust me and do everything that I say, okay? And whatever you do, it’s imperative that you remain calm.”

Shadows flashed across Credence’s face. His eyes lowered in doubt. “I don’t know if I can promise that.”

“I know,” Newt truly did, “But you must try.”

An ear-piercing popping sound echoed throughout the cabin connecting to the conductor’s car. A sound that both Credence and Newt were well-familiar with.

Apparation.

“Newt!” Credence’s frightened shout stirred him to action.

Newt swirled around - an Expelliarmus on his lips - but, their opponent blocked with ease. The black-cloaked figure advanced.

Newt cast offensive spell after offensive spell. Stupefy, Confringo, Expelliarmus, and even a Locomotor Mortis was sent down towards the mysterious figure. However, defensive spells were clearly their forte as they deflected spell after spell and continued to advance.

Newt hastily pulled up a Protego to shield them and corralled Credence behind him with a protective arm.

Their opponent was close enough to breath down their necks.

Golden curls spilled out from underneath the crushed velvet hood. Perceptive gray eyes peered out -
surveying the pair like a hawk about to swoop down on a frightened rabbit’s nest. She was tall - imposing in stature - and Newt recognized her immediately as one of Grindelwald’s followers. One that he had encountered before.

The woman who had broken Hortencia's leg beyond repair.

A shiver shot down his spine.

“Munin.”

She smiled.

Credence’s knuckles turned bone-white as he clutched his wand to his chest, frozen to the spot.

He was scared.

So very scared.

The confident swagger of their attacker and composed poise. The ease in which she deflected Newt’s spells and continued to advance upon them. The cracks she made in Newt’s shield as she sent curse after curse into it as her smile never once wavered.

Munin - follower of Gellert Grindelwald - was powerful, intimidating, and knew exactly what strength she wielded against them.

“Credence, listen to me,” Newt gritted his teeth - perspiration dotting his forehead as he used all his power and focus to maintain the slowly breaking Protego, ” I need you to-..."

But, Credence’s mind had wandered elsewhere.

Back into that dastardly subway.

Muffled shouts and booming whispers engulfed him. Delicate shadows caressed his cheek and enveloped him in a loving embrace. An ocean of liquid night pulled him underneath its twinkling waves and drowned out his agonized cries.

A hollow ringing pierced his eardrums.

His blood stilled.

His heartbeat quickened.

Newt collapsed before him.

Pleading green eyes gazed up at him begging him to do... he didn’t know.

A tortured scream escaped Newt’s lips.

Munin’s wand was pointed towards him.

Causing Newt pain.
Pain.

“Stop,” Credence’s voice broke through the stillness. His command escaping the ocean of liquid night that shielded him from the chaos of reality.

Munin locked eyes with Credence.

She stepped closer.

“Obscurial,” Munin addressed him, her voice as grating as long, unclipped nails raking across an old chalkboard, “Come with me. I'm here to rescue you.”

“Why?”

She hurt Newt.

Why would he ever go with a person that hurt Newt?

The ocean waves of thick, viscous darkness quickened - growing bigger and more violent by the second. Credence couldn’t tell up from down. Left from right.

Real from imagined.

Munin glanced between him and Newt, squatting down to better meet Credence’s eyes and resting her wand against her knee. She either underestimated his power or was confident enough in her own to not keep it pointed at him.

“You don’t belong here,” Munin’s voice had dropped an octave and transitioned into a reassuring - even understanding - tone; however, it remained as sharp as knives and unbearable to listen to, “You belong with us: by Grindelwald’s side. The power you have… the untapped potential he sees in you. You’re incredible, Credence. Fantastic.”

She pursed her lips and tsked in disappointment, “But, you only have this… gift… because of hiding from Muggles. From living your life in fear. Imagine, Credence, what you could have achieved if you hadn’t. If your power had been nurtured and guided… If you were free to live as you are.”

“No.”

“Oh, I understand. I was like you once: all naive and self-righteous,” Munin hummed sympathetically, “I too heard how dastardly Grindelwald could be. But then… I met him. He convinced my brother and I that his cause had merit. He’s not what people says he is. Things need to change, Credence. Aren’t you tired of hiding in the shadows?”

The ocean churned and tossed Credence around and around and around. He couldn’t speak. He couldn’t breathe. He couldn’t remember where he was or how he had gotten here.

What was his name?

“Didn’t you dream that you could leave the Muggle World and come join us? To live in an ideal world of magic and wonder? We can do that for you, Credence, but, that world is far from perfect. It’s just a different form of hiding. Don’t you want to be free? To be open about who you are and what you can do?” Munin offered her hand, “Leave with me and we can achieve that. Together. Your master, Newt, will only hold you back.”
Newt.

Credence’s head burst through the top of the waves - darkness clearing for just a moment. He gazed upon the crumpled form on the ground, gritting his teeth and trying to reach him. His hand outstretched towards him. His kind meadow-green eyes stretched with worry.

Newt.

Newt who showed him kindness. Newt who had put his life on hold for him. Newt who had confided in him. Trusted him. Comforted him and allowed himself to be comforted. Newt who was his closest friend.

Newt who now screamed in agony when Munin pointed her wand at him.

Credence’s world turned white.

The shadowed ocean boiled. A wicked storm brewed and filled the sky with endless darkness.

“No.”

---

When the Roman Colosseum was established in 80 AD, various battles were waged within it for the entertainment of Kings and everyday citizens. Glorious sea conflicts against rival countries and monsters were reenacted. Tales of the God’s various transgressions - both good and bad - were performed in dramatic plays. Executions of wicked criminals were carried out and hunting parties of exotic animals were held.

But, the most popular sport held within its famous stone walls were gladiatorial contests.

When the Colosseum was in its prime, spectators would gather into the stadium and cheer for their favorite gladiators while they battled against each other and against ferocious beasts.

Newt now felt a kinship with those spectators.

But, instead of being filled with awe and enchantment, Newt just felt sick.

Everything had happened in a flash.

Credence’s beautifully, impossibly dark eyes turned completely white.

The Obscurus leaked through every pore - dripping out like sludge and gasoline - and dismantled every bone, every nerve, every muscle, and every ligament of the young wizard.

Credence unleashed an unholy, agonized scream and burst into pieces until nothing remained except a swarming ocean of living darkness. It’s supernatural howl positively deafening. Newt covered his ears and hummed to drown it out.

Munin didn’t bother with such preoccupations.

Instead, she quickly bolted to her feet and quickly cast a Protego.

But, clearly this was her first genuine encounter with an Obscurus - especially one this powerful. The
shield proved to be no match against all of Credence’s might, shattering like glass as it barreled against it. The Obscurus wrapped Munin up in its coils and whirled through the train like a vengeful hurricane.

The windows shattered.

Broken glass showered down.

“Credence!” Newt stumbled into action, the lingering effects of Munin’s Crucio causing him to fall once and slam his nose into the floor.

However, that didn’t stop Newt from running down the corridors. From chasing after the Obscurus and the tortured boy trapped within it. “Credence, stop!”

The creature didn’t listen.

Munin - somehow retaining consciousness - was flung against the wall, the roof, the floor. Her wand tossed aside. She struggled to retrieve it, her fingers brushing over the handle, before the Obscurus took hold of her once again and dragged her away.

It was difficult to witness: an Obscurus caught within its blind rage.

But, Newt continued forward - each step more painful than the next.

He collapsed to his knees.

Pushing himself up through his agony, Newt continued with each and every step with a labored breath. He dragged himself to the edge of the raging Obscurus - the outskirts of the storm - and stretched his hand inside the wispy darkness.

“Credence, stop.”

Everything froze.

Munin dropped to the floor.

The follower of Grindelwald scrambled for her wand and disapparated.

Leaving Newt and Credence behind.

Letting Munin escape would surely come back to haunt them later; but, Newt had much more important things to take care of. Whatever Grindelwald’s followers were up to (and, perhaps, Grindelwald himself?) could wait.

“Credence;’” Newt reached further into the Obscurus, the physical darkness trailing off his fingers like smoke, “I’m here.”

Everything remained quiet within the train compartment sans the occasional sound of glass crunching beneath Newt’s feet. There was nothing - not even the sounds of running footsteps - which made Newt wonder whether the other passengers and workers suffered the same fate as the conductor.

“She’s gone, Credence. It’s okay,” Newt continued soothing, “You’re okay.”

The Obscurus flowed over him, draping Newt in robes of smoke and shadow. It’s tendrils inspected his face and the blood which coated his nose, his lips, his chin with surprising tenderness.
It was worried about him.

Perhaps, even-...

“You’re protecting him,” Newt inhaled deeply through his mouth, caught within a revelation, “You’re protecting us.”

The Obscurus didn’t respond.

“Thank you,” Newt reached up into the darkness and embraced it, “But, I need you to bring him back to me. Let Credence return.”

A pause.

“Please.”

The Obscurus’ murky tendrils retracted and the shadows condensed. Newt wrapped his arms around the form until it was not darkness he held onto but Credence himself.

“It’s okay,” Newt hushed, “You’re okay.”

“I’m sorry,” Credence clung onto his back tightly, his fingers entwining in the thin fabric of Newt’s nightshirt, and sobbed into his shoulder.

Newt quietly held the trembling boy. He rubbed his back and smoothed down the thick, black hair that curled just around his ears. He shh-ed like a mother comforting their frightened child and whispered sweet reassurances into his ear.

It pained him greatly to see Credence like this.

Every time he was hurt or angered, Newt was hurt and angered.

Whenever he was upset, Newt was upset.

Everything that Credence felt, Newt felt right along with him.

“You’re a good and kind person, Credence,” Newt confessed within a whisper, uncertain whether his friend would hear through his sobbing, “You deserve none of this.”

He leaned backwards a little and took Credence’s face between his hands. His dark eyes were puffy and reddened but, no traces of the Obscurus remained.

Nothing except a man in pain.

“Rest, Credence. I’ll take care of you.”

“These donuts are wonderful. Send Queenie my best regards.”

“I will,” Tina crossed her arms over her chest.

“I’ll take a dozen more.”
“Graves.”

“Yes, Miss Goldstein?” One Percival Graves - battered, bruised, and skinnier than he had once been - grabbed another perfectly glazed donut and raised a brow, “Do you mean to tell me that you won’t bring in another box, my dearest colleague that didn’t notice that a Dark Lord was impersonating me for months while I rotted away in a suitcase?”

Tina groaned and rubbed her hands over her face, “You’re going to use that against us whenever you want something now, aren’t you?”

“You bet your ass I am.”

As bitter and as haunted as Graves was by his ordeal, he smiled just the tiniest bit to show that he was teasing.

Normality. That’s all that he wanted after what he’d been through. Graves desired nothing more than for everything to return to normal except, perhaps, using what he’d been through as guilty leverage over his colleagues.

It was their own damned fault for not noticing that anything was wrong.

They should be thrilled that these were the only consequences they were suffering.

“We missed you,” Tina confessed after a moment, “Not having that snark around really dulled the place down.”

“Hardly,” Graves scoffed, “I bet it was like I was never gone.”

“Ouch.”

“Ah, ouch,” Graves hummed and gestured towards Tina with the remnants of his donut, “Just like the Crucios I endured at the hands of Gellert Grindelwald every night just so he could retrieve a piece of my hair for his Polyjuice Potion.”

“Graves,” Tina groaned.

“Goldstein.”

Tina smirked and leaned back in her chair, stretching her arms above her head. Her spine cracked.

“Who gets the honor of interrogating Grindelwald today?”

“Thomas.”

Tina raised a brow.

“Mr. Thomas T. Thomas?”

“The very one.”

“10 bucks says that he comes running out screaming.”

“In fear or frustration?”

“Both.”

Graves rolled his eyes and pilfered another donut.
“Okay,” Tina snapped the box shut and dragged it over onto her desk, “That’s enough for you.”

“Oh no,” Graves drawled and idly pulled the box back onto his work-space, “What are you going to do? Lock me away in a suitcase?”

“You’re insufferable.”

Cheerful whistling echoed through the Auror’s Workroom as the Lunch Lady descended the elevator with her trolley. The metal contraption *dinged* and Esme slid open the gate with a graceful wandflick.

Thomas T. Thomas - the MACUSA’s newest and youngest Auror - burst through the doors on the other side of the office, grunting and practically tearing his hair out in frustration.

“Ha!” Tina pointed at Graves as the Lunch Lady carted her way through the sea of desks with her trolley, “You owe me 10 big ones!”

“If I do recall, I never actually took you up on your bet,” Graves huffed and waved Esme down, “What’s his lunch looking like?”

“Roasted chicken breast, mashed potatoes, and a glass of milk, sir.”

“Hmm,” Graves tapped his chin, “I’ll take that one off your hands. Give him the Bologna with Mustard on Rye tray. Grindelwald just *loves* sandwiches.”

The Lunch Lady frowned and averted her gaze to the tiled floor, “I… I don’t know if I can do that, sir.”

“Suitcase,” Graves played the guilt card while gingerly lifting the tray of Roasted Chicken off her hands, “Tortured. Starved. You all noticed *nothing* .”

“Yes, of course, sir,” Esme squeaked timidly and bit her lower lip, “The Bologna with Mustard on Rye for Mr. Grindelwald. Right. U-uhm, sir.”

“That’s what I thought you said,” Graves turned away and set the lunch tray onto his desk.

“You would think that after being tortured, Grindelwald would have done us all a kindness and have removed the stick from up your ass,” Tina huffed.

“Oh shut up,” Graves rolled his eyes, his mouth full of chicken and donut, “The next time you’re captured and impersonated, then you can complain all you want.”

“You don’t have to be so mean to Esme, though. She’s just the Lunch Lady.”

Graves groaned and swallowed his food. Rubbing his hand over his face, he called out, “Esme?”

The trolley halted.

“I’m sorry for being *mean* ,” Graves apologized, looking pointedly at a smug Tina, “It was horribly rude of me and you didn’t deserve to be talked to in such a manner.”

“Thank you, sir.”

The trolley pushed forward.

“Happy now, Miss Goldstein?” Graves turned back around in his chair and returned to his meal.
“Very.”

Esme, the simple and demure Lunch Lady, pushed through the doors leading towards Grindelwald’s holding chamber.

Her golden curls neatly pinned up and gray eyes looking forward. Her bruises hidden behind an expertly cast charm.

Munin continued forward, whistling a happy tune.

Chapter End Notes

Another chapter finished! And so many things happened!

Will Jacob and Queenie ever properly reunite? What are Grindelwald's mysterious plans for Credence? Will there be more Crewt hugs in the future? Will Graves ever stop being an ass and get his second box of donuts?

Tune in next time on Green Meadows, Dark Skies!

So, everyone, I have wonderful news! I was accepted into a study abroad program in Paris this summer! But, what does that mean for you?

Well, the program doesn't officially start until June; so, I will be working hard to crank out chapters and finish this story before I depart! We're getting to the halfway mark of the chapters I've planned so, hopefully everything will progress (like Credence and Newt's relationship) smoothly!

So, how am I doing? Is there anything about my writing that I should improve upon? Please leave your comments and constructive criticism below! What was your favorite part of this chapter or the story so far? Is there anything you'd like to see more of? Less of?

Your comments keep this story going! I love them all and all you lovelies are truly the best followers I could ask for!
My Life, Your Hands

Chapter Notes

There are many different classifications of fairies within the Wizarding World. The first type is the fairfolk which are beautiful tricksters that lure Muggles into their lands for undetermined purposes. While some possess human features, they all distinctly look like they belong to the supernatural world. For example, a fae may have the physical silhouette of a person but, their skin is made of bark, their hair made of thick moss, and have antlers branching out of their heads.

The second type of fairy are sprites. They look predominantly human except scaled down to the size of a finger. They act like bees and other pollinators, helping plants and flowers grow. They are relatively harmless but, can hold grudges for centuries when crossed. Do NOT anger a sprite.

The third type of fairy are simply known as fairies. They are grotesque little creatures bigger than a sprite but significantly smaller than the fae. They are the most mischievous and chaotic of the three types of fairies.

Newt has a few tooth fairies living inside his suitcase. He also has a colony of sprites living in the forest section of his suitcase past the occamies. Sprites do NOT like milk-soaked bread with honey. They like freshly cut strawberries.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Comfort and bliss.

One Credence Barebone - obscurial extraordinaire and apprentice magizoologist - lazed about in bed with an ancient patchwork quilt comfortably clutched to his chest.

It was peaceful here. The sun shined into the bedroom yet, only the warmth reached into the shadowy nook of his bed. Soft chirping echoed throughout like a professionally orchestrated melody or an operatic composition signaling the beginning of a new day. Matched with the not-quite-soft yet not-quite-hard bed he lounged upon, this all spelled out heaven for Credence.

As a born and raised city boy, he had always fantasized about waking up in the countryside.

To the wafting aroma of tart apple pie.

To the harsh crow of a proud, pompous rooster.

To the feeling of warm sun rays brushing across his cheek.

His childhood imagination had stretched out far and wide. He had often pictured himself traveling in an old, colonial caravan venturing out into the untamed southwest.

Perhaps he would end up in the wooded mountains of Colorado?

Perhaps nestled in a log cabin near the soft, bubbling whispers of the Mississippi River?
Perhaps he would live in a humble ranch on the wide plains of Texas?

He imagined becoming a cowboy and building a farmhouse with his bare hands in the middle of nowhere. He would grow corn and wheat, raise a flock of sheep and herd of goats, and monitor his land with a beautiful chestnut horse and a fluffy sheepdog by his side.

Sometimes he *dreamed.*

Even though he was now big and grown, sometimes he still dreamed about escaping out into the country.

Live his life in peace and happiness.

Credence slowly ran his hands down the mattress, stretching out his oddly sore muscles and stiff bones. He lazily flipped over and pressed his face into the pillow. His head gingerly sank into it like a cloud.

He inhaled deeply.

Credence smiled and pressed his face further into it, slipping his arms underneath the soft pillow and holding it close.

It smelled like *Newt.*

He breathed in the smell of grass, dirt, and sweat. It was a bizarre aroma but, it was one that suited Newt. He was a man that belonged outdoors running through forests and getting his hands dirty.

He could never be cooped up within an office building or trapped behind a desk.

Newt was a reckless adventurer that would sketch within his leather-bound notebook hanging inches away from a precarious ledge, capturing the likeness of a rare nesting creature. He would be hurriedly scribbling in his journal while being chased through the dunes by a wild dragon in Egypt.

Perhaps *that* was why Newt’s handwriting was so atrocious.

Credence snorted and hugged the pillow closer.

It was a rather strange occurrence. Credence now dreamed more about running by his wild wizard’s side than roaming the countryside as a lone ranger.

All of Credence’s dreams and aspirations, actually, involved Newt being there right by his side.

Sweat would be dripping down his cheek after a wild chase.

A stupid grin plastered across his angelic face.

Endearing babblings about how wonderful whatever creature it was that just tried to kill them.

Credence listening with matching enthusiasm.

He hummed - content with the thought of their adventures spanning that far into the future.

Credence rolled onto his side and ran his fingers through his hair.

It was longer now than it had ever been. Never before had he realized just how wavy his hair was. Mother had always kept it cropped short and neat like a distinguished, pious gentlemen. But, now,
the ends of his hair were sporting faint curls hanging just past the nape of his neck.

Delighted, Credence ran both hands through the soft, silky strands.

Venturing down his scalp with newfound enthusiasm and feeling freer than he had ever been.

Reaching the slight dent right behind his ear and-..!

His fingers froze.

Touching the dip that was no longer than a thumb.

Yet, to Credence, the old wound stretched further than the deepest caverns.

Revulsion bubbled up within his stomach. He suddenly found that he didn’t quite like touching himself anymore.

Credence sat up and pushed off the unfamiliar rustic patchwork quilt. He stared at the blue and white striped pajamas covering his legs.

That’s right.

He had just been changing into them when the train had suddenly-...

The world halted.

Credence clutched at his chest, his eyes wide.

Where…

Where was he?!

The wooden cabin-styled interior sparked a vague feeling of comfort and familiarity.

A pair of black trousers swayed above the barely-opened window - seemingly having been flung there long enough ago to collect dust. Parchment of various sizes and contents were scattered everywhere except the desk; however, while looking like chaos, still seemed hurriedly cleaned.

A magnificent oak chest of various opened drawers loomed beside the bed. The sunlight reflected across the lacquer, giving it a distinguished shine as the most expensive item in the room.

At the bottom, a large, empty rectangular drawer remained haphazardly ajar. A smaller drawer above it contained a set of blue and orange polka-dotted socks. The one next to it contained finely-pressed white button-up shirts, while the one at the very top contained gray and yellow ties-...

The tension abandoned his shoulders. He let out a breath of relief.

Credence had woken up in Newt’s cabin.

He had never stepped foot past the kitchen and general living area towards the front; but, the pandemonic clutter that reached every nook and cranny of this room screamed Newt. The bed smelled of him and the gray and yellow ties that could only belong to a former Hufflepuff confirmed it.

But, why wasn’t Newt here with him?
Why didn’t Credence remember climbing down the stairs?

Credence slipped his long legs over the bed, pressing his feet against the cold hardwood floor. He gazed around the room for a second longer, savoring the warm feeling of being in Newt’s bedroom, before standing up and heading out the door in search of the wizard and answers.

---

_Bugger bugger bugger!!!_

Vibrant green leaves blurred together until the surrounding trees seemed like one giant forest monster waiting to strike. The brown trunks were its wickedly grimacing teeth, the visible roots its gnarled hands, and the small boulders its hideous moles.

Sunlight burst through an unfortunate opening in the thick canopy and shined into Newt’s eyes, momentarily blinding him.

With a shout, he tripped over an old, rotting log that coincidentally happened to have fallen right in his path. His poor, bruised face and aching nose couldn’t take much more of this. His palms and knees stung viciously and, glancing down, he inwardly groaned at the holes now ripped in his pants.

But, there was no time to think about the literal tatters that was his life. He was already pulling himself up onto his feet, suitcase in hand, and running as if the devil were on his heels.

And, as a matter of fact, they were.

_Bugger bugger bugger!!!_

A _stupefy_ shot past his ear.

_Fuck!_

He continued to run.

Thankfully, Newt was born with impeccably strong lungs otherwise he would be wheezing for air right about now. How long had it been since they first gave chase? 15 minutes? An hour?

His skinned knees screamed with every step and his nose agonizingly pulsed as his nosebleed - having stopped the previous night - started gushing down his chin once again.

He didn’t know whether these _annoyingly persistent_ wizards belonged to Wizarding France having come to question him about the peculiar - and rather deadly where Muggles were concerned - events which transpired on the train or whether they were recruits of Grindelwald.

Merlin, who knows? Grindelwald was smart and charming enough to have followers in the French government!

Either way, Newt couldn’t take the chance of running into them.

Of having word sent back to Grindelwald about where they were.

Where _Credence_ was.
The dark wizard was already bound to have discovered that Credence was alive. Even when locked up, Newt was certain that Munin had ways of sending back information to her master.

And she had already seen so much.

But, if Newt could somehow make it seem like he had doubled back on his plans... That he was traveling in a different direction - to a different destination - from planned...

Perhaps he could buy them some time and keep himself safe.

To keep Credence safe.

His suitcase rattled - one of the clips popping open.

Newt quickly shut it with a click and continued to run.

Credence pressed his lips into a firm line and, holding onto the ladder to give him more momentum, pushed up against the door again.

No budge.

Strange. That had never happened before.

Whenever they were working together inside the suitcase, Newt always left the clips open. Perhaps Newt had simply locked it out of habit after exiting? After all, Credence was just a new addition to his already established years of traveling alone.

No... no. That was preposterous.

Newt may have been a scatterbrained fellow with a propensity to go off on wild tangents but, he wouldn’t have just forgotten Credence in here. Newt was eccentric but, he wasn’t an idiot.

Was he... trying to keep him inside?

Credence’s throat suddenly dried.

After witnessing his unrestrained power - the rage and fury of the Obscurus - up close, had Newt gotten scared of what he could do? Frightened of what happened when he lost control? Did Newt come to the decision that it was better to keep him...

Caged?

Trapped within a magical bubble like the master-less Obscurus?

Credence’s grip on the ladder tightened.

A resounding crack echoed throughout the front room as his untamed power lashed out involuntarily. The ladder wobbled dangerously until it came crashing down... with Credence on it.

With a surprised cry, he toppled over into the bags of potatoes and other root vegetables, sending a few toppling out and rolling underneath the kitchen stove. The ladder fell onto his chest and caused
all the air contained within his lungs to sputter out.

Bruised and sore, Credence slumped into the vegetable bags with a low groan.

Counting his limbs and making sure that he still had all his fingers and toes, Credence determined that he was, overall, fine. A little scratched up but, fine nonetheless.

The same couldn’t be said for the ladder.

The foundation laid in pieces: the wood shattered at the bottom so completely that nothing but splinters remained.

Well, Credence supposed with an inward groan, now was a better time than ever to practice his *Reparo*.

He pushed the broken ladder off of him and ruffled his hair to get rid of any remaining splinters and wood dust. This wasn’t how he hoped his day would begin: trapped within Newt’s suitcase with no explanation as to why, bruised and sore, and now without a ladder to bring him to freedom’s door.

His fingers froze in his hair.

Newt.

Why wasn’t he here? Why had he done this? *Why?*

Was he… was he really that upset with him?

He hadn’t even said Fizzle Whiskers.

Credence stood up and brushed off his shoulders, his mouth set in a firm, determined line.

That’s right. How could he have possibly doubted him?

Newt hadn’t said the word or had even left him a note with it illegibly scrawled upon it. He wasn’t upset. It wasn’t *feasible* that he was upset. He had promised to let him know if he ever was.

Newt would never go back on his word.

*Never.*

No, for some reason or another, Newt needed Credence to remain in here and it was urgent enough to keep the suitcase locked. Furthermore, whatever it was, it was urgent enough that Newt left the very care of his creatures to Credence. He trusted him to hold his own life in his scarred, ugly hands.

So, for whatever reason that Newt needed him in here, Credence trusted him.

He trusted him with all his heart and soul.

No more shadows.

No more whispers of doubt.

Only trust.

Credence rolled up his sleeves.

There was work to do.
So much to do.
So much to do.
So much to do.

So much to do!!!

Most importantly, though, Newt needed his suitcase. Desperately so.

He had only just managed to stuff it inside an old tree burrow that an owl (or something or other) used to nest in. He had had just enough time to pull up a glamour to disguise it as any normal tree and to run a couple of feet away—...

Only for one of his pursuants to capture him with a nicely timed binding spell.

For Merlin’s sake, his poor, poor nose was bound to remain forever crooked at this point.

Blood oozed down Newt’s chapped lips and dripped drip after drip from his chin. The stiff paper butterfly at his lapel - disguised as a peculiar bow tie - twitched as the droplets threatened to fall on her.

Newt sniffled and held his head high to try and stop the bleeding. The coppery scent of blood did nothing to help him concentrate.

He needed to escape.

Quickly too.

There were only enough supplies in his cabin to last a couple days out without worry and if the school of miniature kelpies didn’t receive their bi-weekly medications, they were bound to get grumpy. If he wasn’t there to help them then…

Then…

No, everything would be fine. Credence was there and, so, he needn’t worry. His apprentice had his notes and Newt held the utmost confidence in him. The man was a fast learner and far more resilient than he thought himself to be.

Everything would be fine. His creatures would be taken care of.

But, Newt still wanted to make sure Credence was okay.

He needed to make sure he was okay.

Newt shifted and toppled over onto the side with a loud oof! It was difficult moving since, well, his hands and feet were bound behind his back! But, Newt was a determined young man without an ounce of pride and, thus, crawled like an inchworm across the dirt-covered cell until he reached the metal bars trapping him inside.

“Pardon me,” he addressed the guard stationed just outside, “But, you wouldn’t happen to have a
tissue, would you?”

No response.

He grimaced and furrowed his brows in deep concentration.

“Bonjour, monsieur er... gardien?” Newt fumbled over his words, “Oui, bonjour. Avez-vous un... une? Non, un mou... mouchoir que je peux... pourrais utiliser pour ma... mon nez? Il... Il saigne.”

The guard glanced over.

Oh, goodness gracious was this boy young! His stocky build and pressed uniform made him look 10 years older than he really was but, the youthfulness of his eyes and the lack of wrinkles across his face indicated his age.

A moment passed before he finally curtly responded, “Non, monsieur.”

“Je comprend, monsieur,” Newt visibly deflated and rested his cheek against the floor, “Merci.”

He left it at that. Silence spanned between them.

After a moment, the guard awkwardly squirmed. Every so often he would glance over in Newt’s direction and a conflicted look would flash over his baby blue eyes.

Newt was certain that he looked pathetic.

Sprawled out helplessly with dried blood coating his chin like a strange form of stage makeup and, now, a fresh wave of liquid rouge slowly dripping down onto the floor. The blood collecting in a small puddle and staining his cheek.

The guard shifted from foot to foot.

Newt sighed pitifully.

“Eh bien,” the guard looked back and forth down the halls before holding up a forefinger to him, “Un moment, monsieur. J’ai besoin...”

Newt didn’t quite catch what else the guard said next since his understanding of French was feeble at best. He could speak and write well enough to pass by however, his listening comprehension was, by far, overly sub-par.

No matter how hard he tried - no matter how hard he concentrated - all the words just seemed to blend together into one gurgly mushy mess.

So, he just nodded along and put in enough “Oui, monsieur”s and “Non, monsieur”s whenever he thought it appropriate.

After a practically one-sided conversation that seemed to last twice an eternity, the guard reluctantly left his post - possibly to search for a tissue like Newt requested or for a guard to replace him so that he could look for said tissue.

Either way, Newt didn’t have much time.

He scooted up into a sitting position and sniffled loudly.

He sniffled again.
And again.

And once more for good measure.

An annoyed squeak emerged from his pocket.

“Pickett, my bestest of friends,” New cooed innocently, the paper butterfly at his lapel fluttering excitedly, “Mind picking the lock?”

Credence awoke once again in Newt’s bed.

Alone.

To the sounds of songbirds chirping and sunlight caressing his face but, still otherwise completely alone.

Rubbing his eyes, Credence hoisted his legs over the side of the bed. He stretched his arms sluggishly over his head and yawned before tiredly crossing the room to start another day of work, grabbing his coat from the desk chair and slipping his arms through the sleeves.

He found himself getting used to the quiet.

Well, as quiet as you could be living in a suitcase filled to the brim with fantastic creatures. The Erumpent would huffle and snort about at night and the faint booms of a raging thunderstorm would echo near the underwater habitat.

Regardless, there was still quiet to be found within all this noise.

He had no one to talk to.

Credence turned on the kitchen stove and heated up a cast iron pan, cracking two eggs inside it and sprinkling it with a little salt and pepper. He slipped out his wand from the depths of his coat pocket and cast a small spell - the dented teapot flying out of the cabinet and filling itself up with water.

He flicked his wand again and potatoes flew out from their canvas bags and began peeling themselves at the counter.

Content with his work, he slipped his wand back into his pocket and smiled.

Whenever there was a lull in the amount of creature care-taking and habitat maintenance that he had to do, Credence would practice magic. Simple, household spells had come to him with ease. He had mastered the Reparo and fixed the ladder to the point where it looked as good as new and the culinary spells really helped him in the mornings.

But, once, Credence had attempted something new. Intending to levitate a vibrant green fern, he had ended up levitating an entire tree - uplifting the roots and all to the dismay of the forest fairies.

Credence rubbed the back of his neck. It still felt sore after being pelted with acorns.

He scrambled the eggs and let it continue cooking before heading over to the ladder, staring up at it with a sense of anticipation… and hope. He would climb up there every morning and night and push
upon the exit.

Every time he was met with resistance.

Slowly, Credence hoisted himself up, taking each step one at a time and holding his breath; and, when he reached the top, gently pushed.

Hoping.

Praying that he could finally be let out.

Nothing. The door wouldn’t budge.

Credence rested his head against the top step and gripped the handles. Tears burned his eyes. Something pathetic choked his throat.

The eggs sizzled and popped in the background. The teapot sharply whistled. The birds fluttering outside tweeted merrily.

Credence’s trust in Newt never once wavered.

He would never abandon him. He would never abandon his creatures.

It revealed more of Newt’s incredible trust in him to take care of his creatures while he was out doing… whatever it was he was doing. He was relying on Credence, not punishing him.

So, Credence peeled the potatoes and deboned the fish. He prepared medicines and brewed potions to the best of his ability. He dove into the Kraken’s tank (hating every moment being submerged in the water) and cleaned it while escaping its affectionate, bone-crushing hugs. He climbed the mountains where the mooncalves roamed after one of them got stuck within a crevice. He repaired the occamy nest after a hole was ripped into it and he even bathed the Niffler.

He trimmed the Bowtruckle’s tree and chatted with Pickett’s family no matter how much it hurt that he didn’t know where Pickett or Prue were.

He hoped they were alright.

He hoped that they were safe.

He hoped that Newt was safe.

The teapot’s shrill cry grew louder. The bitter smell of smoke filled the room.

Credence slid down the ladder and wiped his eyes, stirring the slightly burned eggs and dishing them onto a plate. He made the tea, switched the oven off, and headed outside to have breakfast with the Doogle.

The creature had taken a liking to him and Credence had formed a fondness for him as well. They kept each other company.

That, and Newt was right.

The Doogle really did give the best hugs.

“Good morning,” Credence greeted the creature with a small, polite smile and offered him a raw, peeled potato. The Doogle quickly snatched the vegetable and devoured it with the ferocity of a
famished pride of lions.

“Pace yourself,” Credence chided and sat down beside the sloth-like creature. It’s wide, owlish and oddly knowing eyes shimmered with a magical glow before outstretching its hand.

Credence sighed affectionately, unable to say no, and pulled out another potato, “Just one. And, for goodness sake, chew before you swallow.”

The Doogle snatched it out of his hands and stared at him while taking an ungodly slow bite as if to say, “See? I can chew.”

“Oh hush,” Credence rolled his eyes and stuck his fork into his eggs, scooping them up and into his mouth, “I’m just looking out for you. I wouldn’t want you to choke.”

The Doogle merely continued staring at him, eating slower and slower as if trying to establish a point.

“Though,” Credence groaned and pointed his fork at him, “I suppose you would foresee if you choked and, well, died. I get it. I get it. But, my point still stands!”

Satisfied, the Doogle seemed to smirk (the sheer nerve!) and resumed eating the potato; but, at a more normal pace this time.

Thus, the unlikely pair lounged together on the front porch stairs, gazing out into the habitat that Newt built with his own two hands while eating their breakfast.

The artificial sunlight beamed down on them with just as much warmth as the real thing. Fresh dew dripped off the blades of grass before them. Fairies fluttered around and collected the drops.

Upon seeing Credence, one of them stuck out its tongue and blew a raspberry.

Totally mature and dignified, Credence blew a raspberry back.

Almost immediately after, he felt the Doogle’s judgmental eyes upon him.

“What?” Credence certainly wasn’t pouting like an impertinent child, “They have no business being mad at me. I fixed their tree! I even gave them a peace offering of milk-soaked bread with honey!” He had read in Newt’s notes that fairies go nuts for it.

An acorn was suddenly thrown at his cheek.

Credence scowled and turned towards the fairies who quickly dispersed.

“That’s right,” he huffed and finished his eggs, setting the plate aside, “You know what you did! I’ll be expecting an apology later.”

Another acorn hit the top of his head this time.

Credence groaned loudly and flopped backwards, laying on the front porch. He remained there for a moment, listening to the soft buzzing of the early morning creatures.

Loneliness crept into his chest and hollowed him out to make room for its wicked nest. How cruel a thing loneliness was. Always growing bigger with each passing second, hour, and day with no alleviation.

“I want to go outside,” he whispered quietly.
The Doogle stopped chewing and glanced back at him.

“I know. I know… But, I mean the real outside. With a real sun and real clouds and a real sky,” Credence exhaled deeply, dreaming that this week would end. That he would finally climb up that ladder, push upon the exit, and feel the breeze - a real breeze - across his face. He hated being cooped up.

But, more importantly, he hated not knowing what was happening.

“I-… Don’t get me wrong. I like spending time in here and I love our morning conversations,” he smiled over at the Doogle; however, it quickly dipped into a frown, “But, I… I miss him. I need to know that he’s alright and that he’s not in danger. You know how he is: leaping first without thinking. Getting himself into trouble.”

Hello loneliness. Meet your new neighbor: misery.

Credence covered his face with his hands and hissed in pure frustration and agony. Hot tears began forming at the corners of his eyes.

Wonderful. He was crying for the second time this morning and he hadn’t even gotten properly dressed yet.

He hated this.

He hated Newt.

Why? Why?! Why had he left him in here without leaving any word or explanation? This wasn’t fair! How could Newt have left him all alone in here without any guidance? Without instruction? Without anything?

Without him?

God, Credence hated him.

He hated him so much.

And yet…

“I miss him,” Credence sobbed into his hands, “I miss him more with each passing second of each passing day. I… I don’t want to be alone anymore! I want him back!”

He missed Newt’s face that smiled with the very force of the sun.

He missed the feeling of his hands upon his shoulders - so strong, supportive, and warm.

He missed the way Newt would babble to himself in his sleep and cuddle up into his pillow, drooling upon it.

He missed the pink of his freckled cheeks and the insufferable tawny mop of hair that always had a few strands hanging across his forehead that Credence always wanted to brush away.

He missed the way Newt would scarf down his food like a starving man or the light in his beautiful, impossibly green eyes whenever he got a stupid idea or the way he would hold his hand and drag him into something dangerous or new or exciting.

He missed knowing where he was.
He missed having him close.

He hated hated hated HATED Newt for doing this to him.

Didn’t he know that Credence was hopeless without him there? That he was miserable and lonely? Lonelier than he had ever been as an orphan or even after he was adopted by his mother?

Didn’t he know that all Credence wanted was to have him around?

Screw his safety. Screw his happiness. He was sick of being protected and locked away like a damsel in distress waiting for their knight in shining armor! He just wanted Newt to be okay.

He just wanted Newt.

Credence brought his hands away from his face, staring into them with wide, dewy eyes.

He just… wanted Newt.

Credence sat up and stared at Doogle - whose arms were already outstretched for a hug - and pulled him into an embrace, pressing his face into the creature’s soft fur.

Did he…

Did he like him?

Oh God.

Oh God. Oh God. Oh God. OH GOD.

“Newt!” Credence scrambled to his feet - after carefully placing the Doogle back onto the floor - andbolted into the cabin. He skidded to a quick stop, grabbed another peeled potato, and threw it back to the eager creature, before continuing forward.

He was a man on a mission.

Nothing was going to stop him.

Nothing.

Not even a door.

He scurried up the ladder, his feet barely touching the ground, with newfound vigor and desperation.

“Newt!”

He banged against the door with all his strength. Credence would break through it - shatter it to pieces - if he had to.

Who cared what Newt was doing?

Who cared if he was in danger?

If he was in danger, then Credence needed to be there right alongside him! He may have been an inexperienced, slightly trained wizard new to the magical world but, damn it, he couldn’t just be tossed aside and let Newt do all the work! He had already done so much for him already.

And if Newt got hurt because of him…
“Newt,” Credence banged furiously against the door, his untamed power lashing out in his worried, desperate frenzy and throwing kitchenware across the room below, “Newt! Newt!”

He went to bang his fist against the door again when it suddenly snapped open.

And his fist collided with Newt’s nose.

“Newt!”

“Third time today that happened,” Newt whined and pressed an already bloodied handkerchief against his face, “What does everyone have against my nose?”

As horrified as he was that he had accidentally hurt him, Credence scrambled out of the suitcase, grabbed Newt by the shoulders, and stared worriedly into his eyes. He was bruised and dirtied and looked like he hadn’t slept in days but—...

But…

He was fine.

Newt was fine.

Prudence fluttered excitedly at Newt’s lapel, happy to see him. Pickett even poked out of Newt’s coat pocket and chattered with equal joy.

He was okay.

They were all okay.

“Newt,” Credence breathed in relief and held the wizard close, clutching onto his back.

Newt slowly lowered his handkerchief and wrapped his arms around him. He seemed to hesitate for a moment before resting his head against his shoulder, exhausted. “Credence.”

Hearing his voice again - hearing him say his name - filled Credence with such joy and giddiness that loneliness and misery were kicked out of their despicable hovel inside of him.

Credence liked him.

By God, did Credence like him.

But. that was a matter he could reflect upon another time because Newt was safe. He was back and he was safe.

First things first though. Credence had something to get off his chest. Something greatly, insurmountably important that couldn’t wait a second longer.

He pulled Newt away, held him by the shoulders, and smiled with all the charm and happiness in the world.

“Never do that to me again!”

Chapter End Notes
Hello everybody!

Phew! Finally finished with this update! This was a very Credence-centered chapter but, totally worth it if I do say so myself.

So!

He finally discovered his feelings! Yay! But, how will our dearest Credence cope with them? How does Newt feel about Credence in turn? What exactly happened with Newt when Credence was locked inside the suitcase? Was it really Grindelwald's men or was Newt worrying over nothing? Will they EVER get to Italy?

Tune in next time on Green Meadows, Dark Skies!

So, how am I doing? Is my writing okay or is there anything that you think that I should improve upon? Please leave your comments and constructive criticism below! I loving hearing from you all! Comments keep this story going and make the updates faster!

What was your favorite part of this chapter? How do you think this story will end? Is there anything you would like to see more or less of in this fic? Or to just see in general?

I look forward to hearing from you!
Chapter Notes

Lore:

Alma Mae Louis is Tina Goldstein's girlfriend of 5 years. They have been close friends since being sorted into the same house at Ilvermorny and have been inseparable since then. Alma (nicknamed Almasie) is an African-American woman who works as an Herbology Professor at Ilvermorny and is well-known amongst the students and faculty for wearing pink dresses and flowers in her natural hair. Alma is a very shy, soft-spoken, and gentle woman but becomes more free-spirited whenever she's around the Goldstein sisters.

Gellert Grindelwald is a man attracted to power and dismissive of anyone weak. Whether they agree with his ideals or not, he enjoys cultivating people to embrace their strengths and thrive to their highest potential. This usually leads to them flocking to his side but, when they reject him, Grindelwald is satisfied with the knowledge that he is doing battle with people who have reached their highest magical capabilities. The most tragic thing to Grindelwald is seeing witches and wizards not living to their full potential.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Ow!”

“If you stopped squirming so much,” Credence chided softly, dabbing the blood from Newt’s broken nose with a damp washcloth, “We would’ve already been finished.”

At first, Credence had uttered a thousand apologies after accidentally hurting Newt; and, after purposefully hurting Newt while tending to his wounds. However, after an hour had already passed and they were no closer to finishing as they had when they first started, Credence switched tactics.

Now, he was currently treating Newt as if he were one of the orphans who used to be underneath his care: with never-ending patience, gentleness, and just a hint of sass.

“But, it hurts,” Newt whined as if he really were an impoverished five-year-old orphan.

“And that you were dragged off by a harpy and dumped into their nest,” Credence quirked up a brow, “Full of fresh hatchlings.”

“Which I was,” Newt gestured to himself, “Just look at my shoulder-...”

“And that you were half-drowned by a water wraith in an Irish lake.”

“Yes! Yes, I get your point,” Newt flung up his hands in a mixture of exasperation and defeat; giving
him the most pathetic puppy-eyed look that Credence had to turn his gaze elsewhere. Oh look, the floors really needed to be swept. “But, it still hurts.”

“It would hurt less,” Credence sighed and leaned over, dunking the bloodied cloth into the bucket of red-tinted water to clean it, “If you stopped moving.”

“Yes, Mum,” Newt groaned.

Credence paused.

The washcloth floated above the water. His hand poised right above it. Empty.

Newt seemed to realize that calling Credence ‘Mum’, even in an obviously joking manner, was not the greatest or brightest of ideas.

“Credence,” his voice had dropped an octave, heavy with apology, “I’m s-...”

Credence merely leaned forward and touched the side of his nose, inspecting the fractured area. Newt squirmed uncomfortably.

“I’d rather be called Dad,” he hummed after a long moment.

It took Newt a second to realize that he wasn’t upset before retorting, “What about Pops?”

“Papa?” Credence lightly pinched Newt’s nose between two fingers, feeling for the break. “Father?”

“Too formal,” Credence shook his head, “Pa?”

“I didn’t know you were Southern, Credence,” Newt grinned.

Credence smirked and took Newt’s nose right between his hands, snapping it sharply back into place.

Newt howled and cradled his nose.

“You were distracting me on purpose!”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” he responded innocently, retrieving the soaked cloth again and dabbing away the fresh wave of blood dripping down Newt’s lips and chin.

“What am I ever to going to do with you, Credence,” Newt pathetically bemoaned.

“Not lock me in the suitcase again for starters.”

“Har har,” Newt groaned and pushed away Credence’s fretting hands. He walked over to the kitchen sink and surveyed himself in the ancient mirror, touching his sore nose and wincing.

Credence remained seated with the bloodied washcloth in hand and stared at him - really stared at him.

Newt was covered in bruises; or, rather, what parts of his skin that were visible to him were. A large black and blue mark colored the right side of his forehead. His knees were scraped to oblivion and filled with the telltale gooey white of slowly forming scabs. Newt looked like he hadn’t bathed in the week that he was gone - his coat and skin covered with dirt and grime - and his hands were marred
with gruesome cuts.

Credence’s scars ached.

Silent as a Southern Plantation Ghost during the daytime, he stood up and ventured into Newt’s bedroom.

He squatted before the large lacquered dresser beside the bed and rummaged through the messy drawers before finding the clean clothes he was looking for. Clean shirt and trousers in hand, he headed towards the bathroom.

Newt followed soon after and lingered in the doorway, staring curiously.

Credence merely plugged the claw-footed porcelain tub and turned the water on.

“What are you doing?” Newt’s quiet voice echoed throughout the room.

“I knew your eyesight was failing but, I didn’t think it was this bad,” Credence quipped, running his palm underneath the faucet to test the temperature.

Too cold.

He twisted the knobs.

“I’m running you a bath.”

“I can see that,” Newt slipped his hands into his coat pockets, “But, why?”

“Because you need it.”

As if he hadn’t even considered how dirty he was, Newt glanced down at his mud-covered and dirt-laden clothes and raised his brows. “I’ll be fine. See, I’m not even that dirty-...”

Raising to his full height and placing the backs of his hands against his hips, Credence stared at the protesting wizard with all the power of a wizened Mother Hen.

Newt immediately shut up.

Credence was timid whenever it came to authority figures. Anyone that was older than him or held powerful, prominent positions rendered him meek. Defenseless. Submissive.

But, Credence was used to fretting over a hundred children at a time. Sometimes more.

He ensured that they were well-fed and clothed. He cleaned their cuts and scrapes and helped the younger ones - too innocent to really understand their situation - bathe in the orphanage’s poorly maintained washrooms. Credence would scrub shampoo into their hair and pick the dirt and grime and filth from their fingernails.

Whenever the boys had accidents in their sheets, he laundered them with no questions asked.

When bloody rags started turning up amongst the girl’s quarters, Credence consulted some of the older women down the street who gave him knitted pads and herbal medicines.

When it came to taking care of others, Credence held a certain authority of his own.

An authority powerful enough that even Newt buckled underneath his stern gaze.
“Wash up and change. I placed a fresh set of clothes on the sink,” Credence returned his attention to the tub and turned off the water, “I’ll make you something to eat and, once you’re done, we need to-... we should talk. I want to know what happened and why-...”

Credence faced him again.

“Why you didn’t tell me anything,” his voice suddenly became quieter. The misery and pain of being left alone - oblivious as to what was happening outside the suitcase - returned. “Why you left me in the dark.”

Newt looked startled and glanced back behind him into the bedroom.

“You didn’t see my note?”

Pardon?

“What note?”

“The one on my desk,” Newt answered, perplexed and stepped outside into the bedroom.

Credence heard him rummaging through the papers that he knew were wholly unorganized and threatening to tumble off the desk onto the dusty floors. He was surprised that Newt could find anything in that mess let alone return shortly after with a paper in hand, “Did you think that I would have left you in here without telling you anything, Credence?”

Shame colored Credence’s cheeks as he took the note from Newt and glanced down at the familiar scratchy handwriting addressed to him.

“O-oh.”

“Though, I suppose,” Newt babbled, oblivious to his embarrassment and horror. He sauntered past and shrugged off his dirtied indigo coat, “With the chaos of everything and waking up someplace unfamiliar, it would have been easy to miss. I am sorry for that. Damned hindsight. I should’ve placed it a more easily discoverable position.”

When Newt started unbuttoning his shirt, Credence found himself staring at his long fingers. He had pianist hands - long and nimble fingers that were designed for delicate work.

His throat ran dry.

What would it feel like to have those hands running through his hair?

Touching his cheek?

Newt continued to babble and dropped his shirt to the floor, “You do deserve a better explanation for... well, everything that happened and I promise I will give it to you.”

His broad chest was just as lightly tanned and freckled as his face. His muscles impeccably lean and toned - not overly so - but, enough for his line of work; he, had a body made for running. Black-and-blue bruises, with faint splotches of hideous seaweed green, stained his stomach and upper arms. Old, sinewy scars marred his body. Jagged claw marks across his shoulders, painfully digging in. An ancient fiery blast to his stomach spreading outwards in radiating bursts. Brutal lines and blemishes, sickening gashes and lesions. He had just as many scars as Credence.

But, Newt's were beautiful.
Badges of honor proudly worn across his chest - all for the love and care for his creatures. Newt was a genuine saint - a true, modern-day martyr. The selfless savior of the beaten and misunderstood.

Credence wanted to see them all - to explore every scar and mark. To hear the stories of how he received him. To watch Newt's wild gestures and blinding, grinning face as he regaled him with tales more fantastic than the next.

*Good God*, he was in the bathroom with a stripping witch and thinking wholly indecent thoughts and his cheeks were burning—...

Mother would be rolling around in her grave.

“I- yes…,” Credence stuttered and averted his eyes to the ground, holding the note close to his chest and walking backwards out of the bathroom. Newt - *shirtless* Newt - gazed back at him in alarm. “Uhm… let… let me know when you’re done!”

And with that, he shut the door.

God, he liked Newt.

He really *liked* Newt.

He would’ve liked him even if *he weren’t the most beautiful person he had ever seen*.

And, God in Heaven Above, was Newt beautiful.

Credence held Newt’s note against his chest and slid down the back of the bathroom door until seated against the hardwood.

The last time he had liked someone this much, Mother had found out.

Timothy was his name. Timothy Jonathan Williams. Taller than most boys his age, blond-haired, and had the most beautiful brown eyes that shined golden in the sunlight. He was 12 and Credence 11 when they first met. They attended the same church and were both reaching for the holy water when their hands first touched.

Their cheeks both turned red when they laid eyes upon each other.

After their first stuttered hello, they had developed a quick friendship which turned into even quicker crushes. They passed notes through the back pews telling each other secrets and everyday happenings. Credence mourned the day when Timothy’s father took him for a haircut - his gorgeous blond locks sheared close to his scalp.

Yet, to him, Timothy was still the most beautiful boy he had ever seen.

When summer ended and Timothy declared that he was being sent back to boarding school, they vowed to meet one last time.

Away from the church. Away from the view of their parents. Unsupervised and *free*.

But, Mother had followed him to the park where they had met up.

Pushed him away from the sweet, kind boy he was holding hands with and screamed that Timothy was a hellish devil corrupting her son.

Credence had tumbled down the hillside and hit a rock on the way down.
Denting his skull right behind his ear.

The perhaps not-so-irrational fear of his brains leaking out constricted his heart and lungs. He wailed for his Mother. Tears dampened his cheeks and the back of his neck had grown sticky.

Mother peered down the hill.

Credence outstretched his arm towards her.

And she hesitated.

She.

_Hesitated._

Mother hesitated to help him as he lay there bleeding and hysterical - fearing that he was about to die.

As if letting him perish would have been better than him liking a boy. Of going against God’s will. Of going against _her_ will.

It had disgusted him. Had become his most hated scar. His most detested memory. But now…

Now, Credence was learning that most of what Mother taught him was wrong. He had had his doubts before, sure. Credence had been the most rebellious of the group of children she’d adopted and, thus, Mother’s most hated. Most punished.

And upon discovering how wonderful the wizarding world was…

Perhaps Mother was wrong about this too.

Credence looked at the letter in his hands.

_Ivory parchment scrawled in black ink. Newt’s near-illegible handwriting filled with apologies and regret. Hurriedly detailing that they were being followed. Telling of the trust he had in Credence to take care of his creatures. Promising that he would return soon after._

Credence held the letter close to his fluttering heart as if it could smother it.

Perhaps Mother was wrong after all.

Steam filled the bathroom and fogged the mirror - condensation dripping down and leaving little lines behind. Newt sunk into the hot bath and something halfway between a moan and a hiss escaped his lips as the water leached into his weary bones and stung his wounds.

He slunk further down into it, letting his ears and the back of his head dip just underneath the water and stuck his skinned knees out. Newt closed his eyes and tapped his fingers against the bottom of the porcelain tub - liking how the sound reverberated through the water.

Credence surprised him. Constantly.
Newt really had to hand it to him though: Credence really was a worrier. When he wasn’t acting subdued and meek, he really had an authoritative streak. Being on the receiving end of such a stern look, seeing the parental-like power in his eyes, Newt’s knees had buckled and done exactly as commanded.

There was no in-between where Credence was concerned. The same mouth which spoke hurried apologies doled out playful snark with similar ease.

The same mouth which held a perfect cupid’s bow. Which was the perfect shade of pink. Which created smiles of gleaming starlight which took Newt’s breath away.

He sank further into the bath - the water washing over his face and stinging his nose - uncertain whether the heat was natural in his cheeks or from the warmth of the water.

Newt had noticed his… fondness for Credence not long ago when they were feeding the occamies together. The bumpy feeling of Credence’s scars against his palm and fingers were *heaven*. Newt had wanted nothing more than to continue holding his hand in his.

But, when he had left Credence alone…

When he had returned to the nesting area and had seen Credence so immersed with the occamies, Newt’s heart stopped.

Immediately, he had pulled out his journal and started sketching him.

Started sketching the sharpened edges of his jawline reminiscent of rocky points at the bottom of an oceanside cliff. Started sketching the silky, thick tendrils of his hair which curled so wildly at the ends that Credence’s moon-pale face was almost eclipsed by it’s inky darkness. Started sketching the calm, quiet never-ending seas of obsidian which were his impossibly dark eyes…

He was soft yet sharp. Subdued yet powerful.

And then when Credence had caught him…

Had focused those gorgeous starry night eyes onto him…

Newt pulled himself halfway out of the tub and breathed, reaching for the bar of lavender soap.

He had only felt this way once before.

With Leta.

Wonderful *Leta*.

There were only a handful of people that Newt felt a connection with: an old professor embodied with the spirit of curiosity, the fiery and reckless Hortencia, the beautiful and charming Leta, his friends in New York, among others. Those who understood him and who he, surprisingly, understood as well.

A well-knit band of misfits.

But, it was Leta Lestrange who Newt had fallen head over heels for. He had never felt so fiercely - so passionately - for someone else again and he was perfectly content with that.

But then Credence appeared.
And that dormant part of his heart he once thought to be reserved for Leta and Leta alone sparked to life.

Credence held a curious soul. A soul that contained the sun and moon, yin and yang, light and darkness. He was a man of contradictions - a living dichotomy of a person - and, in that, he was made complete. He was perfection.

And that extraordinary being loved his creatures as much as Newt did. He cherished and cared for them and, perhaps most importantly, held a certain curiosity towards them. Newt often dreamed now about traversing through the jungles of Africa or the subzero weather of Russia with Credence by his side documenting the behaviors of rare and endangered creatures.

Newt hummed at the thought and started scrubbing himself clean.

As long as he could live out the rest of his life with Credence by his side, as friends or something more, he would be more than content.

He would be happy.

“That smells heavenly.”

Credence looked up from the vegetable stew and flushed.

The hot humidity of the bath pulled forth a wonderful shade of pink in Newt’s cheeks. His damp hair stuck against his forehead.

He looked divine. Enchanting. Like a mystical water wraith dressed in boots and a threadbare cotton shirt which clung ever so slightly against his chest—...

“I haven’t eaten in days,” Newt continued, oblivious towards how he looked, and headed over to the small wooden table. He delicately ran his fingers across Credence’s coat - his Slytherin green coat - draped over one of the chairs and sat down.

Newt rubbed away the dew from his eyes, letting out a soft hiss when his fingers brushed against his now bruised nose.

“Be careful,” Credence chided softly, pouring the wizard a large bowl and fetching him a freshly washed spoon, “Let it heal.”

“I would if everyone would let me,” Newt whined indignantly and surveyed the room, commenting when Credence set down the steaming bowl of stew in front of him, “Is it just me or… is the kitchen messier than usual?”

Credence averted his gaze.

“My… magic likes to break and throw things around when I’m upset.”

Newt glanced up from his stew and furrowed his brows.

“When were you upset?”
Credence counted the stitches in his leather shoes, unable to meet his gaze.

“About an hour ago,” he swallowed thickly, “When I was trying to leave the suitcase.”

“Oh.”

Credence pulled out the second chair and sat down beside the wizard, watching him eat. Newt normally ate like a starving man but, this time, it was different. More… real. More desperate. There were even tears in his eyes.

“Newt,” Credence’s voice was soft yet prying, “What happened?”

“I don’t know.”

Credence remained silent, patiently waiting for him to elaborate.

“After the train, I thought… I thought I’d let you sleep and recuperate. You were exhausted - falling asleep in my arms - so I brought you down here; but, I couldn’t rest without knowing what happened to the other passengers. So, I got dressed, retrieved Pickett and Prudence from our cabin, and inspected the train,” the shadows in Newt’s eyes and the gradual quietness of his tone told Credence all he needed to know about what he discovered.

Credence shivered.

“I sent a letter to Miss Goldstein explaining the situation and the ties to Grindelwald and headed into the forest. I had only wanted to find a safe place - perhaps an abandoned cave - to store the suitcase so that I could finally rest…,” Newt pushed aside his bowl and rested his head in his hands. A weary sigh escaped his lips.

Wearier than Credence had ever heard him.

“Wizarding France’s team of aurors were dispatched. But, I didn’t know if it was truly them seeking answers for the magical massacre that transpired on that muggle train or if they were Grindelwald’s cronies. I still don’t. Could be both. But, I figured that they just wanted to question me or they were going to try and get information about-...”

Credence’s throat ran dry.

Even across the great blue ocean, he couldn’t escape the will of Grindelwald.

“So, I ran,” Newt continued, “I only had a minute to return here and make sure everything was in order. To make sure you were okay and safe. But then, I ran. I figured if they were Grindelwald’s men, I could make it seem like I was fleeing back to Britain. That I was doubling back. That they had succeeded in scaring us. They chased me for three days without break and, on the morning of the fourth, they had started the chase anew and I had just enough time to hide the suitcase when they caught me.”

Credence yearned to reach over the table and grab Newt’s hand. To reassure him that he was safe and that his plight was now over. But, Credence knew that Newt didn’t like to be touched unless he initiated it.

So, he kept his hands to himself.

“I don’t know how long I was out for. A day? I’m not certain. All I know is that I awoke starving in a cell. I’ll spare you the details of my dashing escape but, I returned here as quickly as I could to
“you,” Newt smiled a little then, “Just in time for you to punch me in the face.”

“Newt,” Credence covered his face in shame, “I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine,” Newt waved his hand dismissively, “You couldn’t have possibly known that I would open up the suitcase at that exact moment-...”

“No, not that.”

Newt paused and placed his hand upon Credence’s shoulder.

It made him feel even more pathetic.

“Why are you sorry, Credence?”

“Because it’s my fault that they’re after us,” Credence’s voice warbled, dangerously close to crying for the third or fourth time that morning, “It’s my fault that they’re after you. I’m so...so sorry. I’m a burden. I put you in danger. I put the creatures in danger. And I-...”

“Credence,” Newt’s ever-patient voice sliced through his despair like the sharpest knife, “What did you expect traveling with a criminal?”

That caught him off guard.

His scarred hands fell to his lap.

“P-pardon?”

“I’ve illegally smuggled magical creatures into America and I exposed a Muggle to magic. I’ve told you this before. Don’t get me wrong though: I regularly interfere with and break the law. Even if you weren’t here with me, I’d still be getting into some sort of trouble and putting my life on the line,” Newt grinned that wonderful lopsided grin of his whenever he was trying to cheer him up, “Merlin, I would probably still be floating in the ocean with a baby Kraken attached to my face if it weren’t for you. You make this life a little easier.”

“But Grindelwald-...”

“Credence,” Newt squeezed his shoulder, “Nothing is more important than you. Nothing. You’re my apprentice and my closest friend. I would face Grindelwald himself if it meant keeping you safe.”

“Technically, you already did that.”

“I know,” Newt nodded his head firmly, “And I would readily do so again.”

“I would much rather face Grindelwald with you.”

That caught Newt off guard.

He took a moment, swallowing thickly, before leaning back in his seat.

Credence already missed the absence of his palm upon his shoulder.

“Well then,” Newt cleared his throat and squared his shoulders. He looked Credence firmly in the eye and outstretched his hand, “From this day forward, whatever we face, we face together. Deal?”

Credence dried his eyes and clasped Newt’s hand.
“Deal.”

“Good afternoon, sugar.”

With a startled shout, Kowalski slammed his head against the top of the display case that he was reloading with a fresh batch of lemon drizzle cookies and fell backwards onto the floor.

“Oh goodness me! Are you alright?”

Queenie hurried around the counter, with such urgency that one would assume that the hounds of hell were snapping at her heels, and knelt beside the injured baker. She tenderly brushed the hair away from his eyes and stared down at him, filled with worry, “Careful now, sweetie. Don’t move. Do you have a first aid kit somewhere?”

“I don’t think that’s necessary, ma’am,” Jacob winced and rubbed his aching forehead, “It was just a conk of the noggin. Nothin’ major.”

“Oh, I just feel so horrible,” Queenie leaned in and automatically kissed the top of his head, “Are you sure there isn’t anything that I can do for you?”

Jacob’s breath hitched.

Queenie’s eyes widened.

Both of their cheeks turned redder than the finest cherry pie.

“Queenie, I-...”

“Oh Jacob-...”

“It’s alright.”

“I didn’t mean to.”

“I know.”

“I mean I did but-...”

“What?”

Queenie’s cheeks turned fifty shades darker and she jumped to her feet, hiding her burning face behind her delicately manicured hands. Oh, she should not have done that. She should not have done that. She should not have done that.

Jacob slowly hoisted himself up, using the opened display case for assistance. He hesitated for a moment, shifting from foot to foot, before slowly taking Queenie’s hands into his.

Oh, they were as large and warm as she remembered.

“Queenie,” Jacob swallowed thickly and rolled back his shoulders, mustering all of his confidence for just this one moment, “Would you… Would you do me the honor of taking you out on a date?”
Those heartbreaking eyes of his gazing into her soul. Her heart melted. Her legs turned into jelly.

“Just a walk through Central Park I thought,” Jacob’s willpower withered quickly at Queenie’s continued silence - self-doubt and self-deprecation taking its place, “But, I... uh... suppose that’s a stupid place for a first date, huh? Maybe we could... uhm...”

“Oh, you big dummy,” Queenie squeezed his hands, “Yes.”

Oh no no no no.

“What?” Jacob gazed up at her, perplexed.

“Of course I’ll go on a date with you. A stroll through Central Park sounds perfect! Perhaps we could make it a picnic?” Queenie beamed and leaned forward to dust a tender kiss across Jacob’s rouge-tinted cheek, “I’ve been waiting forever for you to ask.”

Oh no no no no no.

“R-really?”

“Yes, of course!” Queenie giggled delightedly, “Why wouldn’t I? You’re the most charming person I’ve ever met, Jacob!”

Oh no no no no no!!!

What was she doing? She couldn’t openly date a Muggle. If the MACUSA ever found out about their relationship-...

But, the blinding smile Jacob gave her made breaking the law all the more worth it.

Queenie would break it a thousand times over, if necessary, just to see him smile at her like that.

“I scheduled to have the day off tomorrow,” Jacob finally released her hands and stepped backwards, that beautiful smile of his never once wavering, “I could stop off at your place in the morning to pick you up?”

“Oh, my landlord doesn’t allow us to have men over,” Queenie frowned, “I could meet you in the subway down the street?”

“Ah, erm. I don’t... take the subway. Too many bad memories,” Jacob scratched the top of his head as Queenie’s heart panged in her chest, “Although, coincidentally, I don’t know why... I know: hows about we meet outside the bakery at... let’s say about 8?”

“Sounds perfect.”

“Perfect.”

“It’s a date.”

Somehow, Jacob’s smile grew even larger, “Yeah... yeah, it is.”

The two lovers could’ve stared into each other eyes until the sun set in the horizon. Perhaps even into the wee hours of the night. Alas, the sudden tinkling bell from the door rang through the shop alerting them to the presence of a new customer. They flinched away from each other and turned their gaze onto them.
Every ounce of blood in Queenie’s face drained to her feet.

“Mr. Graves.”

“Hello, Queenie. Fancy seeing you here.”

“And then Alma, wearing this beautiful pastel purple dress and garden flowers in her hair, dragged me back to her loft to have this romantic dinner,” Tina strolled with her sister through the wizard-owned store Gregorio Grumps Groceries & More to restock on vegetables and, perhaps, a few herbs to brew her a pain-alleviating potion or two, “She had at least a hundred candles and daisies scattered around the floor. She’s so amazing. She remembered that I hated roses and the daisies - y’know - were picked straight from Ilvermorny’s grounds.”

A smitten grin crossed Tina’s face as she turned to her sister. “Remember the garden we used to study in back when we were-...,” she trailed off at Queenie’s far-off look.

Tina wiggled her hand in front of her face.

She snapped her fingers.

No response.

Drastic measures clearly needed to be taken.

Tina grabbed one of the carrots from their basket and slowly poked Queenie’s cheek. Queenie blinked and looked at Tina just as she poked the tip of her nose with the carrot.

“Hey!”

“She lives!” Tina dramatically dropped the carrot back into the basket in mock-shock and awe.

Queenie pouted and crossed her arms over her chest with an indignant huff.

“I was telling you about my date and you just blanked out. What else was I supposed to do to get your attention?”

“Oh,” Queenie hummed softly, “How is Almailie darling doing?”

“She’s doing fine. She loves that new dress you sewed her. The pink one with the tulip patterns. And hey, hey!” Tina snapped her fingers in front of Queenie’s face right when her eyes started glazing over again, “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing’s wrong.”

“Queenie-...”

“It’s nothing,” Queenie sighed so-not-like-her-chipper-self and moved further down the aisle. She inspected the fresh heads of cauliflower and hummed, “I just… got asked on a date by Jacob - which I accepted - and then Graves walked in and-...”

“Hold on just a minute,” Tina touched her sister’s arm in alarm, “Go back to the beginning. Jacob
asked you out on a date and you said yes?”

“I couldn’t say no to him, Teenie!” Queenie bit her lower lip and hung her head, “And I like him. You know I like him. And I figured that if I... I don’t know... just keep the fact that I’m witch away from him, it’ll be okay, right? I won’t be breaking any laws.”

“That’s a dangerous road you’re walking down on, Queenie.”

“I know.”

Uncomfortable silence spanned between the Goldstein sisters before Tina eventually sighed and clasped Queenie’s shoulder.

“Then what can I say except that I support you?” she smiled a little, which soon faltered after a thought, “What about Graves though? Does he know?”

“No, I don’t think he does,” Queenie shook her head, her perfect curls bouncing with the action, “He gave no indication of such. My heart stopped when I saw him in Jacob’s bakery but, he was so preoccupied with getting a batch of donuts that he barely even noticed me.”

“Ah, well he has developed quite the addiction to Kowalski’s pastries,” Tina shook her head, mentally reminding herself to check in with Graves in case he did see or suspect more than he let on. He was an auror after all. “Even if he does find out about you two, I’m sure you could bribe him with a donut a day.”

“Tenie!”

“Queenie.” Tina mimicked her tone.

“He may be a pain in the patootie,” Queenie puffed out her cheeks, “But, I highly doubt that’d work.”

“I’m sure it would.”

Suddenly, a screeching tawny owl shot through the grocery store - much to Gregorio Grumps dismay. The owner dropped the carton of summer squash he was carrying, grabbed the nearest non-magical broom, and waved at it in the air, “We don’t allow animals in here!”

"Sorry Mr. Grump!” Tina apologized as the letter dropped into her hands and the owl flew off. Gregorio grumbled underneath his breath and returned to restocking the shelves.

Tina smirked and waved the envelope in front of Queenie’s face, “Maybe it’s Graves asking for a batch of your strawberry cupcakes in exchange for keeping quiet on what he knows.”

“Tenie,” Queenie merely whined.

Sticking her tongue out in a teasing manner, Tina flipped the envelope over to see who it was from. Her smile quickly dropped and was replaced by a grimace of long-suffering exasperation.

She pinched the bridge of her nose, relishing the moment of peace she knew was about to end, before tearing open the letter, “It’s from Newt.”

“Oh! How are he and Credence doing?” Queenie chittered happily while Tina unfolded the letter and began reading, “I was thinking of using the Floo Network to send then some muffins. Do you know if-...”
“I’m going to kill that Scamander!” Burning rage colored Tina’s face purple. The paper in her hands torn into two perfect halves.

Queenie took a cautious step backwards, alarmed. It was rare to see her sister so… angry. “What did he do?”

“Wrong place at the wrong time my ass!” Tina sharply ground her teeth together and crumpled the paper, throwing it onto the floor so hard that it bounced into a completely different aisle, “No, I’m not going to kill him. Oh no. I’m going to kill that blond, pale-faced, smirking son-of-a-bitch that tried to hurt my boy!”

“Teenie,” Queenie didn’t know what to do or how to approach this, “What… What happened?”

“He knows about Credence, Queenie,” Tina seethed and buried her hands into her hair, “I don’t know how he knows but he knows and now he’s trying to-...”

“It’s okay,” Queenie hushed softly, touching her sister’s shoulder, “It’s okay. We’ll figure this out. Just… calm down, okay? Nothing good will come from you getting angry, sweetie. You know this.”

“I’m not going to fail Credence again. I won’t, Queenie. I can’t,” Tina brushed away Queenie’s hand and shoved the grocery basket into her hands, her eyes focused on the exit and the exit alone, “You can finish shopping alone, right? I forgot something that I needed to do at work.”

Angered footsteps barreled down the hall followed by the annoyingly pungent scent of mustard and relish. Grindelwald cracked the sides of his neck and lounged in his chair (as if he had any other choice) awaiting whatever it was that Tina had in store for him.

It was bound to be fun.

As soon as the witch came into view, a tingle shot down Grindelwald’s spine. The fire and flame which danced in her eyes was positively mesmerizing. So, this is what low self-esteem and dreary Tina looked like with her powers unbound.

This was a woman worthy of the title of auror. No more hesitation. No more second-guessing. Nothing but pure confidence and rage. The power and strength he had always detected in her was far beyond what he had imagined. She would make a lovely addition to his crew—...

Grindelwald’s chair was flung into the back of his cell with the force of a thousand running bulls.

He grunted as his head collided with stone. His chair pivoted and toppled over, knocking his cheek against the ground with such a harshness that he tasted blood.


With a wordless spell, the chair turned rightside up again and Tina was dragging Grindelwald close to her. That seething face of rage close enough to his face that he could feel her hot breath burning his skin.

This was how witches and wizards should be. Unleashed to their full potential with no holding back.

“Well,” Grindelwald quipped and lolled his head to the side, “That’s one way to start the afternoon.”
“I know you know about him,” Tina seethed, her nostrils flaring quite like an angered bull and causing her disgusting hot dog breath to become especially potent. “How?”

“My dear Tina,” Grindelwald declared innocently, “I have no idea who you’re talking about.”

“Credence,” she shouted, drowning within her flame and fury, and slammed her hands down onto the the arms of the chair so harshly that they buckled and dented, “Credence Barebone! Tell me how you know about him or so help me!”

“Credence? Oh, how terrible. What a shame. What a shame… Miss Goldstein, is this - frankly sad and pathetic - denial just part of your process of coming to terms with your grief? It’s already been a month - two? - since he died,” Grindelwald tsked, shaking his head, “What a shame that the MACUSA obliterated him. Such power and untapped possibility.”

A loud crack resounded through the cell. The arm of Grindelwald’s chair snapped in half.

“Cut. The. Bullshit,” Tina dragged out each word, “You know he’s alive.”

Shouts emerged down the end of the hall. Frenzied footsteps running down.

“The MACUSA faked his death so that I wouldn’t know about him?” Grindelwald raised his brows in surprise, “Clever.”

“You’re a bastard.”

“Actually I was born in wedlock so-...”

A frustrated scream escaped Tina’s throat - resembling the booming roar of a Hungarian Horntail - and Grindelwald’s chair was flung backwards once again. Merlin’s Beard, he was bound to have a nasty concussion at this point.

The team of aurors sent to stop Tina’s tirade came to a sliding halt as she hastily pulled up a protection charm around the perimeter.

Tina stomped in front of Grindelwald, pointing her wand down at him.

“Cru-...”

She hesitated.

“Do it,” Grindelwald challenged, smiling through blood-stained teeth, “Show me what you’re like without constraints. Without doubt. You have power in you, Tina Goldstein, but what a tragedy that you don’t want to use it. Show me what you’re made of!”

Her wand wavered in the air.

“Come on, Tina! Do it!” Grindelwald narrowed his eyes in impatience, “Cast the spell! Use the magnificent power running through your veins! Free yourself! Be shackled no more by society’s prison!”

The aurors broke through Tina’s charm within an instant. They barrelled into the cell one by one and tackled her, causing her wand to be unnoticeably tossed to the side.

“You’re not going to lay a hand on that boy!” Tina struggled against her colleagues and attempted to lunge at the Dark Wizard, “I swear it, Grindelwald, if you hurt him, I’ll make you regret stepping foot in this country! I’ll kill you! Do you hear me? I’ll kill you!”
“I think she’s hysterical with grief,” Grindelwald drawled as if nothing that transpired within the last few minutes affected him. The team of aurors righted Grindelwald’s chair and fixed it good as new before escorting the screaming Tina out.

“She came in her raving that Credence Barebone survived and, apparently, is the cause of some Muggle Massacre in France. I mean, I do so wish he was alive and breathing but, you guys killed him, didn’t you?” Grindelwald spit out a mouthful of blood as he watched Tina’s horrified face disappear down the hallway, her wand hidden within the confines of his sleeve, “No, that was all Newt Scamander’s doing, wasn’t it?”

Chapter End Notes

Phew! I finally updated after a week? Two weeks? I had a 20+ page research paper due in one of my Sociology classes so, this chapter took a little while to update; but, it's finally here! And boy, what a chapter it is! The seeds of Grindelwald's plan have all been planted and all the players of his game are nearly in place.

Stay tuned for next time on Green Meadows, Dark Skies!

I'm hoping to return to some previous chapters (mainly the first 5 or so) and add some scenes to it to increase the length to get up to the 20+ pages per chapter that I've been putting out.

Please leave your comments and constructive criticism below!

How is my writing? Is there anything that you'd like for me to improve upon? Is there anything/anyone that you'd like to see more of? Less of? What was your favorite scene of this chapter? What was your favorite chapter so far?

I love reading your comments! Hearing how much this story has impacted you really brings a smile (and sometimes a joyful tear) to my day! I'm so happy that I've left such an impact upon you all and I hope to continue to do so for many chapters to come.
Lore:

Newt, while hardly fluent, speaks multiple languages. In addition to English and Latin, he also speaks enough French, German, and Arabic to get by. Credence, on the other hand, can speak and understand a little bit of Italian since he lived in a predominantly Italian neighborhood for most of his life. However, he only learned a handful of useful phrases like, "Hello" and "How are you?"

While Hugin and Munin are Grindelwald's eyes and ears, Bartleby Barnes is Grindelwald's hands. He is a Trans-Man that began working for Grindelwald shortly after he was rejected from his family following his transition. Honing in on his vulnerability and recognizing how useful he could be for his cause, Grindelwald used his charm to recruit Bartleby. He is now sent anywhere Grindelwald needs him to be. He briefly worked alongside Hugin as an Animagus in the form of a grey and black cat.

Credence rested upon the cliffside, his long legs hanging precariously over the sharp edge and his hands clasped together sweetly in his lap. He gazed out into the dark depths of the evening - the wind dancing through his newly developed curls and caressing his pale cheek.

Millions upon billions upon trillions upon quadrillions of stars twinkled in the night sky and surrounded the faint sliver of the crescent moon in a glimmering crown - casting a faint, comforting glow in the otherwise unnerving darkness. The cascade of light reflected in the quiet ocean so that Credence couldn’t tell where the sky ended and the ocean began if he tried.

Wicked nausea bubbled in the cauldron of his belly.

The gentle waves crashed against the razor-sharp rocks poking out below like a menacing monster’s teeth. Sea-foam sprayed up the jagged cliff and rained little droplets upon Credence’s face.

“I don’t want to stay in here anymore.”

Early that afternoon, Credence had refused to remain in the suitcase. He couldn’t. He wouldn’t. Another day trapped inside... He swore that he would’ve gone mad.

It wasn’t that he didn’t love and care for the creatures living inside. It was quite the opposite and he looked forward towards continuing to work with them; but, Credence needed time outside. The real outside. He needed to feel nature-made wind upon his face and smell of rain in the air and the feeling of cool soil against his bare feet.

Newt had obliged.

So, here they were: setting up a small camp on the edge of the Italian coast. Or, rather, Newt was behind him. Credence had taken one whiff of fresh air and immediately sat down where he currently was - having remained still for so long that he even watched the sun set in the horizon, illuminating
the sky with smears of heavenly pinks, yellows, and violets.

They still weren’t quite at the destination where they could release the Kraken yet; but, they were
closer than ever.

A small campfire crackled and hissed behind him while Newt gingerly set up the small, canvas tent.

Credence’s clasped hands tightened.

Credence loved gazing up at the clear turquoise sky and fluffy cotton clouds floating merrily in the
daylight. He loved the warm, all-encompassing feeling of the sun’s rays upon his sickly white skin.
He loved the brightness and clarity that day brought.

But, Credence hated - despised - the night. He hated the ocean and its deceptively calm waters. Its
endless depths taunting him and threatening to pull him deep underneath. It threatened to consume
him and devour him alive.

Credence loathed the dark and the one, dastardly creature that thrived in it.

He hated himself.

A piercing crack! sounded off behind him.

But it wasn’t the fire.

Credence glanced over his shoulder and the boulder that had shattered in half behind him. Dust
carried off from its edges by the wind over the campfire, causing its flames to flicker.

“I... I didn’t mean to...,” Credence apologized quietly, bringing his knees close to his chest and
looking back into the detestable horizon where shadowed ocean met gloomy night sky.

He heard Newt halt. He heard the flap of canvas swaying in the wind.

He heard the footsteps of heavy boots crunching dead foliage. He heard Newt sit beside him and his
gentle intake of breath.

Credence dared to spare a glance at him.

His heart skipped a beat.

Were Credence born a sculptor, he would have eagerly carved Newt’s likeness into the boulder he
had accidentally shattered behind him. No, he would have searched the world - tirelessly climbed
every mountain and crossed every river - for the finest marble and created a statue more poignant
than The Thinker. Newt would be depicted just as strong but, with an approachableness to his
pensiveness.

The curious way Newt rested his chin against his bandaged knuckles and stared out into the sea...

Credence had never seen something so magical.

He realized, right then and there, that if anyone in this dismal, bleak world could make Credence
love the night... could make Credence love the ocean... it would be Newt. How could anything that
enshrined Newt’s beautiful coppery hair in delicate silver moonlight be bad? Anything that caused
Newt to stare out into it with such thoughtfulness? Anything that brought forth that slight curve of
lips?
Newt glanced over at Credence.

He leaned close and extended a hand towards the sky, tracing a swirling line with a pointed finger.

“Do you see that cluster of stars right there, Credence?”

They were nearly cheek to cheek, Newt was so close.

“That brilliant, shining star over there is Vega. It’s one of the brightest stars in the night sky,” Newt dragged his finger down, connecting stars together as if he were casting a wandless spell, “And those ones beside it are Epsilon and Zeta Lyrae. There is Beta Lyrae and Gamma Lyrae; and, you see that faint one right there? That’s Delta Lyrae. All those stars together make up the constellation Lyra - the Lyre of Orpheus.”

“Who is Orpheus?”

“Who-... Who is Orpheus?” Newt turned his head towards him, astonished. His brows lunged straight up into his forehead and his mouth opened and closed so quickly that he resembled a gaping fish. “Remind me to add Greek and Roman Literature to your curriculum. It’s far more interesting than the History of Magic and it contains some of the first references to my creatures. All horribly wrong, of course, but, they’re there.”

“I like the History of Magic,” Credence rolled his eyes and rested his cheek against his knees, “Is Orpheus anything like Achilles?”

“Oh, I see how it is. You know Achilles but, you don’t know Orpheus,” Newt’s voice held an undertone of teasing that made Credence smile.

“What can I say? I had a limited education,” he shrugged and wrapped his arms tighter around his legs, “If the Tale of Orpheus is anything like that of Achilles’... I’m not sure I want to read it.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s sad, Newt. Horribly, terribly, heart-wrenchingly sad…” Credence chewed the inside of his cheek, “Here you have Achilles: this strong, charming man who is, by all means, a genius ahead of his time - especially on the battlefield but, in other things too. He’s caught in the middle of this pointless war when his best friend Patroclus is struck down. Killed. And... Achilles goes insane. Going on this bloodthirsty rampage that ends up getting himself killed too. Can you imagine that?”

“His rage?”

“No,” Credence shook his head and stared into Newt’s eyes, “His grief.”

It seemed that Newt didn’t know how to respond to that.

That’s fine. Credence was perfectly content with sitting in silence-...

“Is that what you feel, Credence?” Newt’s suddenly quiet voice pierced the night.

“Pardon?”

“Do you feel... grief?”

Oh. Oh.

“Sometimes,” Credence confessed and glanced back at the depth-less ocean before standing up,
heading back to the campfire. He could feel Newt’s ever-worried presence following close behind. He wrapped his arms around himself, his eyes downcast as the flames warmed his face and frozen, damned soul.

“Grief. Pain. Fear. Rage… Especially rage. That’s what I feel when it happens,” Credence inhaled slowly, carefully thinking over every word - every sentence - before it left his lips.

He never talked about what it was like to become an Obscurus. Never.

“I become Achilles during his final battle: so consumed by my despair - by my agony - that I lose all sight of myself,” Credence furrowed his brows and shook his head, “No, I… I lose myself completely. It’s like… drowning. I don’t know where I begin and it ends. I can’t breathe. I can’t think. I can’t do anything. I’m suffocating underneath a black ocean with no up or down and all I want is to get out but, I can’t. It won’t let me.”

Credence exhaled a deep breath he didn’t know he was holding and glanced behind him at Newt.

Oh no, what are you thinking of?

There was that curious glimmer in his eyes. He had an idea. Another stupid, brilliant idea that was bound to be either a work of genius or that of an idiot.

“Then I suppose… it’s about time that you learned to swim, Credence.”

“What?”

“I mean-- That is--! Erm, if you feel up to it and want to try… I’ve been thinking that since you already have a firm grasp on the basics of magic that it’s time for us to start working on controlling the Obscurus and--,” Newt paused mid-babble and his tone dropped so much that Credence had to lean to hear, “…keep you from drowning.”

A silent moment passed between them before Credence said softly, “I trust you.”

Something curious, then, entered Newt’s eyes - something that Credence couldn’t pinpoint - but, within a moment, it was gone. Newt simply clapped his hands together and nodded firmly before gesturing for Credence to sit down.

Credence did as instructed.

“Right,” Newt began awkwardly as he seated himself in front of him, scratching his lightly bruised chin, “Yes. Uhm, let’s get started then. I suppose… let’s try and think of something that upsets you. Until we can figure out what else can bring it out - something, erm, less painful - this is what we have to work with.”

Newt paused and added hurriedly, “But, only if you want to Credence.”

“I want to.” That was half a lie. Credence would much rather continue living as a man and never have to undergo the agonizing transformation that came with becoming an Obscurus again… but, his desire to stop hurting people and being the source of so much destruction overruled his feelings of discomfort.

“I’m here Credence if you want to stop.”

“I know.”
And Credence closed his eyes… and breathed.

Think of a painful memory, huh? That was something that Credence had plenty of. He could pick the moment when he was betrayed by Graves - Grindelwald. He could imagine the disgusted look on his old master’s face as he maliciously spit out that he was just a Squib and that he would never be part of the magical world.

Credence’s fingers twitched. A frown tugged at his lips.

He could think of his Mother’s horrified face moments before he killed her and damned his soul to an eternity in Hell. He could remember the pain which tugged at his heart and shattered it into pieces when he saw how scared his little sister was when she saw him. Perhaps she feared that he would kill her next? After all, he was just a monster.

Something stirred within him.

He could think of Newt writhing on the ground while Munin pointed her wand at him. He could remember his screams of pain and agony.

Credence flinched as something beat against his chest - ran its claws down the inside of his ribs.

He could recall the sight of scarlet-colored blood pouring down from Newt’s nose and dripping off his chin. He could dream of what horrors he experienced while he was gone. He could remember the despair of finding him missing and the anger at having been locked away. The rage he had felt against those who hurt him - who hurt Newt. Who hurt his Newt.

Credence’s hands tightened into brutal fists and his trimmed fingernails pierced the tender flesh of his palms. Something cracked and another thing shattered in the hollow distance. He heard something rip and someone calling his name.

Credence opened his eyes but, all he could see was nothing but darkness.

He panicked.

He couldn’t breathe.

He couldn’t breathe.

He couldn’t breathe!!!

He spun frantically in every direction but, there was nothing but an ocean of liquid night surrounding him. Nothing indicating what was up and what was down.

Credence screamed in terror and clawed at his face. Water swarmed into his mouth and burst through his ears and tear-ducts. The ocean was consuming him. Eating him alive. Leaving nothing left except-...

Warmth touched his cheek.

His shoulders.

His hands.

A certain slant of golden light beamed down into the ocean of shadow and oblivion from above. A heavenly escape from the Hell he had been trapped under.
Credence could see the top.

He reached for it.

But, the darkness disappeared. All that he could see was Newt’s concerned face inches from his.

Credence looked around and his heart shattered at the leveled-off trees surrounding the barrier of the campsite. The destroyed halfway-set-up tent and the doused fire.

“I’m so-...”

“Don’t be. I was a fool.”

What remained of Credence’s heart shattered into pieces and tears stung the corners of his eyes. He had finally done it. He had finally disappointed Newt. What was he expecting? He was a wicked beast. A failure. A-...

Warm, calloused hands wrapped around his.

He gazed into kind, meadow green eyes.

“I sent you in without a life jacket.”

“Miss Goldstein,” Percival Graves, the chronically exhausted and grumpy Auror that only wanted to eat delicious glazed donuts all day instead of dealing with this, droned while thumbing through the mound of paperwork that was bound to give him a headache later, “You know that we need to write you up for this. Your behavior was inexcusable.”

“I know,” Tina muttered underneath her breath, keeping her eyes averted to the hardwood floor.

“You were just allowed to become an Auror again and you pull something as reckless like this. I expected this behavior from the new recruit - not from you,” Graves gripped the bridge of his nose and inhaled sharply, “Why?”

“I don’t know.”

“Don’t bullshit me,” Graves ground out, leaning over the table and pointing a finger at her. Smudges of black and violet were smeared underneath his eyes. His pale hands trembled either by whatever haunted his dreams or the insomnia that plagued him.

Perhaps both.

How cruel it was that, even after having escaped Grindelwald, the Dark Wizard still managed to hold a firm grip on him - torturing his mind night after night despite having been freed.

“I’m not in the mood today.”

Tina fell quiet.

Graves sighed and ran his hands through his hair, sitting back down and pulling the metal chair closer to the desk. He browsed through the files he’d requested and asked, “Does this have
something to do with the Obscurial?"

Tina’s head shot up and her eyes sharpened, “His name is Credence.”

Graves quirked a brow, “Is?”

Tina’s eyes widened just fraction and she quickly turned her gaze away, “Was. I mean was.”

“You’ve always been a terrible liar, Tina. I’ve always liked that about you,” Graves hummed. After all, in his not-so-humble opinion, the only bad liars in the world were good people. You would never encounter someone like Grindelwald who was born without a silvertongue.

“You have reason to believe he’s alive, don’t you? He’s a danger to our society, Tina, and not just because Grindelwald has an interest in him,” Graves leaned back in his seat and watched his colleague’s every move, every expression, “You have to report things like this, Tina. I can’t help you if you don’t help yourself.”

“I don’t have to report nothing,” Tina still refused to looked at him, “He’s protected under Rule 221 B12. We-... You can’t touch him.”

“So, he is alive,” Graves made a mental note of that, “And he’s an apprentice at that. To whom?”

Tina fell silent.

“No, that’s fine. Give me the silent treatment, why don’t you? We’re all two-year-olds prone to tantrums. I’ll just wager my wildest guess: he’s apprenticing under Newt Scamander, isn’t he? The murderer that massacred a train of no-Majs on holiday and threatened to expose magic to the world?” Grave narrowed his eyes and sneered, his patience running out, “Or was the culprit the newly resurrected Credence Barebone? A dangerous Obscurial without an ounce of control? Which one are you protecting, Miss Goldstein?”

Now, Tina finally looked at him. Fire and flame danced in her narrow eyes. Her hands tightened into fists by her side.

“If Credence lost control of the Obscurus and killed all those Muggles-...”

“Credence would never!” Tina snarled and bolted up to her feet.

Graves tapped the papers before him, “He’s killed before. What makes you think that he wouldn’t kill again?”

“It wasn’t his fault-...”

“I’m not saying that it is,” Graves clasped his hands before him, “Besides, as you said, he’s protected under Rule 221 B12. We can’t touch him.”

Tina’s shoulders relaxed.

“But, Newt has no such protection.” No matter who was at fault - Credence or Newt Scamander himself - the master always had to answer for the apprentice’s crimes.

"Newt would never hurt anyone and you know it," Tina stiffened, grinding her teeth together and pointing down at the desk, "Look at your precious files. Mr. Scamander might be a reckless fool but, he's a good man. He'd never hurt anyone. Hell, he's the one that unmasked Grindelwald for who he really was. He's the only reason why you're not still in that blasted suitcase!"
"Watch it, Tina," Graves warned, "I'm not the bad guy here."

"You're doing a hell of a good job of it though."

"That's because I can't help you until I know everything!" he slammed his hands on the table and stood up, knocking his chair over.

Uncomfortable silence loomed over them.

Graves reigned in his anger and crossed around the table, extending his hand to his colleague, “In the meantime, you’re taken off this case for your behavior. Turn in your wand and identification. You’ll be on probation until we can clean up this mess.”

Now, a foreboding silence filled the room.

“Don’t…,” Tina’s voice became quieter and quieter with each word she spoke, “Don’t you already have my wand?”

The alarms sounded.

Someone had left their cell.

How indescribable of a feeling it was to have magic flowing freely through him again. Wonderful, beautiful, unrestricted *magic* all at his command. Grindelwald couldn’t imagine a finer sensation.

The wand certainly wasn’t ideal. He would have much preferred to have wielded the wand of Percival Graves instead of the subpar Goldstein wand clutched in his hands now. But, even though it resisted him, Grindelwald was still powerful enough to stop the Aurors pursuing him.

Besides, he wasn’t facing the Americans alone this time around.

His trusted Animagus spy Hugin had already transformed into a raven - magnificently large and filled with beautiful ebony feathers that gleamed violet in the candlelight - and was leading them down the halls towards freedom where the apparition barrier ended.

Protecting Grindelwald’s right was the fierce and deadly Munin deflecting spell after spell that their pursuants shot after them. Flanking his left was Bartleby Barnes who had been working alongside Hugin spying upon the Goldstein sisters.

“Of the boat leaves in 15 minutes, sir,” Bartleby hissed underneath his breath.

“Relax,” Grindelwald purred and shot an apothic green curse down the hall. A young Auror by the name of Thomas T. Thomas collapsed. “We have plenty of time.”

“I also need to use the bathroom.”

“Then, you should have used it *before* we started the escape plan,” Grindelwald chided his subordinate.

“Not for that reason, sir,” Bartleby shot him an annoyed look before casting a spell that blew their pursuants backwards onto their asses, “If I bleed through my pants, it’s your fault.”
“I have no control over what your uterus chooses to do or not to do.”

“Cut the bloody chit-chat and focus on running,” Munin’s raspy voice sliced through the air like an angry knife, “I’ll give you one of Hugin’s pants if you bleed through, B.”

“How nice of you, Munin,” Grindelwald cooed.

“Shut up.”

“That’s no way to speak to your boss,” he tsked before coming to a sliding halt at the end of the all. Hugin circled around, transformed back into a man, and flung a *Confringo* at the remaining group of Aurors behind them. Munin and Bartleby remained at Grindelwald’s side, their wands raised defensively at the unexpected threat in front of them.

“Good evening, Graves,” Grindelwald’s lips curled into a wicked smile and craned his head, “Isn’t it dinnertime?”

The blood visibly drained from Percival Graves’ face at the all-too-familiar phrase.

Grindelwald had known that all his careful planning and patient grooming would come in handy someday. There had always been a reason why he had always plucked a hair from his stubborn head during dinner. Always announced his presence. Always found this strong wizard cowering at the phrase.

Pavlovian Conditioning at its finest: working to Grindelwald’s advantage.

Grindelwald peered behind the frozen Auror and wiggled his fingers at the shell-shocked Goldstein witch, “Thanks for the wand, Tina.”

And Grindelwald and his entourage stepped right where the barrier ended and apparated.

“…Credence finished slipping on his coat and regarded Newt with a skeptic eye, “What you’re saying is that there’s a dinosaur—...”

“A Lariosauro.”

“A dinosaur,” Credence continued, crossing his arms over his chest, “That you *think* you spotted swimming in a nearby lake that you wanted to go see?”

“Precisely,” Newt nodded furiously and thrust out his journal, pointing repeatedly at the blank page, “I’ve documented Larriosauros in all types of aquatic environments but, I’ve never seen one in a lake as small as this one. The last one I was encountered was in this ginormous murky loch and I’m really curious how different the Italian species differs from the ones in Scotland.”

“But,” Credence chewed the inside of his cheek, “You said that there might a fishing village nearby and we really should be going—...”

“It won’t take too long,” Newt bounced from foot to foot, practically thrumming with excited energy. He didn’t know when or where he would encounter such an opportunity again and he couldn’t - just *couldn’t* - let it go to waste. “One sketch is all I ask for, Credence; and, then, we’ll be on our merry way.
Credence lowered his head and sighed, causing the paper butterfly at his lapel to flutter in annoyance. Yet, Newt could spy the faintest quirk of a smile hidden underneath his slightly frizzy black curls. “Sometimes,” Credence finally relented, “I wonder who’s the master and who’s the apprentice.”

“I consider ourselves equal parts teacher and student,” Newt beamed while his entire body vibrated with joy, “I learn much from you everyday, Credence.”

Credence blinked, his brows raising in genuine surprise, “Really?”

“Yes,” Newt hummed, nodding vigorously. He wanted nothing more than to jump in place or to spin around or to flap his arms and hands to show just how wonderfully, enthusiastically excited he was. But, after Mother had once chastised him for it when he was about 8 or 9 years old, he stopped doing so in public no matter how much he wanted - needed - to. “I aspire to be like you when I grow up.”


Everything that Newt would never define himself as.

“You’re already all grown up,” Credence helpfully pointed out.

“Yes, indeed I am,” Newt puffed out his cheeks, “Which means that I have a lot to catch up on.”

“You’re insufferable,” Credence chuckled, sending delightful shivers up Newt’s spine. Oh, how he adored that low honeyed laugh - not just because the dulcet tones were pleasing to hear (which they were) but, because it meant that dear, sweet, wonderful Credence-...

He was happy enough to laugh.

Personal feelings aside, that was all that he had ever wanted for Credence.

Happiness.

Newt beamed and outstretched his hand. Credence grasped it without a second thought.

Once they arrived at the lake, Newt shrugged off his coat and handed it to Credence. While he was rolling up his pant legs to just right above the knee, he could have sworn that he saw Credence pressing his face up against it.

Ah, wishful thinking.

Shaking his head, Newt waded into the water with his leather journal and piece of charcoal in hand. He cringed slightly at the cold temperature soaking into his bones and shifted back and forth from foot to foot to warm himself up.

Only once the goosebumps went away did he get to work.

By making a series of shrill chirping and clicking noises in quick succession of one another.

Hey, if it worked for the Loch Ness Monster, then it ought to work here!

It took a few minutes of splashing around in the water and chirping before the Lariosauro finally popped up its smooth head from the waters - it’s tiny ears wiggling from the sudden motion.

Newt’s heart swelled with barely contained energy.
The Lauriosauro was far, far smaller than any of the other related species that Newt had encountered before. Perhaps no longer than 8 or 10 feet in length which was about a quarter of the size of Scotland’s native Lauriosauros - if that! Nevertheless, this species’ proportions were relatively the same.

A small, rounded headed with tiny protruding ears and a large reptilian-like body; however, instead of possessing protective scales it had thick, warm grayish-green blubber better suited for an aquatic environment. It had two hind flippers and a pair of front legs which held long webbed fingers that ended in black talons.

Possessed with the energy of a thousand suns, Newt focused on nothing else except sketching the large, gleefully chirping creature before him.

Credence watched Newt patiently coaxing the timid Lariosauro closer so that he could draw him at another angle. That wild crooked smile, green eyes wide with delight, and rough fingers smudged smoky gray… it brought a smile to Credence’s face. This was Newt in his natural habitat. He didn’t belong in cities - not even wizarding ones - nor confined in trains or boats. He belonged here. In forests, mountains, lakes, and beyond. Anywhere where creatures lived.

A couple of fisherman floating in the middle of the lake stared at the peculiar scene as they hurriedly pulled up their nets into their boats.

Credence looked around nervously before waving a hesitant greeting towards them.

All of a sudden, an unholy scream resounded through the forest and Credence was being dragged to his feet and held protectively behind someone. Newt’s coat fell to the ground.

An older man - tall, thin, and well-groomed - trembled in front of Credence as he faced Newt and the Lariosauro. He pointed a fisherman’s spear at the creature and waved frantically for Newt to get away. He spoke rapidly in some language that Credence only understood bits and pieces of.

“O-oh, I don’t speak Italian,” Newt remained frozen in place - his journal pressed close to his chest and his eyes wide, “I-...uhm...What was it? Va bene? Va bene!”

“I was raised in New York, Newt. Lots of immigrants. Lots of Italians living on my street. I d-don’t know much.”

Meanwhile, the stranger looked between the pair and groaned in frustration at the language barrier. He pointed a trembling finger towards the creature - which was now rearing its head and bearing its large, pointed teeth - and dragged the same finger across his neck in the universal sign of death.
“No, it’s fine!” Newt protested through clenched teeth and shaking shoulders, placing himself protectively between the Lariosauro and the stranger despite his obvious pain and uncomfortableness, “He’s not dangerous. You don’t have to hurt him—...”

“Newt.”

Newt looked at Credence.

“Let me.”

Uncertain whether his actions were the right move, Credence gently took the man’s wrist while slowly reaching for the fisherman’s spear. He gave him a comforting smile - one that Newt used often on him but could never seem to give others - and nodded, “Va bene. Va bene.”

The older man stiffened and tightened his grip on the spear.

Credence frowned and shook his head, “Va bene.”

He gently tugged the man’s spear again, this time being reluctantly released from his hand. Credence let it drop to the ground beside Newt’s coat and tugged the man along with him closer towards the lake. The man dug his heels into the ground.

“Va bene,” Credence said reassuringly.

The man shook his head.

Credence frowned and looked around him for something - anything - he could use to devolve the situation. He glanced over his shoulder back at the creature.

Its teeth were still bared but, now, the Lariosauro was making a series of low, clicking noises which sounded vaguely threatening. Its elongated neck held its lizard-like head high and its tiny ears were swished back.

Both the fisherman and the creature were scared yet, neither could communicate it to each other. Neither could - would - understand the other.

Credence squared his shoulders - a determined look entering his eyes.

He pointed to the creature behind him, “Lariosauro.”

He pointed towards Newt, “Newt Scamander.”

He pointed to himself, “Credence Barebone.”

Credence pointed towards the stranger and waited patiently, “Signore?”

The fisherman hesitated for a moment, looking between the pair of wizards and the frightened creature, “Ernesto. Ernesto De Campo.”

“Ernesto De Campo,” Credence repeated and inclined his head, “Piacere.”

“Piacere,” Ernesto repeated.

Credence gestured back behind him, “Lariosauro... paura. Paura. Solo paura. Comme... erm... Comme Ernesto.”
He tugged on the fisherman’s hand again. This time Ernesto relented and cautiously allowed him to bring him closer to the water. Credence smiled encouragingly and soothed, “Va bene. Solo paura. Va bene.”

The Lariosauro reared its head and released a strange sort of clicking growl. Credence felt Ernesto stiffen under his hand and merely squeezed his wrist lightly. He let him stand at the edge of the lake and stretched out Ernesto’s hand, forming it into an open palm.

And then he waited.

The creature continued growling for a moment longer and bared its teeth in a loud, intimidating hiss. But, it couldn’t have lasted any longer than a couple minutes before the Lariosauro started lowering its head and slowly - ever so slowly - started inching closer.

Credence could see Newt holding his breath.

The creature leaned forward and sniffed the fisherman’s hand, his fingers, his wrist.

Ernesto trembled. Credence squeezed his hand.

The Lariosauro eyed the fisherman carefully, as if searching for any signs of deception, before nuzzling its head in his palm. Ernesto’s breath hitched. His eyes widened. He stood perfectly still.

Credence smiled at him, “Va bene.”

Everything happened so quickly that Newt could barely register it all. Their new friend Ernesto de Campo had hurriedly dragged them back to his village and demanded that Credence show the rest of his people that the Lariosauro wasn’t bad.

At least, that’s what they thought he said.

Apparently, the people had been living in fear of the creature so long - frightened to death that it would steal their children and eat all their fish - that they realized that... despite all the local legends surrounding it, they had never actually seen the creature attack anyone before.

To show their appreciation, the town had thrown them together a party (which Newt appreciated yet simultaneously hated) and had offered to cook them a meal.

Before long, four to five hours had passed and they were still there.

And now, they were being housed in Ernesto’s home in one of the back rooms. How had a simple sketch turned into this?

“Credence,” Newt flopped onto the bed and stretched out his muscles, “I’m bringing you everywhere now.”

“You already do so.”

“Yes, but look at this!” Newt gestured around the quaint, village room and his heartstrings tugged at the familiarity to his own home, “Whenever I try and help people understand that magical creatures aren’t dangerous as long as you treat them with respect, they get upset. You made it look easy.”
Credence cast a curiously perplexed look over his shoulder back at him, unfolding their pajamas for the night, “I was just copying you.”

Now it was Newt’s turn to look perplexed, “What?”

“What can I say?” Credence hummed and returned back to his task, “You’re an excellent teacher.”

“Clearly since my best student is already surpassing me,” Newt grumbled and picked back up Madame Camembert’s Cantankerous Cabaret from the bedside table. He thumbed through the pages before reaching the chapter he had last left off on.

Credence shook his head and hid a laugh behind his hand; but, then he got a curious look in his eyes that made Newt’s heart flutter. Credence approached him, sitting on the corner of the bed, hesitating before touching his shoulder.

Newt lowered his book.

Usually it was Newt touching him. Not the other way around.

Newt didn’t know what to think of that.

“Are you alright?” Credence asked quickly, “When Ernesto screamed by the lake, I noticed-...”

“Oh, that…,” Newt swallowed thickly, having thought that he had hid it quite well due to the circumstances, “I managed.”

“That’s not what I’m asking.”

“I know,” Newt placed the book aside back on the night table and leaned up, “I’m alright, Credence.”

“Are you sure?” he tilted his head.

Was he sure? Credence had handled the situation by the lake perfectly while Newt had been easily overwhelmed by a simple, unexpected scream. No, Credence had been perfect while Newt had just been pathetic. Perhaps Credence would make for a better magizoologist than he could ever be.

He had bridged the gap between frightened creature and equally terrified person so easily that, had Newt been any other man, he might have been jealous. But no, watching Credence do what he couldn’t do...

“I’m alright, Credence,” Newt patted his hand and smiled, “Because you were there.”

“I need to get out of here,” Tina quickly gathered her things - important case files and various knick-knacks - and shoved them into her work case. She slammed a metal drawer closed and opened another, dumping various items out of it. “Shit, Graves. He has my wand. My wand! Once this gets leaked to the press, they’ll say that my outburst was planned. That I lost my wand on purpose so that he could-... Fuck! Graves, everyone will think I helped that monster!”

“And running away will counter any of the blame?” Graves leaned against his desk, his face still pale and covered in a cold sweat. Tina felt for him, sure. How easy it had been for Grindelwald to take
him down; one sentence and he had rendered Graves defenseless.

“I’ve already been ostracized by everyone else before. I’m not going to be trapped behind a desk again,” she snapped her briefcase shut and threw it onto the table, “I’m going to do something about it.”

“This is madness, Tina,” Graves trembled. He gritted his teeth and slapped the side of his face - perhaps to snap himself out of whatever hold Grindelwald had on him.

“And that’s any different from normal?”

“Tina.”

“Percival.”

“You know I don’t like it when you use my first name,” Graves squeezed his eyes tightly shut and forced himself to breath, “You must be serious.”

“Yes, I am,” Tina grabbed her coat from behind her chair and shrugged it on, “And I’m taking Queenie with me and there’s nothing you can do to stop me.”

“And what about her boyfriend?”

Tina froze - her hands hovering mid-air from where she was adjusting her collar, “What?”

“I’m not stupid, Tina,” Graves ground out, “She doesn’t hide it well. She’s in love with that no-Maj baker that you bought donuts from the day I got back. I caught them earlier… And remember my precious files? Reports of what Grindelwald did when I was gone. One Jacob Kowalski played a major part in his capture.”

“I don’t-...”

“No, you listen to me,” Graves rose to his full height, squaring his shoulders and narrowing his already eagle-sharp eyes at her, “If you’re going to leave, you’re going to do so properly. You need to take him with you.”

“What?”

“I don’t know what Grindelwald is planning but, he’s trying to ruin your reputation. Not just yours but Newt’s and, I imagine, Credence’s too. I wouldn’t be surprised if his plans involved Queenie and Kowalski too.”

“And here I thought you were doing it because you believe in True Love,” Tina grabbed her hat and returned for her suitcase.

“Love is stupid,” Graves declared, “Especially one between a witch and a no-Maj. It’s doomed.”

“You’re an ass,” Tina rolled her eyes and rounded the desk, hesitating for a moment before patting his shoulder, “Thank you, Graves. I owe you one.”

“You owe me plenty.”

“I know,” and, with that, she apparated away.

Straight outside Jacob’s bakery right as he was closing up. He dropped his keys in fright and his eyes blew wide, “Holy shi-...”
“No time to explain,” Tina grabbed Jacob and apparated to her apartment where she grabbed Queenie before apparating one last time to her girlfriend’s loft.

“Alma!” Tina dropped her briefcase and went for the door.

Jacob stumbled backwards into Queenie’s ready arms and looked around the room - filled with a dining area and various houseplants - with his mouth hanging wide open. He clutched onto Queenie’s arm and gazed up at her, pointing between himself and the area where Tina used to be, “I was there and now I’m here. I dunno-... I-... what?”

“It’s okay, honey,” Queenie soothed and ran her fingers through his hair comfortingly, gazing at Tina's retreating figure, ‘I’ll explain everything in a minute-...”

Tina shut the door behind her and descended the stairs to the second level of Alma’s house. She searched everywhere she could possibly be. The upper bedrooms, the bathrooms, the library-...

The library.

Curled up in the window seat with a first edition copy of the first book in the *Madame Camembert’s Cantankerous Cabaret* collection cradled to her chest was a softly dozing Alma. Her thick black braids were gathered up in a violet silk scarf resting on the top of her head. Shadows of flickering candlelight danced across her dark brown skin.

Tina quietly approached and crouched down before her, tenderly touching her soft cheek.

Her gorgeous hazel eyes fluttered open and Alma smiled, arching into her touch, “I didn’t know you were visiting me today. Otherwise, I would’ve made myself look pretty.”

Tina glanced down at Alma’s pink flower-patterned dress and arched a brow, “You’re always pretty.”

“You always say such sweet things.”

“Not this time, Almaisie,” Tina stood up and looked away, crossing her arms underneath her chest.

“What did you do?”

“Erm...”

Alma slowly sat up, swinging her long legs over the edge and patting the cushioned seat beside her, “Sit. Tell me what happened.”

Tina’s shoulders slumped and she sat down beside Alma. She leaned over and rested her head in her lap, wrapping her arms around Alma’s waist and pressing her face against her stomach, “I got myself in a mess again.”

“Hmm, sounds about right,” Alma soothingly ran her fingers through Tina’s hair, “You display a bit of magic in front of a no-Maj again?”

“No-...,” Tina started again before groaning in realization, “Well, yes. Jacob’s in the loft but-...”

Alma’s fingers froze, “You brought a no-Maj here?”

“I wasn’t thinking,” Tina buried her face further into Alma’s stomach, “Grindelwald might be after him. He escaped and he has my wand and-...”
“Wait…,” Alma’s voice transitioned into a surprised squeak, “What?”

“It’s my fault, Almaine,” Tina’s lower lip trembled and she closed her eyes, “Grindelwald… Grindelwald escaped and it’s my fault. I got upset. I ran into his cell without thinking. And I… He got a hold of my wand. He framed Newt and Credence for a massacre and now they’re on the run - oblivious that they have a Dark Wizard after them - and it’s all my fault and I don’t know what to do…”

“Shh,” Alma swallowed thickly and ran her fingers again through Tina’s hair, “It’s not your fault.”

“It is,” Tina responded quietly, “And now I dragged you, Queenie, and Jacob into it too.”

“Queenie’s here?”

“I’m sorry. I had no other choice.”

“There’s always a choice, Teenie,” Alma slowly shifted Tina’s head off her lap and rose to her feet. She walked over to one of the nearby study tables plucked a vibrant yellow ribbon from the small wicker basket and bookmarked her page. She closed the book and set it aside before setting her hands on her hips, turning to look back at Tina, “And I’m glad that you chose me to come to.”

Alma gave her a dazzling smile that made Tina, for just one precious moment, forget all of her sorrows and troubles.

“Let’s go introduce me to Jacob then, shall we?” Alma stretched her arms over her head before heading towards the door, “I have a feeling you’re going to be here for a while.”

“Yeah, I think so too,” Tina responded in an apologetic tone, barely holding back a wince. She rose to her feet and followed Alma out, reaching for her hand as she did so, “I just hope that Newt and Credence are doing better than we are.”

Credence suddenly awoke to a frantic Newt shaking him by the shoulders. The barely restrained panic in his meadow green eyes made Credence bolt up and look around for whatever danger was threatening them.

Upon finding nothing immediately out of place, he glanced back to Newt with his brows raised in confusion. He opened his mouth to speak but, Newt quickly raised a finger to his lips indicating that he should remain quiet.

Credence nodded but, the questioning look in his eyes must not have faded since Newt pointed towards the door.

From the crack underneath, Credence could see shadows pacing back and forth.

And not just a few by the looks of it.

There had to be four - maybe five - people running back and forth down the halls.

Credence couldn’t understand much of what was being said - a mixture of French and Italian being spoken; but, as soon as he overheard his and Newt’s names being spoken in an authoritative tone did
he finally understand what was going on.

Whomever was searching for Newt had found them.

And they had dragged their new friend Ernesto and his village into their mess. They never should have accepted their offer to stay here for the night. Never.

Credence’s heart broke.

There was no time to change. No time to say goodbye. No time to do anything except grab their wands and suitcases and climb out the window, fleeing into the night.

Chapter End Notes

Action! Pining! Escapes! Periods! Foreshadowing!

All the players in the game are coming together and Grindelwald is finally free to do whatever he pleases. Will he finally show all his cards? Will Credence and Newt ever clear their names? Will Queenie ever be able to explain to Jacob what's going on? Will Tina ever catch a break?

Tune in next time on Green Meadows, Dark Skies to find out!

So, I finally finished this chapter and it was a long time coming! It's finals week at my University so, I've been drowning underneath an endless mountain of work. Thankfully, my last exam ends on May 9th so, I'll be able to regularly update again after that! Thank you all so much for being patient with me!

Please leave your comments and constructive criticism below! What was your favorite scene in this chapter? What do you think Grindelwald is planning? Between Newt and Credence, who do you think will kiss who first? How do you think their first kiss will be? How do you think this story will end? How am I doing with my writing? Is there anything that you would like for me to improve upon? Anything that you would like to see more/less of? I love reading each and every single one of your comments! They keep this story alive!
“Oh *wow,*” Jacob swallowed over the lump in his throat. He gently patted his forehead – suddenly dripping with perspiration – with a cotton handkerchief, retrieved from the inside of his tweed jacket. The room teetered and tottered – like a runaway dinghy bobbing along the raging Atlantic waves in the midst of a subtropical storm – while his knees buckled underneath him.

Queenie rested her hands on his shoulders to stabilize him. Compassionate yet firm.

“Magic’s real, ain’t it?”

“Yes. Yes, it is,” Queenie’s melodic and sweetly chipper voice (which often reminded Jacob of the mid-morning songs of a Yellow Canary or Goldfinch) had turned unusually soft and hesitant.

Jacob swallowed and dabbed his cheeks, the handkerchief heavy with sweat.

“And you’re a–…,” he stuttered out, trying to force out the words, “You’re a–…”

“A pretty woman who loves and adores you?” Queenie offered, an uncertain smile gracing her complexion.

“I was gonna go with *witch,*” Jacob laughed hoarsely, his jellied legs and wobbly knees moments from giving out entirely, “But, yeah… We can go with that too.”

Jesus Christ.


Loved him.

Was such a thing even possible?

He imagined the sweet feeling of her rose-colored lips – delicate and fragile as flower petals – upon his and the doting caress of her pianist fingers brushing across his blazing skin. He imagined a life together with Queenie. A good and loving kind of life. Working together in the bakery and spending weekends feeding pigeons in Central Park. Or, fleeing from the smog-filled city altogether to the mountains where they could spend their days gorging on sticky, sweet raspberries and swimming in a creek that only they knew of.

He imagined nights together as forbidden lovers. Jacob undeserving of her attention.

A mischievous look thrown over a pointed shoulder. The faintest coloring of her plump cheeks. Queenie tipping a French lace-trimmed witch’s hat over her batting eyes as she dropped her silk
Queenie giggled as if she could read the very thoughts going through his head—

“Oh, honey. Don’t-cha know that I can?” Queenie confirmed behind a polite hand, placed strategically to stifle her laughter, “You thought that the first time we met too, you cutie-patootie.”

Horror painted Jacob’s cheeks a shameful red. The mere indication that Queenie could hear – see – the indecent fantasies coursing through his head— No lady ought to be subjected to that.

“Don’t you be worrying now, darling. It’s alright. Every man thinks that way when they first meet me,” Queenie chirped and placed her hands upon the sides of her face, “Frankly, I find your thoughts charming. Here we are – having met for the first time twice now – and you’re thinking the same things all over again.”

Jacob stepped backwards and combed a hand through his dark hair, staring at Queenie in disbelief. He dabbed his handkerchief along his face. “We’ve… met before?”

That sorrowful look entered her eyes again and she couldn’t answer him for a moment.

“We have, haven’t we?” Jacob confirmed breathlessly and laughed.

He laughed and laughed and sat down on the hardwood floor and laughed some more.

“Christ Almighty,” hysterical giggles ripped through his throat as everything that happened within the last few minutes hit him all at once, “I thought I was losing my mind.”

Queenie shifted from foot to foot, seeming indecisive.

But, she smoothed down her dress and kneeled down beside him. “What do you mean, Jacob?” she asked, reaching out and taking his large hand between both of hers.

“You’ve ever had— oh, what’s the word? Déjà vu before?” Jacob squeezed her fingers – ridiculously tiny when compared to his – and stared into her sparkling eyes that threatened to draw him in and never let go, “You swear that— that you’ve seen someone – done something – before but, you can’t quite place it?”

He leaned closer and touched his chest. His heart raced. His breath heavy. “I got that feeling when I first saw you looking around my shop. I thought to myself, ‘What a beautiful gal. Looking like she just stepped out a dream. I should offer her an umbrella. I know I have one somewhere. Someone as beautiful as that shouldn’t be standing alone in the rain.’ Which is nonsense since it can’t rain in a store unless the roof is leaking.”

Queenie’s eyes watered.

She brought his hand to her warm cheek and pressed his palm against it, laughing softly… sadly, “I remember. Oh honey, you were so confused. You even checked the window and found nothing but sweet sunshine streaming in.”

“I thought I was going crazy. Bought myself a newspaper too. Checked the weekly forecast. Imagine my surprise when I found nothing by cloudless skies,” Jacob confessed and, after a moment, inquired, “Did we meet in the rain?”

“No, darling. That’s when we said goodbye,” Queenie revealed quietly, gentle tears spilling down her cheeks while she looked anywhere except in his eyes, “Before you gave away your memories.
Before you forgot about us.”

Jacob smoothed away her tears with the pad of his thumb.

“Now, why would I do something as awful as that?”

Queenie crumbled into pieces.

She threw her arms around his neck and crashed into him. Her trimmed fingers digging into his jacket and clinging onto him with such urgency that Jacob’s fluttering heart shattered. She squished her face against his chest – mascara staining the cloth underneath – while her thin shoulders trembled with each sob.

Jacob didn’t know what to do.

So, he simply rubbed her back and soothed wherever he could.

“It’s against our laws for a No-Maj to know about magic,” she explained, her whimpering voice muffled by the awkwardness of their position.

Jacob paid no mind to it.

“To know about witches and wizards or to see anything belonging to our society is— it’s forbidden, Jacob. We’re required by law to *obliterate* anyone who comes into contact with us. We – you – skirted around the inevitable for so long but, we ran out of time and you— you accepted it, honey,” her grip around him tightened, “You left us. You left *me*. And you went with a smile even though I knew that you were petrified. It’s not fair, Jacob. You don’t deserve what you got. You deserve everything and more.”

How could Jacob possibly respond to that?

Magic was real.

The woman he loved was a witch.

And, he gave up his memories for *her*.

“I suppose…,” Jacob continued rubbing her back, “That explains the dreams.”

Queenie lifted her head, her eyes puffy and nose reddened. “What?”

“It ain’t anything special,” Jacob shrugged and touched Queenie’s cheek, more concerned with comforting her than anything else in this moment, “Glittering gold. A cockroach inside a teapot. A blue coat disappearing down the street. And a zoo - a beautiful zoo - filled with the most amazing, fantastic creatures.”

Queenie smiled and pressed her face back against his chest, laughing waterly, “Newt.”

Jacob furrowed his brows and cast his puzzled gaze around the room as if it contained all the answers he was searching for, “What’s a newt got to do with it?”

“No, no…,” Queenie shook her head, “Not a newt. Honey, I’m talking about the Newt. Newton Scamander.”

“Who in the world is Newt?”
“Who is Newt?” Queenie shook her head again and rested her chin against his chest, gazing up at him with the softest of smiles. Her reddened eyes still puffy but no longer overflowing with tears. “My darling, sweet Jacob… let me tell you all about him and the day we met all because of that scatterbrained man. Why I believe it all started with a Niffler…”

Alma timidly ducked behind Tina’s strong back, occupying herself with counting the number of polka dots in her blouse instead of the thoughts in her head. She twisted her manicured fingers in the thin chiffon and pressed her forehead against her spine.

Doing whatever it took to quell the pitter-pattering of her heart.

Alma was magnificent around children. She was confident. Poised. Welcoming. She knew exactly how to act, how to speak, and how to teach in their company. There was endless joy in nurturing the seeds of knowledge within their growing minds; a similar eagerness as when nurturing the seeds of flowers and herbs into blossoming plants.

She loved being around children. They energized her. They pushed her beyond her limits.

But, being around adults? Around people her own age?

Her tongue always seemed to stick to the roof of her mouth. Her world spinning within a cyclone of self-doubts and silent judgments. Her lungs trapped within a python’s squeezing death-grip and frightening, terrifying, no-good dark spots dotting her vision.

To make matters worse, she had a No-Maj in her house…

It went without mentioning that she didn’t hate No-Maj’s with the same feverish passion of some supposedly dignified “pure-blooded” houses.

Purity. She could scoff at the ridiculousness! That man-made construction. Who decided what was pure and what was not?

Witches and wizards looked down upon No-Maj’s for their supposed primitivity - for their lack of magic - while white No-Maj’s sneered at black No-Maj’s for their supposed beastness - for their lack of “European civility.”

White No-Maj’s believed that those that were colored were meant to be ruled. That their whiteness deemed them as the stronger and superior beings - either through evolution, God’s divine will, or both. Similar ideas of superiority, subjugation, and dehumanization were echoed through Grindelwald’s speeches and essays.

Alma was not a hateful person.

Her father often called her “my little lamb” because of the innate gentleness of her nature. But, she despised with all her heart and soul the separation of magical ability, sexual identity, races, creeds, and genders.

She was no stranger to prejudice and hate. She possessed magic, of course, but her hair was black and kinky instead of straight and blonde. Her skin was a beautiful, rich mahogany instead of porcelain white. Because her nose was deemed too big, her skull determined to be too primitive, and
her eyes perceived as too inky.

How could she judge another when she, herself, has been judged?

She was revered as a witch and hated as a black woman. Praised and feared. Loved and despised. Accepted and rejected.

So much hate already swelled within the world because of the chance circumstances of a person’s birth.

But no one could kill the kindness in her heart.

The anxiety of her head, however….

Alma reached for Tina’s hand. A comforting squeeze and her nerves were slightly assuaged. Not entirely but, just enough to stop her heart from fluttering like a frantic sparrow being chased down by a hawk.

“Grindelwald escaped,” Tina continued after introductions and welcomings had finished, her voice resounding through the room and vibrating across her chiffon-covered back. The No-Maj - Jacob, his name was - looked momentarily perplexed and turned to Queenie for assistance who merely shook her head.

Now was not the time for explanations.

“A train of No-Maj’s were slaughtered on their way to Italy and Newt, in the eyes of the government, is to blame. But now? Now some may be suspecting Credence’s involvement which’ll come as a shock to Wizarding America since he’s supposed to be dead-...” Tina’s back tensed in barely restrained anger.

Alma put her hand upon it.

The tension subsided.

Tina continued.

“And, to make matters worse, Grindelwald has stolen my wand - likely using it in all matters of atrocities - which now will lead towards my suspected involvement with his escape. To make matters even more worse, he hinted that he might have plans for you two which puts you all in danger-... Is there anything I’m missing? I don’t know,” Tina ran her hand through her hair, “New York is just not safe right now so, I-...”

“So, you took us here without asking what we wanted,” Jacob finished.

Tina tensed up again, “I-...”

“Hey, that’s n-not to say it wasn’t the right decision or that I don’t appreciate everything you’ve done. I do,” Jacob looked around for a moment and nervously scratched behind his ear, “But, maybe we would’ve had something to offer before you whisked us here.”

“I was only trying to protect you,” Tina muttered guiltily.

Alma rubbed her back.

“I know, honey,” Queenie hummed softly, “But, we were talking earlier - me and Jacob - and… we don’t want to be holed up here.” She peered around Tina’s shoulder, sympathetic, “Sorry, Almaise.”
“It’s alright, darling. I understand,” Alma peeked around Tina’s shoulder and smiled a little before ducking back behind her, her heart hammering in her chest all over again.

“It’s just that...,” Queenie continued tentatively, clasping her hands together, “We want to help Newt.”

Tina stepped backwards. Alma held her shoulders.

“He has no idea what’s coming, Teenie,” Queenie explained hurriedly, “Well, maybe some idea... But! He doesn’t know the extent of what’s going on or the storm that’s heading his way. It’s going to get bad, Teenie. I’ve got this horrible, sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach and you know my gut is never wrong. We need to help. We have to help.”

“Then I’ll just go-...,” Tina interjected.

“Newt is our friend too. We work good together,” Queenie affirmed sternly, “We tried living our separate lives. We tried going on without each other and look where it got us. We’re all on the run. We can help him. You're an Auror. Jacob keeps everyone calm and he has that lovely No-Maj’s perspective. I’m a Legilimens so, I can hear anyone coming a mile away-...”

“I’m a rather handy herbologist,” Alma offered quietly, “And I’m relatively decent at potion-making.”

“Alma, no,” Tina’s head whirled around, alarmed.

“My friends - my family - are in danger. You’re in danger,” Alma clutched onto her back, further burying her face into the material of Tina’s polka-dotted blouse, “I’ll do whatever I can to help. I can’t hold a conversation worth my life but, you know exactly what I’ll do and how far I’ll go to protect the people I love.”

Tina’s gaze darkened. Oh, she knew that quite well.

Alma’s grip tightened. Her shoulders trembled.

“I’ll c-charter us a safe and speedy passage,” Alma continued, lowering her voice a touch, “I know a c-captain in the Caribbean - I think he’s stationed in Port-au-Prince - who can get us t-there. No questions asked. I taught his daughter a w-while back and n-now she’s pursuing a career in Herbology. I’ve been a f-family friend ever since.”

“Thank you, Alma. You’re a godsend,” Jacob complimented with such a genuine smile that Alma could feel it piercing through Tina’s protective fleshy shield, “Now, the big question: how will we find Newt? Do you’ve got some... erm... magical tracking spell?”

Tina thought long and hard for a moment, tapping her chin.

Suddenly, her finger paused, hovering right before it made contact.

“We’ll need to make a pitstop in Arizona.”

Credence shivered.
The midnight winds howled around them. The freezing temperatures dropping more by the minute. The small forest clearing they huddled on the outskirts of doing nothing to protect them from its icy-cold fury.

Credence pressed his knees against his chest, burying his chilled face into the warm recesses of his coat and allowing his long hair to tumble freely over like a protective curtain from the wind. Anything to fight this frozen feeling. Any sense of comfort he could take.

Prudence fluttered at his lapel and climbed down his shirt.

She retreated into the depths of his coat and pulled Pickett out of whatever dark pocket he had secluded himself to. Her little paper legs wrapped around his arm, tugging him upwards.

The unlikely pair of creatures climbed up Credence’s silver buttons and sat upon his trembling shoulders. Rubbing and caressing the sides of his face with tender love and care.

Credence smiled and closed his eyes.

If this was how the evening was going to pass, he would be content.

Into the dark of the night they had fled however many hours ago – though it couldn’t be any more than two. None of their pursuants caught wind of their midnight escape. But, evading capture was only the next step. They couldn’t start a fire and they couldn’t retreat into the safety and warmth of the suitcase until they were certain that they weren’t being followed.

All that they had was each other.

And Credence was perfectly fine with that.

Though feelings of regret and uneasy apprehension bubbled deep within Credence’s heart over one single thing: whether Ernesto and his village were alright.

“I’m sorry, Credence.”

What a strange turn of events this night was.

Newt hadn’t stopped apologizing – his quiet voice carrying through the soft breeze – since they sat down.

“I shouldn’t have gotten distracted,” a faint sniffling adjoined Newt’s quivering voice, “You were right: we should’ve left straight away. We should’ve never gone to that lake. Never gone to that camp. Never accepted to stay the night.”

Credence slowly looked up, wrinkling his nose to stop Pickett and Prue from their pampering, and turned his gaze upon Newt. His curling hair obscured his view.

The corners of Newt’s eyes pooled with unshed tears. He rubbed at his face with his palms – his cheeks turning red and puffy.

Credence reached over – his hand hovering mid-air – and asked quietly, “Can I?”

Newt nodded, his eyes shut as he sniffled.

Credence took his hand into his and threaded their fingers together. He rested the other on top so that all that Newt knew was his comforting embrace. The feeling of his scars – that he knew Newt strangely adored – rubbing across his palm and the back of his hand.
Newt’s shoulders trembled with a subdued sob.

“None of this is your fault, Newt,” Credence assuaged softly, “You can’t blame yourself for this.”

“Oh, but I can,” Newt choked out, “I knew that there were people after us. I knew that they would come after me. I underestimated how quickly they would follow us and now I brought an entire Muggle village into this mess. I’m pathetic.”

“You’re wonderful, Newt.”

“You’re kind, Credence,” Newt laughed softly and looked away, turning his gaze into the darkness of night where all manners of creatures roamed. Were there some watching them now?

“Did you know that I’m a screw-up? Here I am trying my hand at teaching you magic when I, myself, was thrown out of school,” his face crumpled, whispering, “I never finished my education. I’m the laughingstock of my family – no, of all wizarding England. My brother is the good one, you know. Everyone loves him. Perhaps you would’ve done better following him.”

“Newt,” Credence scooted closer, their shoulders touching, and squeezed his hand after bringing it to his face, resting it upon his cheek, “I would have never come this far without you.”

“Once again, your kindness knows no bounds. You’re perfect, Credence,” Newt protested and shook his head, “I keep making a mess out of your life – and mine – and you’re always right there to save me. On the ship. In the bookstore. On the train. Have I even helped you once since we left New York?”

“Newt, look at me.”

Newt did.

Credence abandoned his hand in favor of his shoulders, looking him square in the eyes.

“Look at my face. Look into my eyes,” he softly implored, “I’m happy, Newt. Happier than I’ve ever been before – happier than I knew that I was capable of. That was even possible. I barely even remembered the feeling.”

Something peculiar entered Newt’s eyes. A strange and unknown emotion that Credence had seen only once or twice before within them.

“You have been helping me ever since you first held out your hand in that subway. I had no idea who you were. You had barely known who I was. But, you jumped into a situation where I could have easily ended your life in the sorry state I was in and offered your help. You’re my savior. I revered you,” he paused, “But now, I know you’re just a man.”

Credence smiled at him.

“And that’s a good thing because instead of worshiping the ground you walk on, I get to walk beside you! I get to hold your hand as you drag me on another one of your adventures. I get to see, and learn, and do things that I’ve only seen in my wildest dreams. You’re the best friend that I could’ve asked for; so, who cares what anyone else says? They don’t matter! Nothing is more important than you, Newt.”

How the tables had turned. How many times had Newt comforted Credence in this manner?

But, now that Credence started, he couldn’t find himself stopping.
“When I first stepped into your cabin on *The Wailing Whirlwind*, I was lost. I was still that crying little orphan boy who hid behind his Mother’s apron-strings. That side is still a part of me and I have so much farther to go but, I’m stronger now because of you. Do you really think that because a bunch of wizards are after us that I’ll suddenly think the worst of you? My Mother used to do worse things before I went to bed. Have you ever forced gasoline past my lips because I went out to go celebrate my birthday?” Credence took Newt’s hand and guided his fingers along the puckered mark behind his ear, “Nearly killed me because I held the hand of a boy I liked? Newt, just because an adventure gets dangerous doesn’t mean that you’re a monster.”

Newt’s lips were now parted. His teary eyes widened to such a large degree that the pooled-up liquid dripped down his cheeks in little glistening rivulets.

“Newt, you’re my best friend. My closest companion. I look at you and I’m home,” Credence smiled, pushing all of his love and appreciation into it, “*Thank you. Thank you for being you.*”

Newt remained silent for the longest moment.

Worry cleaved at Credence’s heart. Perhaps he had talked too long or revealed too much?

But, for once in his life, he didn’t care.

As long as Newt was alright, that’s all that mattered.

After a second, Newt threw his arms around his neck and crashed into him. His trembling fingers digging into his Slytherin green coat and clinging onto him with such urgency that Credence’s heart panged painfully against his ribcage. He squished his face against his chest – cool tears dripping onto his shirt – while his broad shoulders trembled with each sob.

Newt mumbled something he couldn’t quite hear.

“I’m sorry, what was that?”

Newt held onto him tighter.

Pickett remained on Credence’s shoulders, but Prudence hopped onto Newt’s and soothingly rubbed her thin, paper legs across his neck. Softly squeaking, Pickett relented and reached over, patting the top of Newt’s head.

“Thank you, Credence. What I said was *thank you.*”

He shouldn’t be doing this.

By God, he shouldn’t be doing this.

*What was he thinking?*

Credence should be back home with Newt. They should be huddling together around the suitcase and trying to get some semblance of rest in that not-so-protective ring of trees. Not leaving Pickett and Prue behind to watch over the sleeping wizard. And certainly *not* trekking through foreign, unfamiliar wilderness back to Ernesto’s village.
God, home.

Since when had Newt become synonymous with the word?

After their (mostly one-sided) conversation, Newt had quickly fallen asleep in Credence’s embrace. The sheer outpouring of emotion and the day’s events having seemingly exhausted him.

But, Credence had remained awake watching the leaves blowing with the wind. Wondering what was transpiring behind that foreboding curtain of marled trunks and swathe of bushes.

Needing to drive away the uneasiness growing in his chest.

So, he had draped his Slytherin green coat over Newt’s shivering shoulders to keep him warm and headed off into the dark unknown.

Credence wrapped his arms tighter around himself, every muscle and every bone in his body steeped with cold and shivering with each passing second.

He was freezing.

But, that didn’t matter, did it?

Credence had trudged through the snow-submerged streets of New York during the dead of winter. He had endured hail pummeling through his bedroom windows and crashing through the ceiling holes. At night, he’d wrapped their meager supply of threadbare blankets around him and his sisters and huddled together on their pushed together mattresses to keep warm. He’d wrapped his one spare jacket around their shaking shoulders and done whatever he could to make sure that they were fine and safe and warm.

He’d been through worse.

He’d always been through worse.

So, Credence trekked through the vaguely familiar valley without complaint – the wind piercing through him and pushing him back as if beckoning him to return to Newt. But still he pushed forward. His wand held tight and his teeth chattering – his midnight black curls dancing along his head.

Finally, he reached the lake.

He spotted the Lariosauro, the creature’s eyes peering out of the murky, windswept water and its tiny ears wiggling with curiosity.

Credence raised his finger to his lips and shook his head.

The creature snorted – nostrils flaring as water sprayed out – and dove back underneath to unknown depths.

Credence slowly stalked around the shore until reaching the docked fishermen canoes – the vessels gently swaying with each rolling wave.

The nearby village was as silent as a ghost.

Faint traces of roasted fish and spilled wine saturated the air – the cobblestone streets made sticky from the latter. Swaying streamers and abandoned chairs and tables strewn across the avenue. A wheeled horse – an infant’s toy – creaked back and forth with the wind.
Remnants of the night’s festivities.

Yet, not a single light shimmered in the windows. Not the faintest trace of movement anywhere – neither human nor beast nor pet. No hushed voices: French, Italian, or otherwise.

It was quiet.
Too quiet.

Nothing except the screaming wind blowing through his curly locks and slamming a nearby door open and shut.

Credence found himself standing before it.

*Why wasn’t it locked?*

The uneasy feeling grew inside his chest.

He looked behind him only once – looking down the street to Ernesto’s darkened house at the end. He needed to make sure that he was alright. That he and his wife and children was safe.

But, how could he favor one family over the other?

A detour.

Just a minor detour and then he’d be on his way.

Credence climbed the front steps of the humble townhouse onto the empty porch, running his hand around the large pillars as he walked past, and searched for any signs of deceit or being lured into some sort of trap.

But, that nagging feeling of apprehension – of looming foreboding – that he couldn’t shake off had surrounded him since he’d left Newt all alone. He couldn’t tell what was safe and what shouted danger.

Credence approached the slamming door, the old wood beneath him creaking under his weight.

Sucking in a breath, he stepped inside.

He now understood what it felt like to be the protagonist of a mystery novel. Having finally tracked down the killer to an old, abandoned house at the end of the street. Going against all senses and stepping inside. Creeping through each of the gloomy rooms one-by-one searching for… what exactly?

A chill raised the hairs on the back of Credence’s neck.

He went into the kitchen first. Dishes dirtied the sink – having been left unwashed and forgotten for the night. A problem better saved for the morning.

He crept through the living room. Small, paperback books were strewn across the coffee table with pages dog-eared and bookmarked for future perusal. Crumpled quilts hung carelessly off the armrests of plump couches – the intricate patchwork old enough to have likely been passed down from generation to generation. Photos lined the walls in glass frames, capturing the black-and-white likeness of a young woman and her triplet daughters.

A small, golden plaque inscribed their names underneath the grand portrait.
The mother named Valentina.

The daughters called Elena, Faustina, and Claudia.

Signs of life and love and memories everywhere.

Credence returned to the front door and looked up the spiraling staircase. More paintings and photos decorating the hall.

Cautiously, he ascended.

Each step proved more tedious than the last. The eerie wind shrieking outside and shaking the locked windows.

*What are you doing, Credence? Have you gone mad? This is something Newt would do, not you. You shouldn’t be here. You know you shouldn’t be here.*

But still he continued forward, reaching the second floor.

He didn’t know what he was doing. Perhaps it was the notches on the doorframe documenting the height of each growing child. Perhaps it was the child-like flowers painted across the door – handprints of various sizes making up the leaves. All that Credence knew was that he was grasping the copper handle before he knew what he was doing and opened the door.

Thunder crashed.

Lightning illuminated the air.


But, the beds were empty.

A shimmering red lake stretched across the floor.

A tiny hand with even tinier fingers splayed inside it. A tiny hand belonging to a thin arm belonging to a-…

“No.”

Horror clenched Credence’s stomach as his feet moved without his bidding. He stuffed his wand inside his sleeve. Extended his arms outwards. Pulled the still, deathly cold children into his embrace searching for any signs of life.

A heartbeat.

A breath.

Anything.

“No,” Credence repeated and covered his face in his hands, bloody prints smearing across his cheek. He couldn’t find anything. Nothing remained within these children – not a trace of their immortal souls.

He shook himself out of his stupor.
He wasn’t trying hard enough. That had to be it.

He pressed his fingers hard against their slim wrists, their tender little necks.

There had to be something he was missing! They couldn’t be—

*They couldn’t be dead.*

God, their ebony curls looked so much like his own. Their olive skin turned pale with death—

He had to save them. He could save them, couldn’t he? Credence had magic, damn it! What good was it unless he could save other people?

The wind outside screamed.

Or was that coming from his own throat?

A sob shuddered through him and tears pummeled down his face like the growing thunderstorm outside. As if he and it were one and the same.

Something flashed behind him

Credence whirled around.

Another blinding light.

Credence shielded his eyes and tried to blink away the stars filling his vision. He tried to look at the shadowy figure who had found him but, it had mysteriously disappeared.

Rage filled his heart. Consumed his soul. The tears dried on his face.

The windows burst behind him and shattered glass surrounded the floor.

Like a man possessed, Credence stood.

The jagged glass crunched underneath his leather shoes. He stalked out the bedroom, covered in the blood of innocent children, and into the hall. Time seemed to slow all around him. He walked—merely walked—the grounds, following the cloaked figure retreating down the stairs at the far end of the hall.


*It should be you lying on that floor, you coward.*

“How could you?” Credence whispered, the ghostly wind carrying his voice through the air. Glass frames—pictures of the happy family—burst as he walked past. “*They were children!*”

But this was only one house. One house that Credence just happened to enter.

“Could you not stop at one? Have you slaughtered the entire village, you monster? What have you done?”

Fire and brimstone crackled and popped in his eyes. Credence saw nothing but the scarlet flames of rage. The blood of innocent children.

“*Answer me!*”
He reached the top of the staircase, his magic spiraling out of control around him and shooting out to knock over the retreating killer. The monster who had committed this horrendous crime. This unforgiveable sin.

But, they were gone.

And the uniformed Aurors of Wizarding France that had been tracking Newt were there.

Credence froze; but, his magic did not.

Unbound and vengeful, it lashed out towards the nearest target – throwing four or five of the witches and wizards into the air like bugs into the wall behind them, knocking them immediately unconscious.

“I didn’t mean to,” Credence said hurriedly, fumbling for his wand and extending it forward, ready to protect himself.

It nearly slipped out of his hands from the blood coating them.

The blood of Elena, Faustina, and Claudia.

The icy claws of the Obscurus ran down his ribcage, begging for release.

“Please,” Credence pleaded, “I don’t want to hurt you.”

“Neither do we, Credence.”

He froze.

“You speak English?”

“Only I do,” the Frenchman answered smoothly, weariness (a type of weariness that could only be caused from a long night spent amongst the most unthinkable of horrors) swirling around his violet-gray eyes, “Come with us, Credence. We can protect you.”

“Protect me?” Credence could almost laugh at the thought. Or perhaps that was hysteria finally reaching him. Was he going mad? “Pray tell, from what? From Grindelwald? He’s in prison.”

The French Auror shook his head and searched for the right words, “From someone much… much worse. The man you’ve taken as your master.”

Credence’s grip on his wand tightened, “He’s not dangerous!”

“Can you know for sure though?” the Auror simply continued, “He killed a hundred muggles on that train. He killed a couple hundred more tonight.”

No.

“That wasn’t him,” Credence refused to acknowledge even the possibility that Newt could be behind this. That man didn’t have a violent bone in his body. Not Newt. Not his Newt. “I was just following the person that did and they’re getting away…”

“No one came past us, Credence.”

“What?” Credence’s mouth parted and the rage within him stirred once again, “He was just here! He’s getting away! How can you blame Newt when the killer was right at your fingertips! This is
madness. Newt helped capture Gellert Grindelwald of all people! He saved me. Newt’s a war hero – not a monster!”

But, it seemed that the Frenchman was prepared for this reaction.

“Then why do death and destruction follow everywhere he goes?”

Credence froze.

“Here’s what we think: that he took advantage of Grindelwald’s appearance in New York to cover his crimes and he’s using you now for more of the same,” the French Auror continued, “The chaos in New York when he released his beasts. The incident in Diagon Alley where witches and wizards by the hundreds have attested that they saw Newt in the source of the destruction. This village. The train. The first taste of death. All the windows were shattered there, you know. The servant’s quarters destroyed. All signs pointing towards an Obscurus attack.”

Credence’s heart stopped.

But not once did his trust in Newt waver.

Instead, he wondered if…

He wondered if, though Grindelwald was bound in lock and chain, his influence still extended across the seas. That he retained every inch of power inside his American prison as he had out of it.

Had Munin planned on Credence attacking her?

“No,” Credence shook his head and stepped backwards, “That wasn’t-…”

“We understand.” And, by that sad, downtrodden look in the Frenchman’s eyes, Credence was inclined to believe him. “We don’t believe it was you. Not for one second. We have more experience with your kind – more than those Americans. We can help you, Credence, if you just tell us where Newt is.”

Credence’s gaze hardened.

“Newt has been helping me just fine. I’m staying with him.”

“But, so did Credence.

A spell passed his lips and he levitated the Frenchman, higher than he intended, and knocked him against the ceiling.

The remaining witches and wizards raised their wands but, the wind swirled around Credence and knocked them off their feet.

He ran.

He ran into the streets and spun around. So many houses. So many families. How many children had been murdered because of-…

Because of what? For war? For pleasure? To convince him to join Grindelwald’s ranks?

All death was senseless. But, the children. Oh God, the children.
And the world thought Newt – wonderful kind-eyed Newt – capable of such monstrosities?

Credence screamed and hunched into himself, his hands burying themselves in his wild hair. How could this happen? Was this all his fault? Death and destruction always led back to a rogue Obscurus. Newt had said it himself.

Newt.

Credence lowered his hands.

Newt all alone in this thunderstorm. Newt who didn’t do well with loud, unexpected noises. Newt who he had abandoned all alone without even a note. Newt who had no idea what was happening or where he was.

Déjà vu. Hadn’t Credence been in this situation before? Yes, he had; but, now, the roles were reversed. Wizarding France at his heels and Newt left behind in the dark.

Shouts emerged behind him. Credence didn’t look back.

He ran.

He ran through blood-stained streets - what he had mistaken before for sticky, spilled wine – as the rain cleansed him and the village of the evidence but not the sin. Credence dove off the dock, over the rocking canoes, into the lake.

The Lariosauro, as if awaiting his call, emerged.

Credence latched onto the creature’s back, wrapping his arms around its neck.

It understood what he wanted. Understood what was at stake here. And it dove under, swimming rapidly to the other side of the lake.

To home.

________________________________________________________________________

Newt gazed upon Credence’s huddled figure, soaked to the bone and shivering violently from the cold. A heating spell instantly left his lips to warm him and Newt found himself running towards him before he could tell his feet to move.

“Where did you go?!”

Credence flinched backwards and focused his gaze unto his shoes.

Newt knew that he should choose his words carefully and mind his manners; but, Newt had been WORRIED, and he was frustrated and upset beyond anything he had ever felt before.

His hands trembled at his sides.

“Fizzle Whiskers.”

Credence’s head shot upwards and his mouth hung open, shocked.
“No word. No note. Nothing. Fizzle Whiskers, Credence, *Fizzle Whiskers!*” Newt paced back and forth in the rain, an agitated humming sound ripping through the back of his throat as he tugged on his hair in frustration. All this restless, anxious energy pumping through him. He needed to get it all out, so he could speak – really *speak*.

It didn’t help that the wind wailed around them with such a maddening, sorrowful scream that it wouldn’t surprise Newt one bit if a mourning banshee was the cause behind all its ferocity.

It didn’t help that he had awoken to the crash of thunder and found Credence *gone* – with only his coat left behind.

It didn’t help that the agony pulsing through his ears – the restless grating static fused with the screeching agony of nails scratching across a schoolroom chalkboard – hurt him and turned his mind into a screaming, chaotic hellscape of unprecedented pandemonium.

“I’m s-sorry,” Credence’s voice sounded hollow and his eyes were splayed wide. His hands had been curled tightly against his chest and he retreated into himself so completely that he shrunk to half his size. “I didn’t think…"

“You didn’t,” Newt confirmed, running his hands through his hair, “Remember how you felt when you thought that I hadn’t left *you* a note – that sheer terror of not knowing anything that was going on. That’s what you just put me through. I was scared that something happened to you. If anything had-...”

The pair of them shivered in the rain – water dripping from their eyes and soaking their hair. They were drenched. Soaked. *Freezing.*

Unable to tell if the water dripping down their cheeks were raindrops or tears.

Until Credence raised his hands to his face and a choked sob shattered through him. He doubled over and *broke.* Newt had thought that he had seen Credence at his worst before – seen his heart shattered beyond repair – when he thought the paper butterfly destroyed. But…

Newt was horrified to discover that he was wrong.

Credence shoulders shook. Sobs shuddering through his body.

He was *breaking.*

Crumbling before him.

Newt’s fury died in his throat. The raging mayhem hellishly rampaging through his ears subsided to a soft tremble.

He knelt down and took Credence’s scarred hands into his, raising them to his forehead and closing his eyes tightly shut.

Was Credence *that hurt* by his anger?

“We agreed to be partners,” Newt whispered softly, “What we do, we do *together.* I don’t… I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

“I’m sorry,” Credence’s voice cracked with such rawness that Newt’s heart broke again and again, “I’m so sorry.”
“It’s okay, Credence,” Newt soothingly shushed, “It’s nothing that we can’t learn from. Nothing that we can’t fix…”

A hollow laugh shuddered through the Obscurial and Credence retracted his hands, covering his mouth.

It was then that Newt noticed the blood.

Faint traces of scarlet underneath his fingernails. Stains ingrained in his shirt.

“Who did this to you? Credence are you hurt?!” Newt grabbed him by the shoulders. Had he been stolen in the night and had fought his way back only to meet Newt’s rage?

But, no. That was not the case.

What had happened was much worse.

“It’s not mine,” Credence choked out and he finally met Newt’s eyes, “The children. They killed the children. Everyone. Everyone’s dead!”

Graves was in a dark place.

Actually, the family library was quite bright – illuminated by a dozen lamps at least across the small room.

But, in his mind? Oh, wasn’t that a dark and pitiful place to be in.

He downed a shot of brandy and slammed the cup down, pouring himself another from the crystal decanter balanced on the table-stand.

He had gone down too easily.

That one phrase. That’s all it took.

That one phrase and, fuck, Grindelwald had him wrapped around his finger all over again like a goddamned wedding ring. It was pathetic. It smeared his name as an Auror. It made him useless. Even worse, it made him a liability. Had someone else caught Grindelwald and his entourage escaping, perhaps he would still be in custody.

Perhaps the young recruit Thomas T. Thomas would still be alive.

Graves downed his drink and, in a sudden fit of rage, threw the glass against the far wall.

He collapsed unto his knees and sunk his nails deep into his tender scalp, closing his eyes tight and releasing an agonized shout.

He could feel Grindelwald’s fingers running down his back, caressing his face and shoulders. He could feel that charming voice in his ear making him question everything he had ever known. Across the backs of his eyes, he could still see the flash of a spell and phantom pain shooting down his limbs.
Terror and rage clenched his chest. Made it hard to breathe.

Graves jumped to his feet and lashed out against everything and anything he could touch. He pulled down books from ancient wooden shelves. He tore his old leather chair into shreds and shattered the frame. He destroyed tables and lamps and expensive decanters of alcohol. Anything so that he didn’t feel torn up inside.

Graves wanted to make the world feel as broken and weak as he did. He wanted Grindelwald to suffer for what he’d done.

He stood amongst the chaos and destruction, panting. His knuckles sore and blood trickling down his forehead onto his cheek.

He needed help.

Merlin, he couldn’t do this alone.

He had tried to ignore it. Tried to ignore the monster hollowing him out inside and destroying everything that he was. Tried to ignore the pain, the vengeance, the nightmares. Tried to pretend that everything was normal.

Hell, he had even turned to food to fill that empty space inside him.

But, Graves realized that he could never return to a pre-Grindelwald world. That had been his mistake. He now had to learn to live a life post-Grindelwald.

A loud pecking sound stirred his attention.

Stepping through piles of torn papers and splintered wood, Graves opened the eastward window and a news-owl flew in dropping the paper onto the floor.

Graves ran his hands over his face.

He wanted nothing more right now than to be left alone to his misery.

But, still he forced himself to fetch the newspaper from the floor and read over the day’s biggest headlines.

Two faces he had never personally seen but knew quite well stared back at him.

Fuck.

A young, pig-tailed girl strolled through New York’s streets.

This was a part of the city she’d never been to before and it excited her to no end. Unexplored territory. Unimaginable possibility.

Perhaps she could establish a new headquarters here? Make a lovely new base-camp she could call her own. Dig through untapped dumpsters for new supplies and clothes instead of the tattered rags she wore.
Determination etched across her visage, the little girl skipped down the alleyway – her warmest blankets and essentials tucked under her arm.

A paper almost immediately blew into her face.

She wrinkled her nose and ripped it off.

Modesty Barebone read the disappearing script and fading pictures but, her No-Maj eyes had already seen too much.

*Oh Credence. What horrors have you found yourself in this time?*

Bartleby tossed the morning newspaper across Grindelwald’s desk, a bowl of sugared oatmeal and raisins in one hand and a silver spoon in the other. He scooped up a mountainous bite and plopped it in his mouth.

“*I think you should see this, sir.*”

“*See what, hmm?*” Grindelwald stretched out his long limbs, rolling around his wrists and appreciating the simplicity of the feeling – the freedom of the action, “*Witnessing you dripping that goop onto your chin? Haven’t you ever heard of a napkin?*”

Bartleby just stared silently – his eyes boring holes into Grindelwald’s skull. He scooped up another overflowing spoonful and ate it slowly in front of him.

“One day we’ll teach you proper manners and etiquette, Mr. Bartleby Barnes,” Grindelwald quipped and unrolled the newspaper, flipping to the first page.

“*Unlikely, sir.*”

“*Besides,*” Munin rasping voice cooed as she entered the cabin, wrapping her arms around Bartleby’s shoulders, “*We love B just the way he is, don’t we?*”

“I think there’s room for improvement,” Grindelwald drawled and turned his gaze unto the paper.

A cat-like grin spread across his lips.

Munin peered curiously over, “*Everything okay, sir?*”

“Oh yes. Dare I say everything’s coming along *perfectly.*”

Delightful conversations and youthful shrieks echoed down the staircases and hallways of *Hogwarts School of Witchcraft & Wizardry* as young witches and wizards made their way towards the Great Hall for breakfast. Ravenclaws and Slytherins traveled down the ancient halls in an orderly fashion from the different dorms while rambunctious Gryffindors and giggling Hufflepuffs headed down less so.
They sprinted and strolled, skipped and sauntered at their leisure.

After all, they were Hogwarts students. They studied at the safest, most prestigious school in the world. No wars or problems could breach their walls. What did they have to worry about?

*Ah, to be as ignorant as a child again. What bliss.*

The young professor lounged against the archaic stone pillars and shook his head, a twinkle in his eye and a smile at his lips as he watched students barrel past.

After the last of the stragglers caught up, he vacated his post and headed to his office.

The professor had taken off early last night to go drinking with his co-workers down in Hogsmeade – a celebration of the end of the war and new beginnings. After an hour into their festivities, he had found that he had a little one too many drinks and had ended up in the bed of the rather handsome waiter that had served him.

Needless to say, he had buckled his pants, pulled on his glittery turquoise socks as quickly as possible, and hightailed it out of there.

He had so many essays that he still had left to grade.

The young professor shook his head and entered his office, shutting the door quietly behind him.

Ah, the morning newspaper already laid across his desk. Prompt as always. Perhaps he could peruse the crosswords and try his hand at sudoku for a only a minute—

But, the headlines and moving pictures printed across it gave him pause.

Obligations and flights of fancy forgotten, Albus Dumbledore sat down in his chair and picked up the newspaper.

And he read.

Chapter End Notes

Hello again, my darlings! I have a wonderful announcement for all you lovelies. In addition to this newest chapter, I've been working on something big - a couple thousand words big, I mean. Nearly every chapter in Green Meadows, Dark Skies - especially the ones in the beginning - now has new scenes and bonus content for you to read and enjoy! A chapter here and there only underwent minor edits but, there's something for everyone!

So much happened in this chapter. So much pain and emotion on all sides. How will our poor boys ever recover? Will Newt and Credence's names ever be cleared? Will their American friends ever meet with them?

Tune in next time on Green Meadows, Dark Skies to find out! Big things are coming in the next chapter <3 A little bit of sweetness to make up for this one.

So, y'all, this is where I ask how I'm doing as a writer? Is there anything that you would like to see me work on? To see more of? Less of?
What has been your favorite chapter/scene overall in this series thus far? How do you think this adventure will end? Who will kiss who first: Credence or Newt? Cast your votes now while you still can! You might not be able to do so soon <3

And, finally, please your leave your comments and criticisms below! They are the lifeblood of this fic and keep this writer's motivation going! Please let me know if I'm capturing a marginalized character's experiences (Trans, POC, disabled/mentally ill, etc.) in a manner that is less than believable. I will do my best to go in and correct it not only here but in myself. I feel comfortable writing from a PTSD/Abuse Survivor, Autistic, Non-binary, flamboyantly pansexual perspective since that is how I experience the world. But, I am still learning and I want to portray characters different than me as best I can.
Just a Little Kiss Would Do

Chapter Notes

Lore:

*coming soon I promise*
*disclaimer: Modesty is a firecracker that kicks ass and takes names. A child that takes no shit from anyone. The literal embodiment of the phrase: "FIGHT ME." I don't know how this happened but it did so you have been warned*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mother tutted around the kitchen making breakfast – the scent of burnt buttered toast, roasting tomatoes, and frying eggs wafting through the cottage. Ever since Theseus returned home from the War, she had fretted over him like this as if he were five-years-old all over again and hanging onto her leg. It irked him to no end – being pampered and doted upon – but, he indulged her for the meantime.

He couldn’t imagine what it was like for a parent to see their child leave for the battlefield.

And not know where the other one was.

Oh Arty, where have your beastly adventures brought you this time?

Theseus leaned back in his favorite quilted chair and ran his hand over his forehead, pinching the bridge of his nose. The living room still smelled of smoke when Newt set it on fire however many years ago.

The memory brought a smile to his face.

They were the brothers named after Greek Legends, Heroes, and Gods. Theseus for him and Artemis (Arty, as Theseus liked to call him) for Newt. And how their fates reflected their namesakes.

Just as the legendary hero Theseus solved the Labyrinth and slayed the Minotaur, Theseus the wizard had become a powerful Auror and led the wizarding movement to countless victories in the War. Theseus would sacrifice everything for his brothers and sisters on the front-lines and back home – loyal to what was right no matter the cost and regardless of opinion. They both possessed great destinies. Born to lead and to conquer. Soldiers by birthright.

Just as Artemis was famous for being the Goddess of the Hunt, Mistress of Animals, and Nurse of Youths, Newt had courted beasts and taken other misfits under his wing. He jumped into the most dangerous of situations with kindness in his heart and hand outstretched to help. They were both wild creatures. Born to a life on the run and the wind at their heels. Wanderers since infancy.

They were opposites.

Theseus sharp where Newt was soft. Theseus cold where Newt was understanding. Theseus confident where Newt was hesitant. The other's weaknesses were their brother’s strengths. They were made equal in that way. Together they made the perfect person.
So, Theseus could never understand why people favored him over his brother.

Granted, Newt had always been the strange one of the family.

When Theseus had been taking his first steps at two and learning his ABCs, Newt had been staring at the window watching the light shine in. When Theseus was learning to read at four, Newt had been scribbling curious designs and pictures with his crayons. When Theseus was learning his first spells, Newt had been jabbering on about the insects he caught outside in a glass jar. When Theseus was old enough to dress himself, not a single wrinkle could be spotted upon his shirts, his jackets were always neatly buttoned, and his hair was combed to such perfection that nary a strand fell out of place.

When Newt was old enough to dress himself, he matched ghastly purple shirts with yellow shorts. He put his jacket on inside out and left his shoes carelessly untied. Dirt was always smudged across his cheek and his tawny hair – redder in adolescence – resembled a rat’s nest.

He had always been different.

Theseus especially didn’t understand Newt’s devotion to magical creatures and frowned upon his decision to make a career out of it. He could do so much better. Theseus could easily get him a better job with better security and better pay if he only asked.

But, no. Newt was too stubborn to do so.

And happy.

His beloved brother, his annoying little Arty – always the happy one.

Shrieking with laughter louder than any other person in the room when they were children, obliviously embarrassing their parents in front of their guests. Spinning around for hours and hours before eventually falling over in exhaustion and watching the ceiling fan go ‘round and ‘round with that stupid, beaming smile on his face up until he was a teenager. Always waving his hands back and forth when he was overwhelmed with joy.

Even when he was kicked out of Hogwarts… even when he was plagued by worry and self-doubt, Newt always wore a smile.

Newt who found wonder in everything. Newt who loved the unloved. Newt who found curiosity in things that Theseus could never comprehend.

So, Theseus protected his rather strange and peculiar brother from the background.

He may not understand his brother. He may never understand his brother. But, he still loved him.

He sent Newt money and funded his expeditions. He chartered the best transportation he could find and always made certain that he could get him out of trouble should he ever need it. When Newt’s path converged with the Aurors in New York, Theseus had quickly penned a letter to one Percival Graves. They corresponded often – mostly involving work in the Ministry; but, he had written him about Newt. Asked him to keep an eye on his little brother that he worried would one day find himself over his head where not even he could save him.

But, apparently that time had come.

Theseus glanced back to the newspaper laying abandoned on the nightstand.
A moving picture of Newt’s battered and bruised face stared back at him. A photograph of his apprentice (since when did he ever have a traveling companion?) beside it – his face and hands covered in the blood of children behind him. The words “WANTED FOR CRIMES OF THE MOST HEINOUS KIND” scrawled across the top.

*Arty, why must you always make it so difficult for me to help you?*

*“Theseus,” Mother’s voice chittered from the kitchen, “Breakfast.”*

He rose to his feet and tossed the offending newspaper into the crackling fireplace. He couldn’t let Mother read this. Not yet. Just a few more minutes of peace and ignорantly believing that both her children were safe and out of trouble for once.

*“Sorry Mum,” Theseus crossed the kitchen and kissed her cheek, “I’ve got to run.”*

*“No, you don’t,” Mother merely protested, her arms placed sternly upon her hips, “The Ministry can wait an hour for you to eat.”*

*“If only the Ministry were that understanding,” Theseus laughed and grabbed his coat and hat, slipping them on. He lingered for a moment longer before grabbing a piece of buttered toast – giving his Mother an apologetic smile as he did. “But, this doesn’t have anything to do with them.”*

*I have an old friend to meet.*

__________________________________________________________

“What’s the password?”

Theseus impatiently grimaced at his old professor and adjusted his navy-blue tie, loosening the knot ever so slightly so that it didn’t – y’know – *choke* him. “I have no time for such childish fancies-…”

*“Wrong answer.” The door shut in Theseus’ face.*

He sighed.

*I have a pocketful of Sherbet Lemons?*

A moment passed and then the door unlocked, “You may enter.”

Theseus smirked and passed through into the familiar office.

He entered what used to be an elegantly tiled room – any remaining signs of lavish finery worn into an unflattering yellow from years of misuse and shoddy upkeep – and shut the wooden door behind him. An empty perch loomed in the far corner, a golden plate underneath collecting a mound of ash and dust. An antiquated globe spun around beside it and books – some ancient and leather-bound while others were of the common Muggle sort – surrounded the entire expanse of room from floor to ceiling.

*“It looks exactly how I remembered it to be,” Theseus commented upon hanging up his coat and hat upon the metal rack beside the door. He sneezed at the dust floating through the air and sniffed, “Smells the same way too. Have you dusted at all since you’ve been here, Professor?*

*“Albus, please,” Dumbledore smiled before him, that annoying ever-present twinkle sparkling in his*
eyes, “You’re no longer a student, Mr. Scamander.”

“Apologies,” Theseus returned the smile and brushed past him. He plopped a cloth bag on the desk, taking a seat before it, “Have you dusted at all since you’ve been here, Albus?”

“Better,” Dumbledore situated himself behind his desk and pulled open the strings, happily popping one of the artificial yellow treats into his mouth, “Lovely.”

However, Dumbledore leaned back in his chair and clasped his hands before him, looking like Sherlock Holmes or Hercule Poirot or another one of those famous detectives from the novels Newt so adored, “But, Mr. Scamander, I doubt you’ve visited me after all these years just to catch up and bring me my favorite treat. Pray tell, what are you really here for?”

“I think you already know.”

If that ridiculously noticeable brightening of that insufferable sparkle in his eye was any indication, he did.

“Your younger brother has an awful penchant for getting into trouble and blamed for things he hasn’t done,” Dumbledore all but confirmed, “Doesn’t he?”

Theseus’ grimace was paired with an aggravated huff this time, “I dare say he’s making a career out of it.”

Albus chuckled and reached over, popping another candy into his mouth.

He hollowed out his cheeks – closing his eyes as he gave the treat a good, veritable suck – before crunching it between his teeth and swallowing the remains. When he reopened his eyes, that damned twinkle was… gone.

Theseus didn’t know whether he liked that or not.

“Unfortunately, Mr. Scamander, I regret to inform you that I can’t help you and I can’t help him either. I cannot be involved in the affairs surrounding my old… colleague,” a brief flash of heartbreak and disappointment crossed his expression; but, it was gone as quick as it came, “I can’t risk being swayed by his charming words again and jeopardizing all that I’ve come to stand for. I refuse to.”

“You can’t interfere even a little for Arty?” Theseus forced himself into the calm, composed exterior of a battle-hardened veteran though he wanted nothing more than to deck Dumbledore in the face, “I’m not asking you to fight against Grindelwald, Professor. Just keep him from ruining my brother’s life! You were on the council overseeing Newt’s expelling from Hogwarts. You stood by him when no one else did. Why can’t you do so again? Why not now?”

Dumbledore pulled at his collar, suddenly uncomfortable, “As I’ve already explained—…”

“No, you’re making excuses.”

Screw civility.

He was a man of action – not of words.

Theseus stood up and slammed his hands on the desk, jumbling the cloth bag full of Muggle candies. Dumbledore gripped the armrests of his chair in alarm.
“Professor – Albus – you’re letting your fear govern your actions instead of reason. My brother can’t get out of trouble this time alone and, I fear, if we don’t act now while the time is right—Instead of being forbidden from stepping foot on school grounds like before, he’ll go to prison or worse. He’ll be sent to Azkaban or—” Theseus sat back in his seat with a grunt, “Or get himself killed. The fact that he’s taken an Obscurial as an apprentice of all things only increases the odds.”

This time open sorrow and regret flashed over Dumbledore’s expression. He leaned against the armrest, resting his cheek in his palm but, Theseus could spot the faint glimmer of stubbornly held back tears in his eyes.

Secrets upon secrets. That man – charming enough to seem like an open book when, in reality, he was locked with more guards and chains than Gringotts’s impenetrable vaults.

“Grindelwald is targeting him, Professor. He’s targeting Newt. My little brother Arty—” Theseus paused, his voice warbling with emotion.

He took a minute to recompose himself.

Theseus sucked in a breath and met Dumbledore’s gaze, his eyes hardening with resolve, “I don’t know why. Perhaps it’s revenge against what happened in New York. Perhaps he smears my brother’s good name for petty reasons beyond my comprehension or perhaps he isn’t punishing Newt at all… Perhaps he’s punishing the Obscurial for running away from him and destroying the only life he knows. Leaving no safe ally. Leaving no one and nothing he can turn to. Leaving him so completely and utterly alone that he has no choice but to return to his welcoming arms.”

Dumbledore remained uncharacteristically silent.

Theseus pressed his lips together in a hardened line.

He was a man of action.

Not words.

“I’ve never asked you for help before, Albus. You know that it is not in my nature,” Theseus stood proudly, acting as if he weren’t dressed in a common suit but uniformed and decked in full military regalia. He rounded the cluttered desk and stood before the seated professor… and knelt on the floor beneath him.

Theseus pressed his forehead against the ancient tiles and curled his hands into shaking fists.

“But, my brother needs me, and I don’t have the resources or knowledge to help him. I am a soldier – an Auror – not a tactician. I cannot go against Grindelwald alone. You know him, and you know Newt. You don’t have to see either if you just… guide me. Tell me what to do.”

The silence was maddening.

Dumbledore reached out to place his hand in Theseus’ hair.

“I cannot take that chance.”

Theseus stiffened.

“But—” Dumbledore continued and smiled, that damnable twinkle in his eye returning, “I can lead you in the direction of someone that can.”
Theseus lifted his head only to find Dumbledore having already vacated his seat and headed towards the fireplace.

“And as fate would have it,” he continued, “It’s someone you already know.”

Modesty Barebone, recently having celebrated her ninth birthday, feverishly read over the tossed newspaper with her brother’s name and face printed across it. The sheer horror in his eyes and the tears falling down his cheeks so familiar to her that Modesty couldn’t remember him ever having any other expression.

Her heart panged for the fallen children behind him.

It was in that moment that she realized three things:

1. Credence wasn’t to blame for what the papers accused him of. Modesty had seen an Obscurus up close and that was not what it looked like when it attacked. There ought to be more destruction, more chaos. Besides, Credence would never harm children.
2. Credence was in mortal danger and needed help.
3. Modesty was just a child and had no way of providing it.

She crumpled the newspaper in her hands and stuffed them into her pockets. She was angry at Credence for a hundred things. Angry at the world for a thousand more.

Chastity had fled to a covenant and abandoned her and the other children Mary Lou had taken under her wing to the streets. That was fine. She was from the Bronx. Modesty could endure the streets – she’d been there before.

But, what she couldn’t endure was the betrayal in her heart from Chastity leaving her alone. From Credence fleeing all the way to Europe without her.

Not that she would have gone, of course.

Seeing the dark magic pour from his body – from the wicked demon that had possessed him – had frightened her. She couldn’t imagine her soft-spoken brother, that kind and unfortunate soul that protected her and Chastity from the hands of their Mother, capable of such ferocity. Capable of murdering their Mother no matter how cruel she may have been.

Modesty had prayed for Credence’s soul and salvation every night since that fateful day. But, then she realized what she was doing – how very Mary Lou Barebone she was acting – and decided fuck that.

She was a child raised in the slums of New York. She had a wicked mouth and quick hands perfect for picking pockets. She knew how to survive whatever it took. She knew that what people feared and run away from weren’t as bad as what they thought they were.

How many times had she been called a dirty rat when she was scrounging for food before Mary Lou adopted her? How many times had doors been slammed in her face? How many times had she been turned away when all she wanted was crumbs to feed her brothers and sisters?

She couldn’t pass such judgments unto Credence. Not when he was the only kind soul in all of New
York. The shining beacon of light and hope in her life.

No.

She refused to continue the cycle of hate. She had her moment of fear and worked past it.

Modesty vowed that should she ever see Credence again, she would extend her hand to him like he had done countless times before for her and would help him escape this darkness. She would be patient and understanding and kind.

The opposite of Mary Lou.

Exactly the same as Credence.

Glass shattered on the cobblestone streets a few feet before her.

Modesty looked up, shielding her eyes from the morning light, and gazed up at the open window where the trinkets and priceless heirlooms (that she could easily pawn off if they weren’t destroyed) were being thrown down from. Shredded paper floated down. A large chunk of leather. A snapped candlestick.

More pages from the newspaper stuffed in her pockets.

Modesty rolled up her sleeves and set her blankets and other essentials beside the dumpster. She grabbed a wooden crate and another and another until five were precariously stacked one on top of the other, high enough to reach the fire escape.

She climbed up and grabbed onto the metal stairs – the crates tumbling down from the action. But, nothing could stop Modesty Barebone once she set her eyes on something. She ascended quickly – the wind nipping at her heels – and hopped onto the window ledge.

She pulled the newspaper from her pockets, fire blazing in her eyes, and held it out to the pacing figure inside, “Explain this to me.”

The figure jumped in surprise and turned around. Modesty recognized that face instantly.

It was the wizard – Graves, she thinks he mentioned his name was – that had come searching for her. The man who had angered Credence. The one who had somehow betrayed him. The person who had taken her brother away from her.

“You!”

Modesty dropped onto the balcony and pummeled forward with a fiery inferno of pure, destructive rage in her heart. She landed a wicked punch between his legs, causing him to buckle over, and another equally powerful one to his stomach when strong hands grabbed her shoulders and forced her backwards.

Curse her tiny arms.

Curse her tiny legs.

“You!” Modesty seethed and chomped down on his arm, eliciting a howl from the bad man; but, his grip remained firm, “You hurt my brother! You got him sent away!” Angry hot tears filled her eyes and she swung her fists uselessly in front of him.

“Bring him back!” her voice warbled, “Bring my Credence back!”
A sharp inhale.

“Credence… is your brother?”

Modesty paused and suddenly stomped on his foot, earning a yowl this time that brought him to his knees. She wrapped her hand around his tie and pulled him close enough that they were at face-level. She stared into his eyes and found—

Well, pain of course and surprise.

But also… anger. Anger of such ferocious intensity that it froze instead of burned. Opposite yet similar enough to the fury Modesty felt in her heart. She found endless, long-suffering sorrow and a deeper type of misery beyond the fleeting pain she had just caused. She found swirling vengeance. Hate. Rage. Agony.

But, she didn’t find the cold deceit in his eyes that she knew quite well.

Not a single trace of it.

“You’re not him.” She couldn’t understand it – couldn’t fathom the possibility; but, it had to be true. “You have his face but, you’re not him… Are you the real Mr. Graves? Or was the name another one of his lies?”

Realization now entered the cascade of emotions swirling in the wizard’s eyes, “You’re Modesty Barebone.”

“At your service,” Modesty released him from her grip. She stepped backwards and squared her shoulders, unfolding the newspaper gripped in her hand, “Now, tell me what happened to Credence.”

This tiny storm of fire and brimstone was Credence’s sister.

Little Modesty Barebone, with her thin arms crossed over her chest and a scowl on her face. The child sat on the leather chair Graves had (mostly) destroyed mere moments ago, her slippered feet not even close to touching the floor and swinging idly underneath her.

Fuck, why hadn’t anyone obliviated this child? He tried to remember the file they had on her – thin enough to contain only a single paper of information – but, it escaped his grasp.

“You’re a witch, ain’tcha? You a twin or something?” Modesty tilted her head, scrutinizing him, “You don’t act anything like the other guy Credence was with.”

“You mean Grindelwald?”

“He said his name was Graves.”

“That’s my name,” Graves groaned and rubbed his hands down his face. Fuck, he wasn’t good with children. He was fine with them… existing and all but, he didn’t know how to act or speak around them. Especially the oddly perceptive ones. “He was pretending to be me.”

“Oh, weird.” And, there was that child-like understanding that didn’t even question the strange,
mysterious, and peculiar.

Children.

Insufferable, incomprehensible children.

“Where have you been, Modesty?” Graves groaned, wishing that he hadn’t shattered the decanter of brandy against the floor moments ago, “Didn’t anyone who worked for me come fetch you after Credence—…”

“I ran before they had a chance to get me.”

“You ran,” Graves repeated slowly, “From a team of highly trained wizards that can stop you with a flick of the wrist.”

“I’m very fast,” Modesty puffed out her chest proudly, “Look, I don’t know what kinda mess Credence has gotten himself into or what happened to him but, I don’t want another Mother. I just want my brother back and no one is gonna stop me – especially you adults with your tallness and grown-up issues.”

Even Graves had to bite back a snort at that.

“All I want to know is what sort of trouble Credence found himself in. I know that whatever they’re saying about him ain’t true,” a sudden softness dampened the fire that crackled in her young, rambunctious soul, “He’s not that kind of person.”

“Even if he already had blood on his hands?” Modesty stiffened.

“He’s killed people before. Multiple people. If I remember correctly, he murdered your Mother right before your eyes.” This was why Graves wasn’t good with kids. He was too brutal. Too cruel. He just didn’t know when to hold back his tongue.

But Modesty surprised him.

“I confess… I was scared of him at first. I thought Credence was possessed by a demon or something. Maybe that’s true. I don’t know. But…,” she paused and spoke with a sense of clarity – of understanding and forgiveness – that only children of her age could possess, “He was trying to protect me. He’s always trying to protect everyone else. Been that way since he became my brother. It’s just that… the thing inside him took it too far. It’s a part of him but, that’s not Credence.”

Graves often thought himself made of steel. He was cold, and his tongue was sharp and cutting.

But, this child was made of something harder. Cut from a different cloth. She burned where he froze.

He knew that he had to escort her to the MACUSA or just obliviate her right here and now. It was his job to do so. This no-Maj couldn’t go on knowing the things she did.

But, perhaps Tina was right, and he did have a heart in him after all.

Damn it.

“Credence has a good sister in you, Modesty,” Graves eventually replied and turned his back on her. He pulled out his wand and casually cast a powerful Reparo to clean up the destruction he’d caused.
He cast a sparing glance over his shoulder to witness her reaction.

Modesty’s eyes widened slightly, marveling at the simple display of magic, but didn’t comment on it.

Made of hardier stuff indeed.

“Do you want to help your brother, Modesty?”

She nodded furiously.

“What are you willing to give up to do it?”

“I don’t have nothing to give.”

“What about your name?” Graves turned around to fully face her, slipping his wand into his back pocket and crossing his arms over his broad chest, “Your life?”

“My name belongs to my Mother,” she stated bluntly, “And I don’t have a life. I’m just a no-good street rat.”

Graves stared at her for the longest moment, scrutinizing her just as she scrutinized him. This child was tough as nails and there was nothing in this world that could stop her. Whatever she wanted, she would just reach out and take it.

He could use that sort of attitude.

Not only that but, she was an expert on all things Credence.

Graves realized that this could put her in unspeakable danger – this could put himself in danger – but, Graves didn’t have anything else to lose either.

Grindelwald had taken everything away from him already.

He opened his mouth to speak when, suddenly, his fireplace blazed to life. Graves held a finger to the child to make her stay in place but, Modesty was already crossing the room and staring into the flames. She froze for only a second, surprised by the faces she found flickering inside, but then demanded, “Who are you and what do you want? We’re busy.”

“I didn’t know ole Percy had a daughter,” a refined voice drawled when another, more amused one cut in, “Look at her. The spirit of Gryffindor himself, I dare I say.”

Damned Brits.

Always meddling where they didn’t belong.

Graves’ mood soured, and he stomped over to the fireplace, pushing the Barebone child out of the way so that he could address the two inside. “Theseus. Professor Dumbledore,” he greeted, “To what do I owe the honor?”

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Newt was the first to awake that morning.
After Credence revealed what he had seen and what happened in Ernesto’s village (Newt listening on in horror), they had fled once again into the night. They headed further South, avoiding roads and towns and wherever life flourished, until they came across an abandoned farm.

They had pulled apart the wide, barnyard doors and forced open the basement storage area hidden underneath the floorboards. The scent of rotting wood and stifling humidity permeated the air but, they were too exhausted to care. They’d passed out the instant they’d sat down, holding onto each other for warmth and, perhaps, comfort as well.

But, now, Newt was awake and unashamedly staring at his dozing companion.

All that he could think of when he looked at him was, “Wow.”

Credence asleep knew a certain sort of peace that Credence awake could never know or comprehend. There were no ghosts painted underneath his eyes or hesitance etched across his face. He had no fear – knowing nothing except blissful serenity.

The perfect portrait of peace.

As if Johannes Vermeer had somehow survived hundreds of years and turned his paintings into reality. Creating a certain slice of life that evoked nothing except feelings of peace and belonging.

That was what Credence was: the subject of a thousand paintings condensed into one. A genuine Adonis. He was the type of person that poets spun ballads and odes around. The type of person that Shakespeare’s sonnets were dedicated for.

*Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?*

Credence was an artist’s dream and Newt’s reality. He could just reach out and touch him at a moment’s notice.

Newt hesitated as a foolish desire – a childish dream – gripped him.

He shouldn’t.

But, when was impulse reasonable?

So, Newt gently dusted his fingers across Credence’s porcelain cheek – plump, slightly pinkened with sleep, and surprisingly warm. His fingertips lingered there, feeling Credence softly inhale and exhale, and watching his eyes flutter back and forth behind his eyelids.

*What adventures are you experiencing, my friend? Do you dream of me?*

Ha! As if.

Newt ghosted his fingers up the side of his face, reaching delicate ebony curls.

They were like a doll’s hair – soft, impossibly silky, with near-perfect ringlets; but, Credence’s hair was frizzy enough to show that his curls were real and not ironed. They now reached past his ears but, didn’t quite touch his shoulders. *Yet.*

Perfection.

Credence was perfection.

Newt wanted to hold him. He wanted nothing more than to wrap his arm around his back and bury
his hands in his curly hair and never let go. He wanted to press his forehead against his and stare into those impossibly black eyes for all eternity.

If he could hold Credence like that just once, he could die happy.

But, that would never happen, would it? No one had ever liked Newt before and it wasn’t as if he could blame them either. After all, Newt had only liked one person before Credence entered his life so, why would anyone pick him?

He was just too weird. Too strange for even Leta Lestrange.

His teeth were too big, his tawny hair too pale, and there were a frankly ridiculous amount of freckles dotting his skin. When he was younger, his schoolyard bullies called him leopard or cow. Since he was so spotted, he obviously was some sort of stupid beast instead of a fellow child.

Even if he didn’t look completely absurd, his personality was shite. Newt knew himself to be too eccentric. He was embarrassingly awkward around people – around his own peers. He wasn’t kind and soft like Credence. He wasn’t a natural with comforting people like Credence. Newt liked to help people but, he didn’t possess the tools that made it easy for Credence.

No. No one would ever like him and Newt was fine with that. He didn’t need it or desire that sort of companionship.

But, he would be happy if Credence did.

No one mattered except Credence.

Newt hummed softly and closed his eyes, snuggling closer to Credence’s softly breathing form. He rested his hand upon his companion’s warm cheek and lightly pressed their foreheads together.

He would be lying if he said that he wasn’t happy with what they had now. Newt valued Credence’s friendship – more than he possibly imagined. He was truly the best friend that he could ever ask for. He was just so easy to talk to and Newt found himself eagerly desiring his simple company. Newt didn’t find such blessed companionship easily even amongst the handful of people he called his friends and family.

Everything just came naturally with Credence – as if Newt could tell him anything and everything. His days were better with Credence simply being there.

“I like you, Credence.”

There.

He said it.

Only once and he could be content.

Only once and he could move on.

After a moment of lingering in thoughts of what could never be, Newt removed his hand from Credence’s face and sat up, rubbing his tired eyes.

He stood and stretched his arms over his head, cracking his aching back and soothing sore muscles. He knew that he couldn’t linger here long. He needed to go out and see where they were. See if there were signs of them being followed. But, he couldn’t – wouldn’t – leave Credence behind all
alone. Not without some sort of note or messenger—

Newt pulled Pickett from his pocket, who squeaked in protest from being jostled to consciousness.

“Oh hush,” Newt chided with a warm smile and leaned down, setting him on the dusty concrete, “I want you to keep an eye on Credence. I’m not going far. If he wakes before I return, let him know that I’m right outside, okay?”

Pickett crossed his arms and blew a raspberry.

“I’ll give you a handful of blueberries for breakfast if you do.”

That seemed to lighten the Bowtruckle up since he now seemed excited to the task, practically prancing over to Newt’s sleeping apprentice.

Newt smiled and shook his head, ascending the wooden ladder as quietly as possible as to not wake Credence, and softly shut the storage room door beneath him.

Credence’s eyes fluttered open, his cheeks flushing redder than the ripest strawberries in summer, and buried his offending face inside the sanctuary of his palms.

*I like you, Credence.*

Surely, he must have heard him wrong. Surely, it was a sleep-ridden confession that meant nothing. Surely, it was just an innocent confession of the friendship that spanned between them.

Surely, it didn’t mean what Credence hoped it meant.

*I like you, Credence.*

But, he had awoken to Newt’s hands caressing his hair. Felt his calloused fingers touching his cheek. Felt their foreheads pressed against each other and Newt’s gentle breath across his skin. He had heard his whisper.

*I like you, Credence.*

A pathetic noise whined from the back of Credence’s throat and he rolled over onto the opposite side, nearly squishing Pickett underneath him. The Bowtruckle pinched his wrist and angrily squeaked but, Credence paid him no mind; instead, focusing on ridding himself of the fantasy of what couldn’t be true.

Newt couldn’t like him.

Credence was too pale and too tall. He had too many scars and his ears were too big. He was too damaged. He was meek and unconfident and hesitated on the lake of the vast unknown where Newt did a great swan dive inside. Credence was too easily frightened – plagued by the horrors of his memory. He was too weak. He was… nothing.

And Newt… He was *everything.*

Newt would never like him as anything more than what they were; and, Credence was fine with that.
Newt was his best friend and closest companion. Credence was happy enough just knowing him. Thankful to be able to walk beside this magnificent man that was certain to change the entire world as he knew it.

Credence was happy this way.

*I like you, Credence.*

But… perhaps for this one moment he could just… pretend that Newt had really liked him. Pretend that his touch had meant something more. Pretend that they were something that could never be.

*I like you, Credence.*

Pretend that in that moment when Newt said those four words, that Credence wasn’t a coward and said: “I like you too.”

Yes, a coward. A worthless coward.

*You’re worse than that spineless murderer last night.*

Credence froze and lowered his hands from his face. Why was he thinking about such fanciful nonsense when children lay dead in their homes – in their bedrooms – where they were supposed to be safe? One night and he could just… what? Forget such horrors and dream about a romance that would never happen?

No. He could never forget what he saw that night.

Never would he let himself forget the blood of Elena, Faustina, and Claudia.

Never.

Not even for Newt.

Newt crouched beside them and watched the morning light glimmer across their silvery webs coated in just the faintest traces of dew. They were gorgeous, harmless little things.

He offered the closest spider – a *Larinioides sclopetarius*, if he guessed correctly – his thumb and
remained perfectly still. It took a couple minutes of cautious curiosity and wary inspection before the creature climbed aboard.

Newt beamed in triumph and slowly brought the crawling creature up to his face.

He heard footsteps approaching – purposely loud and slow, so that he could hear them coming and not be frightened by their sudden advance.

“Look,” Newt breathed quietly and lifted his hand, showing Credence when he knelt down beside him, “It’s you.”

Credence blinked and quirked up a brow.

“I know a great eye doctor in Brooklyn, Newt,” he drawled, resting his cheek in the palm of his hand, “You really ought to get them checked out-…”

“Oh hush,” Newt puffed out his cheeks and returned to marveling at the spider, scurrying excitedly across his fingers, “It’s okay, Credence Jr. Don’t listen to your Father. Mummy knows that you’re the spitting image of him.”

“Are you sure that’s my child?” Credence tried to hide his amusement behind his hand, but Newt saw it, “I hardly see the resemblance.”

“Blasphemy. He has your hair,” Newt gestured to the shiny black exoskeleton that really did resemble the impossibility of Credence’s curls, “And your eyes.” Matching whirls of obsidian darkness. “Both misunderstood and seemingly frightening but, are really quite gentle.”

A pause from Credence.

“Hmm, I suppose I see it now.”

Newt beamed and brought the creature closer to Credence’s face only for the man to suddenly bolt to his feet and stumble backwards.

Newt stared up at him, perplexed.

“What?” Credence pushed forward a half-grin, “It’s a natural reaction to be uneasy around spiders.”

“Unbelievable,” Newt shook his head yet still held a teasing tone in his voice, “You’ll gladly help me with the Runespoors and handle a bin of cockroaches for the Occamies, but you won’t even hold your own son. For shame, Credence, for shame.”

“Credence Jr. has my sincerest apologies.”

Newt laughed and placed the creepy-crawly back onto his web. Who knew that Credence didn’t like spiders? Such a mundane fear, totally unexpected.

He rose to his feet and brushed the dust off his knees. He offered his hand to Credence, who gladly took it but, his eyes lingered on their entwined fingers for much too long.

Newt furrowed his brow, “Is something wrong?”

Credence seemed hesitant and oddly closed off all of a sudden. As if something was bothering him-

*Merlin. Your obliviousness knows no bounds, Newt.*
“I know it hurts; but, there’s nothing we can do for Ernesto and his village, Credence,” he stated quietly, “I wish there was but, not even we have the power to bring back the dead.”

Credence looked away, nodding. But, then he added, “We have the power to bury them though.”

Bury them? He hadn’t thought about that.

“We can’t do that now—…”

“I know,” Credence looked at him and understood – truly understood, “But, when this all dies down… if we could go back and make sure they have a rightful burial and a proper grave…”

“Yes, we’ll do that,” Newt promised.

But, shadows still flickered in Credence’s eyes.

And something panged in Newt’s chest.

“Come, Credence,” he pulled on his hand, smiling to hide his pain and to help Credence escape from his, “Let me show you what I found.”

The gentle wind whipped at his curls and the pungent scent of saltwater hung in the air but, Credence couldn’t deny that the sight was beautiful. Gorgeous despite the apprehension and discomfort tugging at his chest.

He stood at the edge of the raised dock before the sparkling turquoise seas and the softly cascading waves. Faint white foam bubbled at the edges. Credence could just barely spot the small fish – silver scales glistening dazzling rainbows in the sunlight – darting back and forth through the water.

They were there.

They had finally reached the coast.

The coast of the Mediterranean Sea where they could release the Kraken.

Hope would finally be home.

Credence was happy – over the moon with joy. Hope would be reunited with her family and spend her days growing in the sea instead of trapped inside the suitcase. When she was old enough, she would eventually be able to make a proper journey back out into the Atlantic. She would be able to give her pod (and possibly many unfortunate ships) bone-crushing hugs. It was a tender moment.

And yet…

Why was there sadness also swirling in his heart?

“Do you always feel this way when releasing a creature?”

“Yes,” Newt answered beside him, lounging on the edge of the wooden dock. He knew exactly what Credence was talking about without needing to voice the exact feeling. “I’m happy for them. Overjoyed. But… knowing that I’ll probably never see them again? It hurts. It’s like I’m losing a
friend.”

“That’s why you don’t give them names,” Credence stated in realization.

“That’s why I don’t give them names,” he confirmed, “It softens a bit of the heartbreak.”

Credence fell silent for a moment, gazing out unto the horizon. The crystal-clear waters flowing underneath them, the cloudless azure skies looming above, and the peaceful silence that only nature could provide… It was really quite beautiful. Like something out of a dream.

“What do we do now?”

“Hmm?” Newt looked up.

“Do we just…,” Credence furrowed his brow and gestured to the Mediterranean, “…bring Hope up from the suitcase and throw her in?”

“Goodness me, no,” Newt laughed and turned his attention back to the calm waters, “If she were an adult, possibly. But, she’s still young and, for the most part, grew up in isolation. She wouldn’t know how to locate her pod underneath such conditions. We’ll have to go in there ourselves and find them for her.”

Go in… there?

Credence suddenly felt faint and sat down beside Newt.

“I don’t think I can do that.”

“If you can’t swim then I can-…”

“I don’t like being underwater, Newt.”

Credence now held Newt’s full attention, the silence coming from the wizard being of the patient and understanding sort that kindly implored him to go on.

“I mean… I’ll do it if I have no choice. I’ve done it before when there was no other possible way out,” Credence looked at his shoes, dangling over the edge and handing just above the sparkling waters, “But, I-… It reminds me too much of when it happens.”

Of when the Obscurus takes over and drowns everything that he is.

“Newt, I just… can’t. I can’t,” he began to apologize, “I’m so-…”

“Okay.”

Credence paused and looked at him, at Newt’s smiling perfect face. The wind tousling his auburn hair and the sun shining behind him, coating him in a halo of heavenly light. He was the perfect picture of a summer lover – a forbidden romance by the seaside. A charming sailor and adventurer leaving their doting companion behind on the shore.

Promises of “I’ll wait for you” whispered into the salty breeze.

“Okay?”

“Credence, I’ll never push you where you’re uncomfortable,” Newt rubbed the back of his neck and turned his gaze elsewhere, “When you say no, that’s all the explanation you need.”
Credence’s heart swelled in his chest. What had he ever done to deserve the friendship of this kind and wonderful man?

He smiled and nudged his shoulder, “Be sure to say hello to Hope’s family for me then.”


They retreated into the suitcase to have breakfast. This time an American-styled version since Credence was cooking. A dish of sunny-side up eggs with thick slabs of bacon on the sides and a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice. It was fun, and it was quaint – lots of laughter to replace a sense of normalcy around them after the emotional night they’d had; but, soon it came time to take Hope out of containment.

They first stopped off at the Bowtruckle trees at the opposite end of the suitcase, placing Picket and Prue upon the branches. At first, they didn’t want to go and stubbornly latched onto Credence’s shoulders; but, after placating Picket with a handful of blueberries, Prudence soon followed. She never left his side for long.

Two peas in a pod those two. Stubborn as hell and unwilling to abandon their two favorite wizards; but, they both held an aversion to water. Each one turned up their noses at it. It was just better to keep them down here in the meantime where they were safe and sound.

Then came the Kraken.

It had taken a little bit of coaxing, a dash of elbow grease and, surprisingly a tea kettle.

But, now Hope was out of the suitcase and floating in the bay.

And, goodness gracious, was she massive. Her vermilion tentacles – splashing excitedly in the sparkling waters – spanned the length and width of a mighty sycamore tree they were so large. Her suckers – once a beautiful ivory, now turned a purplish-pink with age– stretched further than the Ferris Wheel on Staten Island.

And her eyes…

God, her eyes.

They were the size of an entire man. No, the size of four or five men standing on each other’s shoulders.

She was magnificent and beholding her in all her glory took Credence’s breath away.

Hope let out a peculiar screech that Credence had never heard before. But, somehow it sounded like happiness.

Shaking his head, Credence turned his attention to Newt who was currently waving his wand in the air and casting an unfamiliar spell. Suddenly, some bizarre bubble shimmered in the air and encased his entire face.

Newt looked ridiculous.
But, Credence supposed, it suited him.

“If I’m not back in an hour, call the coast guard.”

“Aye-Aye, Captain,” Credence saluted, earning him an exasperated (but, bemused) shove on the shoulder.

“Take care of my coat for me.”

“Will do.”

“And-…”

“Be safe, I know,” Credence smiled patiently and nodded towards the water, “Go before Hope leaves without you.”

Newt grinned sheepishly and threaded his hands through his hair. He hesitated for a moment, looking like he wanted to say something more; but, whatever it was, clearly it wasn’t important since he dove into the water – wand in hand.

Credence watched him swim towards the anxiously awaiting Kraken and dropped his smile. He held Newt’s beloved coat close to him and pressed his face against it, breathing in the scent of dirt, sweat, and grass.

The scent of Newt.

They usually did everything together. Much like Pickett and Prudence, he and Newt were never far away from each other. Where one went, the other followed.

But, now? Newt was going off an adventure alone while Credence dutifully waited behind. That was the growing norm nowadays – often leaving the other in the dark. They always returned to each other, of course, and always confessed to their clandestine outings. Never did they sneak off with bad intentions.

But, hadn’t they promised to be partners? To always walk beside each other?

And now they were willingly parting?

Credence only had himself to blame and he felt awful about it.

But, this just wasn’t something he could do, and Newt had readily accepted it. Credence volunteered for this position because he couldn’t stand the terrifying feeling of being underwater. He couldn’t stand that weakness. He couldn’t stand not knowing if he was really submerged underneath turquoise water or consumed by that living darkness that roiled within him. He hated feeling alone in that wretched midnight sea-…

He paused.

If Newt was him, was he really alone?

Credence took a sharp breath.

“Newt!”

The kind-eyed wizard paused and turned around in the water.
Credence stood upon the dock, trembling with equal parts adrenaline and fear, and shed off his Slytherin green coat. He tossed it beside Newt’s and dove into the Mediterranean. Credence wasn’t the best swimmer (never enough time or freedom for it) but, he knew the basics and it was more than enough to reach the wizard.

“Credence,” Newt popped the bubble surrounding his face with the movement.

“Newt,” Credence breathed, exhausted and afraid, and fell against him.

“What are you doing?” Newt grabbed his shoulders and held him upright in the water, “I thought you were—…”

“Yes. I still am,” Credence confirmed, “But, that doesn’t matter when you’re here. You’re my life jacket, Newt. I think I… understand that now.”

There it was again.

That curious look in his meadow-green eyes. That whisper across his lips as if he wanted to tell him something so badly but, couldn’t. As if he wouldn’t allow himself to.

Hope released that screeching sound again, impatient.

Newt recomposed himself and smiled, waving his wand in front of him and casting that strange, unfamiliar spell again, “Let’s go bring Hope home then.

Credence smiled and took his hand, entwining their fingers, “Together.”

Once again, Credence surprised him.

They clung onto Hope’s vermilion tentacles – curling patches of opalesque white creating patterns and interwoven mosaics of color – as she barreled through the water at incredible speed. As they descended into unknown depths, Newt watched his beloved apprentice.

Unquestionable fear swirled within his impossibly black eyes and he trembled with terror but, when Newt had placed his hand over his, he wore nothing but a smile on his face.

Oh, Credence.

Perfect, wonderful Credence.

Credence who faced his fears head-on instead of running away from them. Credence who had grown tremendously since the start of their journey and evolved into an entirely different person by the end of it. Credence… the person Newt had grown to love and care for after discovering just how wonderful and amazing of a friend he was.

Credence, his best friend.

Credence, his fellow magizoologist.

Just simply Credence.
Touching his cheek that morning, running his fingers through his ebony curls, and confessing to his angelic dozing face had been a mistake because now—... Now, Newt couldn’t hold it back any longer. He looked at Credence and felt himself falling. He looked at Credence and he could be himself.

He looked at Credence and he was home.

_Merlin’s Beard, I like you. I like you so much it hurts. I like you so much that I can scarcely breathe because, Credence, you just take my breath away. All this time, I thought I was saving you when you were really saving me. I like you. Merlin only knows how much I like you._

Credence glanced at him and beamed with the sheer force of a supernova and Newt, poor Newt, had to endure the shock-waves.

_Wow._

Hope suddenly came to jarring halt, knocking the wind out of the both of them. Newt pressed a hand against his chest, knocking against his ribs as he wheezed and caught his breath. They’d reached the bottom – nothing but sand as far as the eye could see.

Credence looked at him questioningly.

Newt raised his hand, indicating that he needed moment. There really ought to be a spell to make communicating underwater easier.

He released the Kraken’s vermilion tentacle and looked around the desolate area, searching for signs – any sign at all – of Hope’s pod. Perhaps lingering fragments of the eggs they’d hatched out of, maybe a broken canoe, or even—...

_Perfect. Eye doctor in Brooklyn? Ha! Watch this Credence._

Newt swam before Hope, who was looking more and more distressed by the moment, and hovered near one of her inky black eyes that was quadruple the size of him now. He raised his hand.

Hope quickly caught on.

She raised her tentacle – the one that Credence hung curiously onto still – and brought it towards Newt. He clung onto the end, reclaiming his spot beside his confused apprentice, and pointed towards the bed of sea-kelp in the distance.

Credence followed his line of sight and looked back at him in surprise.

Newt grinned impishly and pointed at eyes, sticking out his tongue a moment later.

Credence shook his head in playful exasperation and shoved his shoulder.

There came that happily screeching noise vibrating through the water and then they were whisked away again. Barreling through the Mediterranean Sea with such speed that the bubbles around their heads giving them precious air – magical as they were – almost burst from the force.

Newt didn’t know how long they traveled for through the forest of kelp – stretching farther than he imagined possible – but, his excitement never wavered. No, it only doubled in intensity.

Suddenly, a similar screeching sound vibrated through the water. And it wasn’t from Hope.

She chittered curiously, altering their course and traveling in the direction it came from.
What Newt saw next took his breath away.

Three Krakens – all the same incredible size as Hope – bouncing through the water and waving their tentacles excitedly. Children – all of them children. Hope’s pod. Her family. She was finally home.

Credence squeezed his hand. Newt squeezed back.

Hope barreled into her siblings, tumbling and rolling around in the kelp with him and Credence stuck in the middle of their crushing hugs. Remembering her traveling companions as if they were an afterthought, Hope shook them off her tentacle; but, then she gestured towards them, chittering frantically and holding up her once-injured tentacle – now healed and scarred over.

The three Krakens – two boys and one other girl – stared as she shared her story. A captivated audience.

Newt reached into his back pocket and pulled out his notebook – charmed to survive underwater – and sketched out the scene before him. Credence hovered over his shoulder watching.


But then, Hope’s tale ended and a sudden screech pulled Newt’s attention away from his notebook.

The Kraken they had come to know and love hovered before him, her family waiting patiently in the distance. He stuffed away his supplies into his back pocket and stretched out his arms. The creature brought him in for a hug – purposely gentle for the fragile creature cradled in her tentacles – and did the same for Credence.

And then, she was gone.

Newt remained there for a moment, feeling sad and happy all at once. Credence squeezed his hand.

Newt swallowed all feelings of bitter-sweetness and faced him, gazing fondly into his beloved apprentice’s face, and nodded.

They swam up from the bottom of the Mediterranean and, when they breached the surface a couple yards away from the dock, the bubbles surrounding their faces burst.

“That was amazing!” Credence exclaimed breathlessly, laughing with childish excitement.

“It was, wasn’t it?” Newt laughed with equal amounts of enthusiasm, “They way they rolled around together in the kelp?”

“Like dogs toiling around in the park!” Credence slicked back his drenched hair away from his eyes so that Newt could see (and admire) his entire cherubic face.

“Precisely!”

They laughed together, treading through the water towards shore.

“I’m going to miss her,” Credence said then, the laughter dying in his throat.

“Me too,” Newt confessed, “But now, we can just go on a brand new adventure, can’t we? Together.”

“Yes. Together.”
They stared into each other’s eyes for a moment, the smiles falling from their faces. They continued their voyage back to shore. To think that Newt had started this journey alone diving into the ocean to save a Kraken… but, now he ended it releasing the Kraken back into the sea with the best friend he could ever ask for by his side.

“Newt.”

The way Credence said his name sent shivers down his spine and Newt realized then and there that, no matter how hard he fought it, he couldn’t keep it inside any longer. No more keeping secrets. No more not-quite-confessions while he was still asleep. No more-…

“I like you too.”

Newt froze.

“I heard you this morning.”

Newt’s face grew hotter and hotter by the minute as Credence floated closer. His hand latched onto his, their fingers automatically entwining together as they’d done a hundred times before. But, this time it was different. There was a meaning behind the gesture that wasn’t there before.

They were close enough to shore now. Their feet only just grazing the sandy bottom; but, neither made a move towards dry land. Not when everything they desired stood before them.

“And I,” Credence swallowed, summoning his courage, “I like you too.”

He liked him.

Credence liked him.

Did his ears deceive him? Was this nothing more than a dream?

“More than just a-…,” Newt began to question but, Credence quickly answered before he could finish.

“Yes.”

Newt’s heart skipped a beat at that word.

They now stood in the water, feet firmly rooted in the sand. But, they were closer than ever. Meadow green eyes staring into eyes of dark skies, fingertips apart.

They mirrored each other. Both moving in perfect harmony. Newt touching Credence’s cheek when Credence touched his.

“Can I?” Credence whispered as they leaned closer.

“Always,” Newt answered and closed the distance between them.

Chapter End Notes

WE FINALLY MADE IT Y’ALL!!! 15 CHAPTERS IN AND WE FINALLY GOT A CREWT KISS!!!
But, never fear, dearest readers. There are plenty more kisses, sweetness, and fluff to come with a healthy dose of angst and delicious plot. Let's hope that the Gods of Writing above favor me so that I can churn out another chapter this week before I leave for Paris!

So, now that Credence and Newt confessed their feelings, what comes next? Did Tina and the American gang ever reach Arizona? What do Dumbledore and Theseus have in store for poor, can't-catch-a-break Graves? Will Modesty ever just chill?

Tune in next time on Green Meadows, Dark Skies to find out!

Once again, here's where I ask how I'm doing and all that jazz yadda yadda yadda. So, without further adieu, how am I doing? Is there anything about my writing that I should work on? Anything or anyone that you would like to see more? Less of?

And, most importantly, please leave your comments and constructive criticisms below! They are the fuel on which this lean, mean writing machine thrives upon! What was your favorite part about this chapter? What was your favorite chapter so far out of this entire series? How do you think this series will end? I love hearing from each and every single one of you, my loveliest lovelies and darling-iest darlings! 'Till the next chapter!
Artificial sunlight poured through the paneled windows that, no matter how tirelessly Credence cleaned, always seemed to stubbornly cling onto a cloudy film against the glass. The filth and grimy residue mocked him. Whispered taunts and jests into his ear. Challenging him to their daily duel. It irritated him to no end.

When he first came to the cabin, he’d naively brought a sudsy rag to the windows and cleaned it over three times. He tried scrubbing it and polishing it and even scraping at the filthy residue; but, nothing worked. Credence even resulted to using simple cleaning spells to clean it up once and for all; but, to his dismay, it only seemed to make the problem worse.

Admittedly, he dedicated far too much time into researching different uses for vinegar and orange peels and spells to develop the ultimate cleaning tool… because now? Now, getting those windows sparkling clean wasn’t just a simple matter of getting them to look presentable. No, now it was a matter of principle; and, Credence wasn’t going to be easily defeated.

But, Credence’s never-ending battle with the cabin windows wasn’t important since they still functioned as windows. Letting people look out and letting the light shine in.

And, today, did it let the light shine in.

Everything was painted with – not a heavenly – but charming glow.

As a result, the small kitchen seemed homier than usual. Bundles of drying herbs (rosemary, thyme, and a bit of a sage) and tea flowers (blooming lavender and a few stalks of jasmine) hanging on the walls seemed more fragrant and lovely. The faded porcelain and steel of the stove-top and adjoined oven seemed quaintier and the sacks of root vegetables – seemingly spilling over everywhere – even more so.

As he stood before the kitchen counter, Credence realized that he had gotten that simply country life he had always dreamed of. Except, instead of fleeing to the hot temperatures of Texas or the mountain ranges of Montana, he had fled to a suitcase of all things. Maintaining all the pleasures of a warm, cozy cabin in the woods while being free to explore everywhere and anywhere all at once.

Credence once thought that Newt carried the world in his suitcase but, what he really carried was home.

He looked down at the cucumbers, tomatoes, and whatnot before him, knowing that he needed to fix lunch. He enjoyed cooking and putting dishes together. It provided a certain sort of comfort of routine that he so desperately needed to calm his heart and nerves. But…

Credence glanced at the man hovering beside him, giddiness rising in his chest.
Newt leaned against the wooden counter-top, his hip against the edge and arms crossed over his chest. Despite having cast a heating spell over them, his hair still remained flattened against his forehead from their morning swim. His cheeks hadn’t lost their crimson flush.

A flush that first manifested after they—

Credence smiled.

“Credence?” Newt furrowed his brows in concern, his lips remaining parted ever so slightly, “Are you okay?”

“Never better,” a pause followed by a confession, “I just feel like I’m dreaming.”

Miraculously, Newt managed to furrow his brows even more. He glanced down at the loaf of bread on the counter and asked, “Because of the sandwiches? I can make them if you want. It’s just that you usually like doing them.”

Credence had to bite the inside of his cheek to keep his smile from growing. “Have I ever told you that I love how utterly oblivious you are sometimes, Newt?”

A moment of confusion from the wizard; but, then, dawning realization followed by the darkening of that beautiful flush across his cheeks. It spread across his nose and the sides of his eyes until his entire face had turned the deepest shade of rouge Credence had ever seen.

Seeing Newt all flustered like that just made Credence think him all the more beautiful.

Credence reached out to touch his cheek — hand hovering mid-air until Newt nodded in permission — and pressed his palm against that scorching blush. “I like it when you do that too.”

“Tell me more.”

Newt’s eyes widened slightly as if he’d only intended to think that instead of blurting it out.

“Hmm?”

Newt hesitated for a moment before casting his gaze to the side, “Tell me more about what you… what you like about me.”

Gladly. Credence could talk about Newt all day.

Reluctantly, he pulled his hand away from Newt’s warm cheek and leaned down. He rummaged around through the bottom cupboards and retrieved a well-used cutting board. Setting it on the kitchen counter, Credence grabbed a knife and the nearby cucumber, cutting off the ends and then slicing thinly down the base.

“Everything.”

“Credence,” Newt whined.

“Patience is a virtue,” he tutted teasingly.

Newt fidgeted impatiently beside him, his hands raising to his Hufflepuff scarf and twisting and turning the frays around between his fingers. Patience had never been his strongest asset and Credence, eventually, decided to have mercy upon him.

“I like the way you sleep.”
Newt blinked and quirked up a brow, “You like the way I what?”

“Newt.”

“Alright, alright,” Newt zipped his lips comically, “I’ll be quiet.”

Credence gave him a disbelieving look, even going so far as to put the knife down on the cutting board so that he could wait expectantly. Newt merely shrugged and gestured to his closed mouth, pretending to open it to no avail and then giving a mock-exasperated ‘what can you do’ gesture of his arms.

Credence shook his head and laughed.

“As I was saying,” he continued slowly, fully expecting Newt to interrupt, “When you sleep… you look like a caterpillar crawling into a cocoon. You look comfortable. Relaxed. And you just don’t stop talking. Lately you’ve been mumbling about the kelpie eggs and how close they are to hatching.”

Credence hummed, rinsing the knife and moving onto slicing the heirloom tomatoes.

“I like watching you sketch in your notebooks, capturing every detail that I can’t even see let alone draw. I think it’s the most amazing thing in the world. I like the way the charcoal smudges against your fingers making it look like smoke. I like how so involved you are in it – in any task really – that you don’t even notice anything going on around you.”

He layered the cucumber, tomatoes, cured ham, and turkey slices on the bread, smearing a bit of mayonnaise across before putting everything all together.

“I like hearing you hum. I like the way you shake your hands or rock back and forth on your heels when you’re excited. I like the way you pull me – literally – on adventures with the biggest smile plastered across your face despite it being potentially terrifying or dangerous.”

Credence tossed the scraps in the compost bin and pulled out the bread knife, slicing off the crusts and cutting the sandwich diagonally as Newt liked it.

“There’s a million things about you, Newt, that I like. There aren’t enough days in the whole of eternity to list them all – though, I certainly intend on trying. But… what I like most of all is the kindness in your eyes,” he wiped his hands across his apron, taking it off and hanging it where it ought to go, “I meant what I said last night. If it weren’t for you, I wouldn’t be where I am now. I like how you make me want to be a better person.”

Credence turned around then, “Lunch is ready.”

He went to pick up the plates and take them to the table but, Newt was quicker. He had taken his hands into his and held onto them tightly.

Credence’s heart skipped a beat.

He watched Newt’s fingers caress his own, rubbing delicate circles around his knuckles and tracing the raised half-moon scars without disgust or pity… but warmth and enthusiasm. Newt ran his thumb down the underside of his palm, tracing the arching lines and swooping curls. Credence shivered.

“Credence.”

He dared to look up into Newt’s eyes.
And he found that curious, indescribable emotion that he couldn’t quite pinpoint before swimming inside them. One that he now knew and could define without question.

“I thought you weren’t supposed to talk,” Credence whispered without thinking.

“Oh hush,” Newt pouted as he always did when Credence teased him and paused, “I really want to kiss you again.”

“Then what’s stopping you?”

Newt grinned and nodded towards the kitchen counter, “Well, you made lunch—…”

“Who cares about lunch?” Credence stepped closer, turning slightly when Newt leaned back against the counter. He touched Newt’s parted lips, wondering when he would wake up from this dream and asked for permission, “Is this okay?”

Newt brought Credence’s scarred hands to his face, the wizard leaning into his gentle touch.

“If it’s you?” he breathed yet, was simultaneously breathless all at the same time, “Always.”

Credence caressed his rouge-tinted cheeks with his scarred thumbs in gentle circles, drawing out the moment for as long as possible, before leaning forward. He watched Newt watching him. Gazed at the dazzling gold flecks trapped within his kind green eyes and the shadows his dark eyelashes cast just underneath. He savored the sound of Newt’s breath catching in his throat before Credence finally closed the distance between them and closed his eyes.

Kissing him was the closest thing to heaven that Credence would ever come to experience.

Newt’s lips were as smooth as decadent honey and he tasted just as wonderful – just as sweet and forbidden. Their kisses (God, he could use plural now after this moment) were unrefined and, frankly, rather embarrassing in their execution. A youthful smashing of mouths and inexperience. But, it didn’t matter that they didn’t know what they were doing because they had each other and that’s all that mattered.

What more could they possibly want?

Credence felt Newt’s hand cautiously exploring his neck and trailing up his jaw, settling upon his burning cheek. The other ghosting across his ear and then burying itself in his hair. Even when his fingers grazed across the puckered mark that Credence detested, he found that he didn’t even mind it. In fact, he enjoyed it more that he should confess.

When they finally parted, neither one dared to let go of the other. Credence rested his forehead against Newt’s, staring into those glowing meadow-green eyes that he so adored, and just remained there for a few moments longer.

“I like you, Credence.”

The way he said it sounded like a prayer. A whisper of adoration and shocked wonder – likely as swept up in the impossibility of this entire situation as Credence was.

A dream. It was like living a dream.

One that Credence would gladly never wake up from.

“I like you too.”
“I hate you, Theseus,” Graves ran an exasperated hand over his face, groaning underneath his breath, “I hate Albus. I especially hate Grindelwald. I hate Newt and I hate Credence and I hate Tina and, most of all, I hate you.”

“You don’t even know me,” Modesty sniffed dismissively and grabbed Graves’ calloused hand, making certain that she didn’t lose track of him within the mass of people and their luggage. Graves deigned to cast a disparaging glance towards her.

Modesty looked nothing like the dirty street child who had swung onto his balcony a week ago, demanding answers about her wayward brother.

Green ribbons – the color of dragon scales – shimmered in her wheat-colored hair, interwoven with the curls meticulously pinned to her neck. A matching velvet dress hung from her tiny body – stunted by years of malnourishment and blatant starvation – that ended right underneath her knees. What wasn’t covered by the conservative dress was hidden behind modest smoky gray tights and black leather slippers, the silver buckles catching the light and blinding Graves’ eyes.

He scowled.

“Precisely.”

“Don’t blame me for this. You’re the one that asked me to come with you, Papa,” Modesty drew out the word, wrinkling her nose as if she hated the stupid disguise too.

Just a simple haircut shearing the waist-length locks to her jaw and scrubbing the dirt from her skin had made the former Barebone child – now Graves – unrecognizable. And, with how quickly children grew and their features altered with burgeoning adolescence, no one would be able to recognize her at all in a year or two.

Claim her as your long-lost squib daughter, Theseus had said. Makes traveling easier and not make you look like some child-smuggling freak, Graves’ thoughts had supplied.

He hated Theseus.

He hated him so much.

“I’m regretting this decision more and more by the moment,” Graves groaned and escorted the little hellion to their cabin, throwing their suitcases onto the cots and shaking her hand away from his.

Wedging the knife in the already festering wound, Modesty gazed up at him and batted her eyelashes, smiling sweetly up at him. “You need me,” she practically sang, “And you know it.”

Unfortunately, he did.

They made one hell of a team. Modesty – the expert on all things Credence. Graves – the expert on all things Grindelwald. Theseus – the expert on all things Newt.

Working together, they could expose Grindelwald’s schemes and bring him to justice while clearing Newt and Credence’s good names. Graves could help Tina and her friends from being outlaws, constantly looking over their shoulders, and restore their uneventful lives. Most of all, though…
Graves could enact sweet, sweet revenge on that pasty-faced bastard that had taken his name, his life, his sanity away from him.

And that, alone, made it all worth it.

So, Graves had taken temporary leave of the MACUSA. Claimed that he was a liability since he froze in the face of Gellert goddamned Grindelwald and his entourage when he escaped. Claimed that, with the reappearance of his long-lost daughter, that he needed to get his life together and his head right. Claimed that taking a mental health leave of absence was best for everyone.

Madam President Picquery had granted his request easier than Graves would have liked.

They must have thought him weak.

“Glaring at me like that won’t kill me, you know.”

“Perhaps if I wished hard enough,” Graves crossed his arms over his chest, “I could transform into a Basilisk and then it would be enough to kill you.”

“I’m going to pretend that I know what that is,” Modesty plopped back onto the cot and gazed at the ceiling, swinging her legs back and forth over the edge, “You know, Mr. Graves, when I said that I didn’t want to go back into the system because I didn’t want another Mother? That didn’t mean that I wanted a Dad either.”

“I’m not your Dad,” Graves wanted to scream and tear his hair out; but, instead, he peeled off his (strangely stifling) coat and headed for the door, “You can go back to being your brother’s problem once we get him out of the trouble. In the meantime, I’m getting a drink.”

Newt lounged comfortably in Credence’s lap, the man’s long arms wrapped loosely around his waist, as he finished detailing the Kraken sketches from Hope’s release. A week had already passed since that eventful day and somehow… Newt was only *just* scribbling his notes and hypotheses beside his field observations.

He’d never been so distracted from his work.

Credence rested his chin against his shoulder, watching every curving brush and sharp line and smudge of shading and soaking it all in – as if he were mesmerized by everything that Newt did. Newt couldn’t help himself but spare a glance at him.

God, he was beautiful.

*How did I ever get so lucky?*

“Newt,” those wonderful impossibly dark eyes looked into his, “The sheets don’t need shading in.”

“What?” Newt turned his attention back to his notebook and cursed at the trailing line from paper to blankets. So distracted by Credence’s otherworldly visage that he couldn’t manage to even keep the charcoal against the page, “Shite.”

“Am I distracting you?”
Damn that teasing curve of his lips. The mischief in his eyes. Didn’t he know that Newt would rather draw that smile – that rare expression – than anything else in the world?

“You always distract me, Credence,” Newt leaned back against his warm, strangely comforting chest, “It’s a good thing.” He shut his notebook and stuffed away his supplies in the drawer in the nightstand, leaving it open.

He heard Credence gently close it behind him.

Credence pressed his face against his hair and Newt hummed, liking the feeling. But then, he heard him softly inhale and he couldn’t help himself, teasing, “Are you smelling me?”

“Oh hush,” Credence flushed and idly trailed his hand up his arm, “I like the way you smell.”

“And what do I smell like?”

“The forest,” Credence replied, as if knowing his scent by heart, “Hard work… Like freedom.”

“You’re so weird, Credence,” Newt laughed, touching his scarred hand to indicate that he didn’t mean anything by it.

“We’re both weird.”

“True.”

Credence continued caressing up and down his arm and Newt swore that he could fall asleep like this. Before Credence, he could easily stay up 48 hours straight. After Credence, he actually managed to have some semblance of a normal sleep schedule.

Theseus would be so proud of him.

Newt closed his eyes and melted into Credence. He even began to doze off, but then Credence’s hand arched up to his shoulder and brushed across the bumpy skin slightly exposed by the loose collar of his nightshirt.

Credence’s fingertips lingered.

Newt shivered.

“Tell me about this one,” Credence whispered, caressing the three raised lines carved into Newt’s shoulder.

“Hmm?”

“This scar,” Credence softly clarified, “I’d like to know about it. That is, if… if you don’t mind.”

There never seemed to be anything that Newt didn’t mind doing – no information that he wouldn’t gladly (eagerly) provide – if it was Credence the one asking him. He could request the world and Newt would serve it on a silver platter.

“You mean the harpy scar? I could’ve sworn I told you before that they hooked me in the shoulder once upon a time,” Newt leaned back and shuffled around in bed, sitting in front of Credence instead of against him.

He unbuttoned his shirt – oblivious to how Credence watched his every move and how his cheeks seemed to darken three shades of scarlet – and casually shrugged it off. Newt stretched his arms over
his head and rolled around the aforementioned scarred shoulder – or rather, shoulders.

“Thought that I was food and brought me to their nest. You can tell that it was a female harpy too. You see that right there?” Newt counted the three jagged lines – matching scars on each shoulder ending in slight indentations underneath his collarbone, “The female of the species has three claws on each side of their foot whereas the males are more zygodactyl in nature. Two claws in front, two in the back.”

Credence remained silent for a long moment; but, he eventually leaned forward, his hand hovering another scar over Newt’s stomach but not quite touching it. “What about this one?

Newt fondly trailed his fingers across the marled mark that ran from his navel, down his side and around his back. “Dragon fire;” he reminisced, a faint smile curling across his lips, “Hungarian Horntail got a wee bit grumpy with me.”

“Dragons,” Credence whispered, awe crawling into his voice.

“Dragons,” Newt repeated and touched Credence’s hand, running his fingers over the raised half-moon scars that he so adored but hated how his friend had received them. “One day I want you to see them. There’s this nesting group that settled in Egypt that made me, sort of, an honorable member of their pack.”

Credence practically gaped.

“You trust me with them?”

“Credence, I trust you with everything.”

He fell strangely silent – a pensive sort of silence as if he were carefully mulling something important over and over and weighing each and every one of the possible options. Something that Newt never did. He just, sort of, rolled with whatever crazy ideas that popped up in his head. Newt liked that reasonableness about Credence – where Newt was chaos, Credence was balance.

They complimented each other perfectly. Like two sides of the same coin.

Then Credence unbuttoned his cuffs and began rolling up his sleeves; and, all fanciful thoughts of philosophy or poetry or whatever nonsense Newt was spouting flew out the filmy windows.

Instead, he focused on the barrage of welts and jarring scars Credence’s arms betrayed.

His heart ached.

“Credence…”

Where Newt wore his scars like a badge of honor, Credence hid his like a curse. Stifled underneath layers upon layers of clothes, revealing nothing of his heart to the wicked world that had done nothing but hurt his kind and gentle soul. Newt didn’t blame him either for the peculiar habit. Credence had been burdened with his scars against his choice whereas he actively sought his out.

So, he knew fairly well the difference between talking about his scars and Credence speaking about his. The difference in the memories brought to the surface.

Newt touched Credence’s knees, “Credence, you don’t have to.”

“I want to.” But, the tremble in his voice told him otherwise.
“If you’re not ready, please don’t push yourself on my account,” Newt implored and squeezed his knees, “You don’t owe me this just because I talked about mine.”

“I know,” Credence swallowed thickly and met his eyes, fear and anxiety swarming them but also unmovable determination, “But, I trust you, Newt.”

Newt didn’t know how, exactly, to respond; so, he just squeezed Credence’s knees again in full support and waited for him to reveal what only he could speak about.

A half a breath later, Credence took Newt’s hand and slowly guided his fingers across the marred interior of his forearms, lined with straight marks one on top of the other. But, they weren’t like the familiar lashings across Credence’s hands. These were *burns*. Rope pulled horrifically into his porcelain white skin and leaving behind an indented brand that never fully went away.

An inescapable memory carved into him. Forever.

“Mother had these two sets of ropes…,” Credence confirmed his suspicions a moment later, “She had a set of Bibles tied at the ends of one set. On the other, she’d—… she’d tie the largest watermelons she could find at the market if my sin was glutinous. Sacks of heavy coins for greed. Large rocks from Central Park if it transcended into multiple types of sins. She’d lay the ropes across my arms – one arm with the Bibles, one with the weight of my mistakes – and I’d have to stand there for an hour, holding my arms up…”

Credence paused, looking away to find his words and courage.

“Mother said it was supposed to show how God’s word was supposed to be freeing compared to the empty promises of the Devil but, after some time, even the lightest of weights can become a burden.”

Newt delicately ran his fingers over the imprints, the years of pain and suffering etched into his friend’s arms. He was about to say something, though he didn’t know how to respond to a story like that without offending Credence with pity—–

But, Credence wasn’t done.

He slowly unbuttoned his nightshirt, his scarred hands shaking as he did, until that night sky full of stars, spiraling galaxies, and constellations faced Newt again. But, this time – instead of a stolen glimpse – Credence was showing him on purpose. An unspoken sense of absolute trust in him.

“This was the first one I remembered getting,” Credence gestured to a small scar the span of a finger in the middle of his chest.

Over the center of his heart.

*Oh, Credence.*

“I was… 6 years old. I think. Mother pummeled me with stones because she found me reading fairy tales in the middle of the night underneath my bed. The Devil’s Literature she called it.” Credence trailed his fingers around the galaxies and stars surrounding that first, heartbreaking scar that had taken away all of his childhood innocence. Some were imprinted like the rope-burns across his arms, some raised like the half-moon scars over his hands, some puckered and some burned—–

“Last year, Mother made me stand at the bottom of the stairs and had my sisters throw things at me. It didn’t matter what it was. A burning pan, a children’s doll, a spare brick, or a simple comb—–,”

Credence forced himself to stop and pinched the bridge of his nose, willing the tears gathering in the corners of his eyes to stop as if that memory hurt the most.
“Credence…,” Newt reached out and touched his cheek, filling his vision so that all he could see was him instead of the horrors that haunted him. “I’m here. We can stop if you want. It’s fine if you don’t want to continue.”

Credence nodded however, a second later, he added, “One more.”

“One more?”

“One more,” he confirmed, a slight warble choking his voice, “One more and then we’ll stop.”

Newt searched his eyes for any signs of hesitation – of pushing himself beyond his limits; but, he trusted Credence’s judgement more than himself and leaned back, his hand falling from Credence’s cheek. “One more then.”

Credence exhaled a shaking breath, running his hands over his face and smoothing out his curls. He was building up to something that Newt couldn’t possibly imagine, he realized. Some untold horror that he hadn’t even caught a glimpse of before. Newt swallowed nervously, bracing himself for another dreadful story-…

And then Credence turned around.

Newt stifled a sound of shocked horror by biting his tongue.

Six perfectly spaced circles – three on either side of Credence’s spine. Burns. All of them burns. Awful, horrific, nauseating burns.

“I was rebellious when I was younger, if you can imagine that,” Credence laughed softly, somehow bitter and sad and amused all at once, “Mother had enough of my rebellion. Enough of my childish games and questions. Enough of my lack of faith. Enough of my infatuation with witches and wizards and fairies and fantasy. So…”

Credence hands tightened into trembling fists.

“So, she strapped me over the stove.”

Newt covered his mouth, his eyes blown wide.

“And she lit the burners,” Credence continued, “And left me hanging like a butchered pig over a roasting campfire. I-… I can’t remember much of it. I don’t remember how long it all lasted. I don’t know how many times I fainted; but-… but, every time I opened my eyes, I was still there.”

Credence finally fell silent and hung his head, his shoulders shaking.

Newt gazed at his friend’s scarred back, his heart snapping in half over and over at the sight and the knowledge of how tremendously Credence suffered in that Muggle House of Horrors. He reached out and touched a patch of, miraculously, unscarred arm, asking quietly, “What do you want me to do, Credence? Tell me.”

Credence buried his face in his hands.

“Could you hold me?”

“Of course.”

Newt wrapped his arms around Credence’s back and pulled the man into a warm embrace. He ran a hand through his dark curls and remained silent but supportive, being the pillar of strength that
Credence needed so desperately in that moment.

“What are we going to do?” his voice was muffled between his fingers.

Somehow Newt knew that he wasn’t talking about the scars.

“Take things one step at a time.”

“It feels like the world is after us,” Credence whispered, “My troubles shouldn’t be another burden.”

“You’re not a burden, Credence,” Newt held onto him tightly, turning Credence around in his embrace so that he could properly look at his face. He needed to see this. He needed to hear this. To feel this.

“Magic cannot heal… this,” Newt brushed away a loop of Credence’s hair away from his forehead, “But, we can work together on managing it – on managing everything. It’ll never fully go away and that’s okay… isn’t it?”

Credence peeked between his fingers before wrapping his arms around Newt’s neck, hiding his face in his bare chest.

“As long as you’re there with me,” Credence murmured, “Then yes.”

“Always,” Newt cupped the back of his neck and just… held him, “As your teacher, as your friend, as something more. No matter what we are, you’ll always be my friend first and I’ll always be there for you.”

A ghost of a smile. But one that was sincere.

“I like you, Newt.”

“I like you too, Credence.”

Graves was having a nightmare.

He had them often, Modesty noticed, staring at the tossing and turning man at the other side of the cabin. Sweat coated his brow and his mouth (while always down-turned) was frowning in clear distress. He looked petrified. Overwhelmed by some unseen entity. It even came to a point where Modesty couldn’t tell if it was truly sweat dripping down his face or tears.

Something unspeakable had happened to the man.

That much was certain. A man had worn his face – a bad man at that – and that couldn’t be comfortable. To be subjected to that sort of torture surely must have taken its toll.

The evidence was right there before her.

Modesty sighed. She was just about to turn around in bed and (hopefully) go back to sleep when Graves sharply cried out.

“Stop!”
Modesty peered over her shoulder.

“Please,” a choked scream, muffled only by how tightly he was clenching his teeth, ripped from his throat, “Don’t. No!”

Modesty’s feet moved before she knew what she was doing.

She dove across the floor and jumped onto Graves’ bed, crawling onto his chest. She pulled his wand away from his tightly clenched fists and threw it onto the floor. She wrapped her hands around his shoulders, forcing all her weight down to keep him still, and then slapped his face.

“Mr. Graves wake up!”

His eyes suddenly snapped open and he tried to jerk up but, Modesty managed to keep him down by sheer force of will. Confusion flashed over his eyes, uncertain where he was and who he was with. A type of helplessness Modesty had never seen before from the man. However, as soon as he recognized that it was Modesty holding him down and not whatever villain plagued his dreams, his eyes narrowed in realization.

“You little-…”

But, Modesty was also prepared for this.

“You’re on The Wailing Whirlwind, Mr. Graves,” Modesty instantly cut him off – her voice surprisingly firm and calm, a touch of sympathy and understanding inside, “You are heading to London to meet with Theseus Scamander. You are safe and you are strong and wherever you think you are, tell it to fuck off.”

Graves blinked.

“Where did you learn that insufferable mouth of yours?”

Modesty rolled her eyes, “I’m from the Bronx.”

He groaned and shrugged off one of Modesty’s hands so that he could cover his eyes with his arm. Tremors still coursed through his body and his breathing was heavy – obviously still reeling from his nightmare but, he was slowly acting more and more like the Graves she knew.

Angry and exasperated.

“And where did you learn that?”

Modesty gathered that he wasn’t talking about the mouth anymore.

“Credence used to comfort me when I had nightmares.”

Graves pulled away his arm, questions swirling through his shadowed eyes.

“I thought it’d be the opposite.”

Modesty wasn’t expecting that. Surprise coated her youthful features, for once taken completely off her guard. And then she snorted at the sheer ridiculousness of it.

“You underestimate my brother, Mr. Graves. Do you really think that Mary Lou hated him that much?” she challenged, “He took the beatings for us. Volunteered for them to save us from the pain. He would never show us how much it all hurt him, you idiot. Y’know, he used to bite into a sock at
night so that we wouldn’t hear his screams.”

Now, it was Graves’ turn to look surprised.

“No, I’m not strong like my brother. I couldn’t hide it like he did. I was… was weak,” Modesty finally crawled off Graves’ chest and hopped off the bed, heading back to her own cot. She wiped at her eyes, hoping that Graves couldn’t see the evidence of her weakness dripping down her cheeks.

She missed Credence.

She missed him so much.

“The funny thing is that I didn’t even know Credence knew how to curse. Sometimes I forgot he knew how to speak, he was so quiet. But, whenever I woke up crying and screaming over something stupid, he’d tell me to tell my fears to fuck off because he knew it would make me smile,” Modesty climbed into bed and, when she thought her tears all dried and gone, she cast her gaze back onto him, “I figured it’d work for you too because you’re like me.”

Graves sat up in bed and hung his long legs over the edge, rubbing his weary forehead.

“And pray tell, how am I like you?”

Modesty smirked and turned her back on him, sinking underneath the blankets.

“Because you’re angry, Mr. Graves.”

She closed her eyes.

“And you want the world to pay for it.”

Credence and Newt finally left the suitcase, leaving behind the abandoned farm that they’d slowly come to call home.

Well, temporarily that is.

They had every intention of returning to the humble, dilapidated abode that faintly smelled of old dust and mildew – finding the all-but-forgotten area well and secluded from everything. Though they didn’t completely realize it – a vague conception lingering at the back of their minds instead of a fully-fledged thought – the farm was slowly becoming their base of operations where they could hide without worry, mind the creatures in Newt’s suitcase, and figure out what exactly to do with all the people on their trail that grew minute after minute.

But this time…

Oh, this time when they left the farm, instead of heading out into the abandoned fields and scrounging the abandoned crops for tomatoes and courgettes and peppers, they were leaving the grounds. Completely.

All because Newt said that they needed to head into town for just a moment.

Not even a Muggle town either where they could be somewhat safe. No siree! They needed to visit a
wizarding town. As if they needed another reason to look over their shoulders, to be prepared to run at a moment’s notice.

But, it was imperative that they visited the Owlery as soon as possible, Newt said.

He needed to send an unmarked Owl to his brother, he said.

To let Theseus and their Mother know that he was safe and that whatever the wizarding world was saying about him and Credence weren’t true. To let them know that he was working on a solution and that he loved them.

Credence told Newt that it was a stupid idea.

And then, Credence grabbed his Slytherin green coat and walked beside him into town.

Hand-in-hand as always whenever Newt dragged him on some miscellaneous adventure that Credence somehow knew would always end in disaster. But, this time, walking with him with their hands linked together was… different.

And even though Credence saw Munin in every shadow. Heard Grindelwald cackling in his ear. Felt blood dripping down his cheek. Sensed the French Aurors charging up behind them—…

Well, it wasn’t alright.

Credence’s pulse still raced. Sweat still coated his brow. He still flinched at every mysterious noise and too-fast gestures of the witches and wizards that passed them by.

He was still afraid.

But, with Newt there beside him holding his hand and knowing that – by some sort of miracle – he had garnered his attention and (possibly) captured his heart… Credence supposed that even the worst of his fears weren’t as bad as he thought. He could face death itself if Newt were right there with him.

Credence squeezed Newt’s hand.

“You’re going to get us both killed.”

“Haven’t killed us yet,” Newt declared cheerily, familiar with the not-really-serious-but-totally-sounds-like-it nature of his teasing, “Have faith in me, Credence. We’ll be fine.”

But, Credence glanced warily over his shoulder at a wickedly dancing shadow that seemed far too real. A nearby raven’s crow unsettled him and the brewing rainstorm – perhaps an hour or two away judging by the distance – only encouraged his apprehension. He could faintly make out the muffled crack of thunder, the rain falling over the hidden fields where he knew the farm was.

He nudged Newt and nodded his head towards the storm, silently warning him in case they got swept up in it.

Newt’s following look of appreciation and sheer adoration made his heart flutter.

“Then why do I have a bad feeling about this?” Credence merely continued.

“You have a bad feeling about everything.”

“And I’m usually right.”

“And you’re far too trusting, Newt.”

“See?” Newt beamed enthusiastically and Credence couldn’t help himself but soften a little at it. “We balance each other out. With me being too trusting and you being too cautious, we become a perfectly well-rounded individual where nothing we do could go wrong.”

*Oh, bless this man.*

“That’s not how it works, Newt.”

“You know, Theseus tells me that all the time too.”

Credence paused.

Newt never really talked about his brother much – perhaps a brief mention or quick story here and there. A somewhat bitter reference to how Theseus was the golden child of the family while Newt lingered on in the background. A proud boasting about his brother’s success as an Auror. Once, even a sweet memory of how Newt accidentally caused a fire in the living room and how Theseus secretly put it out, covering up the incident before their parents could return from work.

He clearly cared for his brother but, Credence still didn’t know much about who he is.

“Tell me about him.”

“Hmm?”

“Your brother,” Credence clarified and glanced at the wizard, “You don’t mention him often and I’d like to know more about your… family.”

“Oh,” Newt frowned for a moment but, it was out of pensiveness and deep consideration rather than sadness. And then, he offered, “I’ll tell you everything you’d want to know if you tell me about your sisters.”

“Deal.”

They approached the Italian Owlery which, to Credence’s surprise, was nothing more than a single pillar sticking out of the ground made out of glistening white marble that shimmered in the light with rectangle windows – sans glass – carved around the building in a dazzling circle. At the very top was a flat square that curled downwards in an intricate design of flowers and ferns and beautiful botanical creations that Credence had never seen before. Vines and vibrant moss the color of Credence’s jacket crawled up the side of the pillar and spilled out of the open windows encircling the top where faint little dots – owls, of course – flew in and out of.

It reminded him of ancient ruins – designed by a people long departed that wished to reach the sky.

To sit atop a throne of stone gazing upon the vast countryside – upon the entire world – high above everyone.

To look upon their kingdom of mortals and beasts, ruling over them all and guiding them like a living God.

It was absolutely breathtaking.

And it only contained *owls.*
Credence remained completely silent as they approached, the building becoming seemingly larger and larger with each and every step they took. When Newt suddenly squeezed his hand, he looked at him questioningly out of the corner of his eyes. But, then, Credence realized by the whites of his knuckles and the blues of Newt’s fingers that he was gripping him too tight.

Credence exhaled and relaxed.

Thankfully, Newt never spoke a word of complaint and merely stopped before the guard outside the pillar. The communication barrier proved troublesome once again; but, with grand gestures and an exchanging of coin, they were easily granted access to the pillar of giants.

They stepped through the door – which was nothing more a rounded hole in the wall – and ascended the stairs – beautiful marble steps with an uneven dipping structure about them, worn by centuries upon centuries of feet going up and down.

“Theseus-…,” Newt finally broke the silence, furrowing his brow as he figured out where to begin, “…Theseus, I suppose, is the better brother.”

Credence remained quiet, waiting for him to continue.

“He’s… always been better than me in everything. Not just in spells or potions or flying on broomsticks either – which he did excel in far better than I ever did, mind you,” Newt threaded his fingers through his auburn hair, twirling a couple strands around his fingers.

“He learned to write quicker that I did. Learned to read ages before me. Always earned top marks where I always struggled to pass. Bloody hell, I wasn’t able to speak my first word until I was six. Theseus was able to speak full sentences since he was two!” he released Credence’s hand suddenly so that he could focus on walking upstairs while fiddling with his hair with both sets of fingers.

Credence didn’t mind at all.

“Mother always told me to be more like Theseus,” Newt continued, “Bless her heart, I doubt it was her intention to compare us. She’s really quite sweet and will stuff you with enough food until you burst.”

“And yet, you’re skinnier than me,” Credence quipped.

“Oh, hush you.”

But, by the subtle upwards quirk at the corner of his mouth, Newt was clearly eased. His shoulders weren’t nearly as tense and his twirling of his hair slowed ever so slightly.

“You and her would get along charmingly. Perhaps too well, even. On second thought, Credence, never meet my mother,” he teased and nudged Credence’s shoulder, “Because then I’d have two people nagging at me and telling me that my ideas are awful; and, we can’t have that, can we?”

“Certainly not,” Credence agreed and smiled, “Because that’s my job and I’m quite proud of it.”

“I regret taking you on as my apprentice,” Newt shook his head and took Credence’s hand back into his, rubbing his thumb across the half-moon scar on the edge of his wrist. He fell silent again – lost in thought – and frowned a little after a moment. “I love my Mum. I know that you’d love her if you met her but… even though she loves Theseus and I the same, I know that she’s prouder of Theseus than me. It’s always been that way and I suppose that’s fine. It’s not like it’s undeserved. He’s amazing. Some might even call him a prodigy and I get to call him my brother.”
Credence squeezed his hand and Newt smiled a little at him, appreciating the gesture.

“Theseus is one of my closest friends and confidants but, I’m only human,” he continued slowly, choosing his words carefully instead of babbling onward like he usually did, “I started developing a resentment towards him when I was 15. I envied him. He mastered every spell ever presented to him on the first try. He got a perfect score on his OWLS. When he graduated from school, he was immediately accepted into the ranks of Auror since his reputation as a formidable wizard was so well-known. I couldn’t understand why everything came so naturally for him when I had to work twice as hard to barely get on by. I was jealous and I hated him – I hated myself – for it. It was like he was born to succeed but me? I was born to struggle.”

He paused.

“And then I was expelled from school.”

Newt lowered his gaze.

Credence squeezed his hand once more.

“Mother yelled at me. Theseus berated me. They couldn’t believe how stupid and reckless I was acting. And I… I snapped. All the resentment and jealousy and hatred in my heart flowed out and, when I thought I was almost done, another wave of pent-up bitterness crashed through. Years upon years of envy unleashed…,” he stopped in front of a window and looked at Credence, meeting his eyes, “And then everything I knew about him changed.”

Credence didn’t hesitate. “How so?”

“He told me that he always envied me.”

The light shined through at just the right moment, catching the gold strands in Newt’s tawny hair and making his following smile just glow with iridescent beauty as if he belonged on the top of this pillar to be worshipped.

Enchanted, Credence blindly followed when Newt started heading up the stairs again.

“Now that I think about it, you and him would also get along pretty well,” he chuckled, “He said that he loved how I could always find the good in a situation – in the people – no matter how dark and gloomy it might all seem. He loved how I always smiled in the bleakest of hours. He loved that I could see the entire world – the biggest and tiniest of pictures – whereas he only saw a small part of it. My brother envied me. He loved me. And he thought I could see that. It was then that I learned the value of communication and we’ve been close ever since.”

“But, you still envy him,” Credence observed, “Don’t you?”

“Yes,” Newt’s smile flickered for a moment, “I still envy him.”

They reached the top step and Newt released his hand, heading straight into the rounded room without batting an eye.

The first thing that Credence noticed above all else was the smell. Pungent ammonia permeating the air. The scent of filth wafting from the floors of excrement, wet feathers, and decomposing furs and bones of whatever animals they had devoured before. It was disgusting and it took all of Credence’s willpower not to gag.

But the owls?
They were beautiful.

Owls of every size, every age, and every color. Some as white as freshly fallen snow twinkling in the sunlight. Some as tawny and earth-toned as Newt’s wonderful hair. Some with speckled eyes and some with the strangest orange feathers. But, no matter their differences, Credence found them all gorgeous and magic.

If it weren’t for the smell, Credence could easily spend the rest of his days here just looking at them.

Newt selected an owl – the one with rich brown feathers so dark they almost seemed black – with a missing toe and chipped beak and gave it the letter that he procured from his pocket.

And then it flew through the arched windows in crystal blue skies.

“That’s it?”

“That’s it,” Newt confirmed and headed back towards the stairs, glancing over his shoulder back at Credence, “Were you expecting something more?”

“I don’t know,” Credence confessed as he caught up to him, “I thought that there might be a spell or something to direct them where to go.”

“Not everything in this world functions on magic, Credence,” Newt grimaced in a manner that made Credence think that others thought otherwise, “Owls are smart creatures. They know where to go – sometimes before we, ourselves, know.”

They descended carefully down the stairs, going around and around in circles across the massive pillar. When they finally reached the bottom, Newt nudged his shoulder, “Your turn.”

“Hmm?”

“I told you about my brother. Tell me about your sisters.” Something peculiar entered Newt’s kind green eyes then – as if asking about family in general was a touchy subject for anyone let alone Credence of all people. “That is… if you want to.”

But, Credence merely smiled.

He might have been uncomfortable in the past. Perhaps even avoided the subject with a ridiculous amount of stubborn ferocity. But now? Well, he wouldn’t have accepted the terms of their agreement if he wasn’t fine with talking about his family now, wouldn’t he?

“There’s not much to tell,” Credence confessed, rubbing the back of his neck, “Chastity was the most like Mother. Headstrong. Devout. She came to us when she was just a baby and Mother raised her completely as her own. We… never really got along much. No, that’s not true. I love her like all brothers love their sisters. But-…..”

“But, two completely different personalities clash, don’t they?” Newt offered when Credence found himself at a loss on how to continue.

“Precisely,” Credence agreed and reached for Newt’s hand, butterflies fluttering in his stomach when the wizard automatically began tracing the crescent lines of his scars, “I like it when you do that.”

Newt furrowed his brows, “When I finish your sentences?”

“No,” Credence almost laughed and raised their hands in front of them, “I like this.”
Newt flushed as if he hadn’t even thought about that.

Credence merely continued.

“Modesty came to us when she was older so, she already knew what life was like beyond the Barebone household and how… different it was inside. She was only with us for three years but, we were close. Closer than Chastity and I ever were,” Credence smiled fondly, finding himself missing his little sister and the company she provided, “We were always right beside each other. I protected her inside the house and she… protected me outside of it. You know, she reminds me a little of when I was kid.”

“Oh?”

“Mmm-hmm,” Credence nodded, “With the mouth of a sailor and the fury of a woman scorned.”

Newt choked.

“You were not like that as a kid.”

“You’d be surprised.”

“No.”

“Yes,” Credence affirmed and nudged his shoulder, “If it weren’t for the fact that we look completely different, I would have sworn that we were adopted from the same family. Modesty likes all the things that I did when I was her age. Oh, she just loves stories of fairies and elves and knights in shining armor. I always played the swooning princess stuck inside a tower and she was the prince charming who rescued me.”

Modesty just loved the thought of swooping in to save the day – of riding a golden horse into battle and wielding a magnificent sword twice her size that she would name Heaven’s Smite. Most of all, though, she loved the idea of working beside Merlin and, perhaps, becoming the first sorcerer-knight to serve King Arthur.

God, he loved her so much.

“Of course, this was all in secret,” Credence confessed, “Since Mother would be furious if she ever found out. But, time and time again, I’d risk that chance because I wanted Modesty’s imagination encouraged instead of stifled. I wanted her to have everything I didn’t. I still do.”

Newt stared at him for a long moment.

“You’re a good big brother, Credence.”

“Thank you,” he averted his gaze and focused on the horizon, the thunderstorm growing closer than he expected, “I hope that I was enough.”

“You undoubtedly were and more.”

Thunder crashed in the distance and blinding white lightning – with the power and might of Zeus himself – lit up the dismal gray skies with such celestial beauty that it was surely impossible that mankind had ever seen such majesty before.

Strange.

Credence hadn’t predicted the storm to approach so quickly. What should have been an hour or two
away was now mere minutes from reaching them. Such a fast-approaching storm was the definition of foreboding and Credence wasn’t taking any more chances.

He frowned and pulled off a couple flyers from the walls for a makeshift covering before remembering that they have spells for that. “We should head back before-…”

But, Newt had paled to a worrisome degree, his eyes cast onto the papers clutched in Credence’s scarred hands.

“Newt? What’s wrong? Is everything-…”

Credence peered down and everything inside him froze.

That light back in Ernesto’s village. The one from the coward. From the killer.

*It had been a camera.*

Because now Credence’s own face, covered in the innocent blood of massacred children, stared back at him. He couldn’t read the words scrawled across the top – the limits of his Italian knowledge not stretching beyond ordering a sandwich or saying hello and goodbye – but, by how large they were printed across the page, he knew that it couldn’t be good.

“Newt, we need to go.”

Credence stuffed the flyers inside his coat pocket and grabbed Newt’s shell-shocked hand, turning to leave – to return to the farm – only for a trembling wand to be suddenly pointed at his face.

Scared cerulean eyes met his.

Cerulean eyes… framed by golden curls spilling down across her shoulders.

Her features morphed into a conglomeration of Munin – her wicked smile and rasping laugh echoing in his ears – and the Aurors down in the New York subway determined to end him once and for all. Another situation where wands were pointed at him aimed at his destruction.

Credence quivered, the pitch-black darkness crawling across his vision. He stepped backwards and abandoned Newt’s hand, clawing at his head as the ocean of perpetual night overwhelmed him, dragging him under.

He didn’t know what was going on.

He didn’t know how long he was under.

He just knew that he couldn’t speak, couldn’t breathe, couldn’t move. All that Credence could do – all that he was *allowed* to do – was let the wailing waves take hold of his body and soul and move him as it willed. He was only a puppet to be controlled by the vast darkness of the ocean. All that he could do was scream in agony.

And wasn’t that how it always was?

Credence had had his voice taken away from him by Mary-Lou. Forced into pious submission and never allowed to do anything on his own lest he find himself swayed by the Devil and his minions. Forced to keep his eyes low and hands clasped before him. Never allowed to speak a word or in a tone just above a whisper. He was just a marionette – not a true person with thoughts and feelings – and Mary-Lou controlled the very strings that were his life.
Over two decades living this way.

Years upon years of being chained to the whims of others.

Then along came Grindelwald who pushed Mary-Lou out of the way and took hold of Credence’s strings; but… also his heart. Making him feel like he had a friend and confidante for once in his life outside of family. Saying all the right words and doing all the right things so that, when he finally released his hold, Credence still followed him like a dog on a leash.

Credence was always controlled.

Always tamed.

Always bound by the expectations and desires of others.

Movement stirred in the darkness.

A current – strong and formidable – that wasn’t there before brushed past Credence, swirling through his hair and caressing his hands. His scars. The current wrapped around him in a tight ball and pulled him through seas of liquid obsidian towards it.

Hope.

Not just the concept but the creature.

Floating in front of him, her massive eyes darker than the ocean surrounding him.

Credence released a muffled cry of surprise and alarm. He tried to cover his mouth, attempting to recover his breath, but found the attempt futile. Both his arms and legs were tied up in not a current but, in a scarred vermilion tentacle – the very same one that had healed because of him and Newt…

Newt.

Light cascaded down from above.

And caught in Hope’s eyes.

Credence had a startling realization right then and there. He could almost laugh at how ridiculous this sudden revelation was. How many times had he dove into the Kraken’s tank and come face-to-face with her all-knowing, silent gaze? How many times had he looked into those eyes of never-ending abyss? How come he hadn’t realized that Hope’s eyes weren’t black at all?

They were green.

The darkest shade of green that he had ever seen.

The color of life and nature. The color of kindness. The color of Newt.

Hope loosened her tentacle from around him. Credence reached out his hand, the young Kraken lifting him up through the waters until-…

He breached the surface and saw, not through his own eyes but, through the swirling mass of the unleashed Obscurus.

Wisps of gray and black flickered before him.
The town had them surrounded. Thirty or forty people— wizards— still remaining upright, gaping up at him, and another twenty already knocked over, unconscious. The nearby library had been reduced to rubble and the windows in all the surrounding shops had burst into pieces. Glass littered the streets and glinted with every lightning strike and clash of thunder.

Newt laid behind him, thrown to the ground but otherwise safe.

*Protect him.*

All of a sudden, the Obscurus lurched forward and surrounded Newt. The swirling, raging storm of liquid darkness encased him in an oblong shield, blowing his tawny hair around into a chaotic mess but never once hurting him on purpose or even on accident.

He had control. He had absolute *control.*

Credence reached through the night personified and took Newt into his loving embrace, the gray wisps of the Obscurus solidifying around him.

*Leave.*

And then they were bolting past the townspeople, through the village and the surrounding houses, out onto the main road where they stopped.

His arms—the wisps of darkness—continued solidifying until Credence stood there holding Newt in his arms instead of the Obscurus. The rain poured down heavily around them and lighting colored the air in beautiful, fleeting extravagance. The townspeople came running through the village after them.

“You…” Newt marveled at him, “You just-…”

“I know,” Credence found himself just as surprised as he was, grabbing his hand and pulling him forward, “But, no time. We need to run!”

But, the two wizards hadn’t taken nary a step when a large crash sounded behind them, followed quickly by an ear-piercing scream and the scurrying of a hundred feet.

At first, Credence had thought that lightning had struck the road however, when they turned, they immediately met the twinkling gaze of an enormous winged creature that Newt quickly recognized.

“Frank!”

The Thunderbird’s eyes glowed enthusiastically.

Newt beamed at the creature and reached forward, wrapping his arms around the Thunderbird’s neck and burying his hands into its soft feathers. “What are you doing here?” he questioned, squeezing the magnificent creature between his arms in a warm, welcoming embrace. “You were supposed to go back to Arizona, not follow me around!”

“To his credit, he was in Arizona.”

Credence froze at the familiar voice and took two steps around the creature, his breath stopping entirely upon recognizing the familiar figure perched on it’s back.

Tina Goldstein smiled and outstretched her hand to him, “Hello Credence. Need some help?”
Mon Dieu, 24 ENTIRE pages on Word for this chapter y'all and I somehow managed to finish this AND turn in a 6-page research project. In my defense, I had hoped to get this chapter out before I arrived in Paris so that I wouldn't be overwhelmed by writing (in two languages, no less) but, we can't always get what we want. Ah well, it was so totally worth it <3 Anyways....

Credence gained control over the Obscurus! Tina has officially returned! Modesty and Graves are super exasperated with each other! And Credence and Newt are as adorable as always!

What will happen next? What adventures have Tina and the gang been on while we were following Credence and Newt on the road to romance?

Tune in next time on Green Meadows, Dark Skies to find out!

So, here's the part where I ask how I'm doing and all that jazz. So, without further adieu, how am I doing? Is there anything about my writing that you think I should work on improving? Is there anything or anyone that you would like to see more of? Less of? Please leave your comments and constructive criticism down below!

What was your favorite scene in this chapter? What has been your favorite scene out of all the chapters? How do you think this series will end? What is Grindelwald's grand plan? What hidden secrets have you found in past chapters? I love hearing from each and every one of you <3 It's all because of you lovelies that we've gotten this far in this fic! You're the fuel that makes this writing machine function!
Holy shit.

Credence Barebone – in the flesh – stared up at Tina, impossibly dark eyes blown wide and curly hair blowing gently in the wind.

Tina touched her lips, unable to look away.

Look at him.

Just look at him!

Squared shoulders broader than when she’d last seen him. A brilliant green coat adorned with glittering silver buttons draped across them, bringing out the pink in Credence’s porcelain cheeks and making him stand out instead of hidden away within the shadows.

Such a vibrant color that few wizards could pull off let alone pull off well. But, with Credence… why he positively flourished in it. Thrived in its thrumming vibrancy. Prospering enough that it was as if Credence himself were a blooming flower and the green of his coat were the stem and leaves supporting his magnificence – holding him up and supporting him so that he could reach the sun.

It gave him a commanding presence. One that couldn’t be ignored even if Tina tried.

Or perhaps it wasn’t the color of the well-tailored coat at all (although, it certainly helped) that made him look so… so healthy. He’d put on weight! Filling out his clothes like a man instead of a walking skeleton. He looked well-fed for once – positively glowing with health and prosperity – instead of horribly malnourished and on the bridge of a fainting spell.

And that hair.

Merlin’s Beard, that hair.

Beautiful thick ringlets of condensed obsidian that ended right above his shoulders. Casually parted on the side and tousled in the breeze – creating just a bit of frizz. A few stray strands – perhaps three or four – clung onto Credence’s forehead in the Italian humidity.

What stood before her was the portrait of a swashbuckling pirate captain about to set off to sea or a dashing explorer about to tackle the African jungles.

Nothing like the haunting image of a boy forced into pious servitude.

Nothing like the scared child she’d seen when she first stepped foot in the Barebone household. No longer did Credence stand curled into himself, braced for a wicked sort of pain that could come from anywhere and everywhere at a moment’s notice. No longer did he keep his face pointed towards the
ground. No longer did he try his damnedest to just not exist. No longer was he afraid to look at Tina in the eye.

Credence now stood before her a man, not a boy.

“Miss Goldstein.”

Even that precious voice – that vibrant cadence – no longer warbled in unthinkable terror or uncertainty.

He approached the enormous Thunderbird, gazing upon the glistening feathers jeweled with raindrops in unrestrained awe, and extended his hand to Tina – half-moon scars bared to the world. She clasped it and pulled him up.

“Credence,” her voice was nothing more than a whisper (when did she get so breathless?) and tenderly touched his warm cheek, confirming that he was safe. That he was real. That he was here. “You look great, honey.”

“O-oh,” Credence smiled and scratched the back of his neck, “Thank you?”

Time itself stopped to gaze upon such beauty.

If there were a God or some Higher Power or whatever, they would fall upon their knees before Credence and worship him just to see a glimpse of that smile again. Tina thought that she could even cry just by looking at it for too long.

“Oh, don’t mind me,” Newt hoisted himself onto Frank’s back, “Not like I’m here too.”

Tina flinched in surprise.

Her elbow colliding with his nose. A loud snap echoed through the air, quickly followed by a piercing whine as Newt tumbled backwards.

Credence’s hand shot out and wrapped around his wrist, catching the wizard before he could fall off.

“I should start a counter,” Credence quipped – quipped for heaven’s sake – and helped Newt get situated behind him on the back of the Thunderbird, “How many times can Newt break his nose in a week?”

“I think we’re at 5 now,” Newt grumbled and searched for a handkerchief, patting down his pockets with no success until Credence sighed amusingly and fetched it for him from the interior of Newt’s sleeve. The magizoologist gave him a look of appreciation – and something more that Tina couldn’t quite pinpoint – and held the cloth up to his bleeding nose.

“I thought it was 6,” Credence hummed then as if none of whatever that was happened.

“No, it’s most definitely 5.”

Credence quirked up a brow.

Newt stubbornly puffed out his cheeks.

“Very well. 5 it is,” Credence admitted defeat before adding innocently, “Either way, I’ll have to set
“it again when we get back home.”

“Oh, lovely,” Newt grumbled, “You’ll really enjoy that, won’t you? Don’t even think about trying to hide it, you sadist.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it,” Credence laughed and turned back to face Tina. His joy suddenly faltered, replaced with immediate concern and just a trace of hesitation.

“Miss Goldstein?”

She sharply flinched and shook herself out of her stupor. Had she been zoning out?

“Yes, Credence?”

Merlin, what was wrong with her?

Tina rubbed her aching eyes only to suddenly pull back in surprise at the tears she found gathered there.

When did she start crying?

And why did her cheeks feel all warm and sticky?

“Are you…,” Credence reached out to touch her shoulder; but, his hand merely lingered in the air, uncertain on whether or not to move forward. “Are you alright?”

“Yes,” Tina answered, clearing her mysteriously phlegmy throat and wiping her face, “It’s just… been a while. I mean, with the whole getting over here and all…”

What was it that Graves had told her before she left?

That she was a bad liar.

Tina inhaled deeply and turned around, patting Frank’s head and smiling at his resulting chirp, “Speaking of, we should get back to the others. We stopped off at an old farm an hour before coming here-…”

“Strange,” Newt commented obliviously, not connecting the dots together, “We’ve been living at an old farm too.”

Credence moved slightly behind her and nudged Newt’s shoulder, “Why I’d garner that it’s the very same one.”

“You think so?” Newt asked before shaking his head, “No, impossible. It’d be too much of a coincidence.”

“More of a coincidence than to believe in two abandoned farms in the same general vicinity?”

“Oh hush.”

“Are you done?” Tina drawled in exasperation, “Because we can go find out if you’re done.”

“Yes, yes,” Newt had the decency to look a little apologetic for his dawdling, “Of course.”

“Thank you,” Tina wrapped her arms around Frank’s neck and warned, “Hold on tight.”
And then they flew up into the air.

Credence – poor, poor No-Maj-raised Credence – immediately stiffened behind her and slipped his arms around her waist, pressing his face against her strong back. His long fingers curled into her sides with almost bruising intensity and she could only just faintly feel the tremors coursing through his limbs.

_Shit._

“Sorry,” Tina apologized softly, “I didn’t even think-…”

“S’okay,” he murmured, his rich voice muffled from the material of her coat, “Couldn’t have known that I’ve never flown before.”

He paused.

And then he snorted.

_Snorted._

“Well, I’ve never flown like _this._”

“What?” Tina’s head whirled around, glaring accusingly at Newt, “You mean to tell me that he’s put you on a _broom?_”

“Goodness me, no,” Newt removed the handkerchief from his nose, blood dripping down his lips and chin, “We’ve been occupied by other things, thank you very much!”

“You mean to tell me that you’ve been _too busy_ to put him on a broom then?!?” Tina amended, wanting nothing more than to smack him upside the head, “It’s far too soon to introduce him to that.”

“I’ll let Credence decide that for himself.”

Tina groaned and pinched the bridge of her nose, facing forward once again.

That was until she remembered-…

“If you haven’t been on a broom, then how have you flown before, Credence?”

She felt Credence smile into her back.

“Oh, haven’t you heard the news, Miss Goldstein?” he teased – _teased for Merlin’s sake!_ She would never get used to that, would she? “I’m what you’d call _an Obscurial_ and they don’t exactly have _feet. Or hands. Or a face for that matter. More like a bizarre dust cloud with a penchant for shattering windows._”

Tina snorted, amused.

But…

_Somewhere deep within her heart, something was aching._

_Never before had she felt like such a stranger. Like an outsider looking into the lives of someone else. It was like she no longer belonged here._

But, honestly…
When had she ever belonged?

She knew Credence, of course, but how much time had she actually spent with him? An hour? A minute? A day?

Tina watched and observed how Mary Lou carted around her children – forced them to parrot whatever hate-fueled nonsense she believed in this time in her twisted interpretation of the word of God. She watched her hit Credence in public, pummeling him with such ferocity and rage in her beady eyes until he lay bleeding on the street… no one ever extending a hand to help. She watched him pick massive rocks and sticks in Central Park and bring them back to the Barebone House of Horrors where Tina would listen to him scream for the next hour from some unimaginable act of savagery. She would see the bloodied bandages hidden behind the dumpster an hour afterwards…

Tina would see him quietly sobbing in the ally, biting into a dirtied sock to muffle his cries, while trying to literally stitch himself back together.

She would always watch.

Always.

Forbidden to do anything else let alone interact.

That was… except for that one time.

And Credence had looked at her like a savior.

He’d clutched onto her like a newborn babe wailing for comfort at someone finally coming to his rescue.

Viscous snot oozed down his chin, his face rendered puffy and splotchy red, and his impossibly dark eyes filled with a never-ending stream of tears. He’d trembled so violently in her comforting embrace that she thought he might have fainted had they not held onto each other. He’d buried his face into her coat and dug his hands into her back.

Grasping her desperately enough that her spine and shoulders had fingerprint bruises for a straight week afterwards.

Credence had finally found his sanctuary, his refuge, his saving grace.

Only for it to be suddenly taken away.

And then Tina went back to watching.

Always watching.

Watching Credence handing out anti-magic propaganda with impossibly dark eyes lowered. New cuts and bruises adorning his scarred hands with every passing day. Sometimes there were no visible traces of injury…

But the haunted look in his gaze and the stiff, strained way he’d walked betraying everything that remained hidden.

She was a silent spectator. Always there but not in the way it mattered.

They couldn’t possibly know each other. Not really. But, Tina had always known what he was like.

Now, she didn’t even know *that*.

“So,” Newt interrupted her reverie, “How did you find Frank anyways?”

“Used the Floo Network to reach an old buddy stationed in Sedona,” Tina answered and snorted, “You should’ve seen Jacob’s face when we told him we’d be using the fireplace.”

A strangled noise came from Newt’s general direction.

She would’ve thought that he had somehow snapped his nose in half again had he not reached around Credence to grab Tina’s shoulder. She looked back.

And found his eyes widened three times their normal size.

Newt’s mouth opened and closed, hesitation gripping his entire being, until he asked softly, “Does he remember—?”

“No,” Tina frowned and looked forward once more, “Queenie filled him in.”

“Then why is here?”

“Do you not want him to be?”

“No!” Newt exclaimed, rapidly fumbling over his words, “I mean, *yes!* Of course, I do. But, what I’m trying to say is—…”

Tina’s eyes narrowed.

“Trust me, Mr. Scamander,” she said a bit too coldly, “I wouldn’t have brought a *no-Maj* here—even if it is Jacob – if he weren’t in danger.”

Silence.

And then…

“He’s in danger?” Newt asked softly.

“You’re not the only one Grindelwald is targeting, Mr. Scamander.”

She felt Credence stiffen behind her.

“It’s like I said, honey…,” Tina kept her hardened gaze focused forward, “It’s been a while.”

Creaking open the rotting barn doors to the sanctuary they’ve been living in for the past couple days was like opening a magical portal straight back to New York.

Everything inside remained exactly the same as they’d left it. The various cobwebbed colonies of black and white-striped spiders still inhabited each and every corner—Credence Jr.’s cobweb filled with juicy flies that he devoured in a predatory flash.
The tawny-colored owls – which Credence named Newt, Newt II, and Newt III much to their namesake’s amusement – still fluttered in their nests in the exposed rafters.

The piles of juicy green courgettes, glistening red tomatoes, and plump peppers that they’d managed to harvest from the untended farm outside still remained in old, long-emptied flour sacks above the basement door where they stashed their suitcases.

And yet…

Tina guided Frank inside and headed straight to her leather knapsack. Sticking her entire arm inside, she pulled up a positively ginormous silver fish (that couldn’t have possibly fit inside that bag sans magic) and threw it to Frank.

The Thunderbird gobbled it up happily.

He chirped and pranced around in a circle for a moment before settling down in a small ball on the pungent haystack in the corner. He rested his beak on his claws, his eyes fluttering closed from exhaustion.

Newt and Credence stood by one another, neither one daring to move forward.

*Everyone was there.*

Old faces.

New faces.

Confused faces.

And…

Queasy faces?

“Poor Jacob didn’t take too well to flying,” Queenie answered Newt’s unspoken thoughts and smiled, daintily wrapping him up in a well-intentioned but uncomfortable hug that he didn’t like whatsoever but, indulged anyways. “It’s good to see you, honey. Have you been eating?”

Almost immediately, Newt thought of Credence quietly working in the kitchen.

Of decadent breakfasts with fried eggs and roasted tomatoes or American-style pancakes with blueberries or toad-in-the-hole toast…

Of New York-style sandwiches for lunch, sliced diagonally and the bread crust always cut off just how Newt liked it.

Of Shephard’s Pie and Vegetable Casserole and Pot Roasts and the richest Chicken Noodle Soup filled with fresh herbs that Credence would always make on rainy days…

“Better than ever.”

Queenie’s eyes sparkled and glanced over Newt’s shoulder at his silent apprentice.

“Oh darling, I like you. You and I just have to trade kitchen secrets sometime,” she smiled and outstretched her hand to Credence, “Queenie Goldstein. Tina’s sister. We spoke in the fireplace. It’s wonderful to properly meet your acquaintance this time.”
Credence glanced down at Queenie’s hand and meekly accepted it, looking as if he would rather be anywhere – even if it meant giving the Niffler a bath – than here at this moment, “C-Credence Barebone. A pleasure.”

“Oh yes, you are darling.”

Credence looked down at his shoes, hesitating, “How did you know that I-…?”

“Legilimens, honey.”

With just those two words, Queenie managed to break Credence out of his shell within a manner of seconds.

His entire visage brightened up, his pale face undertaking a healthy pinkish glow as he gazed upon Queenie with complete and utter awe.

“What’s it like?” Credence inquired and took her hand into his, grasping it tightly in his youthful enthusiasm, “Is it like tuning into the radio? Are each person’s thoughts like a different station or do they come at you all at once? Can you see if a person is thinking of a certain image or is it just verbal thoughts that you can hear?”

“Y-yes,” Queenie blinked, surprised by this sudden exuberance, “All of the above, honey.”

“Tell me more.”

Watching Credence and Queenie interact like this – with Credence asking a million questions all at once and Queenie patiently answering with an adoring smile – made something… proud and resplendent swell within Newt’s chest. Had they met earlier-… Had they met before Newt found Credence sobbing on The Wailing Whirlwind with nothing more than the clothes on his back, Credence would have never had had the confidence to do… well, this.

To live freely.

To express his curiosity.

To not be afraid.

“Wow, when he gets started he just keeps on going, huh?”

“Yeah,” Newt agreed and looked down at Jacob, an awkward smile tugging at the corner of his lips, “Shame he doesn’t do it that often in public.”

“He a bit of a shy one?”

“You could say that,” he laughed lightly and extended his hand, introducing himself kindly, “Newt. Newt Scamander. And you are?”

They regarded each other for a prolonged moment.

Wizard to Muggle.

Old friend to Stranger.

“I, uh-… I know who you are and you know who I am,” Jacob started slowly, rubbing the back of his neck, “Why the sudden introduction?”
“Ah,” Newt dropped his hand in favor of twiddling with his hair, “Because, my friend, I know that you might know about me but… you don’t really know me anymore. It’s all brand new for you. So, I thought it appropriate to – I don’t know – make some new memories instead of recounting the old.”

“Isn’t that a little weird though?” Jacob shifted from foot-to-foot, “Pretending that you don’t know me? You don’t have to do that for my sake.”

“No, it isn’t weird at all,” Newt answered truthfully, “It just means that we can become friends all over again; and, I’d like that very much.”

“Really?”

“Yes, very much so.”

Jacob hesitated for a moment, looking over Newt just as Newt looked over him. He wondered what exactly Jacob saw. Whether he focused on the too long limbs and the overly-freckled face. He most definitely noticed the bloody nose.

But, did he notice the fact that he… didn’t belong? The way that Newt couldn’t meet Jacob’s eye – not out of malice or shame but out of simply not possessing the ability to do so – or the way that he had to keep his hands occupied at all times.

Whether by twirling his hair, fiddling with his scarf, or stuffing them into his pocket.

At least Jacob – lovely Jacob – looked amazing as always. Perhaps a bit too green around the edges but thrumming with life and brightness – positively lighting up the room wherever he went.

_Merlin, I’ve missed you._

Newt gave another awkward smile.

Jacob laughed heartily then – coming to some silent decision that Newt couldn’t possibly comprehend – and outstretched his arms, pulling him into yet another uncomfortable hug that he couldn’t reciprocate even if he wanted since his arms were promptly squished at his sides.

“You’re a good man. I can tell,” Jacob gleamed upon pulling away, “We’re gonna get along well, aren’t we?”

“Only one way to find that out, now, isn’t there?”

Newt stepped backwards, inconspicuously rubbing his arms to get rid of the _ICKY_, uncomfortable, staticky feeling whenever someone touched him without having the time to properly brace himself first, and accidentally knocked into someone.

He sharply flinched.

What was with all the needless physical contact today?

“Sorry,” Newt apologized and turned around, “My fault—…”

Only to stare into the frightened dark brown eyes of someone he’d never seen before.

“Alma Mae,” she squeaked out an introduction and thrust out her hand. She averted her gaze to the ground as her entire body trembled, a cold sweat dripping down her brown forehead and cheek. “P-pleased to please you—… GREET YOU! Oh no, I mean—…”
“Confession: I don’t like being touched all that much.”

That seemed to break her out of her stuttering mess.

“W-what?” she stared up at him, wide-eyed.

“Therefore, since I don’t like being touched that much and you, frankly, don’t look like you want to be touched either, how about we just opt out of the handshake altogether since we both won’t enjoy it,” he waved a little then and offered a kind smile, “I’m Newton Scamander but, most people just call me Newt. Nice to meet you.”

Alma stared at Newt for a long, awkward moment before slowly retracting her hand and waving timidly.

“I’m Alma,” she winced and clutched her hands to her chest, “Wait, shoot, I already said that. T-Tina’s my – well, she’s… uhm, my darling – and I’m here to help her? And you and C-Credence too. I’m the Herbology Professor at Ilvermony.”

“Oh! What a genuine pleasure to meet you then, Professor. I’ve heard nothing but good things coming out of the Ilvermony Herbology Department,” Newt beamed, excited at the opportunity to pick her brain, “I’m a magizoologist. Our fields sometimes branch into one another.”

“Oh, I’ve heard! It’s fascinating the work you’re doing. Teenie was telling me all about your adventures in New York and about your little Bowtruckle friend! Pickett, yes?” Alma beamed, her nerves gradually being replaced by growing enthusiasm, “There’s so little known about them and what a shame that is. They’re such an integral part of the ecosystem – far more than just maintaining good wand-making trees.”

Newt blinked, surprised.

“Really?”

“Oh yes,” Alma smoothed out her pastel green dress, a Monet Garden pattern decorating the bottom and waist, “They’re the natural gardeners of the world: planting seeds, aiding cross-pollination, keeping away pests…”

“I didn’t know that,” Newt admitted and asked, “Would you mind joining me in the suitcase later and giving me your expert opinion? Of course, I’ll quote you in my book.”

Her smile faltered, being replaced with hesitation, “Oh, I would hardly call myself an expert…”

“You’re a Professor at Ilvermony AND you know more about Bowtruckles than I do,” Newt affirmed, “You’re more of the expert here than I am.”

“Well, I suppose….” Alma fiddled with her skirts and her timid smile returned, “I’d love to.”

“Wonderful!” Newt clasped his hands together and looked over his shoulder to see Credence still chittering on excitedly with Queenie – the latter looking just as enthralled as he was. Jacob had meandered over at some point and Queenie was introducing them to each other.

Albeit, Credence still looked slightly out-of-place, constantly looking down at his feet and tucking a stubborn curl behind his ear. Jacob seemed just as awkward, patting his sweaty forehead.

But…
They still smiled.

They still laughed.

Something warm inside Newt’s chest flourished, thrilled that his friends were all getting along with each other.

Well, for the most part…

Tina lingered in the shadowed background, standing beside the happily dozing Thunderbird with her arms crossed tightly over her chest - as if that were the only the thing holding her together. A worried frown tugged at her lips.

Their eyes met across the barn.

Newt wasn’t sure if she inherited a bit of her sister’s Legilimens prowess however, she seemed to understand exactly what he was trying to say.

“We need to talk.”

“You need to eat your peas.”

“No.”

“But, you have to.”

“I said no.”

“If you don’t eat your peas, then you can’t have dessert.”

“You can’t tell me what to do.”

“I can and I will, Mr. Graves,” Modesty Barebone crossed her arms over her chest and stubbornly huffed, “And I’m not letting you leave this table until that plate is finished.”

“Why you stubborn, little shi-…” Graves practically snarled, hesitating only when a passing waiter cast them a befuddled look. “I mean, sweetie.”

Modesty snorted.

Brat.

“If you’re so keen on these peas being eaten,” Graves sneered underneath his breath and pushed the unfinished plate of that evening’s dinner towards her, “Why don’t you eat them then, hmm?”

“I would have had you asked me kindly but, now? It’s a matter of principle,” Modesty answered curtly and pushed back the plate, “Eat. Your. Peas.”

“No.”

“Mr. Graves,” her upper lip curled distastefully.
“Modesty,” he mimicked mockingly and rolled his eyes, “Why are you so damned adamant about it anyways? You’re what… five? You should be showering me with thanks that I’m obviously not the type of adult to push you to finish your vegetables.”

Modesty gave him a rude gesture, which he kindly returned.

“First of all, I’m nine,” Modesty corrected and slumped backwards in her seat, “And I know what it’s like to not know when or where my next meal is coming. Even if I don’t like it, I’ll eat it.”

She twirled a strand of wheat-blond hair around her finger that had escaped from her sapphire ribbon.

“And I like peas.”

They stared at each other for a prolonged moment, neither one breaking eye contact out of either stubbornness or…

No, it was definitely stubbornness.

The waiter returned, hesitating before their table for a second until he inquired, “Are you finished, sir?”

Graves turned his sharp gaze onto him this time and, all while staring him in the eye, scooped up a spoonful of peas. “Does it look like I’m finished?”

The waiter timidly slunk off.

“That’s what I thought,” Graves grumbled and forced the disgusting spoonful of green mush into his mouth, nearly gagging from just the texture let alone the taste. “Nosy, little fucker,” he turned his attention back to Modesty, “Seriously, what’s his problem—…”?

Graves trailed off.

Modesty smirked triumphantly.

“You waved him over,” realization dawned on him, “Didn’t you?”

“Whatever do you mean?” she batted her eyelashes innocently, “I have no idea what you’re talking about, Dad.”

“Hah!” Graves plastered on a thin-lipped smile, speaking through clenched teeth, “Oh, I think you do, sweetie.”

“But, aren’t I your little angel?”

“More like a little shit.”

Modesty laughed and idly swung her feet back and forth below her seat, her feet only just grazing the ground.

Remarkable how different the Barebone child was from what he’d read about her.

Granted, her file was no longer than a page but… whatever Graves had expected, it certainly wasn’t this rambunctious, audacious, positively annoying ball of fire seated before him now.

He’d expected her to be quiet and meek – not because she was a girl but, because of what she’d been
through. Born into the poverty and destitution of the Bronx with a handful of brothers and sisters and – evidently – not enough food to go around. Adopted by that twistedly religious Mary Lou and forced to witness, if not experience herself, unspeakable horrors.

What Graves had expected was another Credence.

Not a kid with the foul mouth of a sailor and the raging fury of a thunderstorm.

Modesty surprised him at every turn, but…

But…

Graves knew little else about her.

And she knew next to nothing about him, now that he thought about it.

Only that he was a wizard and that some other bad wizard had stolen his identity and manipulated her brother.

And yet… she was traveling across the world for him.

Well, rather for her brother but, she was putting her entire trust and well-being in the hands of a virtual stranger. Not even Graves had the guts to do such a thing.

“I know what it’s like too.”

Modesty’s legs stopped swinging underneath her. She cast him a curious look.

“To not know when or where my next meal would come from,” Graves clarified, already regretting mentioning it in the first place because, oh boy, did he not want to talk about this. He could barely face what happened to him himself let alone speak about it in front of a child as some fucked up way of opening up.

Surprise flashed over Modesty’s face and she asked without any trace of judgement or condescension, “Were you a street rat too?”

“Oh! No,” Graves snorted and funneled in another wretched spoonful of peas. Vomit rose inside his throat – acid burning his tongue – but, he forced it back down. “I was locked inside a suitcase – an enchanted one that made it bigger on the inside – for a little over a month by the man that wore my face and used your brother.”

He paused.

His brow furrowed.

“At least… I think it was for a month,” Graves groaned and set down his spoon, briefly running his hands through his hair before resting his forehead in his large palms, “Fuck, was it longer?”

“I-…,” for once, Modesty seemed like she didn’t know how to react, “I’m sorry.”

“I-…” for once, Modesty seemed like she didn’t know how to react, “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be,” he laughed lowly, bitterly, “It was my fault for being foolish enough to end up there in the first place. I should’ve had my rank stripped for allowing myself to get captured like that.”

Graves knew that the system didn’t work in such a heartless manner; otherwise, Aurors would constantly find themselves out of a job each time they found themselves in a sticky situation. But, that didn’t mean that he didn’t feel that was undeserving of such treatment.
His weakness had allowed Gellert fucking Grindelwald to infiltrate the MACUSA.

This wasn’t any ordinary fuck-up and, frankly, in his humble opinion—

*He didn’t deserve to be an Auror anymore.*

“To maintain such an elaborate act of deception, it was necessary for my captor to keep me alive,” Graves explained, uncertain if this was an appropriate conversation for a child to hear but... well, perhaps Graves needed to talk about this more than he thought and Modesty needed to know more about the stranger she was spending so much time with so...

“But, that didn’t mean that I had to be comfortably alive. He’d feed me the same meal everyday: overcooked peas and mushed carrots. That is, whenever he’d deign it necessary for me to eat. Sometimes I’d lose track of the days, of when I’d last had a taste of water or food... Either way, I can’t stand the taste of either anymore.”

Graves shook his head and shifted, resting only his cheek in his palm now. After a moment he quirked a wry grin.

“See? I’m more like you than you think, kid. The only exception is that peas make me want to vomit my intestines out.”

Uncomfortable silence lapsed between them and Graves was certain that he’d made a horrible mistake. Damn it, this was why he didn’t try to open up to people. This was why he avoided children. This was why—...

Modesty reached over the table and pulled his unfinished plate towards her.

She took the spoon between her tiny fingers...

And ate his peas.

Graves frowned and reached for the plate, “Kid, you don’t have to—...”

But, she swatted his hand away and grinned innocently, “What can I say? I like peas.”

“Kid—...”

“And there’s nothing you can do that can keep me away from them.”

“Modesty—...”

“So,” the stubborn, lion-hearted Barebone child looked him square in the eye and stuffed another spoonful of mushy green vegetables into her mouth, “I’ll just get it over with and say that I’m sorry now: I’ll be eating all your peas in the future.”

*For fuck’s sake, kid...*

Graves covered his face in his hands, his shoulders shaking.

His fingers only just covering the smallest of smiles.

“Can’t argue with that.”

*Thank you.*
“Would you like to swing on a star,

*Carry moonbeams home in a jar,*

*And be better off than you are,*

*Or would rather be a…?*

“Pig!”

Credence laughed and promptly scrunched up his face. With an exaggerated motion, he hunched over his back and pressed his hand against his nose to flatten it. He puffed out his chest and stomach to make it seem like he was fatter than he was and then—…

He snorted.

Modesty giggled excitedly, pressing her hands over her mouth so that Mary Lou wouldn’t hear. “Again! Again! Do a fish this time!”

“No, no,” Credence stood up properly only to settle down next to her in bed, gesturing for Modesty to lay down so that he could pull the thin sheets over them. Mother had taken away his bed again for something stupid so, Modesty had snuck him into her room for tonight so that he didn’t have to sleep on the floor. “Now it’s time for sleep.”

“But, Credence,” she yawned a complaint, “I’m not tired.”

He raised a brow.

“Please?”

“Okay, okay,” Credence gave in and laid his head down on the pillow, “But, you sing it with me this time.”

“*Would you like to swing on a star…*”

Modesty stared up, bleary-eyed, at the ceiling and hummed the rest of the tune.

God, how she missed Credence.

She missed how happy her brother made her feel. How she could be a genuine kid around him. How she could have fun and laugh and be perfectly at ease in his mere presence. She missed his piggy-back rides and weird lullabies and how they would sneak off to play knights and princesses in the park.
Whenever she couldn’t sleep at night (which was more often than not) she thought of Credence.

But now…

Now, she also thought of another man.

Modesty hadn’t expected Graves to open up to her – at least, to the degree that he’d had over the past few days on *The Wailing Whirlwind*. She hadn’t imagined the sheer extent of what he’d been through.

Of course, she’d known that *something* had happened.

She had known about the nightmares. She had known that he didn’t like small spaces. Once, when she had enthusiastically proclaimed that, “It’s dinnertime!” to him, Graves had been sent into such a spiraling rage that he had commanded her to stand outside for the better half of the hour so that she wouldn’t see.

But slowly…

Graves opened up.

He *talked*.

He spoke about the man called Grindelwald.

About how he’d trapped Graves.

About how he had infiltrated the MACUSA.

About how he had deceived Credence.

But, mostly about the horrors Graves endured at the hands of the dark wizard with far too much time on his hands and cruelty in his wicked, shriveled heart.

And after listening to everything he had to say… After watching him let down his walls just a smidgen… After watching him try his damnedest to heal and open up and include her – to *trust* her….

Well, Modesty supposed that… maybe, Mr. Graves wasn’t that bad after all.

He wasn’t the best person in the world – oh, certainly *not*. That title was solely reserved for Credence and Credence alone. But, even though Graves was a little snarky and cold and clearly didn’t know what he was doing… he made sure that Modesty was clothed and well-fed. He didn’t question why a child her age had so many nightmares and why she always seemed to be awake in the middle of the night. He didn’t try to curb her filthy mouth – in fact, he seemed to *encourage* it.

Graves accepted her exactly the way she was and didn’t try to change anything about her except, of course, for the necessary guise of pretending to be her father.

Aside from that, Modesty was free to live exactly as she wanted.

And she’d never had that before.

Modesty rubbed her aching eyes and pulled the covers over her head, trying to get comfortable so that (hopefully) sleep would come.
But, either God or Satan or whatever incomprehensible forces that commanded the known universe seemed to specifically have it out for her that night.

Or rather, whoever the absolute fuck decided to bring a goddamned lantern into the hallway in the middle of the night and shine it right under their fucking door!

Modesty tossed off the covers with a barely subdued snarl and stomped over to the door, slamming it open straight into the stranger’s face and knocking them off their feet. She was just about to make a nasty comment about evening etiquette, paired with a rather unkind gesture—...

When the wizard, with their forehead now bloodied, raised their wand.

Modesty didn’t have enough time to react.

Primal fear gripped her heart as she stepped backwards, searching for safety. For sanctuary. For aid.

“Mr. Graves!”

A glittering spell, like a moonbeam piercing through the darkness, shot out from behind her and disarmed the witch. Taking advantage of that chance, Modesty promptly kicked her in the face – holding nothing back – and knocked her out.

Her breath came in short spurts. Her heart thumped rapidly in her chest, adrenaline coursing through her veins. What the hell had just happened?

She glanced over her shoulder.

Graves was already on his feet, the sleep wiped away from his reddened eyes. He stomped towards Modesty, pushing her backwards with, perhaps, more force than necessary – causing her to stumble but, not fall – and looked cautiously into the empty hallway, glancing back and forth.

Finding no immediate danger, he slowly approached the unconscious witch.

Carefully, Graves pulled back her crushed velvet hood – darker than a raven’s bluish-black feathers – and cursed at the golden curls spilling out from underneath.

“Grab your coat, kid,” he immediately stood up, a tell-tale cold sweat forming across his furrowed brows and his large hands trembling despite how tough and detached he tried to act, “And nothing else. We need to leave. Now.”

“I hate to break it to you, Mr. Graves,” Modesty hissed underneath her breath, gesturing down the hallway, “But, we’re in the middle of the ocean. Where are we gonna go?”

Graves whirled around and grabbed her shoulders, forcing her back so that she could look him straight in the eyes. He tried to glare – truly he did – but, all that Modesty found was fear instead of intimidation. “I don’t have time for your mouth. Just. Do. It!”

Modesty sneered but, did as instructed – grabbing her shoes too while at it and quickly slipping them on.

“Hurry up!”

“I am!” Modesty hissed, snatching Graves’ coat as an afterthought and throwing it none too kindly at him, “No need to say thank you.”

He slipped his arms through the sleeves and wrinkled his nose, scoffing, “Wasn’t going to anyways.”
“Asshole.”

“Thank you.”

“Thought you wasn’t gonna say thank you,” Modesty gleamed triumphantly and stepped over the unconscious witch as they slunk past through the hall, “Who was that?”

“Just a simple lunch lady,” Graves answered bitterly, raising a finger to his lips – indicating to keep their voices lowered, “She’s one of Grindelwald’s fanatics. I imagine there’s more of them.”

“Why are they here?”

“I don’t know but, I intend on finding out.”

They crept down the empty hallway, Modesty grabbing Graves’ free hand so as not to get lost and totally not to comfort them both in their fear – no siree. It was just so fucking quiet – far too quiet for even a boat at sea… that was… until they made it to the other half of the residential cabins…

Where cloaked wizards – at least 10 or 12 of them – wandered around, their wands illuminated and giving off a ghostly glow.

Graves squeezed Modesty’s hand, stopping her in her tracks.

They silently watched one of the hooded figures stop in front of a closed door, pulling out from inside their cloak what looked to be just a simple snake but… was clearly something else entirely; although, from that angle, Modesty couldn’t pinpoint exactly what it was.

The wizard’s wand darkened, pointing it towards the lock, and muttering something underneath their breath. The others all stopped, doing exactly the same thing.

The doors creaked open.

They all tossed the snakes into each room and locked them inside.

And then the screaming began.

Modesty’s heart stopped.

She wanted to run away. She wanted to pull on Graves’ hand and flee into the darkness – to anywhere except here. She wanted to go back to New York. She wanted her parents. She wanted her brothers and sisters. She wanted Credence.

Tears poured down her face as she slammed her hands against her mouth in horror, her suitcase dropping to the ground and the contents spilling open.

She stepped backwards when the nearest wizard – their leader – looked over.

She was scared.

So fucking scared.

But…

Credence wouldn’t have cared whether he was scared or not, would he? No. If it meant saving others – especially the innocent – he would always endure what frightened him. Even if he knew it would result in his pain – sometimes, even in his potential death – he would always walk straight
forward instead of retreating backward.

Modesty swallowed thickly and, before Graves could tell her to stay behind, she ran into the fray.

She knocked the closest wizard off his feet, kicking him furiously in his milky-white eye when he tumbled to the ground, and ran into the closed off room.

The door clicked shut behind her.

And Modesty came face-to-face with an enormous reddish-violet snake – bigger than her – with a glistening ivory stomach and arm-length fangs… and all five heads reared back and spitting venom with each threatening hiss.

It’s victim already laid collapsed on the ground, spazzing and foaming at the mouth from an unfortunate bite to the neck before growing still.

No.

She was too late.

She had hesitated and she was too late.

And now she stood eye-to-eye with a monster.

Modesty quickly backed up against the door and reached up, gripping the metal handle tightly and sharply jerking it down with all her might.

Nothing.

Fuck, the bad wizard with the blinded eye must have locked it behind her with magic or whatever fucking nonsense. She didn’t have the time or capacity to dwell on it for long.

Modesty turned around and banged her fists on the door.

“Let me out!”

The multi-headed snake slithered closer, frightened by the sudden movement and violent actions that Modesty made in her unexpected appearance. Pale yellow venom pooled in it’s ivory mouth and dripped to the floor where it evaporated into mist.

It smelled like acid – pungent, nauseating acid – and it just permeated the air.

Modesty could gag.

“Let me the fuck out!” she cursed instead, beating the steel door with newfound urgency the closer and closer that the snake got. She didn’t even feel her knuckles getting torn up or the hot, sticky blood dripping down her palms.

But, she did hear the menacing hiss of the multi-headed snake in her ear.

She did feel her eyes getting droopy with each passing second.

She did feel her lungs slowly become more and more constricted with every breath she took.

She did smell the acidity of the snake’s venom filling the air.
“Help!”

She was going to die.

Had she been more like Credence and dashed into the room the second she saw the cloaked wizards in the hall, she could have saved the innocent man now laying dead on the floor. If she had acted sooner, she wouldn’t be trapped here with a frightened five-headed snake and venomous pale mist slowly filling the cabin.

If she had acted sooner…

If she had stood against Mary Lou, Credence would still be here and they’d all be safe. Her and Chastity and Credence. They would all still be a family with—…

“Daddy!”

Where was Graves? Where was he when she needed him most? Where was he?!

Modesty sobbed, slamming her fist against the door with the last of her energy and collapsing onto her knees.

She was so tired…

The world was growing dark.

“Mr. Graves…”

Modesty slumped to the ground, her cheek pressed against the cold floor. She would just close her eyes for a second. That’s all that she needed… And then she’d find a way to escape from here and….

And then…

And then what…?

A bright, blinding light entered her vision.

Something safe and warm and familiar wrapped around her tightly, pulling her into a close embrace. She wondered if the five-headed snake had finally enveloped her in its reddish-violent coils, rearing back to bite her neck like it’s previous victim lying a few feet away from her…

Either way, she was just going to close her eyes.

Just for a minute.

…

Chapter End Notes

Hello y'all! I'll probably pop back in tomorrow morning to edit the notes section since it's super late and I'm tired and probably not coherent. But look! A new chapter! It was initially supposed to be longer buuuuuuuuuut, after I hit over 20 pages and that lovely little cliff hanger, I decided to leave it here. You'll just have to wait until next time on
Green Meadows, Dark Skies for more!

Here's where I ask how I'm doing with my writing? Is there anything you want to see more of? Less of? Anything that you think I should improve upon?

Please leave your constructive criticisms and comments below! They are the fuel upon which this fic (and author feeds upon)!!! What was your favorite scene in this chapter? What was your favorite chapter overall? What does this fic mean to you? How do you think it will end? Have you found all the clues I've interwoven into the story? I read every comment and cherish them all.

Until next time my lovelies!!!
Bonjour my loveliest lovelies and darling darlings!

I'm proud to announce that I'm officially back! I'm also not-so-proud to announce that Lore Notes will officially be discontinued (unless I go back and add more content to some chapters, which is always a possibility) since I obviously cannot keep up with them. It's a sad, sad day for Lore Notes but, a wonderful day to announce that I'm back home!!! That means that regular chapter updates (hopefully, once every week) are back!!!

I had an absolute blast in Europe and I fulfilled my wildest dreams of my first ever fandom: Phantom of the Opera. I walked through the lavish and (seriously) needlessly expensive halls of the Opera Garnier and laid eyes upon the infamous Box Five. I bought myself a copy of The Phantom of the Opera in French. AND, after stopping off in New York, I saw the play on Broadway so, I'm over the moon.

But, I'm also super glad to be back home because that means that I can write more and be with you all, my lovelies!

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

What in the absolute hell is Newt’s life? Is this what he feels like all the time?

Anxiously pouring over horrendous chicken-scratch notes (bloody hell, those penmanship classes Mother placed him in forever ago really were for nothing, weren’t they?) and deciphering each and every illegible word so that he could brew whatever miraculous, life-saving potion – lovingly developed over years of trial-and-error and sheer ingenuity – that he needed while someone was screaming bloody murder in the background?

Someone who, believe it or not, wasn’t the actual patient.

Merlin, Newt must have the patience of a saint.

Theseus hurriedly read through agonizingly long, detailed descriptions of Western Hydra nesting patterns, yearly migrations into different climates across the Mediterranean, and how to distinguish (with pin-point accuracy) between each of the four sexes. He flipped through what felt like hundreds upon hundreds of gorgeous sketches given life through a careful hand and a brush of magic. Hydras from every stage of life: from egg to their final days on Earth. Hydras with a single head to Hydras with over a thousand. Hydras of every size, shape, and color and more than Theseus imagined possible – more than Theseus thought even existed.

Theseus read through how to cure the stomach-dissolving parasites that plagued the creatures and how to keep their delicate eyes from developing cataracts – a condition surprisingly frequent in them – all while searching for the final part of a certain potion recipe that he knew was there somewhere—
A loud *thump* vibrated behind him followed by a rather *colorful* string of language that would make any distinguished elderly woman blush and clutch her heirloom pearls in horror. Theseus pinched the bridge of his nose and turned around in his chair – exasperated.

One Percival Graves – friend and fellow Auror – cradled his bruised hand and cursed at the wall that *most certainly* didn’t have an unseemly dent in it before.

Never in all the years they’d known each other had Theseus witnessed Graves so out of control. Granted, they had only met in person a couple of times before. They had, what could be kindly called, a professional friendship but… Theseus figured that he knew quite a bit about Graves’ personality and habits.

He had always had a temper about him and the wickedly sharp tongue of a viper but, what distinguished Graves from everyone else is that he knew exactly when to restrain himself and when to unleash his viciousness.

He was a well-rounded Auror – prideful and professional through and through.

But this…

This wasn’t the Graves he knew anymore.

As if sensing his silent audience, Graves paused and turned his narrowed gaze onto him, piercing through his skin and into his heart and soul.

Theseus didn’t flinch.

“What are you doing looking at me?” Graves hissed sharply, his deep voice piercing through the air like a pointed blade, “Shouldn’t you be working?”

Oh yes.

Theseus felt like he understood his brother now more than ever and appreciated his kindness – his patience – even more.

“Yes,” Theseus answered, standing up and rummaging through the glass decanters of potion ingredients on the shelves over his desk.

“However,” he continued, plucking a bottle of Kraken Secretions and Powdered Thistledown, “I never found myself in the situation of brewing a *highly delicate potion* in the middle of bombs and mines blowing holes in the ground. So, unless you want the young Miss Barebone to *die* because you’re too occupied with having a hissy fit, I kindly suggest that you do shut up.”
Graves snarled and stomped up to him, grabbing Theseus’ collar.

But, where Graves was quick to anger, Theseus was quick on his feet and pressed his already drawn wand against Graves’ neck.

Merlin, he looked even worse up close.

Theseus remembered gazing upon the front page of the latest edition of *Wizarding Weekly* over a month or two ago and finding himself having to do a double-take at the photograph of the once proud and formidable Auror Percival Graves being escorted away from the suitcase he had been imprisoned in.

The man that stood before him now looked no different. Perhaps a little heavier but, he was nowhere near the portrait of refined strength and muscle that he once was. His eyes – once as piercing as an eagle – were as sunken in as a corpse and just as haunted. His dark hair no longer held it’s lustrous thickness that Theseus was accustomed to. Oh no, it now hung limply across his forehead – unmaintained and uncut.

This was a walking ghost before him.

And it was hard to look at.

Theseus had seen this same exact look on many of the boys (many who were his friends, for that matter) in his regimen when they were finally okayed to go home. Leaving the war behind yet, having it still being waged full-force within their eyes – their thousand league stares of hopelessness and defeat haunting Theseus to this day.

“Don’t make me fight you,” Theseus commanded, his voice stern yet quiet, “Not another one of my friends.”

“Is that what we are? Friends?” Graves slowly ground his teeth together, the ear-splitting noise sounding somewhere between nails on a chalkboard and a screeching record scratch to Theseus’ ears, “Where were you then when Grindelwald caught me, huh? If we’re friends, how come you didn’t come for me?”

“Colleagues then,” Theseus amended, his wand unwavering, “If that’s what you’d prefer.”

Graves blinked – obviously not the answer he was expecting – and snorted. He released his grip on Theseus’s collar and stepped backwards only an inch, “You’re such an ass.”

Theseus lowered his wand but didn’t put it away.

“Percival-…”

“Ugh,” Graves groaned and ran his bruised hands over his face, “You know I hate that name.”

“I know,” Theseus quipped and turned back around, searching for (and quickly finding) Essence of Dittany. He gathered all the potion ingredients he needed and meticulously put them in order on his desk, pulling out his portable cauldron from underneath it. “You must really care for this girl.”

“No, I don’t.”

But, out of the corner of his ever-watchful eyes, Theseus spotted Graves glancing worriedly at the unconscious girl breathing raggedly on the bed in the middle of the room. He saw his hands twitch and wring around themselves nervously before catching what he was doing and shoving them into
his pocket.

“I just…,” Graves cleared his throat, “I don’t like it when kids get hurt. That’s all.”

“No one does,” Theseus hummed, “But, no one reacts like this over a kid they don’t care about.”

Graves didn’t respond.

Theseus went back to work.

Needless to say, when Theseus had been getting ready for bed that evening and slipping on his fluffy pink bunny slippers that Mother had purchased for him for his birthday, he hadn’t expected, well… this.

Certainly not being suddenly interrupted by Graves apparating inside his apartment. Most definitely not by the shivering, comatose Barebone child cradled in his arms. And unquestionably not by the familiar bound and gagged man he had dragged in by the ear.

Merlin, Theseus had only wanted to go to bed.

But, ever the soldier, he had sprung immediately into action and thrown Graves’ captive into the kitchen and bound him (none too kindly, either) to a chair. He had carefully lifted Modesty away from Graves’ trembling arms and placed her onto his bed where he took her pulse and monitored her vitals. He had asked Graves – interrogated, even – on what exactly had transpired. On what afflicted the poor Muggle child. On why he was here so soon.

Why he was there with him.

But, Graves couldn’t respond at first.

He could only stare at the poisoned girl – at Modesty – slowly turning blue around the edges and breathing becoming more haggard and strained by the moment. Graves couldn’t say anything.

Nothing at all.

Which was, perhaps, most frightening.

Theseus had done everything he could possibly think of to snap him out of his, frankly, uncharacteristic stupor. He tried shaking his shoulders, tried forcing Graves to stare at him, tried yelling into his ear. Theseus even tried slapping Graves across the face but, nothing worked. He just… stared – frozen stiff – until Modesty’s breathing stopped for just half a second.

Graves’ eyes had flashed to his.

And Theseus knew what he was trying to tell him.

“Save her.”

So, as much as Graves’ anger and rage and impatience annoyed him in this moment. As much as how the shadow of the great man before him pained his heart. As unpleasant as the memories that arose after recognizing the face that Graves held captive-….

Theseus channeled his inner Newt and helped.
Modesty was in Hell.

And that wasn’t a figurative statement either. No bullshitting act of eloquent Shakespearean poetry or alliteration or allegories or other fancy words that she didn’t know the meaning of interwoven together to make pain sound pretty. No, Modesty was legitimately in Hell and currently being roasted over an open pit of wicked flames, being cooked alive with chemical-tasting smoke filling her lungs and skin crackling as it turned into leather.

Modesty was burning alive and no one was coming to save her. Hot scorching magma pumped through her veins and destroyed every muscle and ligament holding her together. Her very bones were crumbling into dust and powdery ash. Her screams were nothing more than burning embers flickering away into nothingness, into oblivion.

Much like her.

She no longer knew reality from hallucination, consciousness from nightmares.

She didn’t know when her torture had become so painful – so fucking agonizing – that her vision dotted out and faded into pitch-black darkness. Darker than even the impossibility of Credence’s eyes and hair.

Credence...

Someone wiped away the sweat dripping down her scorching forehead with a damp cloth. Someone else gently gathered her hair away from her face as she spewed lava from her mouth.

This was it.

Mary Lou was fucking right.

Consorting with witches and wizards and wicked magic had landed her in Hell.

Perhaps this was what she deserved.

Eternal damnation and everything included. Alone in a blazing inferno surrounded by the weight of her sins and misdeeds with no one coming to her rescue. Alone without even Credence to keep her company. Alone without even-….

“For fuck’s sake, kid, those were new shoes.”

Graves?

“I hope you know that you’re replacing them,” his voice came again, along with the careful patting of her forehead with that heavenly cold, damp washcloth, “You hear me, kid? New black oxfords. Size tens. Not stolen.”

Modesty couldn’t help herself.

She cracked a smile. Laughter wanting desperately to escape the wall of fire and brimstone it was trapped behind.

“Ass.”

Graves laughter, she supposed, would suffice.
Graves paced restlessly around the barren (well, mostly) bedroom, wringing his bruised hands together to keep himself from pulling out his hair or, hell, breaking something that didn’t belong to him.

He had always had a destructive temper about him. When he was a teenager, he terrorized his Father’s prim and proper – if not overly pretentious – household with sudden bouts of icy rage filled with shredded paper and shattered glass. Once he graduated school, he had reigned in these troublesome episodes to the point where they had become a rarity once he was accepted as an Auror. They had grown in frequency once again after Grindelwald happened but, he always restrained himself to breaking his own stuff instead of priceless family vases or whatever.

However…

At this moment, that beautiful shelf of glittering potion ingredients hanging above Theseus’ desk looked awfully tempting to pull down with gleeful fervor. Squared glass decanters all neat and tidy in three little rows, kept meticulously free of dust and any signs of wear and tear as if they were brand new from the store.

A dazzling frame of golden feathers encircling a crude, aged child’s drawing encased behind glass tempted Graves to snap it’s obnoxious display of wealth and fond memories in half. Even the leather journals organized in the small bookshelf underneath the desk – all labeled from aged 5 to aged 17, with one missing, on the spines – seemed so lovely to rip out each and every page from.

Or perhaps he could go old school and simply tear the lamp from the wall, smashing the glowing bulb on the floor. Or breaking off each of the legs off the wooden chair or-…

Shit, Theseus had both too many and too little things to break in this room.

Almost completely bare of personal touch except for the dimly-lit corner of his desk and the double bed covered in royal blue linens.

A bed where Modesty-…

Graves scowled.

“You said that she would be up by now.”

“No,” the ever composed and ever frustrating Theseus corrected calmly, flipping through the pages of the leather journal labeled aged 15 on the spine, “I said that she could be waking up soon.”

“And what the hell is the difference?”

“Well, one is more affirmed than the other-…”

“Bullshit!” Graves snarled, stomping over and ripping the journal from Theseus’ hands. He glanced down at the contents and nearly laughed at the chicken-scratch notes he found there.

“You don’t know what you’re doing, do you?” he carelessly hit the paper, smudging one of the charcoal drawings of a chimera, and looked back up, “Great Theseus Scamander at a loss on what to
do and too proud to admit it.”

Theseus’ glare – full of barely restrained fire and fury – was positively alarming.

“I fully acknowledge my lack of experience in these sorts of things,” his cold voice sliced through the air, snatching back the leather notebook and snapping it shut with a single hand, “But, since my brother isn’t here and since I’m the only one here that can read his atrocious handwriting, I’m your best and only shot, Mr. Graves. So, I highly suggest that you appreciate everything that I’m doing because I could have done nothing at all.”

Graves seethed.

“And what exactly do you call this?” he gestured angrily at Theseus, “Standing around reading while she suffers? That poor excuse of a potion only made her puke all over my shoes and now she’s back right where she started! Damn it, Theseus, she’s only a kid-…!”

“I thought I was a little shit.”

Graves froze.

Slowly, he glanced behind his shoulder.

But, Theseus was quicker and had already crossed the bedroom in two long steps, kneeling down beside the bed and placing the back of his hand against the now conscious Modesty’s sweaty forehead.

Merlin, she looked like shit.

Her cropped hair having lost all semblance of wonderful, youthful golden shine to the sheer point where it barely even resembled blanched wheat. The raging inferno of her eyes had dulled to a near-defeated, exhausted gray. Her lips were chapped beyond repair and her skin had turned so frighteningly pale. But… she was awake and that was something.

That had to be something.

“How are you feeling?” Theseus asked quietly, his hands moving away from Modesty’s forehead to her wrist, checking her pulse.

“How do you fucking think?”

Graves snorted and pinched the bridge of his nose, hiding his amused not-quite-a-grin but not-quite-a-grimace. Even when having knocked on death’s door only moment’s ago, Modesty still was a rambunctious little fury of a girl.

“Dumbledore was right,” Theseus observed with a small smile, “A true Gryffindor spirit through and through.”

“I’m still gonna pretend that I know what that means,” Modesty sharply retorted.

Theseus laughed, placing his hands upon his hips.

“Seriously though,” he continued, “How are you feeling?”

“Like I walked through Hell,” Modesty rasped and cringed at the scratchy sound of her voice or, perhaps, from the pain of simply using it after having emptied well beyond the contents of her stomach, “Can I get some water?”
“Certainly.”

Theseus elegantly rose (because of course he would make standing up look dignified, that posh bastard) and swept past Graves. He lingered by his side for a moment, glancing over his shoulder back at Modesty, before leaning in close to his ear and whispering, “I know that it’s an impossible expectation from you but, please maintain some semblance of patience and decency around her. And, for the love of Merlin, don’t break anything. My poor walls can’t take anymore abuse.”

Graves scowled at Theseus’ back when he retreated into the kitchen, the door clicking shut behind him.

_Pompous ass._

How dare Theseus leave him here with Modesty alone when he—when he didn’t know what he could possibly say to her? When he didn’t know what to do or how to act? How could he look at the damned kid – someone that relied explicitly on him for protection – and say that she’d nearly died?

And that it was all his fault?

Oh, destroying Theseus’ desk and all it’s contents was looking all the more tempting…

“So,” Graves reluctantly broke the silence, unable to look Modesty in the eye let alone in her general direction. Ugh, what he would give to be anywhere except here right now. “Are we going to… talk about it?”

“I’d rather forget and move on.”

Merlin, they were so alike that Graves wondered whether or not Modesty was really his long-lost daughter.

“Glad we’re on the same page, kiddo,” Graves released a heavily-burdened breath and crossed the room, sitting on the side of the bed facing away from Modesty. He hunched over, exhausted and angry, and ran his hands through his hair before finally settling on just resting his face in his palms.

He inhaled deeply.

_Fuck this._

“Never do that again.”

The room dropped ten degrees around them.

“What?!” Modesty bristled, her gravelly voice sharply cracking underneath the use and abuse, “You mean you don’t want me going and trying to save people that need help while you stand around doing nothing? Well, gee! Sorry for caring so much—…”

“No, you insufferable child!” Graves hissed, his trembling fingernails digging sharply into his forehead in a fine—if not painful—example of self-restraint, “It’s my responsibility to make sure you’re safe. It’s my responsibility to be with you wherever you go. It’s my responsibility to make sure you don’t die!”
“Mr. Graves-…”

“No, the adult is talking. Not a peep outta you,” Graves jumped to his feet and ran his hands down his face, wanting nothing more than to punch the wall again or be back in his own home in his own bedroom alone among his own belongings that he could break and repair as he pleased. “I get that you’ve been through shitty situations. Understatement of the year but, I get it. But, the world that you’re used to and the one that I’m used to are two entirely separate things. It’s no longer pickpocketing in the streets and evading the police, darling. This is magic. You could die with the flick of a wand.”

“D’ya think that I don’t understand that?” Modesty seethed, pure ice and malice forming underneath her scratchy breath, “Don’t you think I knew exactly what I was getting into before I came here?”

“No, I don’t think you do,” Graves shook his head, “Because I didn’t prepare you enough. And that’s all my fault. That’s on me. If I had half a mind, I’d send you home right now-…”

“NO!”

Modesty violently stumbled off the bed and rounded around him, the stubborn anger blazing in her tired eyes dying within an instant as soon as she saw him.

Ugh, pity. How he hated seeing that on a person’s face.

“Don’t look at me like that, kid,” Graves wiped the faintest hint of tears from his eyes and sniffed. It took everything Graves had to keep himself from crumpling. “Making me feel pathetic-…”

“Mr. Graves-…”

“You called me Dad before.” Oh, he hadn’t intended on bringing that complicated topic up but, how couldn’t he? “I made a mistake. I shouldn’t have brought you here. You’re too young for this. Far too young-…”

“The world doesn’t care if I’m young or old to be a bitch to me,” she obstinately puffed out her chest, “I’ll handle it.”

“You shouldn’t have to.”

“No,” Modesty agreed, “But, I will if it means I get my brother back.”

Graves snorted and sunk backwards onto the bed, hiding his damnable emotional face behind his hands, “You’re one tough kid.”

“You know it.”

“But, seriously don’t do that again.”

“Don’t worry, Dad,” Modesty hopped onto the bed next to him, “Next time I’ll shove you in the room with a deadly snake instead.”

Theseus silently lingered behind the kitchen door, cool glass of water in hand, as he listened to Graves and Modesty talk. It wasn’t eaves-dropping per-se, he reasoned. Just… giving them enough
privacy to hash out what they needed to while simultaneously paying attention to when he could politely interject.

“And people call me a spy.”

Theseus bristled.

Out of everyone in the world – wizard and Muggle alike – that he most certainly did not want to be stuck alone in a room with, it was him. Former friend and schoolmate. Trusted advisor and valuable soldier.

Theseus turned around.

And stared eye to eye with Hugin.

The decorated war hero and former wizarding philanthropist looked exactly how Theseus last saw him. Tall and possessing a gangly sort of thinness, his thin lips turned downwards in a disapproving scowl, and rage and determination swirling within the darkness of his good eye – the blinded one forever staring off into oblivion.

Forever reminding Theseus of all his failures.

“That’s probably because you are a spy,” Theseus’ upper-lip curled uncomfortably, spitting out, “Even before you turned to Grindelwald.”

“Still angry that I turned rogue on you, Theseus?” Hugin laughed wickedly; but... after years of knowing, supporting, and working with him through the Ministry, Theseus could detect just the tiniest of humanness warbling in his tone – an undercurrent of pain and bitterness hidden underneath a guise of malevolence.

Or was Theseus merely projecting what he wanted to hear – to see – upon his former friend?

Desperately wanting to see the remnants, however faint, of the man he once knew?

“We all suffered over there, Hugin. We fought on the same battlefields. We saw the same atrocities. Felt the same agony and horror. The same helplessness,” Theseus spat, “But not all of us turned to a monster to cope.”

“Grindelwald isn’t the monster you make him out to be,” Hugin hissed, “Sure, there are… opinions of his that I don’t exactly agree with but, he’s taking a stand! And finally! Merlin knows we need some sort of change. I’m tired of waiting for something – anything – to happen, to make what we went through worthwhile, while we all suffer. We help the Muggles in their little war. We lose our friends – our family – so that we can maintain our little pathetic life of hiding. We sacrifice again and again and for what?”

“So, you want to rule over them?” Theseus clenched his teeth, “You think we’re better than them?”

“They’re savages, Theseus!” Hugin struggled against his bonds – the wards keeping him restrained to the chair – and leaned forward, “You saw the same things I did! Those machines those Muggles created just to hurt and inflict pain upon one another? Bombs! Tanks! Guns! Chemical weapons! I lost my eye because of them!”

“No, you lost your eye because of me! Because of my mistakes!” Theseus hissed, “Because I was stupid and proud and didn’t check that we were walking straight onto a bloody mine field.”
“You made a poor decision,” Hugin countered, “But, who laid those mines there in the first place, huh? Who killed Little Patty and Cross-Eyed Richard when they strolled into that meadow because that certainly wasn’t you, Theseus.”

“So, killing more people is the answer?”

“I don’t know,” Hugin leaned back in his chair, “But, at least we’re doing something. What are you doing?”

Theseus narrowed his eyes and turned back to the door.

“I’m waiting.”

“Are you certain that you don’t want to join us, Credence?” Newt asked, positively perplexed, his freckled hands resting gently against the doorway leading into his bedroom, “There’s more than enough room for you to sit down and all. You and Tina can take the bed and I’ll take the desk chair. I even cleaned everything off.”

Credence raised a brow.

“You mean…,” he started counting his fingers, “You fixed the sheets, laundered the clothes, organized the notes in alphabetical order, dusted the surfaces, polished the windows, and mopped the floors?”

“Well, I-… uh. Alright, you cleaned it,” Newt’s cheeks pinkened sheepishly, “And I thank you for that. I don’t know what I’d do without you-…”

“Have a disaster of a bedroom,” he deadpanned.

“Ha-ha, very funny-…”

“No, seriously,” Credence glanced over his shoulder back at Queenie and Jacob sitting down at the kitchen table while gesturing to Newt, “He used to use his trousers as curtains. His trousers. I could barely walk in there without stepping on something important either and not to mention the atrocious state his socks were in-…”

Queenie politely stifled a giggle behind her hand.

“Okay, okay,” Newt waved his hands frantically in front of his face, blushing as red as a ripened cherry, “No more picking on Newt.”

But, Credence wasn’t finished.

“It’s thanks to me that his socks match.”

Jacob snorted. Even Alma Mae, silently gazing out the cabin window into the forest enclosure, cracked a smile.

“Credence…,” Newt whined.

Taking pity on him, Credence relented and nodded his head towards the bedroom. “Go on ahead
without me. I can’t… handle too much more excitement right now,” he finally responded to Newt’s question and glanced over at Tina, “Besides, I know you’ll tell me everything after you’ve finished talking with Miss Goldstein anyways.”

She tucked a stray strand of hair behind her ear, “Tina is perfectly fine, sweetie.”

“I know, Miss Goldstein.”

“Credence likes his formalities,” Newt donned a half-smile, “I remember when you insisted on calling me Mr. Newt.”

“Oh hush.” But, Credence couldn’t help but smile.

“That’s my line…,” Newt trailed off, adding softly, “I’m right here if you need me.”

“And I’ll be right here making lunch if you need me.”

“Oh honey,” Queenie interjected, standing up from the table, “I can help with that.”

“I couldn’t possibly ask that of you, Miss Goldstein,” Credence frowned and looked down at his shoes, “Erm, Miss… Queenie, I suppose? Either way, it’s rude to have guests prepare meals in another’s home.”

“But, darling-…”

Credence turned around and placed his hands upon his hips, “I insist.”

Queenie immediately quieted and sat back down at the table.

“I call that Credence’s Mother Hen mode,” Newt commented and glanced at Tina when her mouth dropped at the sight, “You get used to it quickly. Now, shall we?”

“Y-yes…,” she absently blinked, “Of course.”

And then the door closed behind them, leaving Credence alone.

Alone in a room of practical strangers.

Credence’s gaze lingered behind on Newt’s bedroom door for a half a moment longer before he headed to the oven, shrugging off his Slytherin green coat and replacing it with a bright yellow apron that he tied around his waist. He slipped out his wand from his back pocket and cast a quick spell to gather the ingredients he needed and set everything up.

Vegetables – courgettes and carrots and onions galore – flew from their sacks strewn across the room and set themselves before the bamboo cutting board on the kitchen counter. A ginormous cast iron pat (Handed down to me from my great-great-great grandmother herself, Newt had once said) burst from the cabinets underneath the sink and settled itself atop the stove, the burner instantly lighting underneath it.

“I’m never gonna get used to that,” Jacob’s awe-filled voice resounded behind him.

“I understand the feeling,” Credence hummed, tucking a wayward curl behind his ear and beginning to peel the carrots, “I’ve only been doing magic for about… two months and thirteen days exactly and I still can hardly believe it. That this is my life.”

“I’m only a week in myself,” Jacob leaned back in his chair and rubbed his forehead, amending,
“Well, not exactly doing the magic part. Just knowing about it.”

“Am I correct in assuming that you’re still captured by feelings of both reverence and apprehension then?” Credence asked, brushing away a stray strand of hair from his forehead.

“I— I’m not scared or nothing like that,” Jacob stammered and fiddled with his fingers, “It’s just… y’know strange is all.”

“I understand completely.”

“Oh Jacob, sweetie,” Queenie hummed sympathetically – perhaps even a little guiltily – and placed an adoring hand upon his cheek, “I’m sorry. Is there anything that I can do to make it better?”

“It’s not your fault,” Jacob assuaged and placed his hand atop hers, “It’s just somethin’ that I gotta deal with myself.”

“In my experience, the feeling doesn’t go away completely,” Credence interjected, “But… at least for me, it gets better in time.”

A couple stubborn curls fell, annoyingly once again, across his forehead and blocked his vision. Credence wrinkled his nose as he brushed them out of his way. He really ought to invest in a hairband or some sort of ribbon—

“Oh honey,” Queenie chirped, “Almaisie has a spare ribbon. I don’t think she’d mind sharing.”

*How did she—*?

Credence blinked.

*Right. Legilimens.*

“O-oh, yes,” Alma turned away from the cabin window, reaching into her dress pocket (her arm going farther down than what should be physically possible) and pulling out a copy of *Miss Camembert’s Cantankerous Cabaret*. She casually flipped to the back page and hummed, “I always store a couple extra in case I lose mine. Wait, why do we need ribbon again?”

“Credence needs something to tie back his hair,” Queenie answered and glanced back at him, smiling that wonderful smile of sweetness, homemade pastries and everything good in the world incarnate, “By the way, honey, long hair suits you.”

Credence flushed in embarrassment and looked down at his shoes.

“Correct,” Alma approached and held out the book to him, three ribbons of vibrant apothic green, sunshine gold, and glittering silver shining back at him, “Feel free to take whichever strikes your fancy.”

“Thank you,” Credence murmured upon selecting the silver and quickly tied his hair back in a clumsy bow. His gaze flickered back to the all-too-familiar book for just a moment until he couldn’t help his tongue, “Newt reads those too.”

Queenie’s eyes widened to the size of dinner plates while Alma merely gasped in delight, holding the book tightly against her chest, “He reads Miss Camembert?!”

“Wow,” Queenie leaned back in her chair, placing a hand against her forehead, “Newt is always full of surprises, isn’t he?”
Jacob looked between the three wizards and frowned, “I feel like I’m missing something here.”

“I’ll explain later, honey.”

“Even better,” Alma exclaimed, a beaming smile lighting up her face as she turned to Jacob, “I’ll lend you the first book. But, more importantly, Credence… I say again: He reads Miss Camembert?!”

“Religiously. He has an entire bookcase dedicated just to the series and, I swear, it’s the only thing he has organized in this place,” Credence grimaced. Granted, he thrived upon cleaning up Newt’s messes and found a certain joy and accomplishment in tackling particularly hard cases (which was in no short supply where Newt was concerned) but…

Sometimes, it still shocked him how much of a disaster Newt could be sometimes.

Those damnable mismatched socks…

Credence shuddered and returned to peeling the carrots.

“And the row of pots and pans hanging beside the stove all decided to casually float off their hooks, gingerly hang mid-air, and crash onto the floor in a cacophony of clangs and clanks.”

Jacob sharply flinched in his chair and pressed his large hands against the table, “What was that?”

“S-sorry,” Credence averted his gaze and switched from peeling the carrots to dicing the courgettes, “I still don’t have the best grasp on my magic.”

“I see,” Jacob didn’t seem to question it – not that he should – and curiously inquired, “That happen often then?”

“Only on occasion,” Credence forced a comforting smile upon his face and reassured him, “No need to worry all that much.”

“That just mean you’re getting better at magic?”

“Oh, I wish.”

Not at all,” he answered truthfully, filling the warmed-up cast iron pot with a vegetable broth he had made earlier and stored in the ice box. He swept the courgettes and diced carrots inside from the cutting board before starting on chopping the onions. “The best I can manage are simple housework spells and the occasional Lumos.”
The forest fairies still hadn’t let him forget about how he uprooted their entire tree when attempting a *Wingardium Leviosa* on a leaf.

That was the problem with most of his spells. Credence could never be delicate. It was either completely overboard and overpowered or not at all. He had far more luck and progress with controlling the Obscurus than controlling his own magic. Granted, the two parts of himself were related but…

Progress or no progress, the only reason he was even here at this point of his wizarding life was because of Newt.

Sweet, wonderful Newt…

He smiled and tossed the chopped onions into the bubbling stew, wiping his scarred hands on his apron before heading to the windowsill for some herbs. Perhaps some Dill or Parsley…

Had Tina not interrupted their moment earlier that morning after he successfully gained control over the Obscurus for the very first time, Credence would have much liked to have kissed Newt again. Just the thought of looking into those meadow green eyes of pure awe and wonder…

Credence plucked off a couple pieces of Dill and paused.

Speaking of thoughts…

He slowly turned around.

Queenie’s shocked gaze locked instantly onto his and her cheeks turned the slightest bit pink. Credence flushed from head to toe and looked down at his shoes as he headed back to the stove and tossed the herbs inside the pot, stirring it with a wooden spoon.

He added a pinch of salt and pepper and raised the spoon to his lips for a taste.

*Do you know?*

Out of the corner of his eyes, Credence watched Queenie hesitate for a moment before nodding.

*Have you… You haven’t told anyone have you?*

Queenie smiled soothingly at that and raised her finger to her lips as if to say that his secret was safe with her.

*Thank you.*

Credence wasn’t anywhere or anyhow ashamed with what he had with Newt. Their—whatever they had between them was one of the best things that had ever happened in his life and he was, frankly, quite proud to have someone like Newt interested in *him*. It was just that—…

He didn’t want to spoil the reunion between Newt and his friends with… well, with *him*.

They all already possessed an amazing repertoire. Newt had bonded – endured the best and the worst – with his friends in New York while Credence was out raising destruction and havoc at every turn. They all had suffered together. They had adventured together. They had formed beloved memories together.

And Credence…
Well, all he had in common was Newt and Tina.

Credence slowly stirred the wooden spoon inside the pot of stew and added a touch bit more salt to balance out the flavor.

He didn’t belong here, did he?

How could *Credence* of all people ever hope to be a part of such magnificence? To be a part of such a great group of friends? He would only bring down their already well-established and balanced relationship with his problems and inexperience. He would only-…

“Oh honey,” Queenie elegantly rose from her seat and approached him, openly touching the disgusting half-moon scars marring Credence’s hands, “Don’t you see how amazing you are?”

Shame colored his pale cheeks in a devilish shade of scarlet as he remembered that a literal mind-reader was present. See, this was why he shouldn’t be here. Forgetting one stupid little thing within the span of a second and-…

“Honey,” Queenie comfortingly squeezed his hand and gently took his chin between her fingers to turn his face towards her, “Stop.”

“I’m sorry,” the words spilled from Credence’s lips out of habit, “I-…”

“And don’t you go apologizing neither,” Queenie puffed out her cheeks, “There is no one here that’s a hinderance *and* there’s no one here that doesn’t have anything to contribute – least of all, you.”

“Thank you, Miss Queenie but-…”

“Oh no, no, no!” she shook her head, her golden curls bouncing from the movement, “No ifs, ands, or buts, mister!”

“But-…”

“Nope, not gonna hear it.”

“But, Miss Queenie-…”

“Nu-uh, no siree.”

“But, I-…”

“*La la la*, not listening.”

Credence cracked a smile against his will and sighed heavily, relenting, “Okay, Miss Queenie.”

“There we go,” she beamed, triumphant, “Now, repeat after me: I have something valuable to contribute here.”

Credence laughed quietly but did as instructed.

“I have something valuable to contribute here.”

“Good, now: We are all friends here.”

“We are all friends here.”
“And we all have one thing in common here: Newt.”

“And indeed.”

“And since Newt likes all of us,” Queenie pointed out, “And, as much as we love him, we have to admit he’s not the most sociable person in the world… so, if he likes us, we’re all bound to get along now, right?”

“Right.”

“Of course I’m right,” Queenie giggled and released Credence. She returned to her seat and nudged Jacob’s arm, “Isn’t that right, honey?”

“I’m learning that rather quickly.”

“Oh you.”

“Oh me,” Jacob smiled, hesitating for a moment, before asking, “So… uh what was that all about?”

Queenie blinked and bit her lower lip, “Oh, uhm…”

“It’s nothing important,” Credence returned to the stew and continued stirring, “I was just thinking that I don’t deserve to be here.”

“What?” Jacob’s eyes blew wide, “Kid, if anything, you’re the person that deserves to be here the most! I’m more of the outsider than anybody. Alma here doesn’t even know Newt and she’s fits in more than I do.”

Alma’s cheeks flushed in embarrassment and she quickly covered her face in her hands. “That’s n-not true,” she squeaked out, “I m-mean-… Yes, I don’t know N-Newt but-… What I’m trying t-to say is-…! I mean! Jacob you’re more important t-than I am.”

“No, I know that I’m not,” Jacob rested his forehead in his hand, gesturing outwards with the other, “I’m a – what do you call it – person without magic. No-Mug or something. I dunno. All that I know is that I don’t remember none of you and I have-… well, I have no idea what I’m doing here except being selfish – wanting to know the people that I’ve forgotten. I’ve got nothing to contribute.”

“But,” Credence stepped away from the cast-iron pot, perplexed, “You’re one of Newt’s closest friends.”

Didn’t he know that Newt talked about him all the time? Realized just how important he was to Newt’s life? On how much he influenced Newt’s way of thinking and even his manner of approach with Credence’s inexperience with magic and magical creatures?

Didn’t he realize just how much of an impact he’d had on Newt’s life?

“Right, I’m a good friend,” Jacob laughed breathlessly, his voice filled with low self-esteem and self-deprecation, “But, nothing else.”

“And what’s wrong with being a friend?”

Jacob paused and looked up.

“I-…,” he opened his mouth and closed it, falling victim to his thoughts for a split-second before admitting, “Well… I suppose you got me there.”
“Good, I’m glad,” Credence smiled and switched off the stove-top burner.

With another quick flick of the wand, four matching sets of porcelain bowls patterned with a ring of blue fleur-de-lis around the edges came bursting out of the cupboards. They darted uniformly through the air before coming to a halting stop in front of the stew pot where Credence ladled a decent portion into each of the bowls. Once each one was filled, they flew onto the table in front of each guest with one extra spot for Credence.

He was just about to join everyone at the table when he looked to the bedroom door.

Credence supposed it would be alright – and expected, where proper manners were concerned – to pop in and ask if Newt and Tina wanted anything while it was still hot.

So, he went to Newt’s door and was about to knock when-…

“What do you mean there’s been another attack?”

Credence froze.

“I just heard about it myself,” Tina replied, sounding more exhausted than she had earlier, “Yesterday on The Wailing Whirlwind, Grindelwald’s men released a nest of newly hatched Hydras on the cabin deck. Fifteen people died. Two more are missing.”

_Fifteen people._

_Dead._

“That’s the ship we sailed in on,” Newt observed quietly, “Are they trying to make me look careless?”

“Careless and dangerous,” Tina confirmed, frustration leaking into her voice, “Everyone is painting you in a negative light. The newspapers. The press. Your goddamned Ministry. Hell, even Graves started questioning you before he decided to help me escape. They’re saying you’re unable to control your apprentice, your creatures… They’re coming for you, Newt. Fuck, they’re coming for all of us.”

_No._

Silence filled the room. That was until Newt asked in a whisper, “…And what happened to the creatures?”

“The Ministry had to kill them all.”

Credence stepped back in horror.

Every single kitchen chair – at least the ones devoid of people – all flung violently backwards into the cabin walls, at least two of them cracking from the sheer force of impact.

“Credence?” Queenie stood up, alarmed, “Honey, are you okay?”

Everyone was suffering.

Creatures, Muggles, Witches and Wizards.

Newt and his friends.
Everyone was suffering because of Credence.

Because he had attracted Grindelwald’s attention. Because he had lured him with the prospects of his enormous power. Because right when Grindelwald was about to finally get everything he’d wanted… Credence had told him no.

And now how many people were dead because of that decision?

How many children like Claudia and Elena and Faustina died because of him?

“Credence…?” Queenie cautiously approached and reached out to him right at the same moment that the door to Newt’s bedroom opened, “Honey…?”

Credence stepped backwards.

And he ran.

“Oh, my goodness me,” Queenie placed a hand against her heart, alarmed, “Is the poor darling alright?”

“Queenie, I’m not the smartest man in the world but, I think running out the door lookin’ green in the gills means he ain’t nowhere near alright. We oughta go after him,” Jacob answered, already up on his feet and heading towards the cabin door. Right as he reached for the handle, he paused and patted down his chest, “Do I have my handkerchief?”

“It’s right there in your breast pocket, honey,” Queenie approached and pulled the old, weathered thing out from his jacket, gently pressing it in his hand.

“What would I do without you?”

“Isn’t it obvious, pumpkin?” Queenie tittered with a beaming smile, “You wouldn’t have your handkerchief.”

“This is all my fault…,” Tina slumped down into Queenie’s vacated seat, resting her elbows on the table and threading her hands through her hair, “I shouldn’t have let Credence stay out here. I shouldn’t have let Credence stay out here. I should’ve included him. God, overhearing that of all things…”

Alma quietly sat in Jacob’s seat and rubbed Tina’s back, murmuring, “Oh sweetie… He just would’ve ended up just as upset if not more.”

“But-…”

Newt couldn’t bear this any longer.

“Alma’s right.”

“Yes, of course I’m right,” Alma nodded in agreement before hesitating, peeking over her shoulder at him, “I am?”

“Of course,” Newt reaffirmed. He shrugged off his beloved indigo coat – already missing the familiar weight upon his shoulders – and tossed it onto the table before sauntering past Tina and
Alma and Queenie and Jacob while loosening his collar.

“I appreciate everything that you all are doing. I can think of no better bunch to call my… well, my friends,” Newt offered a meek smile and stopped in front of the cabin door, fiddling with the stubborn buttons of his cuffs, “But, Credence is… I think that it would be better if I go to him. Alone.”

“I’m the one that caused this mess, Newt,” Tina started, slamming her hands on the table, “If anything, I should be the one to go and get him and explain-…”

“Tina, having so many people jumping in trying to help – while, yes, with the best of intentions – will only overwhelm him. It would overwhelm anyone and, in the end, that would just make everything worse for everyone,” Newt explained before hesitating, “And I… I know Credence. And I know exactly what will bring him down from this.”

“You?” Tina stared incredulously.

“No,” he shook his head and stepped out the door, “A butterfly.”

Pickett lounged on the lowest hanging branch of the Bowtruckle tree, an enormous blueberry in hand and remnants of past bites splattered across his face. He stared down at Newt, angry squeak followed by angry squeak as Prudence fluttered – exasperated – nearby.

“Yes, yes, I know,” Newt groaned and rubbed his hands down his face, “I’m well aware that we have a habit of getting into these situations at the worst possible moment. I know that you’re in the middle of lunch. Yes, I know that I’m quite capable of handling this myself.”

Pickett stood up and gestured towards him.

Newt puffed out his cheeks, “But, I just thought that you would be able to help more than I can.”

Pickett rolled his eyes and blew a raspberry at him.

“I’ll grab you more blueberries if you come with?”

Insulted by that blatant act of bribery (which was, admittedly a low point for Newt), Pickett huffed and turned his back on him.

“Not even the prospect of blueberries work,” Newt rubbed his eyes in exasperation and offered the paper butterfly his hand, “Are you at least going to come with me?”

Prudence glanced between Pickett and Newt before fluttering into his open palm, nestling comfortably inside.

“See? She at least understands.”

Pickett merely released another angry squeak – even going as far as to glare over his shoulder at Newt – before going back to ignoring him.

“Well then. No need to be rude about it,” Newt huffed and brought Prudence closer to his face, “Now, onto the matter at hand. You wouldn’t happen to know which direction our dearest Credence
went off in, now do you?"

Prudence lazily stretched her wings and hopped onto his lapel, settling down snugly against it.

“I thought not.”

Newt sighed and placed his hands upon his hips, scrutinizing the suitcase and all the many habitats contained within it.

After having exited the cabin, there hadn’t been any clear signs on where Credence had bolted off to. No footprints stomped into the dirt. No torn pieces of clothing hanging on outstretched branches. No trails of chaos and destruction anywhere.

Newt had initially hoped that on the way of fetching Prudence that he would have found Credence seated underneath the Bowtruckle tree, already finding comfort from the paper butterfly; but, evidently, Newt wasn’t that lucky enough of a man. No, instead, he would have to find Credence the old-fashioned way.

Through hard work and hoping for the best.

Newt pinched the bridge of his nose.

Credence concerned him. The poor man had already been through and seen more than enough horrors in his short lifetime to necessitate an eternity of nothing more than blissful happiness and comfort; however, it seemed that the universe had determined that wasn’t within his fate. Why was it that the one person that deserved the world was served nothing more than tragedy after senseless tragedy?

Newt sighed.

Overhearing his conversation with Tina was exactly what Newt had wanted to avoid. Overhearing and actively participating were two different things and that was one of the reasons why he had wanted Credence to join them in their talk. Well, that and he had wanted Credence by his side regardless; but, he understood that Credence had had a rough day and needed the time to mentally recuperate.

Of course, Newt could have phrased his concerns better.

Or at all.

Merlin, hindsight was such a gift and a curse at times.

Regardless of whether he had addressed his thoughts or not, Credence had had a difficult enough of a day already. Yes, perhaps Newt could have prevented this catastrophe by pleading more with Credence to have joined him but, he had really needed a break no matter how short. Controlling the Obscurus for the first time must have taken it’s emotional – not to mention physical – toll. It was an unprecedented development and one unforeseen in all of wizarding history at that. Newt could only imagine what it felt like.

Not only that, Tina had appeared literally from the heavens and then whisked them away to meet all of Newt’s friends. That likely had only added to all of Credence’s mental stress despite how well he had handled it. And then he had to set Newt’s poor nose all over again and—

Wait, the Obscurus…
“I know where he is.”

Newt bolted through the suitcase with a sense of overwhelming urgency. He passed the empty Kraken tank. He passed the Niffler and the Occamy Nestlings. He passed the Sprites and the Will-O-Wisps. He passed the forests and the mountains and the blazing hot African savanna until, finally, he slid to a halt in front of his destination.

Newt rested his hands upon his knees, catching his breath.

Before lifting the flap to the wintery tundra and entering inside.

Credence silently sat with his knees pulled tightly against his chest before the carefully contained and overly warded Obscurus – the dark, physical reminder of all of Newt’s mistakes and failures. His untamed magic spun out of control around him, picking up snow and ice until a virtual blizzard had been created.

Newt hated coming in here.

He avoided this section of the suitcase at every possible chance he could take.

He hated the painful memories – better off buried underneath hours upon hours of tireless work – brought forth from being in here. He hated the bitter cold stinging his cheeks and freezing his hair. He hated the feelings of dread… of regret that swelled within his chest.

Most of all, he hated seeing Credence in here.

Something about seeing him before that whirling ball of rage and agony and darkness incarnate…

It made Newt consider the possible eventuality of failing Credence too. Of watching him lose the battle to the Obscurus within him. Of watching him become consumed by the parasite until nothing of him was left. Until Newt would have to contain him here too in this barren wasteland.

Newt shook his head. This wasn’t about him.

“Well… Credence!”

He sharply flinched and his scarred hands raised to bury themselves within his hair but, Credence made no move to address Newt – not even a glance over his shoulder to look at him.

“It’s my fault.”

Newt stepped closer, “Credence…"

“Please don’t try to make me feel better and tell me that it’s not because… because it is. This is happening because of me. All this violence. All this death. It’s all my fault because I told him no,” Credence’s voice – soft and despondent – somehow carried through the howling wind and snow, “If I hadn’t happened—… If New York hadn’t happened then, all those people – all those creatures – would still be alive and Grindelwald would have never been looking for an Obscurial in the first place.”

“Credence,” Newt shielded the paper butterfly with his hands and continued venturing forward. Through howling wind and snow and ice, he would always keep moving forward if it meant the possibility of reaching Credence. There wasn’t anything that he wouldn’t do – nothing that he wouldn’t give up – if it all meant that Credence would be alright. “Tell me what you want me to do. What to say.”
“I… I don’t know,” Credence curled tighter around himself, his shoulders shaking as he choked out, “I’m just… not okay and I want to able to be not okay for a minute.”

The blizzard forced Newt down to his knees.

“Okay.”

“You’re too nice, Newt,” Credence muttered, practically oblivious to the storm and struggle being waged behind him, “You’ve been so perfect with me ever since we met. So patient. So understanding. Sometimes I wonder if anything makes you upset.”

Newt shivered violently and huddled into himself; and yet… he still continued forward. Even if it meant that he had to crawl one-armed through the snow, he would do it for Credence.

“You know that there’s plenty.”

“I know,” Credence admitted, “I know… But, whenever I look at you, I see someone that is amazing at everything he tries. You’re amazing with me and you live this amazing life with these amazing creatures and you only complicated it by having to take me in-…”

“Credence,” Newt interrupted.

Credence fell silent.

“Credence, wanting to take you in was my decision to make,” Newt continued through chattering teeth and uncontrollable shivers and stinging wind, “I could have said no but, I didn’t because I wanted you here. I wanted to help and that was all me. So, yes, this wouldn’t have happened if you hadn’t become my apprentice but, it also wouldn’t have happened if I hadn’t offered you the position in the first place. If anything, all this tragedy and senseless bloodshed is because of me.”

“But-…”

“Or rather both our faults really. What with you being an Obscurial and doing Obscurial things and me being, as you put it, too nice and taking you in underneath my wing. However, since we both contributed to the situation together, that just means that we have to work hand-in-hand to get ourselves out of it, doesn’t it?” Newt reached forward, “And, if the going gets too tough, we have our friends now to help us.”

The wind and ice died down.

Newt embraced Credence.

Credence’s arms slowly uncurled from around his legs and wrapped around Newt’s waist, his fingers tightly burying themselves into his back. Prudence took advantage of this close opportunity to hop from Newt’s lapel onto his.

Credence smiled slightly and pressed his forehead against Newt’s shoulder, his exhausted impossibly black eyes fluttering closed.

Leave it to the paper butterfly to make Credence happy.

“I’m here,” Newt soothed into Credence’s curly hair, squeezing him tightly against his chest without any intention of letting him go. Ever. “I’m here.”

“None of this is going to stop until we stop running away and face it,” Credence murmured softly.
“I know.”

“So… Let’s face it,” Credence looked up, “Let’s face Grindelwald.”

“Together?”

“Together.”

Munin slithered through the empty streets of Diagon Alley, her midnight-black velvet cloak pulled tightly around her shoulders and her long golden curls spilling down her back in a frizzy, tangled mess. Dark circles of bruised violet and indigo were smeared underneath her eyes, bloodshot from either a restless night’s sleep or crying. Her leather boots clacked down the dew-covered cobblestone, her aura radiating with such determined intensity that even the shadows backed away from her wrath.

“Mu-Mu, this isn’t a good idea, honey,” Bartleby had droned out a warning in that forever monotonous tone of his when she had stormed towards the fireplace with a handful of fluorescent green Floo Powder.

This was one of the worst moments of Munin’s life.

And, like always, this too involved her brother.

For someone so aggravatingly quiet and withdrawn – a genuine studious nerd and goody-two-shoes that would rather stick his pointed nose in a book than get himself in trouble – Hugin always had such a knack for finding himself in the most ridiculous, most horrible of situations.

“I don’t see you giving me any other options, B,” Munin had immediately hissed back, glaring over her pointed shoulder as she stepped into a pile of ash and soot, “So, unless you have any other better ideas, my not-so-good idea will just have to do.”

Hugin – precious Hugin – who had always been the weaker of the twins. Hugin who had always been rather shy and introverted instead of being loud and confident like her. Hugin who had always been more inclined towards academics and research than the dueling spirit that she possessed. Hugin who had been tormented and bullied by the stupid Muggles at the orphanage and later by their fellow witch and wizard brethren at school. Hugin who had always been Munin’s biggest supporter. Hugin who had always followed Munin on her ventures and whims.

Bartleby sighed and tore off a piece of buttered toast, popping it into his mouth, “Grindelwald isn’t going to be happy when he hears about this.”

Hugin who had followed his friends into war and came back a changed man – blinded and scarred. Hugin who had then been approached Grindelwald and asked Munin to follow him into servitude. Hugin who had never asked Munin for anything before.

“Grindelwald can just shove his hurt feelings up his ass.”

Hugin who had been carelessly caught by Percival Graves and his Muggle Ward.

Hugin who was now trapped in the hands of that coward Theseus fucking Scamander.
“This…,” Munin had faltered only once, “This is my brother, B. He’s my responsibility. I have to protect him.”

I have to protect him…

Munin stopped in front of the windowed storefront of her destination, the rusted tin sign hanging outside flipped to the “Sorry, we’re closed” side. She pressed her manicured hand against the door, the ruby red polish glinting in the early morning light, and hesitated.

Bartleby was right. This was really a stupid decision. One of her stupidest in a long line of stupid decisions.

But Hugin was in trouble…

And she was his sister…

Munin walked through the door, the metal bells tingling from her arrival.

“Not that big of a reader there, are ya? Sign outside says we’re closed, as in we’re not open,” snarked a young woman with bulging biceps as she limped out from the back room, her cane clacking loudly on the wooden floor, “So, I’m just gonna have to ask you to leave-…”

Hortencia froze.

Munin smiled and wiggled her fingers in greeting.

Hortencia’s tanned face contorted into a violent expression of pure, utter rage – her skin turning redder than Munin’s nail polish – as she snarled, “You.”

“Me.” Munin sauntered forward, not even bothering to pull her wand out since she knew quite well that the woman wouldn’t be able to do anything to her anyways. “How’s the leg doing, Hortencia?”

“Just dandy,” she spat, stepping backwards until her back hit Klaudius’ vacant desk, “Come to smash the other one in too? Or are you thinking of changing it up and going for an arm this time around?”

“Oh honey, if you just do as I ask…,” Munin cooed sweetly, her scarred vocal cords making it sound even more threatening, “Then I won’t have to do anything.”

“What more could you possibly want from me? I already taught your brother how to brew Polyjuice potions for that-… that freak,” Hortencia ground out, her thick fingers curling tightly around her cane until her knuckles turned bone white, “I ain’t got nothing else to give.”

“It’s funny that you mention my brother,” Munin’s right eye twitched and forced a smile upon her face, “But, this time I need you to teach me instead.”

“Ask Hugin to do it.”

“I’m asking you.”

“And I’m telling you no.”

Munin’s lips pursed into a straight, thin line and reached for her wand.

Hortencia’s skin instantly drained of color. Her eyes clenched shut and she dropped to the floor, her muscled arms raised protectively over her face. Such a powerful woman in both brute strength and
magic, rendered defeated and trembling in terror without Munin even having to do anything.

*M Merlin, this was a stupid, *stupid* idea.

“Oh darling,” Munin knelt before her and caressed her arm, watching how Hortencia flinched from the contact, “I think I heard you incorrectly. What did you say?”

“I’ll… I’ll t-t- teach you how to brew a Polyjuice potion.”

“That’s my girl.”

Chapter End Notes

Ohhhhh boy, oh boy! Serious jet lag and 26 long pages later and we’ve finally updated, my darlings! So much happened in this chapter! It's finally been revealed who disfigured Hortencia's leg and who created Grindelwald's Polyjuice Potion for him. He learned that Theseus and Hugin used to be friends AND, most importantly, we learned that poor Credence Barebone needs a hug.

Now that they're finally all together, what will Theseus, Modesty, and Graves do now? Whatever will they do with Hugin? How will our beloved heroes face off against the likes of Grindelwald? What in the world is Munin planning?

Tune in next time on Green Meadows, Dark Skies to find out!

This where I ask how I'm doing with my writing and if I should look on making any improvements. How is my dialogue and scene transitions? Is there anything you'd like to see more of? Less of? Also, please leave your comments and constructive criticisms below. They are the lifeblood on which this fic thrives upon. What has been your favorite chapter so far? What was your favorite scene here or in general? I love hearing from all of you!!!

Also, I'm happy to announce that Green Meadows, Dark Skies is getting its very own sequel! Never fear: the ending for GMDS is still quite a while away but, I think you'll be happy to know that I'm not quite done with Credence and Newt. It'll be a more intimate look into the lives of Credence and Newt and they'll be facing some entirely different conflicts than the ones that they face here. I look forward to continuing on this journey with you!!!
Bonjour, my loveliest lovelies and darling-iest darlings!

First and foremost, SUPER BIG SHOUT OUT TO ASCHENVALL FOR LOOKING INTO NEWT AND CREDENCE'S WAND DETAILS!!! I've been waiting for this moment since I released that chapter and I'm super excited that you found it! Big round of applause to Aschenvall!!!

And now, this chapter turned out waaaay different than I expected it to be because the boys are still in that ooey-gooey, rose-colored glasses, "I can't believe my crush likes me back" phase of their relationship and they are the biggest nerds to have ever existed in all of existence.

Without further ado, please enjoy this brand new chapter of GM, DS, alternatively titled as: Newt and Credence go on a date before shit gets real.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Snip.

Newt delicately ran his fingers through Credence’s hair, grasping the ends of the curling black locks between middle and index, carefully trimming the split-ends.

Snip.

Credence stiffened in the wooden stool, his hands clenched tightly in his lap.

Snip.

The trimmed edges of Newt’s nails lightly scratched down Credence’s scalp. He hummed, taking another swirling strand that hung just below the young wizard’s ear, “Do you like your hair like this?”

Snip.

“I beg your pardon?”

Snip.

“Long. Unmaintained and unrestrained,” Newt clarified, “You’ve just never asked me for a haircut before and I was wondering if something was wrong.”

“It’s not a haircut, Newt,” Credence emphasized, that American accent (mixed with just a subtle touch of New Yorkian twang) drawling in that particular exasperated yet endlessly adoring manner that Newt so loved, “It’s a trim.”

“Yes, yes. Of course, but even so-...”
“Even so,” Credence repeated and glanced over his shoulder, through the rebellious whorls of curls that had fallen over his face and making Newt’s heart go all aflutter *Merlin be damned*—

“Not everything about me has some secret meaning or tragic backstory, Newt,” Credence continued, “I just thought that I was… overdue is all. I like my hair how it is.”

*Snip, snip.*

“You mean to tell me that you *don’t* have anything potentially horrifying and unspeakably heartbreaking to say about your hair?” Newt teased.

Credence laughed, and his hands quickly unclenched. “Now, I didn’t say *that*.”

*Snip.*

Remarkable.

Absolutely remarkable.

*Just look at far we’ve come in the short time we’ve known each other, Credence. Just look at you now.*

Newt was glad – no, *ecstatic* – that Credence had reached that certain special place in his life where he could make light of the situation he was in. That he could tease and be teased and laugh about it all.

Not to say, however, that he didn’t have his moments. Not to say that he was no longer burdened by the horrors he faced and survived. Not to say that he had accepted or moved on or forgiven Mary Lou for the atrocities she’d committed, bastardizing the Good Lord’s name that she so vehemently believed in whilst doing so…

Credence…

Dear, sweet *Credence*…

He had learned to cope with it. To live on with the scars.

There was no such thing as erasing the past and no such thing as healing completely from something terrible that had happened. No such thing as returning to the person before the trauma had occurred. Any notion otherwise was, frankly, ridiculous. Things could get better. Happiness could reenter a life full of tragedy. But… every wound – no matter how shallow or deep, mental or physical – would always leave behind some sort of mark.

So… living with the scars might what it will always have to be for Credence.

And, perhaps, that was just alright.

*Snip.*

“You’re so cute when you laugh, Credence.”

“*Newt*,” he flushed and averted his gaze, staring down at the tops of his polished leather boots, “You’re just saying that because you like me.”
Newt lowered the scissors and rounded the wooden stool, placing his hands against Credence’s knees so that he could lean down and attempt to meet his embarrassed gaze. “Do I really need to grab Tina or Queenie so that they can tell you the same thing?”

“They don’t count,” Credence affirmed, “Friends are supposed to say nice things about each other.”

“You don’t say very nice things about me when I put on socks of two different colors, Credence,” Newt pointed out, “And we’re friends.”

Credence’s head immediately shot up, impossibly dark eyes piercing his very soul.

_Merlin_, was he ever so passionate about Newt’s sock habits.

“That’s different,” he drawled, “And you know it.”

“You know, Credence,” Newt restrained himself from rolling his eyes because, for goodness sakes, he was an _adult_ and not _twelve_, “I’ve solved some rather tough mysteries in my lifetime. Like the reason behind how and for what purpose Snallygasters and Occamies took two entirely different routes of evolution. Or like finding the cure for the intestinal parasites of Amazonian Titanoboas. Or why Mooncalves are the most adorable beings in the entire known universe or how to brew the perfect cup of Earl Gray. But, the one thing that eludes me is how the most handsome wizard I’ve ever laid eyes on doesn’t know that everything about him is gorgeous.”

“You mean to say that you don’t know you’re gorgeous, Newt?”

It took an entire minute for Newt to register what he was saying.

But, when he finally did, his freckled face quickly spiraled into a bubbling volcano of fire and lava and whatever someone poetically inclined like Shakespeare would use to describe all things _hot_.

Whatever this burning feeling was – in whatever more elegant ways it could be described – one thing remained perfectly clear: it reminded Newt of the brightest, most vibrant, purest color of _red_.

Redder than cherries. Redder than raspberries. Redder than strawberries and currants and gooseberries and the ripened flesh of a cracked open watermelon. Redder than sunburns and bloody noses. Redder than anything he had ever seen before. Anything that he could have possibly _imagined_.

“I… I… I…,” Newt spluttered most unrefinedly, stepping backwards against Great-Great-Great-Great-Grandfather Scamander’s antique dresser and having to put the scissors down before he hurt himself while attempting to hide his blazing face to maintain some remaining semblance of dignity.

“Credence,” he bemoaned, “I’m supposed to be boosting your self-esteem. Not… Not turning into an incomprehensible puddle of _goo_ at the slightest bit of—of—of whatever that was!”

There goes Credence’s laughter again; and, was it just him, or did it sound closer?

“I’m right in front you, Newt.”

_Merlin_, _fuck_—

“Can I touch you?”

Wait.
Wait, wait, wait, wait one moment there and hold up a second—

“I… erm,” Newt heard himself responding, “Yes?”

“That sounded more like a question than a response, Newt.”

“Yes.”

“Are you sure? I don’t have to—…”


But, Credence (Thankfully? Mercifully? Regretfully?) only took his hands into his and gently guided them away from his face, his impossibly dark eyes staring straight into his soul.

Newt shivered.

“You mean to tell me then….” Credence tilted his head to the side, his trimmed curls framing his pale face like some sort of wickedly beautiful dark halo, “That you aren’t normally an incomprehensible puddle of goo?”

Newt blinked.

Credence tried (and failed) to hide his smile.

“You—… you—…”

“See? Incomprehensible puddle of goo,” Credence laughed once more and sat back down on the wooden stool just three feet away, still teasing, “I like that about you.”

“Can you believe it? Can you believe it? He’s sassing me,” Newt exclaimed to no one in particular and ran his hands down his face with a groan, “I regret encouraging that in you. It’s only come back to haunt me.”

“Oh hush, you like it.”

“I love it.”

Recomposing himself, Newt retrieved the scissors and went back to trimming Credence’s hair. There really wasn’t that much of a drastic difference in the length – the looping, twisting curls still brushing up against Credence’s shoulders – but, this tiny, itty bitty bit of maintenance did wonders for his overall appearance.

If Credence just tied his hair back in that silver ribbon…

If he donned a proper, tailored three-piece suit underneath that Slytherin green coat and added a gentleman’s hat or silver cane—…

By the Great and Powerful Merlin Himself, Newt could just picture him rubbing elbows with the Malfoy Family at fancy, high-class luncheons in their summer mansions, being waited to hand-and-foot by their house elves. Talking politics or discussing the current state of society with the posh and pompous Crouch’s. Debating fiercely about Pureblood Customs with the Blacks and the Macmillans and the Lestranges—…

Lestrange.
“Are you sure that you want to go against Grindelwald?”

Credence’s shoulders stiffened. His scarred hands clenched once more in his lap.

“Without a doubt in my mind, I’m certain. Ignoring what’s happening around me and running away— … I just can’t do that anymore,” he swallowed thickly and looked down, “I need to do something, Newt.”

“I know. And I agree that something – anything – needs to be done and I’m right here beside you,” Newt hesitated, “But, are you ready for this?”

“I don’t know what you mean.”

“I think you do.”

Credence fell silent and Newt continued trimming his hair. When he was finished, he dusted off the stray bits from Credence’s shoulders onto the floor and set the scissors aside on the dresser before rounding the wooden stool. He wasn’t exactly certain on what to do with himself – what to do in general actually – so, he merely decided to sit on the floor beside Credence, resting his head against his leg.

Waiting.

Since the very beginning of their friendship, a silent understanding had formed between them. A certain sort of quiet… respect. If Credence wanted to talk, then he certainly didn’t need Newt pestering him. He’d be ready in his own time.

And were the situation reversed, he knew that Credence would do the same for him.

“I only know him as Graves,” the young wizard started hesitantly, “I never knew him as Grindelwald.”

Newt remained silent – respective and understanding.

“I just— I don’t know what to expect,” Credence released a shaky breath, “I once saw Grindelwald as a savior. My own personal White Knight straight out of a fairytale. He confided in me. Trusted me with the secret world of wizards and magic.

He… gave me purpose and I— I thought that I was doing something good, you know? Something noble. Helping a child who needed me – who needed him. I only needed to suffer through the pain a little longer. I only needed to be silent for a couple more days. I only needed to be obedient. I only needed to please him and then he’d save me. I did everything for him and he—… threw me away.”

Credence swallowed thickly.

“And then he hurt you.”

“It wasn’t that bad—…”

“That doesn’t matter,” Credence slumped down from his chair and joined Newt on the floor.

Snip.
almost immediately opened his arms and Credence’s shoulders slumped from relief before resting his head against his lap. Newt ran his fingers soothingly through his hair, resting the other hand against his shoulder.

“You were nice to me – genuinely nice – and… you wanted to help me. No conditions. No restraints. No expectations. You just wanted to help. I was just something to be used to him. I just-… I don’t know. It’ll be different seeing him as an enemy – seeing him as he really is now that he has nothing to hide – instead of the Mr. Graves that healed my hands, that hugged me, that wiped away my tears and turned my head with promises and dreams.”

“I’m sorry, Credence,” Newt murmured, “I’m so sorry that this is happening to you.”

“I know. But, it’s not your fault.”

“It’s not yours either but, you still have to deal with the consequences of other people’s actions,” Newt held him tightly in his arms, “It’s not right.”

“… Thank you,” Credence relaxed completely in his embrace and closed his eyes, “I like you, Newt.”

He smiled and brushed his hand delicately across his cheek.

“I like you too, Credence.”

“You’re worth everything I’ve been through and everything that I will go through.”

“Credence,” Newt couldn’t find the words of how to even possibly begin to respond to that, “I-…”

“I think I’m… I’m ready to hear about Grindelwald.”

“…Pardon?”

“Before we left London, I asked to know more about the kind of man he really was, and you made sure whether or not I was really… ready to hear about him,” Credence answered, his voice growing softer with either hesitation or conviction – Newt didn’t know. “About the person behind the guise of Mr. Graves. I wasn’t. Ready I mean. And we’ve moved passed it. I’ve gathered a better idea of who he is, what he’s done but… I still don’t know, exactly, who he really is and I-… I think I’m ready now to hear it.”

Oh, Credence...

“Are you certain?”

“Yes.”

And so, Newt told him everything that he knew. Told of Grindelwald’s archaic views on Muggles and the wicked stance he took on wizard integration into the outside world. Newt confessed that, personally, he thought that the integration between the two worlds – the magical and the scientific – was long overdue. There was so, so much that they could learn and benefit from each other but, Grindelwald…

He didn’t want to peacefully intermingle for the betterment of humanity as a whole but, to rule over the non-magical as a cruel master.

Newt told of the uncountable, unimaginable crimes of Grindelwald. He told of the innocents –
Muggle and Wizard alike – who had lost their lives to his beliefs. He told of how Theseus even went to battle against his dastardly cause. He told of the dear friendships lost to Grindelwald’s side.

And once he was done, Credence remained quiet.

That was, until…

“How are we ever going to go up against him?”

“I was thinking-…”

“That’s never a good idea.”

“Oh hush,” Newt lightly nudged Credence’s shoulder and continued, “Now, where was I? Ah yes. I was thinking that, perhaps, we could return to England and meet up with my brother Theseus. He should have received my letter by now and, since he has such strong ties with the Ministry, I’m sure that he could manage to-…”

“No.”

Newt blinked.

“No?”

“That’s just another form of running, Newt,” Credence explained, “And one that isn’t guaranteed – one that has little chance of success even. You heard Miss Goldstein. You heard and saw how people treat us. You know that people are hunting us down and what they will do to succeed in doing so. When people are afraid, they never listen to reason. And Newt, they’re terrified of us.”

“True enough, but-…”

“If I-… If we ever want this to end,” Credence merely continued, “It’s going to have to come down to a fight. Forcing Grindelwald to confess. Forcing him to leave us alone by any means necessary.”

“We don’t have to do that by ourselves though, Credence. There’s no shame in asking for help.”

“We have Miss Goldstein and the others.”

“We’re still only six people up against an army of Grindelwald and his followers,” Newt emphasized firmly, “That’s a death wish waiting to happen, Credence, and while I’m usually the first to run headfirst into the heat of danger, I cannot – simply cannot – let you all do so too.”

Credence raised his head from Newt’s lap and met his eye, spelling out slowly, “We don’t have any other option, Newt.”

“There’s always another option.”

“Then what?” Well… wasn’t that a new expression on Credence’s face? Frustration. “What do you suggest we do?”

“I suggest asking everyone else of their opinion first before deciding on behalf of us all on what we do.”

Credence blinked slowly and ran his hands over his face before plopping back into Newt’s lap.

“You always have all the answers, Newt,” he murmured fondly and wrapped his arms around his
waist.

“No, Credence,” Newt confessed and placed his hand against his shoulder, “It’s exactly the opposite.”

“Gently, Newt, gently,” Queenie chided and patiently squatted down beside him, taking away the scissors from his fumbling hands, “Plants are like pastries, honey. They just need a little tenderness and love to grow to their fullest potential.”

Newt puffed out his cheeks, looking exactly like a stubborn child, “I thought I was doing just fine.”

Queenie glanced back down at the tomato plant – a beautiful Pisanello or juicy Cuore di Bue if the fat, ribbed tomatoes that grew from it were any indication – and at the stem that had been snipped down far too low and at the leaves that had been all but completely sheared off. It would be lucky – a genuine miracle – if it survived the next harvest.

She looked back at Newt and quirked up a brow.

“I mean…,” he grinned that shy, half-not-quite-a-grin that he really ought to have patented by now he wore it so much, “I thought I was…”

She sighed.

“You’ve never had a garden growing up, have you?”

Newt’s thoughts immediately showed her otherwise.

Beautiful childhood memories of bright, fluorescent pink bandaged fingers digging through nutrient-rich, fertile soil in search for wriggling earthworms. Memories of those same plaster-covered hands grabbing a friend – no older than perhaps 3 or 4 – around the wrist and dragging him along to a nearby bubbling creek to catch shimmery fish – looking like large, moving diamonds swimming underneath crystal-clear waters. Memories of the pair messily-eating fresh raspberries one day – the sticky, red juices smeared across their cheeks and clothes – and picking ripe peas from their pods on the other. Memories of them chasing ivory butterflies and carelessly trampling through the crops.

Memories of a beaming smile with the power of a thousand suns surrounded by a mop of unmaintained black curls…

“Alright, you’ve only benefited from gardens then,” Queenie amended, “Never actually taken care of them.”

Newt flushed sheepishly, twiddling with the ends of his auburn hair.

“Almaisie darling will hit you if she finds out, you know.”

“You won’t tell her then, will you?”

Queenie smiled impishly, raising a thickly gloved finger to her lips, “You’ll find that I’m rather good at keepings secrets, honey.”

Just like how that little curly-haired boy running through Newt’s childhood memories looked almost
No, that was ridiculous. Impossible even.

But, perhaps… worth looking into when all of this was over.

“Like how I know about you and Credence.”

Newt’s cheeks flushed to unprecedented degrees, much to Queenie’s surprise. He flopped backwards onto the ground and covered his traitorous face in his hands – not even bothering to remove his dirt-covered gardening gloves before doing so. “Queenie, I-…”

_How precious…_

“I think you two are positively adorable.”

He paused.

“You do?”

“Why wouldn’t I?” Queenie hummed sweetly and gingerly switched to picking off a couple of ripe tomatoes off the nearest unmaimed plant, placing them gently inside an old flour sack they’d discovered in the barn.

“Because I’m-…,” Newt gestured outwards, wriggling his fingers, “Well, you know who I am. _How I am_. I’m not… _good_ at all the things normal people do. I feel like-… I don’t know. I’ll only hurt him in the end because I’m stupid and reckless and Credence deserves so much better than _me_.”

“Stop that nonsense now,” Queenie whirled around and stuck her finger in his face, “I’ll tell you what I told Credence yesterday. Newt, you are loved. You are wonderful and there’s nobody here that’s worthless – least of all you, honey. _Honestly_, how two of the most deserving people in the world with nothing but kindness in their great, big ooey gooey souls can’t see that is beyond me.”

A tiny smile quirked across his face, “I said something similar to Credence last night.”

“Yet you don’t think the same of yourself,” Queenie _tsked_ disapprovingly and shook her head, “Do me a favor, honey, and have a little confidence in yourself.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Good,” she smiled triumphantly and returned to her work, harvesting tomatoes and pruning the plants, “Now, tell me everything, sweetie-pie: when are you taking our darling Credence out on a date?”

Newt blinked.

“A what?”

“A date!” Queenie repeated in mock-exasperation, taking on that particular sisterly tone whenever sweet Teenie forgot some normal sort of basic social functioning, “For goodness sakes, Newt. You’ve been running around and around since you’ve got here without taking any time for yourself or nothin’. Take a break and live a little.”

Newt seemed unconvinced. “But, Grindelwald-…”

“Honey, he ain’t here right now, is he? We can deal with him tomorrow or even the day after
tomorrow,” she softened a little, “Besides, if we don’t take advantage of every moment we’ve got right now then… what is it all for?”

Newt hesitated before eventually relenting, “I suppose you’re right.”

“Like I tell Jacob, I always am,” Queenie beamed, “So, where are you thinking of taking him?”

Newt’s thoughts flashed over to her once again. Of him exploring around the area when he and Credence had first arrived on the farm. Of everything he had discovered in that short amount of time. Of the white-and-black striped spiders inhabiting every nook and cranny and the newly-tamed one that he’d named after Credence. Of the nest of owls inhabiting the rafters that Credence had, in turn, named after him. Of the crops stretching out for acres filled with endless vegetables as far as the eye could see. Of the Kraken-infested Mediterranean nearby and the-…

“Oh Newt, that’s perfect.”

“Overall, all that you need to remember when feeding the Big Runespoor is to keep eye contact at all times when approaching and…”

“Keep eye contact?” Jacob blubbered incredulously and gestured in front of him, “They have three heads! Three!”

“Yes, and we have three people,” Credence helpfully pointed out, lugging over the final of the three buckets of defrosted rabbits readied for the feeding and wiped his sweaty forehead, “Which makes it much easier than when Newt and I do this by ourselves. I can’t imagine how he managed before I came along.”

“But- but- but- they’re poisonous!”

“Venomous actually,” Credence lightly corrected with a patient smile, “The way that I learned it was that if you bite it and you fall ill then that means they’re poisonous but, if they bite you and then you fall ill, that means they’re venomous. And, with a Runespoor, it’s only the third head that’s venomous.”

“You know what I meant to say.”

Credence raised one of the buckets of the Runespoor’s dinner, “Does that mean you’re more than happy to help me feed them then?”

“You’re damned right I am,” Jacob grabbed the bucket from Credence’s hands, teetering momentarily off balance from the unexpected weight of the cursed thing, “I’m not letting you go out there alone.”

“Thank you, Mr. Kowalski,” Credence smiled and offered the second bucket to Tina, “Are you ready, Miss Goldstein?”

“As I’ll ever be,” she responded with a small smile, taking it off his hands.

“Wonderful,” Credence took the last bucket and stepped forwards, “Let’s be off then.”

Newt currently housed two Runespoors in the suitcase: a ridiculously large one the relative size of a
fully-grown elephant and an absurdly tiny one that could fit in the palm of Credence’s hand. The little one suffered from a grievous set of bite wounds on the third head so, that one had a protective cone placed around its neck so that the other heads didn’t pick on it. But, the big one? The big one suffered from an unknown illness that irritated its scales that Newt was trying to get to the bottom of. Either way, both were kept in the desert potion of the suitcase amongst other rather venomous creatures.

Credence didn’t venture often into this particular area but, only because it was dreadfully hot; and, not the type of hot that he was accustomed to. He didn’t mind the Italian weather so much because it was humid. He liked the feeling of sweat dripping down his back and coating his brow in a manner that kept him cool. It made him feel like a grizzled cowboy satisfied after a hard day’s work.

But this? The desert sucked him dry.

It took and took and took until nothing was left. There wasn’t anything accomplishing about working in the unforgiving desert heat.

“Ugh,” Tina grimaced, “It’s just like Arizona again.”

“Really?” Credence asked, squinting his eyes in the fake desert sun, “That’s where you found Frank?”

“Oh yeah, and it took forever to find the skittish fellow,” Jacob interrupted, licking his lips to maintain some semblance of moisture, “Eventually found ‘em in a canyon cave hidden deep near the bottom. Took us five whole days to hike down there. Weren’t we in for a bit of a shock to find himself with a missus, eh?”

Credence blinked.

“Frank’s… mated?”

“More than that,” Jacob grinned, “With three little ones on the way.”

Credence stared – completely awed – at Jacob as if he had suddenly started seeing color for the very first time in a world of black and white. Marveling at the serene crispness of the color of leaves, the soothing feeling of the color of a glimmering lake, the powerful intensity of the color of roses—

“Mr. Kowalski, you have to tell Newt this when we get back,” Credence demanded, his voice soft with joy and wonder, “He’ll be so excited.”

He smiled, and Jacob suddenly found the tops of his shoes so entirely interesting.

A mated pair.

From what Credence had gleaned over from his notes, Newt was greatly concerned about the quickly dwindling population of Thunderbirds in Arizona and the states surrounding it; but, at least in Frank’s case, it seemed that he was doing just fine.

Credence just couldn’t wait for Newt to hear the good news.

He could picture his reaction perfectly. Newt’s meadow green eyes growing three shades lighter in his sheer excitement. His entire posture vibrating with absolute delight while flapping his hands back and forth to release some that chaotic, joyful energy. His mouth moving rapidly, babbling at full speed as he danced around the cabin—
Credence smiled, so preoccupied with imagining Newt’s happiness and picturing that thousand-watt grin that he didn’t register opening up the Runespoor paddock and leading Tina and Jacob inside. Didn’t register setting down the bucket of defrosted rabbits and cupping his hands around his lips to mimic Newt’s patented feeding call. Didn’t realize anything at all until the Runespoor’s enormous shadow loomed over him and he met the golden eyes of the venomous third head, the rust and onyx-colored scales glinting in the sun…

“Hello Ian,” Credence politely greeted, reaching down into the bucket without ever breaking eye contact with that golden gaze, and threw the first of the rabbits to him. He knew that Newt rarely named the creatures – not wanting to get too attached to the ones he’d eventually have to release back into the wild – but, Credence sometimes found himself unable to help it.

And besides… Ian looked like an Ian.

Credence watched Jacob and Tina – after a moment of cautious hesitation – throwing their respective rabbits into the air through his peripheral vision. Each of the Runespoor heads caught their meals with ease, unhinging their lower jaws and slowly swallowing the rabbit.

“This one is Ian,” Credence introduced, “The middle one there, Miss Goldstein, is Stewart. And that one there, Mr. Kowalski? That’s Patrick.”

“Oh, u-uhm,” Jacob nervously stammered, keeping eye contact with Patrick with unwavering certainty, “How do you do?”

Credence shook his head in amusement and reached back into the bucket when he noticed that Ian was almost finished with his first rabbit. He threw the second course into the air a few seconds afterwards, watching Ian snatching it out of the air like a frog catching a fly, and placed his hands contentedly on his hips.

The three of them all fell into a not-quite-comfortable-but-occupied sort of silence.

A sort of silence that Credence was slowly becoming used to from Miss Goldstein.

Ever since she’d arrived, Tina seemed to hang back in the shadows away from everyone else. She’d talked with Newt in the beginning – updating him on everything that had happened in America and such – and Alma often flocked to her side whenever she saw her but… Tina rarely engaged with anyone let alone Credence after that first initial rescue and he wondered if something was wrong. Well, everything was wrong what with Grindelwald being Grindelwald but-…

He wondered if he had done something wrong to upset her.

“Credence,” Tina addressed him carefully, reaching into the bucket in front of her to throw another rabbit to Stewart, “You’re… really happy here, huh?”

“Yes,” Credence answered, wondering what had brought this on, “Happier than I’ve ever been.”

“It’s not just because Newt took you in, right sweetie?” Tina asked before clarifying, “You don’t have to be interested in magical creatures just because… Newt is.”

“Miss Goldstein, I… I appreciate your concern but, I genuinely like what I do here,” Credence assuaged, hesitating for a moment before admitting, “Yes, Newt introduced them to me and, I suppose, he roped me into this sort of work but… I like it. Even if Newt’s enthusiasm wasn’t infectious, I’d still like it. I like helping and these creatures— They all need me, and I— I need them too.
I mean— I suppose that even if I didn’t have the creatures – if I didn’t have Ian, Stewart, and Patrick or Pickett and Prudence and Hope – I’d easily find any other aspect of magic satisfactory. Oh, I’d love to be a historian. I’ve nearly finished with the *History of Magic* and—"

“Wait,” Tina practically gaped, forcing herself to maintain eye contact with the Runespoor instead of staring at Credence in astonishment, “You like reading the *History of Magic*? Willingly?”

“What’s not to like about it, Miss Goldstein? It’s the history… of magic!”

“No one likes the *History of Magic*, Credence. Not even the author of the *History of Magic*. It’s boring.”

Now it was Credence’s turn to gape.

“What could be boring about *history*?”

“Hey, no judgements here, sweetie. Whatever makes you happy,” Tina laughed and lightheartedly nudged his shoulder. She reached into the bucket for the third rabbit – the dessert course – and Credence did the same when Tina suddenly grew somber, “Credence… I… I’m glad you’re okay.”

The unspoken words hung heavy in the air.

*I’m sorry that I couldn’t help you more, Credence. I’m sorry that you had to run to someone else instead of me. I’m sorry that I failed you. I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m sorry—*

And it was in that exact moment, as Credence flung the third defrosted rabbit into Ian’s open and waiting mouth, that everything fell into place.

**Guilt.**

The reason behind why Tina was acting so strangely around Credence. The reason behind why she avoided him and participating with the others. The reason why she hesitated. The reason why she was so uncharacteristically quiet.

It was all because of guilt. Seeing him so happy with Newt and his creatures. Seeing him acting so differently and interacting with the others. Seeing him functioning – thriving – in person…

Seeing him healthy and okay and knowing that she had played no part in it.

Guilt. Horrible, all-encompassing *guilt*.

“It was—” Credence grew quieter, struggling to find the words, “…difficult at first. Leaving New York… trusting Newt… trusting *myself* especially but, I— I got there. I still have some ways to go – I realize that – but, even with… even with the Grindelwald problem, I’m… I’m okay.”

Out of the furthest corner of his eyes, he saw Tina smile.

“Speaking of the Grindelwald Problem,” Jacob then interrupted, finally throwing his third rabbit over to the patiently waiting Patrick, “What are we going to do about him? I mean, we’re all here to help but, none of us… uh… well, none of us came here with a plan or nothin’ of the sort – which, you know, was probably a bad idea.”

“Credence and Newt were in trouble,” Tina stated firmly, “We had to get here as quickly as possible.”

“Yes, yes. I get that,” Jacob defended himself, “But… it still begs the question: Now what?”
“Newt wants to go to the Ministry,” Credence answered, hesitation and doubt entering his voice as he picked up the emptied bucket and showed Ian that there wasn’t anything left to eat inside. Tina and Jacob slowly did the same – as he’d instructed them to do so earlier – and, after Patrick finished his meal, the Gigantic Runespoor begrudgingly slithered off into the other end of the paddock to burrow underneath the sand while it digested its bellyful of rabbits. “He thinks that his brother Theseus can help…”

“But…,” Tina supplied.

“But… I don’t think it’ll work,” Credence admitted, scratching the back of his neck with one hand while carrying the empty feeding bucket with the other as he led them both out, “I think… I think we need to stand up to Grindelwald. I know that there’s only a couple of us but, I don’t think this’ll stop – that he’ll stop – unless we confront him head on.”

“Credence…,” Tina began softly.

“I’m scared. Terrified,” Credence quickly confessed, “But, I think it’s the only way.”

“Kid, I think you’re right,” Jacob agreed.

Wait.

“You do?”

“And I think that Newt’s right too. We can’t possibly bring an end to Grindelwald himself by ourselves. We need more people on our side,” Jacob suggested, “Maybe the creatures-…?”

“No.” Credence said firmly.

“Then friends. Family. Instead of going to Theseus, have Newt bring Theseus down here to us. If he’s got any other brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, anybody, his parents even, bring ‘em down here to support him,” Jacob continued, “Childhood buddies. Acquaintances, you name it.”

“That still wouldn’t be enough.”

“Then have his friends get their friends. Rally up everyone together that they know. Get people who know Newt. People that know that he ain’t nothin’ like what the media is portraying him to be. Get them here. With us,” Jacob emphasized, placing a clenched fist against his chest, “Grindelwald is trying to tear you guys apart? Fine. We’ll just stick together even more.”

“That’s… that’s actually a great idea, Jacob,” Tina hummed thoughtfully, tapping her chin with her forefinger, “I can rally up some old colleagues and friends together. Almaisie is relatively close with the professors back at Ilvermony. Some might just be willing to help us. Her father is an Army Vet so, he could probably rally some of his old war buddies together. Queenie can call in some favors with our family too. My Aunts might be able to come and help. Oh, and Uncle Terrence too… Yes. Yes, this might just be able to work.”

“Then get them down, Tina!” Jacob exclaimed, beaming in that jovial way that – if Miss Queenie were here – would cause her to wrap her arms around Jacob’s neck and squeal with glee, “Everyone you can think of. Everyone that they can think of!”

“You’re brilliant, Jacob,” she grinned.

Credence couldn’t help himself but smile.
And as he closed the paddock gate behind them with a loud, grating screech… After he secured it so that none of the venomous creatures behind it stood a chance of accidentally getting out, he found himself marveling on how Newt really did have a great bunch of friends. People who could – and would – stick by his side through thick and thin. It was just that—

It was just a shame that Credence had no one else he could turn to for help.

He had no friends.

And everyone in his family was dead.

Credence was all alone.

“And then Monsieur Roquefort accidentally breaks the time-space barrier, transporting himself into a parallel universe where he discovers that he owns a bar named Monsieur Roquefort’s Raucous Rampage but, unfortunately, he discovers that his counterpart died young in that universe. The bar ended up being inherited by his widower Reblochon and widow Gorgonzola. In this universe, he’d married them both. And after meeting their twin children Pecorino and Romano, Roquefort learns the true meaning of family, remarries Reblochon and Gorgonzola, and decides to stay in that universe forever,” Alma explained gleefully, running her hands down the cover of the book, “It’s not the best in the Roquefort spin-off series what with the sci-fi elements but, they took a chance and I respect that.”

“It’s bold of a writer to venture into another genre,” Credence hummed, folding the freshly laundered laundry, “Not everyone is brave enough to do that. Writers get comfortable and stick to what they know – and, sometimes, it’s for the best – but, what’s the point of writing if not to take chances and explore each and every possibility available to them?”

“Exactly!” Alma exclaimed enthusiastically, thrilled that someone agreed with her, “An author could be decent at writing thrillers but, they could be an amazing fantasy writer without even knowing it!”

“Take Molière for instance,” Credence pointed out with a small smile, smoothing out the creases in his spare trousers, “He started out doing tragedies only to become the greatest comedy playwright in all of history.”

“Credence…,” Alma cradled her own face and positively gushed, “I love you, darling. You’re welcome in my library any day.”

Credence nearly dropped his trousers.

“Y-you…,” he stammered, “You have a library?”

“Mmm-hmm,” she hummed sweetly, swinging around her violet skirts as she twirled around, holding her book close against her chest, “It’s nowhere near as big as Daddy’s library but, I’m slowly getting there. One day, I’ll have twice as many books as he does.”

“Do you have a lot of Detective Books?”

“Oh honey, I have an entire section dedicated to mysteries and thrillers. I’ve got Doyle and Christie. A bit of Leroux and Sayers—…”
Credence’s heart pounded against his chest.

So many books… So many novels all within Credence’s ready, eager grasp and all he need only ask.

Dashing tales of high-stakes adventures and impossible-to-solve mysteries with investigations led by dapper, gentleman detectives. Scouring for clues and searching for the unlikeliest of culprits through quick wit, silver-tongues, and the art of deduction. Intense discussions on the psychology of man and what truly constitutes good and evil.

All of this was at Credence’s fingertips.

“Miss Alma?”

“Yes, darling?”

“I love you.”

“Oh,” she laughed and hid her face behind her book, “You’re so cute, Credence.”

“Isn’t he?” Newt suddenly descended the ladder into the cabin, somehow managing to carry an entire sack of potatoes in his arms while not clumsily falling off and spilling everything onto Credence’s freshly mopped floors, “Credence, could you do me a favor and grab my coat? I think I left it outside when working with Queenie earlier.”

“Outside,” Credence turned around and crossed his arms over his chest, raising a single judgmental brow, “With acres upon acres of land.”

“Oh hush,” Newt clarified, lugging the massive sack of potatoes past Credence and Alma towards the front door, “It’s right past the potatoes. If you just head into the woods on your left, you’ll pass by some berry bushes – don’t eat them, please, I don’t need anyone getting poisoned – and you’ll see my coat hanging on the branches. Can’t miss it.”

“Actual directions,” Credence drawled, “That’s much better.”

“Oh, quiet you.”

Credence finished folding a pair of Newt’s yellow socks and set them aside. “Miss Alma, would you mind watching these while I’m gone? Pickett sometimes likes to sneak inside while they’re still warm and snack on stolen fruit and I really don’t want to have to wash them all over again.”

“Pickett,” Alma hummed thoughtfully, pulling up a wooden stool and sitting beside the basket of unfolded but clean laundry, “The Bowtruckle, right?”

“Yes,” Credence confirmed, pulling back his hair and securing it with the silver ribbon, “He’s really easy to lose track of but, if you see a paper butterfly – that’s Prudence – hovering over the laundry then you’ll know that he managed to sneak in.”

“Prudence. Paper butterfly,” Alma repeated and mock-saluted him, “Got it. I’ll make sure that the clean laundry stays clean from any mischievous, thieving Bowtruckles while you’re gone.”

“Thank you, Alma,” Credence slipped on his Slytherin green coat, leaving it unbuttoned, “You’re a lifesaver.”

“I don’t know about that,” she smiled and shooed him along, “You hurry back now, okay? I want to hear about your favorite Detective Novels when you get back.”
That’s a conversation that you’re definitely not prepared for,” Credence laughed before climbing up the ladder through the suitcase, “I’ll be back in a minute.”

Credence carefully closed the lid behind him with a gentle click, refraining from locking it, and slowly stretched out his stiff muscles. Rolling around his head around his sore neck, pulling his aching arms around him, elongating his back and feeling his spine pop into place. Housework and taking care of the creatures took its toll on his body but, it was a sensation that he reveled in. The more aches and pains that he endured, the more accomplished he felt.

Rolling his wrists and cracking his knuckles, Credence hoisted himself out of the basement onto the main floor of the barn.

All things considered, it ended up being a rather quiet night out. Nothing like the constant hustle and bustle of New York – the city that never sleeps – or the noisy chatter of London. The sounds of cars rolling down the roads, sputtering pollution into air, were nonexistent. No clashes or crashes of pots and pans or screaming neighbors or the soft thrumming of electric lights or the hiss and screech of ancient pipes. No sirens sounding in the distance. No screams or cries in the night.

Nothing… except crickets and cicadas singing their buzzing melodies. Nothing except the gentle breeze rustling through the leaves outside. Nothing except the old creaks and groans of the old barn wood.

It was quiet.

The Newt Coop (otherwise known as owls, Newt’s voice rang through his head) had already abandoned the rafters to go hunting for mice in the surrounding fields and woods. The luminous moonlight peeked through the various rotted and decaying holes filling the roof, casting the abandoned barn in an eerie glow that belonged straight out of a horror novel or the beginning of a glorious mystery. The haunting atmosphere highlighted the silvery thread of the cobwebs decorating the posts and corners. In Credence’s humble opinion, the only thing that was missing were bats flying through the window scaring the daylights out of him… or perhaps thunder booming in the distance or mist creeping, crawling in from underneath the locked doors indicating that a monster – unforeseen by the likes of man – was nearby-…

No, what they had instead was Frank rolling around in the haystacks.

Credence sighed and placed his hands on his hips, “I’m going to have to clean that up, you know.”

Frank’s feathered head popped through the scattered piles of straw and wheat, his beak dropping in what Credence considered the Thunderbird version of a smile. The large creature bounded towards him, skidding to a sudden halt, and nudged his head against Credence’s face.

“It’s good to see you too,” Credence greeted, affectionately threading his fingers through Frank’s golden feathers, eliciting an excited chirp from the giant Thunderbird. The creature was beginning to grow in a new batch after molting and thin pin-feathers – new feathers coated in a cylindrical, wax-like substance – pricked out of his forehead and wings. He imagined that they itched horrendously because, when Credence scratched his scalp, he swore that the Thunderbird purred.

“I’ll see if there’s a recipe for a lotion or some sort of salve in Newt’s notes that we can rub into your skin later,” Credence made a mental note and wrapped his arms around Frank’s neck, pressing his face into his soft, feathered cheek, “I’ll be back soon. Keep the suitcase safe for me.”

Frank chirped once again and settled down next to the basement, sitting at attention like a guard dog reporting for duty.
Credence found it absolutely adorable.

He exited the barn, shutting the large wooden doors behind him with a resounding creak echoing through the night, and followed the downtrodden dirt path around the back into the thick of the farm. He could see evidence of Newt’s presence everywhere.

From the over-plucked tomato plants that Queenie had chastised them both about earlier over lunch to the sanctuaries Newt had built for the various wildlife to be found. He had used old planks of wood to build rain shelters over the exposed spiderwebs outside the barn, had rebuilt an entire bird-nest and secured it with twine and cotton after tumbling down from the tree branches, created a new beehive out of pinecones and deadwood—…

Everything had Newt’s loving and caring touch on it and Credence adored it.

Credence pulled his Slytherin green coat tighter around his shoulders and continued walking through the crops – through the silence of the witching hour. Passing through shadowed tomatoes and courgettes and juicy red, orange, and yellow peppers. Passing through sections of ripening melons and blossoming grapes. Passing through underground crops of onions and carrots—…

Even though Credence hated almost everything about the night, there was just something peculiar – indescribable – about walking through the abandoned farm in the middle of the darkness. Something comforting and faintly… nostalgic. As if it was something that he had done before, even though he knew quite well that he’d lived in the city all his life.

He smiled wryly.

Confusing his old childhood fantasies of escaping into the mountains of Colorado or Montana and becoming a cowboy for reality, huh? So much so that walking through the countryside felt… familiar.

Ridiculous.

Credence sighed and glanced up at the twinkling evening sky, faintly recalling the constellations Newt had pointed out. Something about Achille’s Lyre and Zeta something or other—…

He neared the potato plants, shaking his head in exasperation at the chaotic piles of dirt and torn roots scattered everywhere as if a small tornado named Newt Scamander had passed through, and immediately veered left into the heavily wooded forest. Credence walked for a little while – no more than a couple minutes or five – searching for the berry bushes Newt had described and wondering why he had wandered out here in the first place—…

A-ha!

There’s was Newt’s beloved indigo coat – described exactly how he had left it – hanging on an outstretched tree branch, swaying like a curtain in the wind, right above a pair of bushes filled with tempting rosy red berries.

Credence carefully pulled it down and folded it into a neat square.

“Honestly, Newt,” Credence hummed fondly, “You’d lose your head if it wasn’t—…”

He looked up.

“…Screwed…on…”
Credence stepped forward, hypnotized and caught hopelessly breathless, all thoughts of Newt abandoned.

And entered a meadow of pure starlight.

It was like stepping straight into an experienced artist’s entrusted palette, caked on with layers upon layers of old pigments of paintings past. Like entering a Vincent Van Gogh masterpiece of spellbinding starry nights and mesmerizing midnight flower fields.

Breathtaking colors of violets, dark plums, and muted mauves. Of swirling navy blues and glittering sapphires highlighted with touches of teal. Of thick brushstrokes of illuminated silvers and deep, shadowed grays with little dots of amber flickering across the canvas – living jewels made real with incandescent light. The meadow breathed with life underneath an enchanted curtain of darkness.

Of course, those jewels were only fireflies darting through the air from flower to flower; but, the way that they danced through the air… the way that they disappeared within the petals, illuminating the entire flower from within with a charming candlelight glow… It was magical. Positively magical.

Credence closed his eyes for just a moment, pressing his hand against his mouth.

He could just make out a creek bubbling nearby.

The evening breeze rustled through the branches behind him, fluttering through the ends of his coat, and tangling though his trimmed curls, threatening to pull them away from their silver ribbon prison. He inhaled deeply, smelling the now well-known scent of Newt: of dirt and grass and sweat–…

But, also of mid-morning dew and nectar and wonderful wildflower honey. A certain sort of sweetness hanging delicately in the air.

Credence opened his eyes.

The meadow seemed like it spanned forward for miles – farther than even the human eye could see. How had they missed this before? How come Newt hadn’t noticed it–…?

Well, of course, Newt really wasn’t the most observant person in the world. Credence imagined that he’d be oblivious if Gellert Grindelwald himself was standing next to him–…

“It’s beautiful, isn’t it?”

Credence violently flinched, Newt’s coat dropping to the ground, his scarred hands sharply flinging up in surprise and knocking the actual Newt off balance. Newt’s eyes widened three times their normal size as he, most inelegantly, flapped his arms around like a bird – trying desperately to regain balance – but, he was already tumbling over–…

Credence quickly reached out to grab him, his hand latching onto Newt’s wrist, he other ducking underneath his waist–…

And they both froze, staring intently at each other, inches from the ground.

Until Credence suddenly lost his balance trying to support Newt in his arms and crashed on top of him.

“Why am I always the one getting hurt?” Newt whined childishly, feverishly rubbing the back of his
likely aching head after having thumped it quite harshly against the hard ground.

“Because you’re an idiot,” Credence responded dryly, rubbing his throbbing forehead with just as much fervor – if not more – after having knocked it against Newt’s. He could have sworn that this was what déjà vu felt like – pounding headache aside. He could have sworn that somehow, somewhere, they’ve been in this same exact situation before.

With Newt sprawled awkwardly on the ground, Credence hovering over him, barely supporting himself on his forearms.

They stared at each other again.

A half-grin slowly spread across Newt’s lips, “…surprise?”

Credence blinked.

“Erm… this is isn’t exactly how I imagined that this would go. Actually, I wanted to sweep you off your feet instead of the other way around but, I suppose, this will do. Very fast reflexes you have there, Credence,” Newt babbled on, “I never intended on giving you bit of a fright. Sorry. Completely my fault. I just, erm, am not entirely sure how these sorts of things work and Queenie suggested-…”

“Newt…,” Credence interrupted because, if he didn’t do so soon, then this would go on forever, “I-… uhm, is this-… Newt, are we on a date?”

Newt paused, the tips of his ears slowly turning bright red.

Credence flushed deep scarlet from head to toe and leaned back, plopping himself beside Newt, freeing his arms and quickly hiding his rouge-tinted face in his hands. He laughed a little, not believing this ridiculous situation at all despite the adorable chaos just screaming of Newt’s handiwork, and peeked at the wizard through his fingers, “You’re hopeless, Newt.”

“A hopeless romantic?”

“Don’t get your hopes up,” Credence teased and rested back on his arms, staring up into the twinkling night sky and the fireflies that danced and twirled in the gentle moonlight, “I like it.”

“You do?”

“Especially the falling for you part,” Credence teased again, unable to help himself, “Unexpected but, creative.”

“You’re impossible, you know that?” Newt retorted and hoisted himself halfway up from the ground, sitting beside Credence. He crossed his gangly legs in front of him, resting his hands against his knees and followed Credence’s gaze towards the sky.


Newt blinked and looked over his shoulder, “Hmm?”

“Is this it, or…?”

Newt tutted, a devilish smile curling across his lips, and wagged a playfully chastising finger at him,
“Patience is a virtue, Credence.”

“One that you don’t have,” he helpfully pointed out.

“Oh hush,” Newt nudged his shoulder and looked up at the glittering stars above them once more, “Close your eyes.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“If you don’t mind,” Newt gingerly hoisted himself onto his feet and stood before him, stretching his arms over his head, “It’ll only be for a minute. Promise. Magizoologist’s honor!”

_How could I possibly say no to that?_

“Oh, okay,” Credence relented and closed his eyes, “I give in.”

“And no peeking either.”

“I won’t.”

“You swear?”

Credence made a show of raising his hands in the air and placing them over his eyes as an added precaution, “I swear.”

Honestly, this was totally, completely unexpected of Newt – especially what with Grindelwald and everything horrible and depressing that was happening all around them – and yet, Credence selfishly loved absolutely every single minute of it.

No one had ever really treated him in this manner before. It felt almost like he was being spoiled with attention but, Credence… didn’t care. He found a certain, indescribable and incredibly strange thrill in Newt thinking of him and wanting to do things like this. Of Newt considering things to do with him, planning out this gorgeous place to take him to, and overall things that he would like. It wasn’t completely perfect since Credence and nighttime still had a so-so relationship but…

Newt _tried_. He had attempted to make Credence happy for happiness’ sake.

And if that wasn’t perfect in its imperfection, Credence didn’t know what was.

“Oh, okay,” Newt’s voice stirred him out of his thoughts, “Open.”

Credence opened his eyes and lowered his hands into his lap, seeing Newt standing proudly in front of him with an accomplished grin splattered across his face but, nothing different. Nothing immediately noticeable or out of the ordinary. He frowned, puzzled, until Newt pointed up—

And it was like he had brought down the sky itself for him.

Floating witchlights magically dangled in the midnight air above them and the fireflies darted through them like shooting stars and dazzling comets. They twinkled with artificial candlelight, casting an otherworldly glow across the meadow that – despite it being dark out – wasn’t eerie or foreboding at all. It was— It was—

_Fantastic._

“Newt…,” Credence couldn’t find his voice, rendered completely speechless.
When Credence finally tore his gaze away from the beautiful, sparkling scene above him, Newt silently outstretched his hand. Credence reached out, sliding his scarred fingers into his unmarred palm… and Newt pulled him close, an arm going around his waist and the other around his shoulders.

Music from somewhere unseen (magic, handy thing sometimes, wasn’t it?) started playing and Newt spun him around. It was perfect. Magical. Like something straight out of a book-…

That was until Newt stepped on his foot.

“Confession: I don’t actually know how to dance,” Newt admitted sheepishly, “Sorry.”

Somehow, that classic little Newt-ism only made the night all that more perfect.

“Don’t worry,” Credence confessed, “I don’t either.”

“So, what you’re trying to tell me is that we’re two hopeless fools, dancing around underneath the starlight… not knowing how to dance?”

“Hmm, sounds like something we would do,” Credence hummed.

“Merlin’s Pants,” Newt snorted, “It does.”

“The only way we could make it better is by singing when we can’t sing,” he teased.

“La la la la,” Newt immediately responded, making his voice sound atrocious on purpose, “Just you wait, Credence, I haven’t even started my aria yet.”

“You’re ridiculous.”

“I mean, you do have me spellbound.”

“Newt!” Credence laughed and rested his head against his shoulder, murmuring incredulously, “You’re impossible. Simply impossible.”

The soft music continued playing into the night, and they continued swaying in place despite neither one knowing how to dance. Credence didn’t know exactly how long they stood there like this, enraptured in that one perfect imperfect moment, and he frankly didn’t care.

He just savored the all-too-wonderful feeling of Newt’s arms wrapped around him. Of being so close against his chest and feeling so… safe and warm.

Credence closed his eyes, trying to memorize everything that he felt right here and now. He wanted to hold onto to this memory forever. Wanted to remember everything that he heard, everything that he smelt, everything that he saw and tasted-…

Tasted.

Oh, he would very much like to-…

“Credence?” Newt’s voice suddenly interrupted.

“Hmm?”

“I’m going to pick you up now.”
Credence’s eyes slammed open. Wait, wait, wait, what…?

And then, ever so suddenly, he found that his feet were no longer firmly standing on the ground. Instead, Newt held him in his arms, carrying him like a new bride with an arm resting supportively around his back and another underneath his knees, and twirled him around. Credence’s arms immediately wrapped around Newt’s neck, protesting more on instinct than actual desire, “Newt!”

But, the wizard only grinned, spinning him around once more, “I told you that I’d sweep you off your feet.”

“You’re ridiculous,” Credence responded, holding onto him tighter, “Ridiculous and an idiot.”

“Perhaps but, you like it.”

“I love it.”

Once Newt was finally satisfied with spinning him around for the up-teenth time in a row, Credence allowed Newt to lay him back down on the ground – his indigo coat all spread out underneath on the soil because of course it was.

“I just did laundry, Newt,” he complained, “And there’s dirt on it.”

“There’s always dirt on it though.”

“Yes, but-…”

Newt crawled over him and touched his cheek.

Credence paused.

“But…?” Newt dragged the word along.

“I-…,” his face flushed, “I suppose you’re right.”

“It’s a genuine miracle if I’ve ever seen one,” he grinned that goofy grin of his, “You’ve agreed with me!”

“Oh no,” Credence drawled, realizing exactly what he’s done, “And I’m already regretting it.”

“I’m putting it on the calendar.”

“Oh God, no.”


“You’re insufferable.”

“Yes, but you like me.”

“You like me too,” Credence helpfully pointed out.

“That I do,” Newt grinned but, then it slowly transitioned into something softer… something far more tender than before as he dragged his fingers delicately down Credence’s suddenly blazing cheek, “I very much do.”
Silence.

“Is it alright if I-…?”

“Yes.”

Newt leaned closer and pressed his lips against his. And Credence felt like heaven.

He wrapped his arms tightly around Newt’s warm back, burying his scarred fingers deep into the crisp folds of his oversized, ivory shirt that he still swore belonged more to the Victorians or the Colonials than now. His hands dipped down, his fingertips only just faintly detecting the bumps and curves of Newt’s scars poking out from underneath. Credence followed the radiating lines with his fingers, around the spiraling burns of dragon fire and across the bumps of Newt’s spine.

Newt cupped his cheek, deepening the kiss (Oh Lord in Heaven Above, so that’s how his tongue tasted), and rubbed his thumb tenderly up and down his jaw, the uneven distribution of weight between his arms causing his chest to rest against his. Credence could feel Newt’s lungs expand and retract with each and every breath he took, feeling it twicefold against his mouth as he breathed him in. He could feel his heart beneath his ribcage beating faster and faster-…

Credence quickly broke the kiss, running his hand through Newt’s beautiful tawny hair, and rolled them over. He took a moment to stare down into Newt’s green and gold-flecked eyes gazing up – enchanted – at him. At the clouds of freckles across his cheek, hidden behind an all-encompassing reddened blush. At pinkened parted lips rendered silent and speechless, at strands of ruffled hair fallen across his forehead.

Credence leaned down and pressed his ear against Newt’s chest, over his heart.

He listened to the rhythm. The steady beat.

And hummed it out loud.

_Ba-bump._

_Ba-bump._

_Ba-bump._

“Credence-…”

“For someone who claims he can’t sing, you make really pretty music, Newt.”

“That-… that was cheesy,” Newt laughed breathlessly, pressing a palm against his forehead, “I can read that in one of my novels.”

Credence raised his head and an impish smile curled across his face, mischief dripping from his tone, “I know.”

Newt blinked, the implication donning on him-…

“Are you quoting Miss Camembert to me?”

“I don’t know what you mean, Monsieur Cheddar.”

“Credence!” Newt laughed so intensely that he snorted and pulled him back up, cupping his face between his hands and staring into his eyes, “You-… you-… you-… For Merlin’s Sake, Credence,
you’re so… so… ugh!"

“Yes, I agree,” Credence drawled, “I’m very ugh.”

That only made Newt laugh even harder, enveloping Credence into a tight, endlessly adoring embrace and squeezing him against his chest. Credence kissed his reddened cheek and ran his fingers lightly up his sides—

Only for Newt to suddenly laugh tenfold and then freeze.

Wait…

“Newt…,” Credence leaned up, marveling down at him, “Are you—?”

“N-no,” Newt stammered and slid out from underneath Credence, quickly hoisting himself onto his feet, and rubbing the back of his head with twice the amount of awkwardness as usual, “I have no idea what you’re talking about. Me? No. Never. Absolutely not.”

“Newt,” Credence stood up, dusting off his legs.

“No. Nope. No siree.”

“Newt,” Credence approached.

“Credence,” Newt stuttered, backing up slowly, “W-what are you doing—?”

Credence suddenly lunged forward and Newt quickly darted from underneath his grasp.

“Credence!” Newt bolted through the illuminated meadow, fireflies scattering from the flowers from the hurried movement, “I was trying to be romantic here! Not for you to tickle me!”

“You are!” Credence cried out triumphant, and picked himself back up to chase after him, “You’re ticklish, admit it!”

Newt’s laughter echoed through the night.

“You’re going to have to catch me first.”

“And then—then I caught him, and we ended up tumbling down a hill,” Credence explained to Queenie the next morning, leading her out from the basement to the main floor of the barn, “And there I am, tickling his sides and I discover that there isn’t anywhere that he isn’t ticklish. His sides, his neck, even the palms of his hands!”

“No. Way.” Queenie exclaimed, dragging along a large bucket of Frank’s breakfast, “His hands?”

“Not just the palms of his hands either,” Credence continued, heading over to the lounging Thunderbird – the creature having only just woken up if the glazed-over look in his eyes and lazy yawn were any indication, “His knuckles. His wrists too!”

“Credence, honey. Darling, this is information that you know will be used against Newt in the future,” she responded, dropping the bucket onto the ground and wiping small beads of sweat from
her forehead.

“No, it won’t,” Credence peered over his shoulder, raising his forefinger, “Unless I’m in on it too.”

“Done.”

Credence shook his head, smiling, and unbottled the container of anti-itch salve that he had Newt brew for Frank’s itchy pinfeather problem that morning. He was only just about to pour some onto his hand to rub between his irritated skin and feathers when Frank suddenly perked up, standing at attention. He bounded over to Queenie, who stepped backwards in alarm, and busily used his clawed feet to kick hay over the basement door.

Something he’d been instructed by Newt to do in case an intruder approached.

Credence stared at the old, weathered barn doors in alarm, slipping out his wand from the interior of his sleeve as he saw Queenie doing the same. They both cautiously advanced forward, standing silently side-by-side prepared to protect the suitcase at whatever cost—

When the barn doors suddenly creaked open—

And a man in a well-tailored, navy blue pin-striped suit stepped in.

“Oh! Hello,” the stranger didn’t even bat an eye at the looming Thunderbird or the wands pointed threateningly at his face as he advanced forward, “You must be Credence Barebone and you— One of the Goldstein sisters, I presume? Queenie, right?”

He stopped mere inches in front of them and thrust out his hand, the other holding up an unfolded letter as he introduced himself, “Theseus Scamander. How do you do?”

Credence and Queenie glanced at one another.

“Now,” Theseus continued, a prim and proper smile curling across his lips, “Where’s my little Arty?”

Chapter End Notes

Where to even begin with this chapter? Well, we’ve finally introduced the long-awaited meadow to the story (oh yes, the green meadow of GM, DS is a place as well as a metaphor) and the boys had their first romantic date that turned into a childish tickle-fest at poor, poor Newt’s expense. Oh, and Theseus is here too.

How will everything progress from here?

Tune in next time on GM, DS to find out!

Now, here’s that certain, special part of the notes section where I ask how I’m doing and if there’s anything about my writing that I can improve upon. Is there anything that you would like to see more of? Less of? Anything to be worked on?

Anyways, please leave your comment and constructive criticisms below, my darlings! Who is your favorite character of the series? What has been your favorite chapter/interaction so far? What was your favorite part about this chapter? Your
comments are the lifeblood of this series. The reason GM, DS exists is all thanks to commentators like you! Until next time, my lovelies!
Bonjour, my loveliest lovelies and darling-iest darlings!

Wowie, what a wonderful feeling it is to be regularly writing chapters for y'all again. I've missed this so much and I've missed all of you. And, paired with my newest obsession with Detroit: Become Human, I've (poorly) decided to pile even more fanfic onto my pile of things to write with developing yet ANOTHER series. Hooo boy.

AND, we're kicking off this new Fall Semester with a proper start and 28 entire pages of content!!!

All I can say is, I'm sorry ahead of time.

And that it brings me so much happiness to find out that Oreos existed back in this era AND we're getting baby Nifflers in the new movie.

But, also, sorry.

So sorry.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Everything was quiet.

The mid-morning light reflected through the grimy windows of the suitcase cabin into the kitchen. It’s comforting golden rays somehow managing to pierce the filthy clouded glass that, no matter how much Credence adorably attempted to clean with a surprising stubborn-filled passion, would never actually become clear enough to properly see through without some sort of a foggy haze.

The Doogle casually wandered inside through the open door. Slowly waddling across the neatly mopped floors, all while side-stepping around the areas that had yet to dry, he grabbed a wooden stool from the nearby worktable and dragged it over to the counter. He hoisted himself up, using his arms as leverage, and grabbed a handful of peeled potatoes that Credence had started that morning.

Pleased with his newfound treasure, the Doogle casually began his departure. His eyes shined over once – his gift of foresight granting him a vision – and he cast a disparaging glance at Jacob’s shoes. Messily abandoned in the middle of the floor, after having rushed inside to use the loo.

Alma and Tina’s boots were already gone, the pair having decided to take a stroll before the sunrise.

The Doogle shook his head. Foreseeing the inevitable catastrophe that laid ahead, he quietly shut the front door behind him and plopped a prized potato into his mouth.

It was quiet within the cabin. Terribly quiet.

But, Newt continued to read.
He glanced over the all-too-familiar letter in his hands. His disastrous, scrawling hand-writing against crisp ivory parchment stared back at him, telling of his adventures with and affections for a certain Obscurial named Credence Barebone and how proud Newt was for his beloved apprentice’s gradual improvement in magic. He had written excitedly about watching the Kraken infant growing up right before his eyes and about Hope’s eventual return to her family in the Mediterranean Sea. He had written about the atrocities that Grindelwald was committing in his name, how disaster after disaster followed him wherever he went, and that he didn’t know what to do.

He had asked for guidance.

He had pleaded for aid.

And yet, Newt had never imagined – even considered the possibility – that Theseus would have left England and journeyed his way all the way down here just to help his hopeless brother in need.

“There’s no question about it,” Newt finally placed the letter on the table, breaking through the thick, positively stifling silence filling the room. Credence and Queenie leaned forward across the table, eager to hear what he had to say.

He quirked the corner of his lips in a lame attempt at a smile – as he always seemed to do whenever he felt awkward or uncomfortable or just generally out of place which was, admittedly, 99% of the time.

“It’s my letter.”

“So, that means…,” Credence asked quietly, distrustful, “…it’s really Theseus?”

“It has to be.”

“Newt, honey… I know that I’ve got no right to talk. Frankly, it’s just the teensiest bit hypocritical of me and I’m ashamed for even thinking it but…” Queenie bit her lower lip, clasping her manicured hands politely in front of her to keep herself from wringing them together.

“Go on,” Newt encouraged.

“It’s just that… Oh darling, how did he even get here? It took us days of searching after getting to Italy and, even then, meeting up with you was still all just a happy happenstance. Resting here in what we thought was an abandoned barn until Jacob – sweet thing he is – spotted a swirling black mass in the horizon. But, Theseus just waltzed through the door like he knew where we were,” she hesitated, lowering her gaze, “You didn’t put down your location on that letter, did you, sweetie?”

“I may be scatter-brained but, not even I would make such a mistake,” Newt twirled his fingers around the edges of his scarf, braiding and unbraiding the frays together, “I only mentioned Italy but, not where exactly.”

“He should publish a book, really. Call it: Newt’s Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them. I think he’d make a killing.”
Queenie returned the smile only for it to falter soon after. She rose from her chair, wrapping her arms comfortably around herself, and approached him. She hesitated, biting her lower lip once again, before reaching out to touch his arm.

As uncomfortable as it made him, Newt didn’t dare to remove it.

“Newt… I’m worried,” Queenie’s golden brows furrowed together, “I don’t—... I just can’t hear him. And the last time this happened – the last time I’ve heard such… emptiness – was with—…”

Her concern-filled gaze flickered back to the diligently watching Credence.

“Well,” she forced the tiniest of smiles, “…you know.”

Oh. Oh.

“This is entirely different, Queenie,” Newt calmly assuaged, suggesting, “If we believe someone is disguising themselves with Polyjuice Potion, we’ll figure it out as long as we work together. We can ask Alma to monitor the supplies and herbs needed for making it.”

“I don’t know, Newt…”

“I thought herbology and potions-making were her specialty?”

“They are,” Queenie confirmed before shaking her head, her trimmed golden curls bouncing around her cherubic face in a manner that would make anyone – regardless of sexuality – swoon from how utterly adorable it was, “But, what if we figure it out too late, Newt? It could take days – weeks – to notice a dwindling supply and—... We thought we knew Graves, but he just deceived us for so long—…”

“Well, the person waiting upstairs that may or may not be my brother gave us the letter I sent to Theseus,” Newt pointed out, shimmying around from foot-to-foot before admitting, “I suppose it could have been easily intercepted which is why I used an unmarked owl and why I didn’t give out our location; but, this is still my brother. Graves, no offense, was just a coworker. A friend perhaps. I’ve lived with Theseus for all my life. I’ll know if it is someone impersonating him.”

“I understand. I suppose, it’d be like if someone pretended to be Teenie. I’d know whether it was her or not in an instant,” Queenie admitted, “But, I still can’t hear his thoughts, Newt.”

“Theseus’ has been a skilled Occlumens since he was fifteen. A bit of a natural at it,” Newt forced an uncomfortable grin because, of course, Theseus was skilled enough to have mastered the craft after a mere year of practice. Theseus was the golden child. He was skilled at everything he tried.

Newt, on the other hand…

“Tried practicing it myself,” he admitted and turned around, “Never got the hang of it, as you know. But, nevertheless, my dear Queenie… even if you can’t hear him, I’ll still easily be able to determine if it’s Theseus or some imposter. I highly doubt anyone that knows the both of us well would try to—…”

Newt went to grab the first step – determined to go upstairs and end this debate once and for all – when Credence’s scarred hand came into view. Unlike Queenie immediately invading his personal space, Credence didn’t move to touch him; instead, wrapping his fingers around the side of the ladder and succeeding in getting his attention.

Newt paused and looked at him.
Oh, that was Credence’s worried face.

Dark brows pressed far up into his forehead, creating deep pits and canyons into his porcelain white skin. His eyes swirled abysses of judgmental darkness and his pale lips parted ever so slightly – as if wanting to speak but forcing himself to hold back his tongue.

Credence wore that expression far too often for a man of his age, in Newt’s personal opinion. Especially wherever Newt was concerned and especially whenever he did something rash or stupid that he disapproved of.

Shortly before exasperatingly joining him in whatever stupid and rash thing he was doing, of course.

“If you trust him, Newt,” Credence finally broke the silence, “Then… I trust him too.”

Newt smiled – a genuine one this time. Not a smile that was forced. Not a smile that was uncomfortable or strained but, one out of genuine happiness and joy. It was funny. Smiling had never come so easily to him before but, almost mere seconds after being around Credence regularly, he found himself unable to stop.

It was like… he brought out another side to him. One that was energetic, eager, and confident. One that could babble on and on for hours about his creatures without worrying about being looked down upon for it. One that could relax and be himself. One that was happy.

Newt reached out and brushed away a stray curl from Credence’s forehead.

“Thank you…,” he cleared his throat a moment after and finally pulled himself up the ladder, “Well then… Credence? Queenie? I’d like to introduce the both of you to my big brother.”

Something about this entire situation – something unexplainable and shameful enough to even think about let alone seriously consider – disturbed Credence. Running into Tina and having her rescuing them from a literal angry mob – where the only thing missing were fire and pitchforks – was one thing. Both Credence and Newt had already met Tina before and knew her well enough to know that she could be trusted but, Theseus…

Credence had only heard of him from Newt’s stories.

More importantly, Queenie was right. Their little group happening upon their hide-out could easily be associated with an act of fate or sudden flash of the hand of destiny. Something that could be brushed off with the excuse of chance circumstances occurring in their favor.

Theseus coming across them too, however, was suspicious.

Even if it wasn’t, it just meant that they were far too easy to find which was even more disturbing.

But, Credence’s feelings and deplorable suspicions were one thing. His absolute trust in Newt was another.

Credence trusted Newt with every fiber of his being. Trusted him more than he trusted himself and that was the one, singular aspect of their relationship that would never, ever change. If anyone knew whether to trust Theseus or not, it would be his own brother and Credence would follow and readily
accept Newt’s decision.

So, Credence silently followed Newt up the ladder of the suitcase. Followed him through the basement and onto the main floor where they had left Theseus – wand temporarily confiscated and guarded by none other than Frank.

Theseus’ eyes – an intense shade of blue darker than the roiling ocean trapped within an afternoon thunderstorm – flickered briefly over to Credence but, immediately honed onto Newt. He squared his shoulders, smoothing down the front of his jacket, and went to approach him; but, Frank merely stepped in his way.

Credence forced back a smile.

*Good boy.*

“Your beast is a loyal one, Arty.”

“That he is,” Newt smiled awkwardly and stepped around the protective creature, running his hands soothingly through Frank’s golden feathers and scratching the irritated areas where waxy pinfeathers stuck out, “Frank meet my older brother Theseus. Theseus meet Frank.”

“Frank,” he repeated, a bemused smile crossing Theseus’ stern features as he seemed to indulge him, “A pleasure to make your acquaintance.”

Credence immediately didn’t like him, which came as a rather startling surprise.

He liked to consider himself as the type of person that wasn’t quick to judgement about a person’s overall character but, there was just something *unnerving* about Theseus…

The subdued manner that Newt shied away from him and casually hid behind Frank’s feathers… The refined way that Theseus clasped his hands formally behind his back and squared his shoulders, his sharp chin tipped high – not haughtily but, with an inner strength.

The brothers looked similar enough. The same beautiful auburn hair except Theseus’, perhaps, was just a shade darker and actually combed. Both possessed a rather fair complexion except Theseus’ face wasn’t as covered in as many freckles as Newt’s by far. Around similar heights and slim, toned builds. They were most certainly related but, they couldn’t look any more different from just demeanor alone.

Because Newt shrunk considerably underneath Theseus’ chiding gaze. As if he didn’t seem like a sibling, but another parent judging his every move.

And the way that Theseus seemed to consider Newt like an overly imaginative child didn’t help it at all. He looked down upon him as one would with a toddler: indulging his games and fantasies for now while patiently waiting for the day for him to grow up, put aside childish flights of fancy, and join the sophisticated world of adults.

“Have you eaten today?” Theseus broke the uncomfortable silence.

Credence didn’t like him one bit.

“Of course, I have,” Newt responded, twirling his fingers nervously through his hair, “I’m not five.”

“A handful of Oreos doesn’t constitute as a full meal, Arty.”
Credence clenched his hands together.

There was nothing – absolutely *nothing* – teasing about Theseus’ monotone voice. Credence could easily find himself saying similar things to Newt and he would just puff out his cheeks and become adorably red in the face because he knew quite well that Credence was only playing with him. He poked fun at Newt’s peculiar habits – especially the more exasperating ones – and Newt merely laughed along because he knew that Credence still loved him exactly the way he was.

But… this? Newt just seemed defensive. Uncomfortable.

“I-… I’ll have you know,” Newt flushed, his hands twirling through his hair at a rate that made even Credence feel worried, “That Credence prepared a fine breakfast this morning, thank you very much! I quite liked his pancakes and sliced fruit.”

Theseus blinked and suddenly peered over Newt’s shoulder to meet Credence’s eyes, declaring quite firmly, “I like you.”

*What a coincidence, because I really don’t like you.*

Queenie had the decency to hide her knowing smile behind her hand.

Credence merely shifted silently from foot-to-foot.

Understanding that he wouldn’t be gaining a response anytime soon, Theseus turned his hawk-like gaze back onto his squirming younger brother, nodding contentedly to himself, “Yes… *yes.* You do look healthier now that I think about it. Not as thin as you were last Christmas.”

“Thank you, Theseus, for your input.”

“All I am doing is looking over you, Arty. Mummy worries about you, you know,” Theseus tilted his head to the side, nothing escaping his sight, “As do I. And I’m quite certain she’ll be happy to know that you’re doing well. *I am.*”

Newt’s fidgeting fingers paused in his hair.

“…Does she know about this?” he asked so quietly that Credence wasn’t certain whether or not he truly heard it.

For the first time since meeting Theseus, Credence spotted a flicker of… emotion. Theseus straightened his black tie and looked away, seeming to gather his thoughts.

“Arty-… Newt,” Theseus slowly corrected himself, “There’s no way to avoid it. Your face is… everywhere. Plastered on newspapers, splattered across magazines and flyers. If Mummy didn’t know before, she knows now.”

“Bugger,” Newt cursed, lowering his gaze and running a stressed hand through his hair, “You think she believes them?”

“*Of course not.*”

“Oh,” Newt smiled a little, obviously attempting to lighten the tense situation to distract himself from the seriousness, “So, it’s apparently too unbelievable that I’d eventually snap and unleash my creatures upon the world, huh? Grindelwald’s losing his touch.”

“You’re a *Hufflepuff*, Newt,” Theseus responded dryly, “If you were a Slytherin, perhaps-…”
“Excuse me. We Hufflepuffs can be quite vicious when crossed, I’ll have you know,” Newt puffed out his chest in a poor attempt to look intimidating, “Just because our House values friendship over knowledge and ambition and bravery, doesn’t mean we’re soft people.”

“Of course. However, you’re certainly not one of those vicious, not-to-be-crossed Hufflepuffs, Arty,” Theseus droned, placing a pensive finger upon his chin, “That Hugin on the other hand—…”

“Don’t remind me,” Newt groaned, running his hands down his face, “Credence and I encountered his sister not too long ago. When Gryffindors turn bad—…”

He shivered.

“It was horrifying enough after what she did to Orty. But then,” Newt hesitated, his voice growing suddenly quieter, “Remember that Muggle Train? I hadn’t thought her capable of—… Especially so many people—… Mer—…”

Munin was a bit of a bully back at school but, she’d simmered down after you and her brother became friends. I never imagined she’d 

“crucio me.”

Munin.

Those disgusting twirling curls of pure golden hair. Those vicious gray eyes of cold, hardened steel. The grating sound of her raspy voice, trying her best to sway him to Grindelwald’s side. The piercing sound of Newt’s scream echoing through the train as she waved her wand over him—…

Queenie placed a horrified yet simultaneously comforting hand upon his shoulder.

Credence wrapped his arms tightly around his chest, squeezing himself to remind him that he was safe. She wasn’t here.

Theseus, however, seemed thoroughly alarmed and instantly closed the distance between him and Newt. Frank squawked in protest, his feathers fluffing threateningly when Newt promptly shrunk three sizes after Theseus placed his hands upon his shoulders.

“Are you alright? Are you hurt?” his brows anxiously furrowed together, fervently inspecting his brother with unrestrained concern and worry, “Are you absolutely certain it was her? I knew that she followed Hugin shortly after he joined Grindelwald but, I never would have 

thought she would—… Especially to you.”

“lt was her, Theseus.”

Uncomfortable silence fell between them.

“Am I… that bad of a friend?”

Newt blinked.

“What?”

“First Hugin defected. I should’ve checked in on him more once he was sent home. I should’ve checked in on him period. He was never the same after—… after…. And now, Munin? I only knew her because I worked with her brother but, I never would have thought her capable of killing innocent Muggles and hurting you. Of hurting your friends. I just—…,” Theseus hung his head, “I feel like you are suffering for my mistakes.”

Did he…
Did he feel *guilty*?

“Theseus….” Newt assuaged and carefully pulled away from him to comfort the growling Frank, smoothing down his fluffed feathers, “This isn’t your fault. And look! I’m fine! Credence was there to help me and I’m. . . I’m alright.”

“Yes… yes, of course,” Theseus stiffened uncomfortably and fixed his jacket, smoothing down the lapels and straightening the cuffs. He glanced back over to Queenie and Credence momentarily, surveying his silent audience, before nodding his head towards them, “Would you mind introducing us?”

“But…,” Newt glanced curiously over his shoulder, raising a brow, “You’ve already met.”

“Brilliant observation however, we… unfortunately met under less than ideal circumstances,” Theseus formally clasped his hands before him, “Besides… I imagine it would mean more coming from you.”

Credence watched as Newt pulled his attention away from Frank towards him – meadow green and impossibly black eyes meeting across the barn. A small smile slowly spread across Credence’s face, waving his hand in which Newt, after a brief moment of contemplation, shortly returned. While his smile and wave were far more awkward than his, Credence could see his shoulders relaxing and his posture gradually losing their tenseness.

“Theseus, I would very much like you to meet—…”

And then, as luck would happen to have it, a loud ferocious *bang* echoed throughout the barn.

Newt froze within an instant, eyes slowly growing wide.

A clamoring cacophony of clattering *clangs* and *crashes* sounded from the basement.

Queenie quickly ran towards the source to investigate. Credence immediately darted forward instead.

Jacob’s loud, pained cursing reverberated throughout the entire area, powerful enough to send the sleeping owls in the rafters into a sudden hooting fit of fluttering feathers and alarm. Credence could just faintly detect Alma’s fervent apologizing and Tina’s exasperated groan underneath the barrage of noise.

Newt’s hands violently slammed over his ears and a staticky humming sound already began vibrating from his throat. That frantic noise of pure desperation – of unimaginable *agony* – clenched at Credence’s heart. That panicked expression within his fear-filled meadow green eyes gripped him with urgency.

He had to help. Had to help. *Had to help—…”

But, Theseus had already unwrapped Newt’s Hufflepuff scarf from around his brother’s neck.

Looped it twice around his ears.

Masterfully unbuttoning his pin-striped jacket within a blink of an eye, he even drooped the article of clothing over Newt’s head to provide him a private sanctuary away from prying, potentially judgmental and non-understanding eyes.

Credence slowed to a stop.
Newt huddled underneath Theseus’ large jacket, pulling it closed around his face like a curtain, and plopped down onto the floor. He pulled his knobby knees violently against his chest, rocking rapidly back and forth as the widely alarming humming sound increased in intensity.

“I know this must be unnerving,” Theseus reassured Credence, taking a casual step forward, “This little… problem of Newt’s has been happening ever since we were kids. I implore you to just… give him a couple minutes to recompose himself. He’ll be fine.”

“I… I don’t know,” Credence hesitated, his worried gaze flickering down towards his suffering friend. He slowly knelt down beside him, prepared to take Newt comfortingly into his arms like he usually did whenever these episodes flared their ugly heads, “He usually likes me to—… Newt, I’m here. Do you want me—…”

“Trust me, I’ve got this taken care of,” Theseus assuaged, taking another step closer when Newt’s hand suddenly shot out in front of him, snatching onto Theseus’ pant leg and holding onto it tightly.

Theseus paused, looking between Credence and Newt in torn contemplation before ultimately kneeling down before his little brother. His arms immediately opened towards him and Newt flung himself at his chest, clinging onto his shirt tightly as Theseus’ hands pressed tightly against his ears.

“Shhh,” Theseus soothed, “It’s okay, Arty.”

Credence stared – mouth parted, and eyes widened – rendered shocked and useless.

Entirely. *Useless.*

“Big brother’s here now.”

Credence stomped through the suitcase’s enchanted forest, his raw and unbridled magic roiling around him in chaotic, burning waves of the utmost frustration. The wind swirled violently around him, tearing off leaves from their branches all the way up to the canopy and sending bugs and small creatures alike scampering away.

Credence wasn’t a perfect man – he knew this. He was gullible and stubborn, intensely fierce and quick to anger whenever people crossed those he considered his dearest friends and family. He was most definitely flawed – as everyone was in some peculiar manner or fashion in the wide expanse of the known universe – but, never before had Credence been… jealous. Never before had he despised a person that had done little to deserve it. Credence hated it – hated this – as much as he hated him.

Theseus *Mr. Perfect* Scamander.

He stopped along the downtrodden path, pulling the silver ribbon from his hair so he could run his scarred hands freely through the wildly unleashed curls.

Credence had gotten on spectacularly with Newt’s friends almost immediately after meeting them. It had been relatively easy – much to his delighted surprise – finding things that they all had in common. He got along with Queenie – considering her as the older sister he never had – and found himself often seeking out her advice or talking about Newt. He got along with Jacob – talking about their low-esteem and confidence issues – and bonded over feeding the animals together. He got along with Alma – talking about books and of mysteries, of cowboys, of explorers – and related
deeply to her anxious fears that she struggled with. And Tina-…

Well, Credence had already known Tina.

But, Theseus…

In all circumstances, Credence should get along with him just as well if not more.

Because this was Newt’s older brother for Heaven’s Sake! Credence should adore him just as much as Newt did! Not a single day passed them by without Newt mentioning him at least once. Newt’s undying admiration for his brother was, by far, ridiculously well-known. His guiltily hidden feelings of jealousy and incompetence when compared to Theseus’ brilliant magnificence, less so. Theseus’ own admiration of his free-spirited younger brother? Even less.

But, despite their rather complicated history together and various issues with expressing themselves properly to each other, the Scamander brothers were ridiculously close.

Credence should, at least, like him.

And yet…

Credence felt… small in his presence.

After Newt had recovered from his meltdown – wholly embarrassed from the entire encounter and refusing to talk about it – they had meandered down into the suitcase. Alma immediately launched into such a successive set of apologies, having apparently clumsily tripped over a pair of shoes and knocked poor Jacob over into the pans hanging on the nearby wall, that she nearly passed out from sheer lack of breathing. Once she had quieted down, Jacob had readily taken her place apologizing since the entire thing wouldn’t have happened had he been more careful.

Tina, at least, had lingered silently in the background, nodding in agreement.

Facing a sudden barrage of noise and endless apologies so soon after his momentary experience with catastrophe, Newt had shrunk into himself, smiling his awkward get-me-the-hell-out-of-here smile. Credence had only just opened his mouth to suggest clearing the kitchen so that he could get a start on an early lunch-…

Only for Theseus to have already slipped on an apron and switched on the stove.

Credence narrowed his eyes at the branches hanging above him and covered his mouth, muffling his scream of shame and frustration. The ground trembled violently underneath him. The closest branch loudly snapped and crashed down, falling before his feet.

He hated him.

Absolutely hated him!

Especially since Theseus’ improvised lunch had been the most delicious thing he had ever eaten in his life. Enough that Credence had shyly requested seconds after everyone else at the table had finished their thirds.

That was only the beginning, though.

Because as much as Credence avoided Theseus these past couple of days, Theseus seemed prone to follow him everywhere.
Whenever Credence attempted to escape by using his creature chores as an excuse, Theseus promptly requested that he join him; and, Credence couldn’t exactly tell him no because there was no real reason for him not to. So, Theseus often joined him on his ventures helping him lug food around and clean the various habitats. He studied Newt’s animals and asked questions about each and every one of them.

Credence had suggested directing his questions to Newt since he was literally the best expert in his field but, Theseus had curtly responded that he specifically wanted to know what Credence thought. He had been taught by Newt himself and, since Credence was so important to his dear brother, he wanted to know more through his point of view.

Credence couldn’t exactly say no to that either.

He supposed… that Credence could tolerate his questions and occasional tagging along. He supposed that he could try his best to get along with him. Credence knew that he was being unreasonable, and it wasn’t Theseus’ fault that he just bristled in his presence.

But then… Theseus just couldn’t stop outshining him.

When they had visited the Niffler the day after Theseus arrived, Credence had offered the creature a nickel as per usual. Theseus, following his lead, had produced an entire Galleon from his pocket and outstretched his palm with the shining coin inside.

Only for a small hand that hadn’t belonged to the Niffler before them to greedily shoot out and snatch it away. Before Credence could fully realize what was going on, his nickel had been promptly abandoned – forgotten – amongst the shiny treasures and two small, black bodies began fighting and rolling around the golden horde over the wizarding currency.

Two Nifflers.

How had they possibly overlooked two Nifflers inside the suitcase? How in the world had Newt missed it?

And then if that startling revelation hadn’t been enough, the tussling Nifflers unearthed something vastly more peculiar and unexpected underneath the mass of gold coins and sparkling jewels and pilfered trinkets. Theseus swiftly reached inside and retrieved a small, palm-sized egg.

And there were, at least, a dozen more inside.

When they had shared their discovery with Newt, his meadow green eyes had nearly burst out of his head.

And then, he had taken both Nifflers into his loving arms (much to their chagrin) and twirled them around and around in sheer, utter delight and unfathomable glee because he was going to be a Mummy again! And this time, instead of Occamy hatchlings or Kraken infants, it was to Niffler babies! This most certainly had been the most exciting news he had heard next to Jacob’s revelation that Frank had a partner in Arizona and—

Credence closed his eyes tightly shut, pinching the bridge of his nose.

Everything had only gotten worse from there.

Because today…

Today, Theseus had accompanied him to the Bowtruckle’s tree.
Credence had been in a particularly happy mood that mid-morning – one that he believed that not even Theseus could ruin by his unwelcome presence. With a handful of freshly picked blueberries and a desire to reward Pickett for nothing more than being his charming self, Credence had even begun happily whistling. Credence just simply liked to dote on him from time to time – as was the case with all the creatures in the suitcase – at least, whenever Pickett wasn’t being a pest.

Sometimes, even when he was, Credence would still sneak him a few blueberries here and there.

But, no. Pickett had actually been somewhat halfway decent lately and was spending more and more time away from his pocket in preference of the Bowtruckle tree with the rest of his family. Surprisingly, Credence didn’t feel a sense of loss but, of accomplishment and pride that his little bug-like friend had gained that sort of confidence in himself. Even Prudence sometimes preferred hanging around Pickett here instead of resting on Credence’s lapel.

The moment Credence had arrived within their line of sight, Prudence had rustled her wings happily and flew down to him. He had smiled – oblivious to what was to come next – and had immediately outstretched his palm to meet her halfway—

But then, Theseus had peered around his shoulder. And Prudence blew past Credence – her wings ghosting across his cheek – and landed on Theseus’ nose.

Credence slowed to a gradual halt mere inches away from his destination – momentarily frozen out of pure shock, having been ignored by the very companion who had been there by his side from the beginning of his journey.

Pickett quickly squeaked upon his arrival, and Credence’s hopes rose for a few precious seconds, only for Pickett to use Credence’s shoulder as leverage to get to Theseus. All the other Bowtruckles cooed in a similar manner from their respective branches and hurriedly began climbing down.

But, not for him.

No, of course not. Who would need Credence when they had Theseus fucking Scamander around?

His hand dropped to his side, the fruit falling onto the dirt.

And Credence slowly turned around, pure hate and loathing raging deep within his eyes… smoldering with matching guilt because it wasn’t Theseus’ fault, and quietly excused himself saying that he really ought to practice his magic.

Which was how he found himself here now, in the forest, all alone.

Credence released another rage-filled scream of frustration and anger and every negative emotion that ate away at his heart ever since Theseus showed up at the door. He bent halfway over, his scarred hands clenched into vicious claws, as he shouted and seethed into the emptied trees around him.

He hated this side of himself. He hated the fury and the wrath and the dark, despicable part of himself buried deep within his wretched soul that Grindelwald had seen and encouraged – had reached out and squeezed until Credence found himself utterly devoted and at his mercy. Credence desired nothing more than to unleash everything he had upon Theseus just like he had on those cruel, wicked men in New York.

On his own Mother.
And they had all turned up dead.

A booming, ear-shattering crack tore through the forest, a powerful gust of wind trembling through the trees – the aftermath of a destruction that Credence hadn’t seen but, undoubtedly, caused.

Credence paused and pressed his trembling hands against his face, horrified at all the evil thoughts swimming around his head because, yes, certain things about Theseus’ personality and the way he presented himself irked the hell out of him but… they weren’t major flaws. He wasn’t cruel and conniving or intentionally mean. He was a good man and Newt adored him.

He forced a shaking breath past his lips, attempting to calm himself down.

Damn it.

His raw, emotional magic should have calmed down at least a smidgen – the teeniest fraction of a fraction – now that Credence regularly used his wand. He had finally discovered an outlet and yet…

Yet, his magic was as uncontrolled as ever and it terrified him. He hated it. He hated himself. He hated the Obscurus eating away at the ocean within him yet, not making a damned dent in his seemingly unlimited power—

The unnatural rumbling returned.

Credence clenched his teeth and forced himself to breathe.

In and out.

Everything was fine.

In and out.

Everything was going to work out. It might take time. It might take effort. But, everything would eventually work out okay.

In and out.

He just had to be patient a little while longer. He just had to trust in Newt. He just had to trust in himself.

In and out.

All that Credence needed to do, was simply breathe.

Credence slowly sat down on the forest floor and crossed his legs underneath him. He smoothed back his hair, unwrapping the silver ribbon from his wrist and tying his curls into a neat bow resting at the nape of his neck.

He pulled out his wand from the interior of his sleeve.

And accessed that ocean of darkness and magic inside him.

He just needed a drop. A single drop.

And it was awful of Credence to complain about – he realized – but, it was really more difficult than he imagined it to be because separating one… itty-bitty, utterly insignificant drop from an entire sea of pure magic was just— just-—!!!
He sighed.

All that Credence wanted to do was conquer a simple levitation spell. That was it. He couldn’t proceed forward until he learned it – mastered it – just out of… of principle and, perhaps, slightly out of pride. If he truly wanted to learn everything he could about magic, he couldn’t just abandon spells and concepts halfway through because they ended in disaster.

Credence outstretched his wand at the fallen branch before him.

He felt his magic responding, flowing through his arm like a gentle stream.

Or, rather, more like a decimated dam unleashing a massive wave of watery hell and imminent annihilation.

Credence ground his teeth together and reigned that destructive force in, concentrating on forming that roiling power into a delicate trickle as it crashed and slammed through his veins—

“Wingardium leviosa.”

The branch trembled for a moment – causing Credence to briefly wonder if, by some sort of miracle, he had channeled too little magic into it – when it suddenly skyrocketed into the air farther and faster than the eye could follow.

Credence scowled. Theseus had probably mastered this spell before he could even walk.

He pinched the bridge of his nose and stuffed his wand back into his sleeve. He shouldn’t compare himself to him. Credence had only started his magical education a couple months ago whereas Theseus had been exposed to this wonderful, magnificent world since he was born. He had had his entire life to master magic.

So, if Credence looked at this reasonably, sending the tree branch flying off was an improvement. At least he hadn’t uprooted an entire tree this time around.

In some sudden twist of ironic fate and narrative coincidence, an acorn suddenly slammed into his forehead.

“T’ve apologized over a hundred times already.” Credence groaned, rubbing the reddening mark developing across his skin. This was exactly what he needed. An old grudge reappearing on a day where he wasn’t in the mood for such trifles. “I’ve given you treats. I’ve giving you offerings. I’ve given you gifts. I fixed your tree and done every single possible thing I could think of to please you and make this right… and you’re still mad? What more do you want from me? What more do I have to give?”

The entire colony of forest sprites – over three or four dozen of them – slowly floated out from the bushes and branches and leaves and trees.

All armed with acorns in hand.

*Shit*—

Credence scrambled onto his feet and ran, acorns slamming into his back.

He hated this.

He hated hated hated hated this.
He was absolutely pathetic and miserable, and it didn’t help in the goddamned slightest that Theseus fucking Scamander made him feel all the more worthless because he was everything that a proper wizard ought to be. Everything that Credence could have been had he a normal wizarding life with loving magical parents and doting siblings and an actual education. Theseus was poised and controlled. Beloved by creatures. Intuitive. Observant. A genuine natural at everything he expressed even the mildest interest in.

Everything that Credence wasn’t.

Credence was just… a disaster waiting to happen. A disaster that had actually happened – on multiple occasions no less. He was dangerous. Uncontrolled and could explode at a moment’s notice. Some of Newt’s precious creatures liked him, yes, but the sprites despised him; and, Theseus had made it evidently clear that each and every one of the magical beasts contained within this blasted suitcase preferred him over little, insignificant Credence.

Even worse, practicing and grasping magic and spells was proving more difficult than he imagined it to be and Grindelwald was on his trail and causing trouble and countless deaths like the innocent children Elena and Faustina and…

Credence found himself entering the Obscurus’ tent.

The bitter winter air stung his cheek.

Contrasting heavily with the warm tears falling down his face.

He wiped his eyes with the edge of his Slytherin green sleeve and collapsed down onto the freshly fallen snow underneath the whirling orb of living darkness. He buried his face into his hands and trembled – not from the cold, but from overwhelming feeling.

God, he was pitiful.

“… Credence?”

He automatically stiffened.

Great.

Just great.

“Hello Theseus.”

“Do you mind if I come over there?”

Credence scowled for what seemed like the hundredth time that day.

Yes.

Oh yes, he minded quite a lot and, in fact, he would much rather prefer that Theseus left him alone altogether to wallow in his solitude and self-pity.

“I suppose,” Credence found himself quietly saying instead, hugging his knees against his chest, “I don’t see why not.”

Silent as a ghost, Theseus closed the distance between them and sat down beside him. Credence cast a begrudging glance towards his unwanted companion and found himself unsurprised that Theseus even sat down perfectly.
“Credence,” Theseus addressed him carefully, “You don’t like me very much.”

It wasn’t a question.

Credence shamefully averted his gaze and rested his forehead against his knees, mumbling out, “I’m sorry.”

“It’s unnecessary to apologize. No, it’s… understandable,” Theseus curtly replied, “It happens more frequently than you might think.”

“But, you’ve done nothing to deserve it.”

“And that is exactly the reason why it’s understandable,” he heard Theseus exhale – so softly that Credence might have even considered it a sigh. “Don’t be fooled. I’m more than well-aware of my natural predisposition towards excellence. I’ve succeeded in every endeavor I’ve attempted. I’ve never had to try – seriously put effort into anything I do – and that… frustrates people. I know this quite well especially since Newt-…”

Credence looked up in just enough time to witness genuine emotion – something completely frazzled and uncontrolled – enter Theseus’ miraculously blue eyes only for the man to turn his head away to hide it.

“Especially since my brother has such a difficult time with everything. It… isn’t fair.”

“I’m aware.”

Theseus scoffed (and was that a self-deprecating tone Credence detected or wishful thinking?) and ran his hand through his well-coiffured hair.

Somehow, even after the invasive action, it still seemed perfectly untouched.

“Here I am complaining about being too perfect,” Theseus responded, most definitely sighing, “No wonder you hate me so much.”

“I don’t hate you, Theseus.”

“Highly dislike then.”

The corners of Credence’s lips involuntarily quirked upwards.

“Highly dislike is a good description for it,” Credence agreed, resting his cheek against his knees and turning his attention completely onto Theseus now, “I still feel horrible about it though. Whenever I’m around you, I just… I don’t know. I’m reminded of how inadequate I am. But, that isn’t just because you’re here.”

“Then what is it about?”

“I’m too powerful,” Credence finally revealed what he already suspected – what remained unspoken even between him and Newt, “I’m… abnormal. Bizarre. I have far too much magic – enough that not even an Obscurus could consume it all and kill me – and because of it… I have Grindelwald tracking me wherever I go, wanting me for a power that I have no control over.”

Credence outstretched a hand before him, gazing upon his scars scattered across his palm.

“I-… I’ve been trying,” he frowned, “Every single day, I try. I fall asleep every night with a different textbook between my hands and everything about me remains the same.”
Credence allowed his hand to fall and buried his face back between his knees.

“I know a few spells,” he continued, his voice muffled, “Domestic ones without any practical use in the real world. But, any time I try something more… I channel too much magic into it and they backfire in my face.”

“Surely you must have improved somewhere,” Theseus insisted, “All that practice necessitates some award – no matter how small.”

“I mean…,” Credence reluctantly confessed, “I uprooted an entire tree the last time I attempted a levitation spell. I managed to float just a branch this time around.”

“Credence, that’s wonderful!”

Credence lifted his head just to frown at him, “It hasn’t come down yet.”

And in that moment, the tree branch Credence had attempted to simply levitate earlier in the enchanted forest came tumbling down, landing between them in the snow.

“Oh,” Credence blinked, “There it is.”

“It’s…,” Theseus quirked up a brow, “…not supposed to go that fast.”

“Trust me,” he groaned at the reminder, burying his face in his hands, “I know.”

“Regardless, it’s something,” Theseus scooted closer, emphasizing, “Surely, though… you must have improved elsewhere, Credence.”

“I managed to take control of the Obscurus for the first time about a week or so ago.”

“Credence…,” Theseus breathed, “That’s fantastic!”

“I don’t know…”

“Credence, in the entire documented history of known Obscurials, not a single one has managed to accomplish what you’ve just told me,” Theseus insisted, glancing back towards the floating orb before them, “… Newt tried to get them to do the same thing. But, they were too young and too… scared. Their magic couldn’t cope until…”

Credence didn’t know how to respond to that.

“But, Credence…,” Theseus continued, “You’ve managed to do what was once considered impossible. If that’s not impressive, I don’t what is.”

Credence glanced away, smiling just a little bit, “… thank you.”

Momentary silence grew between them. One that was neither uncomfortable nor comfortable – rather, something that just… was.

A couple minutes passed in the cold until Theseus finally spoke once more.

“You think it’s suspicious that I managed to find you so easily, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Do you remember that wizarding town nearby? Perhaps an hour or two worth of a walk from
“Here?” Theseus droned, “There were reports of an Obscurus attack and, given that your last known whereabouts were around this general part of Italy, I figured that it must be you. There’s no such things as coincidences.”

“Oh…,” Credence muttered guiltily, “That was my fault.”

“I imagined it was, hence the situation we’re in right now,” Theseus paused, strangely hesitating, “But, I must confess… Tracking you down and helping my brother is only half of the reason why I’m here.”

“Is that so?”

“I need your help, Credence.”

Theseus had his full attention now.

“I assume you already know about Grindelwald’s latest attack?” Theseus inquired, clarifying a second later, “The one on The Wailing Whirlwind?”

Credence’s mood darkened, his hands involuntarily clenching.

“I’ll take that as a yes,” Theseus confirmed and elegantly rose to his feet, clasping his hands firmly behind his back while gazing out unto the winter horizon, “I glanced over the roster of guests on that ship and discovered something… peculiar. A young girl from New York sailing across the ocean unaccompanied. Modesty Barebone.”

Everything inside Credence froze at those two words.

“She wasn’t among those who were, unfortunately, killed during the incident; however, she is… missing,” Theseus frowned ever so slightly, “After conducting a small investigation into the matter, I discovered that Grindelwald had taken Graves’ face again. A face that, I believe, your sister already knew and trusted. He used that to his advantage and… took her. I imagine he’s plotting to use her to get to you.”

No.

Credence slid his hands down his face, rendered speechless in his unfathomable shock and horror.

Modesty.

Not Modesty.

He hadn’t thought—

Hadn’t even considered that she would be in danger.

“I presented my findings to my colleagues but, no one within the Ministry will help coordinate a rescue mission for just one Muggle – especially one related to a… controversial figure. They suggested quite the opposite, in fact. Declaring that this might be a good opportunity to lure you and Newt out into the open. It would be killing two birds with one stone. Grab you and Newt. Capture Grindelwald after. I protested but, no one would listen,” Theseus knelt back down beside him and, after a moment’s hesitation, placed his hand upon Credence’s back, “She was trying to find you, you know.”

Oh God.
Credence was going to be sick.

“I can’t… do this alone, Credence,” Theseus’ voice grew ever so slightly softer, pleading, “If I went after her myself, she would only run straight into Grindelwald’s hands. I’m an unfamiliar face threatening to take her from a world of safety. If you were there though…”

“…Anything,” Credence all but whispered, gazing up at him, “Whatever you need, I’ll do anything you ask. Just-… Just save my little sister.”

Newt and Credence lounged together in their meadow.

It looked completely different – and maintained an entirely contrasting atmosphere – in the daylight from the way it did in the middle of the night. Instead of a swirling palette of royal blues and decadent violets, it was comprised predominately of the most stunning green Newt had ever laid eyes upon. It was one of the many reasons why he had fallen in love with this place the first time he had stumbled upon it – rendered completely starstruck by the masterful brush of color.

In the evening, their meadow resembled a painting by the brilliant Van Gogh himself.

But, during the day? It was a picture straight out of Monet’s garden.

Peaceful, quiet, and sublime.

Newt sighed contentedly – completely relaxed within this rare tranquil moment – and watched the clouds gingerly floating through the pastel sky of muted yellows, pinks, oranges, and violets as the sun gracefully set in the distant horizon.

Credence curled into his chest beside him, his eyes closed, and his lightly pinkened cheek pressed against Newt’s bicep. Newt smiled softly and lazily caressed his hair, twirling around the impossibly black strands between his fingers and admiring the silky soft texture.

This relaxed moment was exactly what he’d needed after the tumultuous week they’d had.

After seeing Theseus again for the first time in what seemed like forever and facing all the unpleasant memories – all the uncomfortable, half-buried feelings and unspoken sentiments – that had arisen because of it-…

Newt loved his brother. Truly. And he couldn’t deny that their relationship was far better now than it had ever been before but…

“Credence?” Newt softly interrupted the peaceful silence, “Do you think the others like him more than me?”

“Hmm?”

“Theseus,” Newt clarified, “Now that everyone’s met my brother-… I-… I’m nothing when compared to him.”

“Newt, you’re everything,” Credence’s eyes fluttered open and gazed up at him, “We all became friends with you because we like you exactly for who you are – not for who you’re not. To be perfectly honest, I prefer you over Theseus. It’s because you’re imperfect, that you’re perfect.”
“That makes no sense.”

“Yes, it does. Newt, I like you because you try your hardest in everything you do,” Credence hummed thoughtfully, “When you took me here that one night… I thought it was the most perfect thing ever because it had you written all over it. I liked that you stepped on my foot because you didn’t know how to dance. If Theseus had coordinated that night… it would have been too perfect. Too effortless. It wouldn’t have had any snags and that’s were all the fun is. If you had made it perfect, Newt, then we never would’ve laughed as much as we did.”

Credence smiled and lazily wiggled his fingers into his side, Newt flinching and clamping his mouth shut to muffle his giggles.

“And,” Credence emphasized, “I never would have found out that you’re ticklish.”

“I don’t know. I could have done without that.”

“Oh hush. You like it.”

“I love it,” Newt agreed and squeezed Credence against him, burying his face into his hair, “I like you, Credence.”

“I like you too, Newt.”

They relaxed there in their meadow as the sky gradually darkened around them, taking silent comfort in each other. Recuperating from their exhausting day – the entire week, more like – from just being in each other’s presence.

Until Credence shifted uncomfortably beside him.

“Newt…,” his already softened voice turning quieter than even a whisper, filled with a rather worrisome type of hesitation, “I… I have something to tell you.”

“Go on.”

“Modesty is in trouble.”

Newt’s hand froze in Credence’s hair.

“Grindelwald… He’s… he’s taken her. She was on that ship, Newt. Alone. Determined to find me at whatever cost because I had left her behind. And he saw her and took Graves’ face again and he took her just to get to me,” Credence hid his face behind his shaking hands, “And it’s all my fault.”

“Credence…”

They would figure something out. Surely there must be some way of rescuing little Modesty Barebone without endangering anyone. It would be risky, and it would take time – certainly – but, there must be something that they could do.

“Newt, I have to go get her.”

“Credence,” Newt carefully sat up and gazed down at him, sympathetic and understanding, “That’s impossible right now. We’ll get her – you have my word that we’ll do everything we can to help – but, we’ve talked about this before. If we just wait to recruit other people-…”

“She’s waited long enough for me, Newt!” Credence jumped up to his feet and whirled around on him, eyes blazing with that stubborn determination that Newt knew was nearly impossible to talk out
of, “I can’t stand by and let Modesty be… be with him for any longer. You don’t know what he’s like. The thoughts he can put into her head… She’s stubborn but, not even she can resist his influence for so long.”

“Credence,” Newt stood and reached out to touch his shoulders, “If Grindelwald took Modesty then, he took her for a reason. He wants you there and what better way to lure you out into open than to kidnap your sister? You can’t do this alone.”

“I won’t be alone if you come with me,” Credence insisted, “We have Tina and Theseus and everyone here with us. He was defeated before-…”

“Because he was pretending to be someone else and we caught him off guard!” Newt exclaimed. He had to talk Credence out of this. Had to keep him away from this decision that would cost him everything if he chose to go through with it. “It won’t be so easy again, Credence. He’ll already be expecting us. He’ll be expecting you.”

“Theseus has already agreed to come and help me.”

Newt froze.

Something strange and unknown in his heart cracking.

“Newt, I’ve already made up my mind. We’re leaving tonight.”

No.

“Once we have Modesty safe and sound, we’ll come right back. I swear,” Credence pleaded, reaching down and taking his hands into his, squeezing, “Newt, please. Come with me. I… I have to do this.”

“No. No, I wouldn’t,” Newt affirmed and pulled away from his grasp, shaking his head in disapproval, “He would throttle me where I stood for playing right into Grindelwald’s plans. Credence, I can’t let you go. I can’t let you do this.”

“Credence,” Newt breathed, uncharacteristically quiet, “This… this is suicide.”

“This is my little sister,” Credence insisted, “You would do the same for Theseus if the situation were reversed.”

“No. No, I wouldn’t,” Newt affirmed and pulled away from his grasp, shaking his head in disapproval, “He would throttle me where I stood for playing right into Grindelwald’s plans. Credence, I can’t let you go. I can’t let you do this.”

Credence pressed his lips into a thin line and stepped backwards.

“This is my decision, Newt. Not yours.”

“If you go, you’ll die.”

“Perhaps. But, at least… I will have tried,” Credence’s impossibly dark eyes softened, tugging at Newt’s already broken heartstrings, before turning away, “I thought that you would have too.”

And then, Credence ran urgently back towards the barn with a certain sense of… finality about it. If Credence was leaving with Theseus tonight to rescue Modesty, then that meant…

That meant…

No.

“Credence!” Newt chased after his disappearing figure through the meadow, through the trees, and
through the farm. Not caring about the branches scratching across his face. Not caring that he stumbled and fell over the roots. He ran without any consideration towards himself – running as if this was his last chance to change fate itself – because if Credence left now—… “Credence, wait!”

Credence didn’t dare look back.

Newt quickly closed in on him, hand outstretched towards his Slytherin green coat.

He tightly grabbed onto the back, intending to stop him and talk more about this; but, Credence, what with his penchant towards leaving his coat constantly unbuttoned, slipped his arms out of it and continued to run.

Newt fell backwards onto the ground – both him and Credence’s coat abandoned – as he watched in horrified silence as Credence ran straight towards the already patiently waiting Theseus beside the side of the barn.

“Credence!” Newt called out to him – his voice cracking from his pleas – and hurriedly pulled himself back onto his feet, “Credence, wait!”

But then, of course Alma – of all people – had to come running up to him from the herb garden once she saw him pass by.

“Yes now!” she insisted and grabbed onto his arm with a surprising strength that Newt never would have expected from her, “It’s about Theseus.”

“I was tending to the herbs and keeping track of our supplies, as you told me to, when I noticed that…,” Alma hesitated now, her gaze flickering towards Theseus in the distance, “Certain… types were running low.”

No.

This couldn’t mean what he thought it was.

“And what…,” Newt swallowed thickly, “What does that have to do with my brother?”

“That’s the thing, Newt. I… I don’t think that’s your brother.”

No.

No no no no!!

“All the ingredients that were gone…,” Alma continued.
Newt turned slowly around, catching a glimpse of Theseus’ triumphant grin before he apparated away.

With Credence in tow.

Newt fell to his knees. He was too late.

“Were all the ingredients for a Polyjuice potion.”

Credence was heartbroken.

While he and Newt certainly had their disagreements from time to time, never before had they fought like… like that. Never had they strayed apart from one another instead of finding some sort of alternative – some middle ground – where they could both agree.

Perhaps even more painfully agonizing than that… Credence was disappointed that Newt hadn’t even tried to listen to him – at least, that’s the way it felt like to him. He had ignorantly thought that Newt would have understood where he was coming from and – even if he hadn’t – would have at least joined him instead of letting Credence continue forward alone.

But, Newt…

Newt had abandoned him during his time of need. Had told him no, had told him to wait when pleading – begging – for his help.

“You’ll make up eventually.” Theseus soothed, placing a strong and comforting hand upon Credence’s defeated shoulder, “Once we’ve retrieved Modesty, we’ll return to the barn immediately. Newt will be upset for a couple days but, he’ll get over it.”

“I’ve never seen him like that before,” Credence whispered, his eyes miserably cast down and focusing upon his pathetic reflection gazing back up – judgmental – at him from the dulled shine of his leather shoes, “We don’t fight. Never. At least… not like that. And I’ve… never been away from him like this before…”

“Arguing every once in a while is healthy,” Theseus reassured, “And independence – even from your closest of friends – is something to be encouraged, not suppressed.”

Credence wasn’t certain that he agreed.

He reluctantly tore away his gaze from the cobblestone street and focused on the lone two-story building looming in front of them, shrouded almost completely in shadow by the darkness of the evening. Credence wasn’t certain of his location – whether they remained in Italy or were someplace else entirely – aside from the fact that it wasn’t in a city. It wasn’t even in a town or village but, the outskirts of the countryside in a tiny farming community where there couldn’t be more than five or six people residing.

It was quiet.

With all the lights shut off except one.

Credence broke the silence, “Is that where he is?”
Theseus pulled away and fixed his pin-striped jacket, meticulously smoothing down the sides, “Yes."

“Where is everyone else?” Credence questioned, his brows furrowing as he gestured towards the building, “Shouldn’t he have followers? Guards or… or something surrounding the perimeter?”

“Grindelwald is a very secretive wizard,” Theseus answered, “He doesn’t like anyone – let alone his followers – knowing where he sleeps.”

“O-oh.”

Credence twiddled his thumbs together, uncomfortable without Newt here beside him. He hated this. Hated being alone but… it had to be done.

For Modesty’s sake.

“So…,” Credence rolled his shoulders back and straightened his posture, “What do we do now?”

“You mentioned that you have control over the Obscurus.”

“I’ve…,” he hesitated, uneasy with the direction this was going, “…I’ve only done that once.”

“I believe you’re overdue for a second attempt.”

“Theseus, I don’t–… I don’t know if I’m alright with that,” Credence confessed, forcefully ignoring every screaming sense inside him warning him to back out of this rash, impossible endeavor now before he made some horrible mistake, “I don’t know if I can do it again and, it would frighten Modesty. She’s already seen me like that twice now and both times she was terrified; and, she’s not easily scared. Trust me.”

“And yet, Modesty still crossed an entire ocean by herself to find you,” Theseus pointed out, narrowing his eyes firmly at the apartment in front of him – growing strangely impatient, “She needs you right now, Credence. Once you distract Grindelwald, I’ll go inside and grab her; then, we’ll apparate out of here and you can reunite with Newt and make amends.”

“I-…”

“Credence, the longer we dilly-dally, the quicker we compromise our position! We have to act now or never,” Theseus snapped.

Credence flinched backwards from his outburst, stepping away from Theseus and glancing back at the quiet building.

Theseus pinched the bridge of his nose, forcing out a frustrated sigh, “I… I apologize. I just… can’t do this without your help.”

Theseus… needed his help. Not only that, by the sound of the growing restlessness in his voice, he was desperate. If Theseus Scamander, of all people, couldn’t complete this mission without him – if he couldn’t rescue Modesty without Credence’s aid – then that could indicate just how urgent the situation truly was since Theseus could probably defeat Grindelwald himself with his hands tied behind his back, he was so damned perfect.

Besides, Credence was already here.

And… he had already failed Modesty once before. Abandoned her when she had needed him most. Credence wasn’t going to make the same mistake twice.
“O-okay…. I’ll do it,” Credence closed his eyes and breathed deeply, “Please stand back. I don’t want you to get hurt.”

Without giving himself any time to hesitate or second-guess his decision – committing himself fully to saving Modesty no matter the cost – Credence brought forward every single horrible memory, every instance of betrayal, every experience with Mother and Grindelwald, every feeling of pain and agony and inadequacy and despair and fear and rage-…

He thought about Modesty cowering in absolute terror at the mere sight of him that time they’d seen each other last. He thought about the pure fear circling inside her wide, innocent eyes and that frightening scream escaping her lips. He thought about that horrified look on Tina’s face – crashing down with despair and regret – as she helplessly watched him get destroyed. He thought of Newt and how he had looked a mere two minutes ago, gazing up at Credence in disappointment-…

The familiar darkness swept over him, pulling him under deep underneath the crashing waves.

But, this time, he was not alone.

Because Credence clung onto the memory of Hope. He clung onto Pickett and Prudence. He clung onto his sisters. He clung onto Tina, Jacob, Alma, and Queenie, all working together in tandem to lift him out of the darkness into the shining light. Credence reached out of the watery depths and grasped onto Newt’s outstretched hand, gazing into his smiling face as he glowed with such magnificent brilliance that it dispelled everything bad from the good.

Happiness from despair.

Somewhere within the back of his mind, Credence wondered whether this was, perhaps, the reason why Obscurials never managed to conquer the parasite eating away at their life and soul. Perhaps it was because they were so overwhelmed with the agony found within their tragic, miserable lives that they had lost themselves within this ocean of darkness. They had never found the opportunity to be free. Never had the chance to live.

Never had the moment to find the good – to experience love and kindness and friendship – to balance out their pain.

Credence surfaced and found himself watching the world through a gray-tinted veil.

And he thrust forwards towards the apartment, channeling all his strength and power and magic onto one, single important task: Get rid of Grindelwald.

Credence pummeled through the flat – the Obscurus howling in rage and fury – and blasted every single window into a million pieces. He shattered the closest wall blocking his way into the bedroom – crumbling bricks into powder and dust – and caused the roof to collapse over him; but, it only passed through Credence like a mortal hand through the body of a ghost.

Grindelwald – cowardly maintaining the face of the Auror Percival Graves – whirled around from Modesty who immediately sat up in bed. She looked positively awful. Downright ill given from the pale, green complexion of her skin.

That only managed to enrage Credence further.

With merely a thought, the Obscurus violently flung Grindelwald away from her into a wooden desk, causing the shelf of bottled potions and miscellaneous ingredients to crash and shatter around him.
But, Modesty had already fallen underneath his charming, deceptive spell since she quickly hopped out of bed and bolted to Grindelwald’s side.

Credence was seconds away from lashing out again when something… completely unexpected occurred: Grindelwald flung his arms wide open and pulled Modesty tightly against his chest, curling around her and turning his back to Credence.

Grindelwald… was protecting her.

What…

What was going on?

Suddenly, a stinging spell crashed into Credence and he swirled around, lashing out defensively against his attacker.

Only to furiously slam Theseus Scamander into the floor.

Credence hesitated.

He didn’t know what to do, what to think.

Something was wrong here.

Terribly wrong.

“Theyseus!” Modesty cried out, frantically scrambling from Grindelwald’s tight embrace to his fallen figure just as the wall to the kitchen crumbled to pieces.

And Credence saw Theseus’ perfect doppelganger helping an unconscious man out of a chair.

Theseus met his gaze.

His eyes the coldest shade of gray.

His well-coiffured auburn hair growing and turning into wild, curly blonde locks.

Everything about him changed until it was no longer Theseus standing before him but Munin.

Credence reformed slowly – the spiraling wisps of darkness and rage condensing down into one, single form – and collapsed upon his hands and knees. “You…,” he whispered, staring in pure and utter betrayal, “You… tricked me… You said… You said…”

“It’s as you told Newt before, Credence,” Munin’s cruel, rasping voice clawed against his eardrums, revealing to his horror that she had been watching – spying – upon their fight so that she could sweep in at the last possible moment outside the barn and whisk Credence away before he had any time to doubt himself, “If it was his brother in trouble, he would’ve done anything to rescue them.”

“Yeah, which is exactly what I’m doing, you bitch,” Modesty climbed onto the chair behind the witch, having quietly snuck through the rubble and debris while Munin had taunted Credence with her deceitful success, and slammed a metal pan into the back of Munin’s head.

Silence spread across the destroyed apartment as everyone still conscious watched Munin collapse to the floor.

Grindelwald – or rather actual Auror Percival Graves – immediately sprang towards her, retrieving
his wand from the interior of his sleeve and casting a spell to restrain Munin and her brother before checking over Modesty.

Modesty didn’t even cast a sparing glance at him, her eyes focusing instead on her fallen brother across the room.

“Credence.”

“… Modesty…,” he whispered quietly.

She smirked and cocked her head to the side, placing a hand upon her hip, “Nice to see you’re still an idiot.”

Chapter End Notes

Lulling everyone into a sense of gushy, heart-warming safety and bringing everyone together only to tear them apart seconds later, I am so terribly sorry. Newt and Credence feel betrayed by one another. Credence is horrified by what he’s done and by how easily he was tricked by Munin. How will our boys possibly get out of this one this time?

Tune in next time on Green Meadows, Dark Skies to find out!

Oh, look what time it is! The section where I ask how I'm doing with my writing. So, how am I doing, darlings? Is there anything I should work upon improving? Anything that I should include more of? Less of?

And most importantly, please leave your comments and critiques below! They are the lifeblood of this fanfic and it's thanks to commentators like you that we've managed to get this far! So, go on ahead! Write a little blurb below. What has been your favorite chapter so far? What are your predictions for the final showdown? I LOVE to hear from each and every one of you!
It's super late so, I'll update this notes section in the morning.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Modesty.”

Damn that voice.

Damn it all to hell.

How many months had passed since she’d heard Credence whisper her name like that? How long since she’d heard it spoken without terror warbling in that soft, dulcet tone? Without pain? Without anger? Without misery?

How long had it been since she’d last seen her big brother?

Half a year. Perhaps even longer.

Over half a year had passed since Credence had fled – raging and sadder than he’d ever been before – into the night far beyond Modesty’s reach. Over half a year since Mary Lou was buried underneath the cold, dark, unforgiving soil and the weight of her insurmountable sins. Over half a year since Chastity abandoned everything she knew, fleeing into the arms of the covenant. Over half a year since Modesty had been left all alone – homeless, penniless, and without a friend in the world.

But, she’d been here before.

She knew how to survive.

So, Modesty had wormed her way through New York’s polluted streets of smog and smoke and waste, collecting tin cans for coins and stealing bread and crumbs from dumpsters. She’d built cardboard and newspaper shelters within the dark, cold abyss of the metro, wallowing amongst the stink and filth of piss and shit, and sleeping with a knife and curled fists against what disease-ridden and lecherous evils lurked in the shadows of night. She’d celebrated her birthday spitting blood into a sink, triumphant from her latest fight and flight for her life.

She had evaded police – wizard and no-Maj alike – and had searched for new hunting grounds.

She had found Graves.

And she had been introduced to a world of magic and wonder and war.

She had found a family, while searching for a brother.

She had nearly died.

And Modesty Barebone – nine-year-old homeless orphan from the Bronx – would have endured all that and more just for this moment.
Because God in Heaven Above, **Credence was here.**

Just within arm’s reach.

Modesty’s snarking grin faltered, replaced with a trembling lower lip. The pan fell from her limp, uncurled fingers, clattering onto the dust-covered floor.

“**Credence...**”

“I— I’m here, Modesty,” Credence reached out and extended his scar-filled palm to her, seeming tall and magnificent and warm and, goddamnit, safe despite kneeling on the floor with heavily defeated and overburdened shoulders. His impossibly dark, sympathetic eyes filled her with hope. They felt like home. They were—

“I’m not going anywhere,” Credence’s beautifully subdued voice – as sweet and velvety as mahogany teddy bears with great, big scarlet ribbons tied around their necks or fuzzy cashmere blankets or perfectly baked chocolate birthday cakes – softened, “I’m here now.”

Modesty choked on a sob.

She was **home.**

Modesty bolted forward, eyes blurring with a waterfall of burning hot tears, and collapsed onto her knees in front of her big brother Credence. His strong arms quickly wrapped around her and pulled her against his chest. His scarred hands – accustomed to soothing and caring for everyone except himself – ran gently through her hair as if they had always been meant to be there.

“**Credence,**” Modesty violently wept, tugging desperately on the black and white straps of Credence’s undoubtedly expensive waistcoat and burying her splotchy red face against his ivory dress-shirt – not caring that she might stain it with her snot and tears, “I missed you, Credence. I— I missed you **so much.** Don’t leave me again! I can’t— I can’t...”

Credence squeezed her tightly against him, pressing his face against the top of her head.

“**Never,**” he trembled, his promise wet with tears, “I swear.”

“**Credence.**”

It was like no time at all had passed between them. Modesty could blink and, in a moment’s notice, they would be back in the Barebone house of horrors, hiding from Mary Lou’s wrath and embraced on the floor of Credence’s bedroom. He was still that heaven-sent light in the darkness that Modesty could cling onto for comfort and warmth. He was still Credence. He was still her big brother.

God, he even **smelled** the same.

Modesty rubbed her snot-covered face against him, inhaling that familiar perfume that was **Credence.**

A sweet fragrance of mid-morning dew and nectar and wildflower honey.

She never knew how he managed it – smelling of freedom, of love and adventure, of stunning flower-filled meadows; besides, Modesty didn’t make it a habit of smelling people, thank you very much! And, even if she did, it wasn’t like she could readily identify their exact scent.

That was weird.

That belonged only in fantastical books of the most romantic kind and elegant poetry spun by
Renaissance artists towards their fair, golden-haired lovers – not in real life.

But, Credence was special like that.

He belonged in storybooks.

Credence was the hero – the prince charming galloping in on a gallant white horse – in the story of their lives. He was that special slice of hope – the spark of life, the sprout of nature – growing within the dark and despair of the city. That stubborn dandelion peeking out through the cracks of the crumbling sidewalk, reaching for the sun.

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry,” Credence tried muffling his sobs in her hair, “I didn’t know— I thought you were in danger. I never would have— Oh God, what did I do? What have I done? Modesty, I’m so… so sorry.”

“S’okay, you big dummy,” Modesty’s voice painfully scratched, strained from crying and general misuse from that whole Hydra debacle, “I thought that this Graves and your Graves were the same person too at first. But, he’s not, Credence. He’s—”

“I know, I know,” Credence soothed, his shoulders shaking and his voice growing suddenly quiet, “I— How can I ever— I’m so, so sorry about New York, Modesty. About Mother. About leaving you. About— about scaring you.”

An agonized sob broke through Credence’s defenses.

“I didn’t know that I was— I had no idea. None. Had I known, I never would have hurt anyone. Oh God, I never would have killed anyone. Modesty, I swear I never would have scared you—”

“I know, you great big lovable idiot you,” Modesty sniffled, “Don’t you apologize anymore. It’s my turn now. I never should’ve gotten so scared in the first place. You’re my brother, Credence. No matter what happened – no matter who or what you are – I love you. You’re not a monster.”

“But, I am—”

“Then I’m lucky enough to call a monster my family.”

Credence quickly pulled away, his face splotched scarlet and his shadowed eyes swirling lakes of sadness and regret. He stared at Modesty for a second, before a small grin tugged at the corner of his lips.

“You always did want a pet dragon.”

“A pet wyvern,” Modesty corrected, crossing her arms over her chest, “There’s a difference.”

“My mistake,” he laughed and pressed his rough scarred hands against her face, kissing her sweaty forehead and tear-stained cheeks and the reddened tip of her snot-covered nose—

“Ew, Credence.”

“Love you too, Modesty,” Credence teasingly laughed once again, kissing her wet cheek before pulling her back into his arms, “I missed you.”

“I missed you too, you fuckin’ idiot,” she sighed contentedly into his comforting embrace, relaxing at the sound of his strong pitter-pattering heart, “Don’t leave me again.”

“Never.”
“Well, I’ll be damned: the kid has tear ducts,” Graves interrupted gruffly and, just like that, the moment was ruined between them. “I’ve never seen her cry like that before. Usually kicks people in the balls instead.”

“I’ll kick you in the balls if you don’t shut up,” Modesty pulled away just enough from Credence to glare at the grumpy wizard.

But, the insufferable bastard only smirked.

“That’s more like it.”

Modesty scowled.

“You’re an asshole, Mr. Graves.”

“Love you too, kiddo,” he dryly snarked, slipping his hands inside his pockets. A moment passed before his sharp gaze switched from Modesty to Credence, tipping his chin up in the air in intimidating scrutiny, “So… you’re the one everyone’s obsessed over, huh? Credence Barebone.”

“Y-yes, I’m him. I mean, that’s me,” Credence answered, gathering Modesty into his arms as he stood up. He balanced her on his hip like a fretting mother with their youngest child – which she was, of course, a child – but, that didn’t mean Modesty approved of such treatment.

Well, underneath normal circumstances she didn’t.

But, goddamnit, she missed Credence. She missed not having to be strong all the time. She missed being able to act freely like the child she was and not a tiny adult. She missed having someone to worry over and care for her.

She missed having a brother.

So, Modesty supposed, she would award him this one moment as she wrapped her arms around his neck and rested her head upon his shoulder.

“And you must be the— uhm…,” Credence awkwardly looked to the ground, “…r-real Mr. Percival Graves?”

“Mister… Percival Graves?” he sniffed and rolled his eyes, “Just call me Graves.”

“Yes, Mr. Graves.”

“Just Graves.”

“Mr. Graves,” Credence insisted politely – if not a bit meekly, “With all due respect—”

“Uh-uh, you listen to me, kiddo,” Graves stepped forward and pointed sharply at his face, causing Credence to instinctively flinch backwards, “You called that bastard Mr. Graves. So, with all due respect, I insist you call me Graves. I don’t want no one – least of all you – confusing me with that fucker.”

Modesty’s upper lip quickly curled into a vicious snarl to protect her brother. The Credence that she knew and loved – as much as it frustrated her – would have accepted that and demurely acquiesced to Graves’ demands without a fight.

But, Credence surprised her.
“Perhaps I could call you Percival instead?”

Modesty stared—open-mouthed—at his profile.

She took in that cutting jawline, sharp enough to be an Ancient Roman’s sculptor’s masterful slice through the most stubborn block of marble, and high-rounded cheekbones denoting a dignified, if not bourgeois, status. She marveled at that long, curling midnight black hair freed from it’s stupid bowl-cut and pulled back into a practically Victorian-style fashion in a glimmering bow of starlight.

He was… different.

His eyes remained kind and sympathetic but, now they held a certain… confidence. A self-assured stubbornness that wasn’t there before.

Credence stood tall.

Betraying no discomfort except for, perhaps, in the trickery that had gotten him here.

Modesty openly gaped at the stark change in her brother before remembering he had asked Graves a question. She was about to respond, telling that Graves absolutely hated his first name for some bizarre reason, when her companion surprised her too.

“Percival is fine,” Graves grunted, looking away from her blue eyes widened with shock and pure, utter confusion, “But, you’re the only one that gets to call me that so, don’t be getting any ideas, Modesty.”

“What the fuck?!” she exclaimed.

Credence’s brows furrowed, unperturbed by Modesty’s foul language as he glanced between the two, “I don’t understand.”

“He hates his first name!” Modesty gestured outwards at Graves, “Everyone always called him Graves or Mr. Graves. He punched a cabbie once for calling him Percy!”

“Because Percy is an even stupider sounding name than Percival,” Graves’ upper lip curled in foul distaste, “Merlin, I’d rather be called Percival than Percy. Blegh.”

“O-oh,” Credence’s cheeks flushed rouge in embarrassment, shifting awkwardly from foot to foot, “My apologies for suggesting it. I’ll happily call you Graves instead—”

“Kid, if anyone in this blasted, miserable world we call home gets the right to call me Percival, then it’s you, Credence,” Graves’ broad shoulders visibly slumped from some invisible burden and that familiar wearied glint entered his gaze, aging him years before their very eyes, “We both… endured him. We’re closer than fuckin’ family now. We’re bonded, Credence, and there ain’t nothing you can say to convince me otherwise. Don’t fight me on this.”

A moment passed between them.

“… I suppose then,” Credence responded after a moment, stepping forward with the smallest of smiles, “It’s nice to meet you, Percival.”

Graves snorted and turned away to hide his amused smile.

“Likewise, Credence.”

“I wish it would have been underneath better circumstances though. I feel horrible over what
happened. What I’ve done—,” sudden horror flashed over Credence’s face, “Is Theseus alright?”

Oh shit.

Modesty had been so preoccupied with her long-awaited reunion with Credence that she had all but completely forgotten about him. She scrambled down from Credence’s embrace – her bare feet touching the dust-covered floor – and scampered towards where Theseus had fallen unconscious—

Only to witness the carelessly forgotten wizard in question slowly picking himself back up – his shoulders heavy and body violently shaking – with his wand outstretched threateningly at Credence.

Modesty halted.

Rage.

She found blinding, unadulterated rage blazing within his normally so well-composed eyes. Theseus’ split lip curled menacingly, his perfect teeth stained with blood as he demanded,

“Where is my brother?”

Credence flinched backwards, stumbling over nothing more than his own two feet and coming crashing down onto the floor; but, he didn’t so much as react to the pain radiating up his hip until he practically felt it throbbing in his teeth. No, instead he stared wide-eyed up at Theseus in instinctive fear and raised his hands defensively over his face.

That was until he remembered that he was a wizard too, damn it.

He should pull out his wand. It was right there in his sleeve, patiently awaiting his call.

Goddamnit Credence, pull out your damned wand and defend yourself! That wonderfully stiff, 15-inch cedar wand with a unicorn hair core that you were so proud of! Move, damn it. Move! Do something!

God, was he pathetic.

He really ought to be used to having wands pointed threateningly at him by now. Ought to be used to witches and wizards being afraid of or angry with him within an instant after meeting him and acting out carelessly based upon it.

He shouldn’t cower every time he saw a wand.

Shouldn’t be reminded of New York.

Shouldn’t be reminded of that subway.

“Where is my brother?” Theseus repeated slowly – dangerously – with a low hiss, nothing about his haggard demeanor resembling the fake-Theseus that Credence had spent the past few days with.

He looked exactly the same, of course. So much like Newt and yet so different all the same. His coiffured auburn hair messy from being thrown recklessly across the room from Credence’s
unwarranted attack. His torn lip dribbling blood down his chin and a nasty greenish-blue bruise swelling painfully above his brow.

Theseus looked like one of Newt’s creatures when they were afraid – lashing out in defense in the only way they knew how.

With tooth and claw.

Credence knew how he should react and yet…

“Where is Arty?” Newt’s brother snarled, his formidable wand wavering in the air not from hesitation but, from the too-firm grip on the handle that bordered on snapping the wood in half,

“What happened to my little brother? Why isn’t he here?”

Credence retracted further and further into himself with Theseus’ each and every advance. Melting into the floorboards like the pathetic, whimpering puddle of cowardice he was. He needed Prudence here to flutter in front of his face. He needed Pickett to pat his scarred knuckles and Newt to call out his name and tell him to breathe—

“Answer me!”

Theseus reached forward.

Credence’s eyes slammed shut.

Newt, help—

Credence tried to catch his breath. Tried to expand his constricted lungs and breathe in and out and calm himself down and ground himself in reality and not drown in that wicked ocean of pain and fear and—

He trembled, feeling the black wisps peeling off his fingers.

“Leave my big brother alone.”

Modesty’s small hand slipped into his and squeezed it comfortably – without fear – just like old times whenever someone smacked Mother’s pamphlets out of his hand or called him a freak back in New York. Modesty: always the one to protect him whenever he needed it most.

Credence slowly opened his eyes, looking between them at their fingers laced comfortably together, and squeezed her palm.

The dark wisps stopped.

“Theseus,” Graves stepped between him and Credence and placed his hand around Theseus’ raised wrist, “Put the wand down. He ain’t dangerous.”

A blazing inferno flared within Theseus’ narrowed eyes and he turned that powerful heated gaze onto him but, to Graves’ credit, he didn’t collapse into dust from the raging flames like Credence had.


Graves placed a firm pressure onto Theseus’ extended wrist, forcing his trembling arm down so that his wand was pointed onto the floor instead of in front of him.
“Leave him alone,” Graves glanced at Credence out of the corners of his eyes in an almost sort of understanding manner. As if he knew exactly what wars were being waged inside Credence’s head. “He’s just a scared kid.”

“He attacked me. He attacked you. He destroyed my house,” Theseus pointed out sharply and then sucked in a breath, pinching the bridge of his nose as if none of those were really important compared to what was really plaguing him, “And Arty isn’t with him. They’re always together. Always.”

“I— I’m sorry, Mr. Scamander,” Credence stuttered out an apology and rose to his feet, reluctantly pulling his hand away from Modesty’s comforting grasp, “I thought that you were in danger and when I saw Mr. Graves – I mean, Percival – I thought it was— No, that doesn’t matter. I was wrong, and it was mistake and I’m so, so sorry. I’ll fix your house immediately.”

Credence slipped his wand from his sleeve.

Modesty sucked in an audible breath.

“You’ll need a group of Aurors, Credence, to undo the damage done here,” Theseus gestured dismissively at the bricks literally crumbled into microscopic dust scattered across the wooden floor around them, “At least three and we only have two. You’re nowhere near that level to do so by yourself—"

Credence didn’t listen.

Instead, he merely breached the dam holding back that massive ocean of magic churning within him and let it flow freely through every inch of his body. Credence waved his wand elegantly through the air – like a masterful maestro conducting an orchestra’s final symphony – and cast the spell.

“Reparo.”

Time stopped around them.

And went in the reverse.

At least, that’s what it looked like to the two Aurors, No-Maj child, and ridiculously powerful Obscurial Credence goddamned Barebone as the effects of his spell took place.

Everything magically fixed itself anew as if they never had been disturbed in the first place. Bricks rebuilt themselves and filed into neat rows. Splintered support beams and metal plumbing pieced themselves back together. Powder and dust reformed into strong walls and looming roofs. Glass vials fixed themselves and refilled with spilt potions and priceless ingredients; but, not only that, everything about the room – about the entire house – de-aged before their very eyes and held a certain shine not seen since the house was first built.

Theseus blinked, caught within a surprised daze, and idly approached his newly repaired desk. He selected a leather notebook – looking as supple as the day it was purchased – from one of it’s built-in shelves and flipped it open, revealing vibrant childish drawings once lost and faded to the hand of time.

“Impossible,” Theseus flipped page through page, enraptured, “Impossible.”

“How the—” Graves dragged his wearied hands over his face, turning around in a complete circle marveling at the sheer perfection of Credence’s magical reconstruction, “What the absolute fuck?”
“Credence…”

Even Modesty openly gaped at the miracle surrounding her, gazing up at him as if he were some sort of messiah and whispering, “… you’re incredible.”

“This wasn’t what I— what I intended to do,” Credence shifted uncomfortably and slipped his wand back into his sleeve, flushing deeply in embarrassment, “I’m sorry… I only meant to repair what I destroyed but, I—”

“I don’t believe it,” Graves scoffed and outstretched his arms, “You’re apologizing for this?”

“Y—yes?”

“What the fuck, kid?” Graves practically whispered in astonishment, “You’re like the fuckin’ second coming of goddamned Merlin himself and you apologize for it.”

“… I’m sorry.”

“And there you go again!”

“… My stars,” an awe-filled voice echoed from behind him – one that was unfamiliar yet oddly chilled Credence to the bone, “He’s even more powerful than I ever imagined. What strength. What potential… and all completely untapped. Spectacular.”

A loud sudden snap filled the bedroom as Theseus slammed shut the leather notebook he was holding with a single hand. He left it balanced on the corner of his desk and stalked through the room like a predator on the prowl – anger now checked into place as he smoothed his hair back into well-coiffured perfection.

Despite the split lip and bruised brow, Theseus now looked more like that elegant, refined gentleman that Credence once thought he knew.

He dismissively brushed past Graves and spared no acknowledging glance towards either Modesty or Credence as he approached the bound and restrained servant of Grindelwald: Hugin.

“Aww, who hurt our perfectly polished Theseus while I was asleep? Underestimated the Obscurial too, eh Theesy? Release me and I’ll give you a pretty pink plaster,” Hugin snarked and leaned back in his chair, taking in his environment.

It seemed like he was trying to piece together what happened when he was unconscious by silent observation alone. Credence could see the gears whirring around in his head, working overtime to solve this mystery. His lone golden eye left no surface untouched – taking in anything and everything and analyzing it as he were Sherlock Holmes himself stepping straight out of The Hound of the Baskervilles and into reality.

Yet… he didn’t even acknowledge Munin’s existence even though she was bound and chained like him right beside him.

Credence wondered if it had anything to do with that strangely white eye of his.

It was in that moment that Munin stirred.

Her gray eyes lazily fluttered open and quickly gleaned from her restrained movements that her plan had failed, resulting in her shameful capture, “Ah fuck.”
Hugin stiffened suddenly in his restraints and leaned around, searching for his twin sister with his good eye. Surprise had flashed over his wicked expression for just a moment – flickering briefly with concern – before transitioning quickly into scarlet-colored anger.

“You idiot!!”

Munin sharply flinched – fully awake now.

“Why did you come for me?” Hugin hissed furiously, uncaring of their audience, “I was handling this just fine by myself.”

“You’re my goddamned brother,” Munin sneered a defensive response, “Why wouldn’t I come for you when you’re in trouble?”

“I’m not a twelve-year-old schoolboy anymore. I can fend myself and I certainly don’t need you around protecting me.”

“Evidently not since you keep getting yourself in stupid situations like this where you need to be rescued!”

“Grindelwald would’ve figured something out,” Hugin stubbornly jeered, tilting his pointed chin up high, “If you only could have been a little more patient, you stupid Gryffindor. Now, we’re both in trouble.”

“So, you admit you were in trouble then, huh?”

“Goddamnit Munin, that’s not the point! If you just trusted Grindelwald—”

“Screw Grindelwald!” Munin clenched her teeth, grinding them together and eliciting a most unpleasant sound, “Don’t you see, you stupid little boy? He would’ve left you here just so he could pursue his little itty bitty Obscurial. You’re not important – just a pawn to be played in his game.”

“Shut up,” Hugin seethed.

“It’s true and you know it.”

“I said shut up!”

“Silence!” Theseus interrupted, stepping in between the chairs and pushing them further apart from each other, “The both of you.”

“Silence, he says,” Hugin sneered mockingly, “I’m sorry: are we giving you a headache with our little sibling disagreemanent? We all know how much dearest Theseus here absolutely hates when things go wrong with his friends. Dare say he avoids it at all costs.”

Theseus stiffened and clasped his hands firmly behind his back, casting a military grade glare upon them both, rendering the twins silent exactly how he desired.

This was the man – the intimidating demeanor – that Munin had donned for her deception. Cold and removed – unaffected by anything and everything that came his way be it bullets or slander of the most unkind manner. A well-composed aristocrat that knew exactly what power and influence he wielded.

Like a Grecian God upon a pillar, staring down judgmentally at their unworthy subjects with a hawk-like gaze.
But, if Credence looked closer…

Subtle tremors coursed through Theseus’ clenched fingers: self-restraint hidden underneath the guise of refinement. Theseus’ crumbling gaze and clenched jaw twitched – perhaps not a domineering act at all, like how it was perceived by those caught on the receiving end of such an intimidating look, but rather anger and frustration channeled into something more.

Perhaps… Theseus Scamander wasn’t as unfeeling and perfect as everyone thought him to be.

Not a Grecian God at all but, rather, an unfortunate mortal man placed upon a too high of a pillar by others who looked up to him.

And perhaps it was this difference between the man he was and who he was perceived to be was the reason why Polyjuice Potions were so successful; because, the people wearing another person’s face didn’t have to act exactly like they were, only how others thought them to be. So, while Theseus was a man of emotion and vulnerability hidden underneath the guise of a powerful wizard, others thought him too cold and unfeeling and perfect.

And perhaps…

While Graves was a man of anger and stern beliefs – with a New Yorkian penchant for foul language – others thought him as untouchable. Unapproachable. A formidable wizard not to be crossed or questioned but followed like how Grindelwald portrayed him to be.

How unbelievably sad.

“What happened to you two?” Theseus sucked in a quiet breath between his teeth, turning his back momentarily to the twins and closing his tired eyes, “My colleagues – my… friends – turned followers of Grindelwald. For Merlin’s sake, you were just approved for a grant. What happened to building that school in the North, hmm? Or doesn’t that matter now? What about the orphanage you were renovating or does that not matter since Muggles live there too?”

Theseus shook his head and pinched the bridge of his nose.

“I don’t understand what happened. I don’t understand why you turned to him. But, I suppose, most of all…,” Theseus turned to Munin now, “I don’t understand how you became a murderer. Why?”

“Weren’t that surprised when I broke that apprentice’s leg,” Munin leered, holding her chin up high in unashamed pride, “Why shouldn’t it surprise you I’d do this?”

“Because you’re a good person.”

This is where Credence disagreed.

“She tortured Newt.”

Theseus’s shoulders stiffened, and it wasn’t until he had turned around completely, slack-jawed and horrified eyes focused on Credence, did he realize that he’d said that out loud.

“Explain.”

“W-when we were on that train,” Credence stepped backwards and grew quieter and quieter with each word spoken, wholly uncomfortable with being put on the spot, “I—I don’t remember exactly what she said. But, I—I remember the screams. Awful screams. And I—I’ve n-never heard him like that before…”
A moment passed between them.

The growing tension in the air bubbling and churning like a furious volcano about to burst in a catastrophic eruption of a million years’ worth of magma and fury.

And then Theseus’ face turned cold.

As dead and unforgiving as the frigid terrain of the Artic.

Somehow, Credence found that all the more frightening.

“If you heard that spell again,” Theseus calmly faced Munin, blocking her completely from view, “Would you recognize it?”

Credence’s throat went dry.

“I—yes.”

“Then answer me this, Credence: was the spell that Munin cast on my brother Crucio?”

Munin’s scream pierced the air.

A shrill, glass-breaking screech of the purest form of agony only a smidgen louder than Hugin’s horrified shouts of protest and pleas for mercy.

Credence’s legs moved on their own.

Bolting forward and discovering Munin stiffened in her chair in an epileptic-like episode – all her muscles contracted at once – with teeth painfully clenched together while sweat and tears poured down her face. Her nails clawed into fists, drawing blood from the sensitive flesh of her palms—

Credence’s raw magic lunged forward and sent the chairs – along with their captive twins – sliding across the floor away from Theseus as Credence himself shot forward, reaching for Theseus’ wand.

“She. Hurt. My. Newton.” Theseus snarled in Credence’s face, holding firmly onto his wand but, from the lack of Munin’s screams, had cast off the curse, “My brother who couldn’t hurt a fly. My brother who had never come across a monster he couldn’t love. My brother whose boggart is an office desk and she hurt him.”

“I know,” Credence understood that rage – knew the feeling of becoming lost within it, “But, Newt wouldn’t want this.”

“More importantly,” Graves droned, garnering Credence’s attention. He peered over Theseus’ shoulder and discovered, while Credence had run forward to stop Theseus, Graves had run in the opposite direction.

Towards Modesty.

He had swooped to the ground and pressed her face against his chest, shielding her ears with his hands, and keeping her from witnessing the frightening sight transpiring in front of her. They all knew of Modesty’s strength and fire – it was hard to ignore; but… she was still just a little girl.

“I highly suggest,” Graves’ upper lip curled over his teeth, “Not doing that in front of the kid.”

Credence’s heart plummeted to the bottom of his stomach.
Guilt.

Stupid, Credence, stupid. You’re supposed to be her big brother. You’re supposed to protect her—

“Heh.”

Credence pulled his attention away from Modesty and Graves and back towards Munin.

“You know what it’s like… don’t you?” Munin all but whispered through gasping breath after gasping breath, slumped exhausted in her chair, “No, I know you know.”

A bitter smirk curled across her chapped lips.

“I see that look in your eyes, Credence. You’re a big brother. You’d do anything to protect her, wouldn’t you? Just look at your hands.”

Credence suddenly found himself not wanting to.

“Hah, you know it too Theseus. You wanna know my answer? You really wanna know? Look at you: playing with that very same fire. You already have what you wish for, you just don’t want to admit it because that means you’re just like me,” Munin raised her head, shoulders trembling but remaining strong in will, “I meant what I said, you know. I’d do anything for my brother. Anything.”

Credence’s eyes widened in realization.

“You corrupted yourself,” his gaze flickered momentarily to Hugin who merely narrowed his eyes at him, “So that he wouldn’t have to.”

“I’m a brilliant actress, am I not? Fooled you into thinking I enjoyed this, didn’t I? Would’ve never guessed that I never wanted to hurt anyone. I don’t care if they’re Muggles or not, I’m a fighter not a murderer,” she closed her eyes and sucked in a shaking breath, “But… when my brother here joined Grindelwald, I knew he couldn’t be swayed and I— I couldn’t protect him from the outside.”

Munin shook her head and refocused her stern gray eyes onto him, reaching down into his very soul and wrapping her sharp claws around his still-beating heart.

And squeezed.

“So, I killed so he wouldn’t have to,” she continued, “I became a monster to protect the people I love.”

“Ha! Great job you’re doing there, sis,” Hugin sneered, “I’ve killed plenty.”

“Because Grindelwald went behind my back and gave that assignment to you instead of me,” Munin snarled, “You’re just supposed to be his spy. I’m supposed to be his dog. Screw Grindelwald and—and screw you too, Hugin! You’re better than this. You’re better than him— than me.”

“You idiot,” Hugin leaned forward in his chair and spat, “I killed way before I went to him. You don’t know what I did in that war.”

“I don’t,” she agreed, “But, I know it’s haunted you ever since. I wanted to protect you before you were lost for good.”

“Do you really believe that this excuses what you’ve done? That I’ll just ignore the hand you’ve played in Grindelwald’s game? Reason or not, what you did is wrong,” Theseus intervened and pushed past Credence, looming over the twins, “You’ll be sent to Azkaban for this, Munin. Azkaban.
We could have worked together. We could have convinced him to stay on the side of good.”

“Could’ve convinced him to stay, huh?” Munin narrowed her gaze, “Just like you were there for him when he was crying at monsters and phantoms in the night?”

Theseus fell silent.

“I’m a horrible person. Wicked and unredeemable. I know I am. I didn’t want to be but, what I wanted and what I’ve done are two very different things,” she confessed, “But, the difference between you and I is at least I own up to it. At least I did something instead of ignoring the problem altogether.”

“There were others in our regiment that I needed to check in on. Others who had no one else to turn to,” Theseus defended himself, “I thought that since he had you—”

“Go ahead. Keep talking like I’m not even here,” Hugin seethed, “I’ll wait.”

“Hugin—” Munin started.

“No, it’s fine. Really. I’m used to the both of you talking over me, determining what’s best for me. You want to know what was so appealing about Grindelwald when he first approached me? He listened,” Hugin tsked and glared at Theseus, “I know that I wasn’t your best friend. You don’t have those, do you? But, you were— I looked up to you and you never once visited me after I was sent back home. Not even a single letter to see if I was okay.”

He turned his narrowed gaze – golden and milky white – onto his sister.

“And you. You didn’t have to follow me to Grindelwald if you didn’t believe in him. I wanted you to see my side, Munin, not just give in because it was what I wanted. Because you felt some silly need to protect me. I’m capable of my own fucking decisions.”

“Decisions you don’t even believe in,” Munin scoffed.

“Fighting for them solved nothing! So, I thought I would try something different. Maybe fighting against them was the answer,” Hugin spat, “Those fucking Muggles and their cowardice—”

“This no-Maj crossed the entire ocean and faced you head-on just to find her brother,” Graves nodded his head towards Modesty, squeezing her against him, “And you would call her a coward? She’s fought just as much as you have.”

“Don’t be a fool. I fought in a war—”

“She’s from the Bronx,” Graves retorted, “Different kind of warzone but, a warzone all the same. Kids die there every day. Starving to death. Murdered in their sleep. Modesty was fortunate enough to find someone to adopt her and take her off those hellish streets.”

“And that Muggle was a goddamn monster,” Hugin sneered, “I know all about Mary Lou Barebone.”

“But then she found Credence,” Graves countered, “And he protected her.”

“He’s a wizard.”

“And he only found that out this year,” Graves asserted, “There is nothing – nothing at all – that separates us from them. There is no us and them. Credence here bridges us together whether he
realizes it or not. Modesty does the exact same thing. If wizards and no-Maj’s can coexist like this brother and sister, there’s no reason why we can’t do the same.”

Hugin fell silent.

“Wow, Dad,” Modesty quipped, squirming away from his grip, “Never thought you thought all that.”

“I’m already regretting saying it at all, brat.”

“Aww, I know you love me,” she teased and grabbed Graves’ hand, dragging him away; but, after a moment’s hesitation (or was it contemplation?), she cast a sparing glance over her shoulder, “You really need to stop fighting and just talk. Apologize, stop being mean to each for fuck’s sake, and talk. It’s not that hard.”

And with that, Modesty pulled Graves into another room – the living room? Credence didn’t know – and shut the door behind her with a soft click.

Leaving Credence alone in a room full of practical strangers.

He rubbed his hands together and shifted awkwardly on his feet. Perhaps he should join Modesty and Graves? Yes, that would be a splendid idea or perhaps a walk outside would suffice—

“Credence?” Theseus quietly addressed him.

Damn it.

“Yes?”

“… why isn’t Arty here with you?”

Oh.

“We… had a disagreement,” Credence confessed, glancing towards Munin who had the decency to remain silent, “He didn’t think it was a good idea to come here. Said it smelled like a trap.”

“Which it was,” Theseus pointed out.

“In a way,” Credence agreed and hesitated, casting his gaze unto his shoes, “I— I left him behind. He’s fine. He’s safe. But, I— I should have listened to him. He’s going to be really upset with me whenever I go back. If I can find my way back.”

“We’ll find a way, Credence,” Theseus affirmed, wavering with momentary uncertainty before awkwardly patting his shoulder, “Rest assured. I consider myself a well-qualified expert in finding my brother no matter where his beastly adventures may take him.”

“He mentioned that about you,” Credence smiled a little, “It’s… nice to finally meet you, Theseus. The real you.”

“Likewise, Credence. Likewise.”
Credence headed outside into the cool evening air and situated himself on the concrete stairs leading up to the two-story flat. He rested his arms atop his knees and gazed up at the cloudless midnight sky. If he looked closely enough, he could still follow the paths Newt’s hands had drawn across the stars, painting constellations with a smile.

Orpheus’ Lyre appeared within an instant.

Credence’s heart soared.

Was Newt looking at these same stars and thinking of him at this very moment? Was he lounging in their meadow amongst the dancing fireflies and blooming flowers, awaiting his return? Or had he gathered up his suitcase and supplies and taken off into the night?

Searching for him?

Credence averted his gaze from the stars and their judgements.

He wiped his mysteriously teary eyes with the back of his hand, his heart suddenly aching – beating out a reminder with every ba-bump of how he had betrayed Newt and left him behind. Credence should have listened to reason. He should have let Newt speak. He should have been patient and allowed a conversation to span between them instead of an emotional fight.

He shouldn’t have gotten so defensive.

Newt had never failed him before and, damn it, they were a team; but, one or the other just kept messing everything up.

A distinctive metal click echoed behind him – a sound he knew, surprisingly, quite well what with having grown up in one of the poorer ends of New York.

“Yeah, yeah. Bad habit, I know,” Graves declared roughly, slipping the silver lighter back into his coat and taking the cigarette from his lips between his fingers, exhaling a cloudy breath of smoke into the darkness of night, “Don’t judge me.”

“I wouldn’t.”

“You’re right,” he snorted, crossing his arms over his chest and raising the cigarette back to his mouth, “You’re too nice of a kid to say a bad word about anybody. Goody two-shoes.”

“I wouldn’t say that,” Credence smiled wryly and wiped away the remaining tears from his eyes, standing up and joining Graves by his side, “I’ve had plenty of bad things to say but, only for those who deserve it.”

“Like who?”

Credence thought that was obvious.

“Like Grindelwald.”

“Righteous bastard,” Graves scowled and inhaled deeply into the cig as if it were the only thing in this world keeping him alive and – judging by the tiredness of his eyes and haunted expression – it probably was, “I want to kill him.”

“I understand.”

He did.
Truly Credence did.

“Hell, even if I can’t kill the bastard, I’d be satisfied with just shoving my steel-tipped boot in his fucking smarmy face and show him that— that despite everything he did to me, I came out on top. I came out victorious. I want to be the guy to finally defeat Gellert goddamned Grindelwald once and for all. I want to lock him away in the nastiest prison we can find and throw away the key. I want him to spend the rest of his miserable life rotting away in a cell, knowing that he’s there because I put him there,” Graves scoffed and gestured towards Credence, “Though, you have an even better claim to him than I do.”

“It’s not a competition, Percival.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

“It’s not,” Credence insisted and sighed, “Where’s Modesty?”

“Damned kid’s been a little— she’s been a little sick lately. She passed out on the couch the second we sat down.”

“Did you put a blanket over her?”

“I’m not an idiot.”

“Sorry,” Credence smiled apologetically, “Habit.”

Graves rolled his eyes and exhaled another cloud of smoke.

“If… I may ask—”

“You want to know what it was like being locked away in a suitcase, slowly going insane and losing all sense of time and self, don’t you?”

Shame colored Credence’s cheeks.

“S’okay, kid. Nothing to be ashamed about,” Graves responded gruffly, “You’re not the first to ask and you certainly ain’t gonna be the last. Usually I tell everyone to stuff it. But… I suppose s’long as you don’t tell Modesty, I’ll tell you whatever you want to know.”

“N—no, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have— We just met. I shouldn’t intrude on your life like that. It was insensitive of me and I—” Credence lowered his gaze, hunching over into himself and wanting nothing more than to crawl into a tiny ball and disappear, “You’re not obligated to tell me anything if you don’t want to. You don’t owe me or anyone that.”

“… I know.”

Graves raised the cigarette to his lips.

“But suppose I need to talk to somebody. And suppose that I’d like to take advantage of this opportunity to talk freely with probably the only other man in existence that understands what I— what I went through,” he grimaced, “I… need this, Credence.”

Credence understood that feeling.

He had felt that same way when showing Newt his scars willingly for the very first time, telling the stories behind how he had received each and every one of them.
So, Credence silently nodded his head and indicated for him to go on.

Graves took another long drag of his cigarette, allowing the nasty-smelling smoke to fill his throat before exhaling through his nose like a dragon awakening from its winter slumber.

“Y’know… it’s really kinda funny how fucking stupid it was. How easy he snatched me away. Y’see I drank way too much at a bar downtown one night and tried hailing one of those no-Maj cabs home. I don’t that often – mind you. I have plenty of good liqueur back home but, I’d decided that I needed a different atmosphere for once. Something new.”

Graves scoffed.

“So, there I was – vulnerable and stupid – and a handsome stranger suddenly slipped his arm around mine. Started flirting. Saying all the right words. Asked if I’d like to come back to his place and stay the night. I figured why the hell not? He was a charming devil and I hadn’t recognized him I was so hammered so, I agreed. One minute we were back at his place and he was pouring another drink. The next… I woke up there.”

Graves paused, hesitating.

“It was completely dark in there. Couldn’t tell up from down and I was warded to a chair – strapped in like a medieval prisoner being forced to look straight. Shackles around my wrists, my ankles, my chest, my chin and forehead… I didn’t move from that chair for a goddamned month. He wouldn’t even let me stand up to piss,” Graves sneered and sucked on his cigarette, “He’d feed me once a day and pluck my hair for his Polyjuice. Of course, it wasn’t so simple. The bastard would take… liberties. A simple *crucio* was nothing compared to what he did. I still freeze like a goddamned coward whenever people announce that it’s dinnertime. It’s pathetic. *Disgusting.*”

He grew quiet.

Credence remained respectfully silent.

“But… I’d take that over the other 23 hours in the day. I’d take it over the silence. The darkness. I started hearing voices you know,” Graves smirked wryly, “I was aware enough that I was going mad but sane enough to be scared and horrified of it. My mind was going, and it was the only thing I had left in that place.”

He paused.

“When they rescued me, I thought I’d welcome the light. But, it hurt like a bitch when I saw my first sunrise. I holed myself up in the hospital room with the curtains drawn and lights turned off for days. I threw things. I lashed out like I was a kid again. I tried to soothe myself with food at first. Then drinking but, that wasn’t my cup of tea,” he grimaced at the cigarette, “And I just started *this*. It’s okay, I suppose. Grounds me. Doesn’t muddle my mind like alcohol does – I don’t like that now, as you can imagine.”

He frowned at Credence now.

“Sometimes I still hear him in my head, y’know? Sometimes I feel like I’m there again at night – fucking bastard – because I can’t tell the difference anymore. Sometimes I still wonder if I actually went mad and I’m still there. Strapped to a goddamned chair. Waiting for someone to rescue me.”

“If you’re mad, Percival,” Credence finally spoke – soft and understanding, “Then that means I am too.”
“Thanks kid.”

Momentary silence fell between them as Graves finished his cigarette.

While glad – and somewhat relieved – that Graves had found the prime opportunity to talk about the horrors he endured by Grindelwald’s hand, Credence could help but feel… awful because he had had the opposite experience. Grindelwald had never really hurt him – not like Mother did, anyways – and he was actually kind of…

Nice.

Of course, after a while, it had come to light just how horrible of a person Gellert Grindelwald had been but—

Credence shook his head.

“How did Modesty get dragged into this?”

“Fuck if I know,” Graves snorted and flicked the cigarette butt onto the ground, stamping out the embers with his heel, “Little hellion crashed through my window one day and punched me in the dick demanding where you were.”

Credence choked out a surprised laugh, placing his hand over his eyes.

“That sounds like Modesty alright.”

“How the hell did she get like that?”

“Isn’t it obvious?” Credence shrugged and answered simply, “She’s from the Bronx.”

“Ah.”

Credence looked out into the night, gazing back up at the twinkling stars and familiar constellations, “She called you Dad.”

Graves’ shoulders froze.

“She… deserves a good parent in her life. I could only ever be her big brother and I’m happy with that. But, if she’s taken such a shining to you that she’s calling you Dad…” Credence smiled softly, staring at the wizard out of the corner of his eyes, “What I mean to say is: don’t let her down.”

“… I won’t, kid.”

“That being said,” Credence continued, “Modesty likes songs sung to her every night before bed instead of being read to from storybooks. She loves peas but, she loves blueberry muffins even more. She’ll eat an entire batch straight out of the oven while they’re still hot. Her favorite game is “Rescue the Princess from the Tower.” Obviously, she likes being the knight in shining armor. She’s deathly afraid of dogs and—”

“Hey, hey. Slow down,” Graves dismissively waved his hand, “That’s all you stuff that you got in common with her. I ain’t gonna take that away from you two. She and I will get our own shtick.”

“Sorry,” Credence apologized, “I’m a worrier.”

“Never would have guessed.”
“Very funny,” Credence shook his head before finally addressing the elephant in the room – that was, aside from the disaster of their earlier introduction, “You’re not just here to find me… are you?”

“… No.”

Graves sighed and slipped his hands into his pockets.

“Of course, reuniting you and Modesty was added to the plan after she joined the team,” he confessed, “But, me and Theseus were gonna track you and Newt down and help you with the mess you’re in. We’re on your side, kiddo. Plus, this means I get to punch Grindelwald in the face and I already told you how much I’d like that.”

“At length,” Credence agreed, “Are you still on board with joining us?”

“As long as Modesty is safe,” Graves huffed, “I’d follow you to the ends of the goddamned earth if I have to.”

Chapter End Notes

(Forgive me for incoherency. It's late and I'm tired but, I wanted to get this chapter up! I'll clean this notes section up in the morning.)

No Newt in this chapter, I know but, we'll get him next time I promise! We're getting close to the end, everybody. I initially planned for 30 chapters but, while we still might get there, it's looking closer and closer to 5 more chapters until the end. Please brace yourself now.

Until next time!

Before I get into my usual spiel, I made a Tumblr my darlings! I'll be posting art and writings and other cool things on there so, go and interact with me! You might even see a bit of GM, DS art on there: https://darthpricklypear.tumblr.com/

Now, without further adieu, how am I doing with my writing? Anything that I should improve upon? Anything that you'd like to see more of? Less of?

Please leave your comments and critiques below! I love reading each and every single one of them. They are the fuel in which this series thrives upon!

Until next time, my lovelies!
One day I won't past new chapters past midnight or around two in the morning.

Today is not that day.

(I might go in later and edit some grammar mistakes that I missed in my fatigue-filled haze shhh)

Anyways, thank you so much for your patience regarding the tardiness of this chapter, my darlings! I've been suffering from a random bout of depression lately where the motivation to crawl out of bed was nonexistent, let alone sitting down and writing. BUT! Never fear! I'm feeling much better now and have been bitten by the writing bug once more!

Enjoy the peacefulness of this chapter while it lasts! The climax of this series is upon us!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“What do you mean he’s gone?”

Tina stared down at Newt, wide-eyed and open-mouthed, and loomed over him with her trembling hands placed precariously against her sharp hips – the portrait of an exasperated homemaker, waving her wooden rolling pin at her bungling husband.

Newt didn’t answer.

Couldn’t.

Instead, he backed himself further into the corner underneath the cabin stairs amongst the beige flour sacks of harvested root vegetables, blanketing himself in cold familiar shadows that reminded him of kind and caring eyes as dark as night. He held Credence’s coat tighter against him and pressed his face into the front between the lapels and underneath the collar, imagining thin arms wrapping around him and whispering sweet assurances into his ear.

But, the empty sleeves didn’t wrap around him. Scarred hands didn’t comb through his hair. Pale lips didn’t frown or breathe concern across his cheek.

There was nothing but a lifeless coat. A coat of shining silver buttons without tarnish, seams without frays, and Slytherin green color as bright and imposing as the day he’d bought it for his new, wide-eyed apprentice. Credence took care of his possessions with the utmost love and care.

It was almost blasphemous that he had abandoned it.

Newt’s bottom lip trembled and lowered his head.

Meanwhile, Tina ran her hands through her cropped hair and stomped back towards the dining room table with an aggravated shout. She grabbed the nearest chair – the legs scratching violently across the floor, digging a scar into the woodwork – and collapsed into it.
Jacob pulled at his collar uncomfortably and stood –

Only for Queenie to place her hand upon his shoulder, shaking her head.

“Do we have any idea who the fake Theseus really was?” Alma inquired, resulting in Newt burying his face deeper inside the comforting absinthe folds of Credence’s coat.

*How could I have been so foolish?*

“Could it be Grindelwald again?” Tina grimaced and shook her head, crossing her arms across her chest. “No, he’s not the type of man to pull the same sh*t twice. Impossible.”

“Improbable. But, you can’t eliminate the… possibility,” Alma frowned and lowered her gaze to the table, “If not him, then someone working for him. Someone that knows us. Someone that knows Theseus. Someone that knows Newt enough to…”

Newt clenched his eyes shut.

The judgement. The failure. It was all too much to withstand.

He should’ve been patient. He should’ve listened. He should’ve protested more. He should’ve compromised. He should’ve run faster. He should’ve done everything within his power to keep Credence safe.

“Damnit,” Tina hissed through her teeth and jolted back onto her feet, knocking the chair to the floor.

Alma patiently picked it back up and slid it into place.

“If he touches a hair – a hair – on that boy’s head, I’ll kill him. I swear I’ll kill him,” Tina paced up and down the length of the room, wagging her finger with the ferocity of a mother crossed, “I’ll slug him across that pompous mug of his. I’ll kick him where the sun don’t shine. I’ll _crucio_ him until he goes blind – I swear it!”

“Teenie,” Alma rose from her seat, outstretching her hand, “Calm down.”

Tina halted.

Something curious and heartbreaking quivering at her lips.

Newt thought that she would collapse right then and there when she softly approached Alma and slumped against her, her forehead resting against her shoulder.

“How can I?” Tina asked quietly, a tremble in her voice, “How can I when we’ve lost Credence?”

“Oh honey…,” Queenie hummed sympathetically and abandoned her seat in favor of squishing her sister and dearest Almainte in the ooey-gooiest of hugs, “We have to trust that he can take care of himself.”

“He’s just a boy—”

“He’s a man, Tina,” Queenie emphasized sternly and turned her sister around to properly stare into her eyes, “I’m not saying that hasn’t suffered or that his upbringing hasn’t had any affect on how he experiences the world. He’s been hurt but, that doesn’t make him a child to be protected. He’s a grown man. A grown man that has been learning and thriving underneath one of the cleverest, kindest wizards I know. Credence can defend himself.”
“Not against Grindelwald,” Tina protested.

“Perhaps not,” Queenie frowned in agreement before shaking her head, “But, if there’s one thing I know about Credence… you don’t cross him. Once he figures out he’s been tricked – Grindelwald or not – do you really want to be the person on the receiving end of his rage?”

Tina fell quiet.

Newt had to agree.

But, capable or not, Newt had still thrust this situation upon Credence through his most impressive display of incompetence yet and, now, Credence would have to deal with the messy consequences. He might pull through alive – in all likelihood, he’d leave the battle physically unscathed – but, how much more would his psyche suffer because of this fiasco?

Newt had never wanted to be one of Credence’s scars.

A large hand pressed down on Newt’s shoulder.

He flinched.

“Sorry,” Jacob quickly retracted and rubbed the back of his thick neck, choosing to sit down beside him for the moment, “You doing alright, Newt? I, uh… I couldn’t help but notice you’re being – erm – awfully quiet.”

Newt froze and swallowed thickly, thinking fast for the words—

“Doing alright.”

“You sure?”

Newt nodded.

“… I believe you.” But, something about Jacob’s voice sounded skeptical. Still, he smiled and jovially patted his sides – causing Newt to smile just a little at his friend’s ever-bright and comforting presence. “I’m here if you need me.”

“If you really want to do something for him, Teenie, then I think the only thing we can do is go ahead with Jacob’s plan,” Queenie tutted.

“Oh no,” Jacob groaned, running his hands over his face.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Tina rounded on her,” Grown man or not, he could use our help!”

“Sweetpea, we can’t just go running in all willy-nilly with wands blazing alone. That’s not what Credence needs right now. We need backup,” Queenie placed her hands on her hips, “So, we’ll send word to Newt’s real brother. We’ll send out owls everywhere and contact everyone we know to go and help Credence.”

“So, a rescue mission.”

“More like providing Credence the resources for whatever he needs.”

“What do you think Newt?” Alma interjected softly, everyone quieting down to hear her.

Newt didn’t answer.
Not because he didn’t want to, but because he couldn’t.

The deepest shades of scarlet colored his cheeks in embarrassment. He quickly lowered his gaze, gripping onto Credence’s coat so tightly that his knuckles turned white.

“You know Credence best,” Alma began emphatically, approaching Newt only to stop a few feet away when he made a sudden noise of protest, “You’ve spent the most time with him. You’ve guided him to the point where he can take care of himself now. So, as his… as his friend and teacher: what do you think Credence needs?”

His throat constricted.

Everything that he wanted to say abandoned and lost with three flattened tires and a horrendously smoking engine on the communication highway between his brain and lips.

“Oh,” Alma frowned, “Do you need your scarf?”

An exasperated noise ripped itself free from his throat, declaring, “That’s not what Credence needs right now.”

Alma blinked.

Jacob stared, brows furrowed together in concern.

“Newt, uh… Are you okay there, buddy?”

Newt grimaced and closed his eyes, threading his hands through his tawny hair.

He just… couldn’t find his words – didn’t have access to his inner dictionary – so, he had to rely on others. This wasn’t the first time he had used such methods to communicate. His childhood had been characterized by such circumstances however, he had quickly realized as he grew older and entered school that it was a form of speech not formally recognized by most.

So, he had forced himself to adapt.

But, during times like these…

*Mouth: you overworked machine! Why did you have to choose now to freeze up?*

“Oh,” Queenie exclaimed, raising her hand to her collar in surprise.

Newt slowly turned to her.

Legilimens. One of his friends was a Legilimens.

Suddenly, without conscious thought or command, he found himself scrambling to his feet and over Jacob. He tripped over himself once during the sporadic action mixed with Credence’s coat tangling around his legs, almost sending his nose slamming into the floor; but, somehow, he managed to regain his balance in the nick of time and grab Queenie by the shoulders.

“What do you think?” Newt asked desperately.

*Can you hear me?*

“Yes, honey,” she smiled charmingly, the corners of her eyes crinkling, “Of course. The darned tootin’ thing never turns off.”
A pleased noise more commonly defined as a delighted squeal escaped from his throat.

*Thank Merlin. This makes everything so much easier to explain – I could kiss you! Now, I can’t talk like I normally do so, if you don’t mind too terribly, could you just make sure my point gets across okay?*

“I could just talk on your behalf if you’d like, darling,” Queenie suggested.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Newt frowned, “That’s not what Credence needs right now.”

*I can talk, thank you very much. It’s just… different.*

“I understand.”

“I’m here if you need me,” he responded.

*Thank you, Queenie. Now, where was I? Oh yes!*

“What do you think Credence needs?” Newt finally answered, casting his meadow green eyes across the room from Jacob’s surprised face to Tina’s mildly concerned one, “You know Credence best. We need backup.”

*We go with the plan as always. I’m not letting Credence down this time.*

Pickett peaked through the foggy cabin windows, blowing softly against the glass and wiping a haphazard circle with his palm in an attempt to clean it only to succeed in somehow making it even filthier. He grimaced, squeaking in frustration, and flopped down onto the ledge, crossing his arms over his chest.

He didn’t need to see inside. Really.

But, it would make such a better view than the annoyingly adorable hinkypunks staring up at him with those wide, hauntingly blue eyes, waving around their cute orange lanterns tauntingly at him.

Pickett blew a raspberry at them.

They skittered away into the bushes like a herd of deer frightened by the crack of a branch – their ghostly lights going out one by one until nothing remained except the shadowed forest floor.

Pickett smirked and turned to Prudence to boast about his magnificence.

Only to find her patiently watching the scene unfolding inside as if she could see through the filth and grim with perfect clarity.

Pickett turned away and rested his face in the palms of his hands, staring silently out into the empty forest.

He knew that Prue hated eavesdropping. It was one of many adorable (Irritating! He meant irritating) habits that Pickett loved teasing her mercilessly about especially since she was always listening in on Credence’s conversations hanging about on his lapel; however, this time he kept his mouth shut.
Because her master was missing.
And it was their fault.
Pickett covered his face.
If only he had resisted that whispered *Imperio* that strange wizard that looked like Theseus had secretly cast upon him. If only he had possessed the human tongue to explain that his limbs were acting beyond his will.
He had never wanted to ignore Credence.
And now he was gone, and Pickett only had himself to blame.
Prudence suddenly cheeped in surprise – a high-pitched tone only perceivable to small magical creatures like Bowtruckles – and pulled Pickett out of his brooding reverie.
He turned to her, listening to her sorrowful spluttering and incoherent distress until the two words *Credence* and *danger* clicked together.
Pickett’s eyes widened.
And, after a moment, he stared back into the window and the smear across it.
Lost in thought.

Hortencia hobbled around Mr. Mulpepper’s Apothecary, moving from cardboard box to box organizing their latest shipment of ground-up unicorn horns, preserved frogs eggs, and whatnot. She placed her cane against the wooden floor and knelt down, wincing the entire time at the pain radiating from ankle to hip, and opened the newest container.
Hortencia sliced through the top with her handy dandy box-cutter and rummaged through the protective wrapping. She grabbed the uppermost jar and pulled it out, finding herself face-to-face with a barrage of floating milky-white newt eyes.
The jar tumbled down to the ground with a crash.
Hortencia covered her face in shame.
She had done everything right and reported the Munin incident the first time around to the Ministry. The older Scamander had visited St. Mungo’s to take her official statement minutes after she’d been informed by the doctors that no magic could fully heal her leg – that she’d be disabled for the rest of her life. He had held her hand with compassion and patience even when she sobbed and raged at him. He had promised her that he would take care of it.
He’d lied.
And when Munin had come strolling in this time around, she didn’t have to lay a single finger on her to make Hortencia bend to her will.
“Orti,” Klaudius staggered in, weaving through the maze of jars and containers and boxes of potion supplies towards the shipment receiving area where he stopped in front of her, taking in the shattered product and haunted look in her eyes, “I heard the commotion from up front. You alright down there?”

She snorted, gesturing to the shattered glass and gooey preservatives soaking the wooden floor around her, “When am I ever?”

“I’m serious,” Klaudius scowled and wobbily knelt down beside her, his knees popping and his arthritic back practically creaking at the strain, “That’s the fifth jar you’ve broken today. If you need more time off—”

“NO!”

Klaudius narrowed his gaze.

“Sorry,” Hortencia grimaced and nervously rubbed the back of her neck, “I… I need to be doing something, alright? Anything. I don’t care what kind of bullshit work it is— Just… don’t send me home. I can’t be locked up there doing nothing and feeling sorry for myself, okay? I’ll handle whatever this is, Klaudius. I swear it.”

Klaudius ran his leathered hands through his thick yet balding hair before relenting with an exasperated huff, “Fine. I’ll schedule you in the back then. No customer service for you for the next couple days. You break all the things you want down here, just don’t do it on the floor.”

“But—"

He raised a brow.

“Do you really want to deal with a Malfoy in this state?”

“Point taken,” Hortencia snorted.

She dusted off her knees and reached for her cane, grunting and hissing as she slowly picked herself up and settled onto her feet. She rummaged through her sleeves for her wand, intending to undo her careless mess when decided that hey, she could be nice for once.

“Thanks, by the way…,” Hortencia looked anywhere except at Klaudius, “I appreciate you. I don’t seem like it, but I do.”

“What can I say?” he smirked and straightened out his collar, “I’m the best boss around.”

“You sure you’re not some illegitimate Malfoy offspring?” she quipped dryly, “Cause that pompousness has Malfoy written all over it.”

“Har har, I’m leaving.”

Klaudius shakily picked himself up and headed back towards the front room. He was almost there when he suddenly paused and rummaged through his apron, procuring an envelope from some secret pocket inside.

“Before I forget, this came in from Newt. Seems important.”
To Our Dearest Aunts,

Esther Sophronia Rose and Clementine Clara Charlie Cerberus Goldstein,

And Uncle Terrence...

Esther read aloud the familiar looping cursive of her favorite niece Queenie and rolled her eyes in long-suffering exasperation at her wife. Setting the letter down onto the coffee table, she pinched the bridge of her nose and groaned, “Why did you have to pick such a bizarre name, Clem?”

“When presented with the opportunity to pick one’s name, redefining their entire identity,” Clementine defended herself, placing her hands against her narrow hips, “One doesn’t hold back.”

“But Clara?”

“It’s classy.”

“Says you,” Esther huffed.

“Says me,” Clementine dignifyingly stuck out her tongue only to violently bite down when a pair of arms wrapped around her shoulders from behind the couch. Holding her wounded mouth, she flopped her head back and narrowed her eyes at the forever exhausted visage of her husband, “Merlin’s Saggy Balls, Terrence! You scared me!”

“Sorry, peach,” Terrence leaned down and kissed her plump cheek, “What were you two arguing about this time?”

“Clem’s horrendous naming skills,” Esther gazed boredly at her nails, picking at the chipping cherry red polish.

“Again?” Terrence groaned, resting his olive-toned cheek against the top of Clementine’s chestnut brown hair, “At least y’all got variety. My Momma just took one look at me and was like – yeah, I reckon he looks like a Terrence.”

“Mmmhmm,” Esther hummed, smiling, “Makes you glad you married into the family, huh?”

“Y’all moving down to Georgia was the best thing that ever happened to me.”

“Speaking of family names,” Clementine spoke around her fingers, comically muffling her voice, “Can we finally agree to switch our surname to Coldstein to fit my whole ‘C’ aesthetic?”

“There’s no way in hell that’s ever going to happen,” Esther sniffed, “It’s a strong Jewish name and you can pry it from my cold, dead fingers.”

“You’re not even practicing,” Clementine pouted.

“And yet that doesn’t make me any less Jewish, you ignorant twig.”

“I love you, honeybunch.”

“I love you too, peach,” Esther paused from her nail-picking to point a chiding finger at her, “Doesn’t get you out of you and me having a nice, long talk later about sensitivity.”

“Terrence,” Clementine whined, “Help me.”
“Is that a letter from Queenie?” Terrence smoothly deflected and rounded the couch, flopping beside Clementine and retrieving the envelope, “We haven’t heard from her since the wedding? How’s she doing?”

Captain Argyle Louis scowled - thoroughly annoyed - at the crossword, feathered quill poised in the air ready to ink in the answer that was on the tips of his fingers—

He slumped in his chair in defeat, dropping the quill onto the table.

Captain Louis ran his weathered hands over his face, allowing himself this single moment to groan in frustration, before fetching a nickel from his pocket. Lining the coin up to his target, he flicked it over to his buddy Lieutenant Johnson making coffee at the nearby kitchenette, hitting him in the back of his head.

Johnson scowled and turned around, raising his hands into the air and mouthing, “What?”

“What’s a four-letter word for—” Captain Louis began signing only to be interrupted by Johnson’s slowly growing Cheshire smirk.

“S,” Johnson signed.

“Johnson, no.”

“M.”

“Don’t you dare.”

“A.”

“I hate you.”

“D.”

“I’m never asking you for help again,” Captain Louis rolled his eyes dramatically, adding in a rude gesture between signs, “But seriously: what’s a four-letter word for the boat used by Jason and the Argonauts to retrieve the Golden Fleece? It’s on the tip of my fingers but, I just can’t— What’s so funny?”

“Are you serious?” Johnson asked, his shoulders shaking between violent laughs.

Captain Louis scowled.

“It’s the Argo. The boat used by Jason and the Argonauts is the Argo.”

“Oh. I see. Thank you, I suppose,” Captain Louis, embarrassed, placed his fingers against his chin and extended them outwards, “We’re just going to pretend this never happened, won’t we?”

“Are you kidding? I’m holding this over you forever!”

“Why I oughta—”
Fingers flying a mile a minute, a plain brown owl flew in from the opened cabin window, hooting loudly to signal its arrival but going unheard.

Delphine ‘Delia’ Scamander slipped off her muddy work boots and collapsed onto her bed, exhausted. Her frizzy auburn hair – streaked with silver – stuck out unattractively at every angle and every muscle in her body ached. Breeding and raising Hippogriffs had always been hard work, but now that the years had been sneaking up on her, the work she could easily get through in her 20s was taking its toll.

She pressed her freckled face into her mountain of feather-stuffed pillows, groaning loudly into the plush fabric as her spine popped.

If only her husband were still here to help her out – God rest his soul.

What the bloody hell was with those infuriating Scamander men leaving her all alone to suffer and worry about?

First Adonis and then Newt and now Theseus! And he’d only just returned from the War!

At least the Hippogriffs named after her beloved (yet endlessly frustrating) sons would never leave her. Those two incredible beasts never to be sold no matter how many witches and wizards offered to buy them for their beautiful, glittering feathers and stoic demeanor.

She huffed and flopped over, running her hands down her wrinkled face.

Over a dozen of them attributed to those maddening sons of hers.

Delia had read the papers, of course. She had a subscription of Wizarding Weekly so, it was rather hard to escape them. Even if she had – somehow – continued meandering about her daily life in blissful ignorance, Newt’s face was plastered everywhere the eye could see on Wanted Posters across the marketplace and shopping districts she frequented – sometimes accompanied beside the portrait of that dark-haired and soulful-eyed apprentice of his.

Since when had he taken an apprentice?

No matter.

No matter what lies the papers reported, no matter what rumors and gossip were going around pureblood circles, Delia wouldn’t – couldn’t – believe a word they said. She knew her darling Newt and that boy didn’t have a vicious bone in his body.

That had always been his problem.

He just felt too much.

Delia closed her meadow green eyes and dozed off, consumed by thoughts and dreams of the various messes her sons found themselves in.

Ignorant of the owl patiently perched outside her window, envelope held within its beak.
Professor Albus Dumbledore gazed down upon the envelope sitting opened across his desk, reading the enclosed plea over and over again. A fond smile tugged at his lips, matching the twinkle in his wizened eyes, at the sudden bout of nostalgia tugging at his heartstrings. How many papers had he read through and graded with that familiar near-illegible handwriting?

Newt must have been desperate if he was reaching out to him. That precious boy loved to take on his troubles – and others, for that matter – all alone. These must be dire circumstances indeed.

But, dire circumstances that involved someone he never wanted to – never could – see again.

He gathered the parchment together and stuffed the letter neatly back into the envelope. Before looking to Fawkes and placing it in her beak, the remnants crumbling into ash.

“Bartleby.”

The wizard looked up from unwrapping his Charleston Chew and stared blankly at Grindelwald, waiting for him to continue.

“Gather my followers. There’s to be a meeting tonight in the usual place,” Grindelwald ordered, sliding on his civilian’s coat one sleeve at a time and fixing the gray lapels so that they laid flat and unwrinkled across his chest, “Everyone – I mean, everyone – needs to be in attendance. No excuses. Oh bother, is that a speck of lint?”

His upper lip curled in disdain. And he promptly dusted it away.

“Understood,” Bartleby answered, returning to unwrapping his Charleston Chew one side at a time, “What am I do about Hugin and Munin?”

“They’ve fulfilled their purpose,” Grindelwald brushed him off dismissively, “Their absence is understandable.”

Bartleby paused.

“Sir?”

“Oh B…” Grindelwald’s lips curled into a predatory smile and tutted, approaching his chair and lounging on the cushioned arm, “Did you really think that I didn’t know that Graves and Credence’s sister were on that ship? Do you believe me naïve enough to not understand how certain witches will react when placed in certain… situations?”

Bartleby’s mouth ran dry.

Suddenly, he didn’t find himself so hungry anymore.

“This… this was all part of the plan? But, I thought you wanted to separate Credence from—”
“Is he not currently separated?”

Bartleby jumped up, pivoting on his heel to stare incredulously at him.

“Why?”

“How anything?” Grindelwald countered and stood, slinking over and placing his hands upon Bartleby’s shoulders, “I desire Credence at his most powerful. I want him alienated. I want him alone and desperate. I want him to have no one left to turn to except for me.”

He purred and caressed his cheek.

“My followers have located Scamander’s hideout thanks to Munin and are awaiting my orders. With Credence occupied a million miles away, it’ll be easy to dispose of all who care for him. With everyone gone and the world against him, no one will ever take another chance at reaching out to him and taking him under their wing. Oh, can you imagine how much his misery will power him?”

Grindelwald was positively giddy with excitement, like a schoolboy at Christmas.

Bartleby only thought him mad.

“Why do you even want an Obscurial?” Bartleby pulled away from his grasp, gazing upon him with a clarity he hadn’t possessed before, “We can easily get what we want without one.”

“Oh B, a simple question begets a simple answer,” Grindelwald clasped his hands behind his back, leaning forward, “I’m a man obsessed. Ever since I saw my first Obscurial as a boy, I knew then and there that I simply had to have my hands on one. It’s pure coincidence that I’ve managed to find, perhaps, the most powerful one to ever exist.”

“Your first…?” Bartleby whispered, taking an obnoxious bite of his Charleston Chew and chomping down on it with his mouth open.

Obscurials were rare. A beastly creature belonging to an age nearly forgotten. Grindelwald might be a bit older than him by a decade or two but, he certainly wasn’t enough to remember an era where they were popular. Encountering just one in a lifetime was unusual.

“An old friend’s sister,” Grindelwald explained, frowning and pulling away in favor of pacing around the drawing room, “Alas, not even my charm and Albus’ wit combined could win Ariana and her guardian Aberforth over. That failure… Ruined a friendship. Ruined a dream.”

Grindelwald paused before the window and gazed out, his blond hair matching the glint of sunlight shining in through the glass.

Giving Bartleby the opportunity to take this all in and recompose himself, all whilst taking another bite of his Charleston Chew.

“So,” he spoke around bits and pieces of decadent chocolate and nougat, “You used Hugin and Munin to get an Obscurial that you don’t even need?”

Grindelwald glanced over his shoulder, brow suspiciously raised.

“And what’s wrong with that?”

“Nothing, sir. Simply for clarification purposes,” Bartleby answered boredly and leaned his shoulder against the nearest bookcase, “What are the specifications for today’s meeting?”
“As blunt as always, B,” Grindelwald answered with a dismissive sniff, his manic monologuing spell clearly having passed, “One stroke before midnight. The usual area.”

“Consider it done, sir. Shall I fetch you your hat?”

“Unnecessary.”

And Grindelwald apparated away.

Leaving Bartleby alone, seeing the world for the first time without rose-colored glasses clouding his view.

Newt moved listlessly around his bedroom, slipping on his indigo coat and wrapping his yellow-and-gray striped Hufflepuff scarf around his neck. It was bizarre preparing for the day without Credence here beside him, silently judging. Wearing mismatched socks seemed pointless now without his adoringly exasperated sigh in his ear.

Newt had managed quite well on his own before. For years, in fact! He could easily become accustomed to life without Credence’s presence once more.

It’s just that… he had become so used to it.

His vision blurred.

Newt shook his head – no, now wasn’t the time for tears or feeling sorry for himself. He could totally handle living without Credence. He could totally move forward without such an integral part of his life.

Newt could pretend that he hadn’t come to the realization that all along he had been walking though life ignorant of his other half. He could ignore the fact that now that he had a sweet, forbidden taste of completion – of joining with the missing part of his soul – that he felt… empty without him.

Newt rubbed his stinging eyes and turned his gaze upon the folded Slytherin green coat – haphazardly done despite how hard he tried to match Credence’s perfection – hanging off the corner of his bed. He smiled a little.

The green reminding him of the warmth in Credence’s impossibly dark eyes when hugging the Doogle every morning. Of the crimson color of his cheeks and the sweat dripping across his brow after harvesting the crops. Of the very first smile Credence had ever given him after stepping foot in the magic and wonder of the wizarding world.

Whomever said that green was for envy was wrong.

Green was for Credence.

The miserable tears he’d been stubbornly holding back spilled down his freckled cheeks and dripped off his chin. A wretched sob ripped from his cracking throat, masked only by quickly covering his mouth with his palm.

“I miss him,” Newt confessed to the air around him, his throat thick with snot and tears, “He’s my best friend and I miss him.”
I love him.

Newt squeezed his eyes shut and wept into his palm.

He’s my best friend and I love him.

The time for moping around was gone. One last good cry and he was through with feeling sorry for himself.

Now was the time to rescue his friend.

At least, that was what was running through Newt’s mind when he headed to the door to grab a tissue from the dining room when Tina suddenly slammed it into his nose, the metallic taste of copper suddenly filling his mouth.

“Frank’s gone!”

Credence flipped from page-to-page through the leather-bound journal that Newt had apparently kept when he was 10, smiling fondly at the crude drawings of Bowtruckles and overexcited observations scribbled inside. There was something positively endearing thinking about Newt as a kid. Something that made Credence’s heart swell at the mere thought of it.

He imagined tawny hair turned golden with youth and shining eyes glittering like amber in the sunlight. Clothed only in his socks and trousers as he waded along the shore of a forest-surrounded pond, wiggling his feet in the water and catching small, slimy creatures of all sorts. He could imagine Newt’s tiny plastered hands and his plump dirt-smudged cheeks. He could even imagine Newt’s pouting face when his Mother forced him to wear proper, presentable clothes and combed his messy hair.

Credence smiled at the image.

“He’s improved a lot since then,” Theseus observed from over Credence’s shoulder when he turned the page, pointing to a crayon drawing done in red of a mermaid of positively absurd proportions, “I swear he doesn’t make hands the size of a face anymore unless it’s on purpose.”

“I think it’s adorable,” Credence hummed, commenting, “Mother never allowed me to draw. She considered all art either perverse or iconographic blaspheming the face of the Lord Almighty.”

“… I’m sorry.”

It was then that Credence remembered how bizarre his life truly was and how peculiarly people reacted upon hearing of it. He’d become so accustomed to that lifestyle and talking about his experiences with Newt that statements like, “I lost my first tooth when I was 7” seemed just as normal as “My Mother pulled my nails out with a pair of dirty pliers when I wet the bed.”

“Don’t be,” Credence shook his head, changing the subject into one far more innocent, “Thank you for letting me look at these. I didn’t think you’d, erm, like me so much after how we met.”

“Newt’s destroyed various rooms of our parent’s house plenty of times before albeit not the entire thing all at once. You would have to try far harder that that to make me hate you,” Theseus coolly
brushed it off, “I’m frankly impressed that you’re interested in these old things let alone being able to read Arty’s handwriting.”

“It’s atrocious, isn’t it?” Credence gestured to the page, “He’s hardly improved since he was 10.”

“Thank you!” Theseus exclaimed in vindication, crossing his arms over his chest, “I’m relieved that I’m not the only one who thinks that. Arty took lessons, I’ll have you know, in a desperate attempt to transform his handwriting into something somewhat legible by the time he was accepted into Hogwarts.”

“You’re kidding.”

“Unfortunately,” Theseus grimaced, “I’m not.”

“Poor Newt,” Credence softly laughed, leaning his arms against Theseus’ desk and resting his palms against his forehead. “I’m immediately teasing him about this when I get home. He’s going to be so angry with me.”

Theseus fell curiously silent for a moment.

That was until he leaned his shoulder against the wall that the desk was propped up against and asked firmly, “What is my brother to you, Credence?”

Credence froze.

“Pardon?”

Theseus’ lips pressed into a thin, unamused line, all joking attitudes and embarrassing childhood memories turned into critical stone. He leaned precariously over the desk, arms still crossed intimidatingly over his chest. His narrowed eyes scanned him over, roaming over every detail with a fine-toothed comb and, whatever he found in Credence’s suddenly quiet and nervous demeanor, only seemed to confirm whatever silent suspicions he had.

“You’re finally together, aren’t you?”

Credence jumped to his feet and anxiously held his suddenly sweaty hands against his chest, prepared to politely excuse himself to go check on Modesty in the living room—

“What do you mean by finally?”

“I’ll consider that as a yes. Merlin’s Pants, you’re as cute as he is,” Theseus pinched the bridge of his nose, exhaling forcefully though the mouth, “You have no idea how much he’s been writing me these past few months about his feelings for you.”

“He’s been w-what?” Credence nearly squeaked in embarrassment, his voice somehow going both high and soft simultaneously, “I thought his letters were about what Grindelwald was doing.”

“Oh, he’s most certainly been writing me about that too, of course. But, Arty is always getting himself into trouble – that isn’t new. This just happens to be his biggest incident yet,” Theseus shook his head, getting back on topic, “It isn’t every day when he likes someone though.”

Credence’s throat ran dry.

“He’s never been the type of person that seemed into having relationships with other people. He’s always seemed to be at his happiest on his own. Arty’s tried dating other people before but, I can say
that he’s only liked someone as intensely as you only once before,” Theseus frowned, wrinkling his nose, “No, perhaps not.”

Credence froze.

“He hasn’t liked anyone quite as intensely as you before,” Theseus amended with a firm nod, more to himself than to Credence, “When he writes to me, he talks about you with as much enthusiasm as he shows for his creatures.”

Credence’s heart skipped a beat and his breath froze in his lungs.

By God, he loved that man so much.

He loved him.

He loved him.

“Obviously, you know my brother well enough to realize the sheer impact of such a statement,” Theseus approached, hands clasped behind his back, and loomed over him, “I suppose this is where I say that if you hurt him, you’ll regret being born.”

“I certainly hope not,” Credence responded, shrinking a little underneath his stern gaze.

The corners of Theseus’ lips quirked up.

“Don’t worry. You have nothing to fear from me, Credence. You two… I don’t know how to explain it but, you mean something to each other. You’re different. So, instead of the protective older brother speech,” Theseus returned to his desk momentarily and leaned down, retrieving one of the journals for Newt’s younger years and thrust it against Credence’s chest, “I want you to read this when this whole Grindelwald nonsense is over. Not a second before or I’ll know. Be sure to read it thoroughly.”

“T-thank you?”

“I want that back after you’re done though.”

“O-okay,” Credence stammered out, having been taken on a roller-coaster of emotion all within a five-minute period that felt more like eight seconds, “If I may ask, why do you have these and not… well…”

“And not Newt?” Theseus raised a brow, “He gives them to me every year for safe-keeping at Christmas. Do you really expect Newt – of all people – to be able to find them again on his own in those messes of his if he kept them himself?”

“Point taken.”

Silence fell between them.

Credence stared uncomfortably as his shoes.

“So,” Theseus asked monotonously, “Have the two of you had sex yet?”

Thankfully, in that moment, Credence was saved from this increasingly awkward situation by the doorbell.

“Who would be ringing at this late of an hour?” Theseus turned his attention to that instead of
Credence’s mysteriously boiling face turning more and more crimson by the minute, “Stay behind me – wand at the ready. And please, Credence, don’t do the whole Obscurial thing. I’d prefer not having my home destroyed a second time in a row.”

“No promises,” Credence stuttered, placing the leather journal atop Theseus’ desk and sliding out his wand from the interior of his sleeve.

Not daring to even chance thinking about Theseus’ question, he silently followed him into the front room where the older Scamander brother peered through the peephole.

“Please don’t attack me,” an unfamiliar voice droned from the other side, the bronzed mail slot in the middle of the door clinking open and a wand being passed through, dropping to the floor next to Credence’s feet, “I’m switching sides.”

Theseus opened the door, eyes suspiciously narrowed and his wand pointed dangerously at the stranger’s nose.

“Blunt.”

“People tell me that,” the stranger raised his hands into the air and introduced himself, “Bartleby Barnes. I have some information that you might find useful.”

Hugin – still tightly bound and heavily warded to a kitchen chair – was rendered speechless by Bartleby’s sudden free-roaming appearance, his mismatched eyes widening in shock upon listening to his bored-toned explanation.

Somehow neither Graves nor Munin nor Credence himself, having experienced firsthand the cruelty of Grindelwald’s self-serving plans were at all shocked that he had betrayed his closest followers for his own needs. Perhaps neither Graves nor Munin had fallen underneath his spell to the extent that Hugin had, but Credence—

Credence understood how jarring it was to discover someone you had devoted your life to was someone the opposite of what you thought they were.

“While I appreciate your coming to us, your assistance excuses nothing you’ve already done in the service of Grindelwald,” Theseus calmly pointed out, arms crossed over his chest and wand firmly grasped in hand, “After this is all over, you’re going to have to go to trial and be held accountable for your part in his crimes. Becoming a turncoat might result in a reduce sentence however, I cannot guarantee—"

“I understand. I’ll deal with that when we get there,” Bartleby shrugged dismissively, shoving his hands into his pockets, “My friends are a worthwhile trade-off.”

“Didn’t show this much compassion when you were murdering my Aurors,” Graves ground out, “One of ‘em was just a kid.”

“Hmm, I don’t recall using the Killing Curse when we were breaking Grindelwald out of your poorly secured prison. But, if I did, I apologize for your loss,” Bartleby droned – his tone making him seem more uncaring than he truly was – and promptly turned the subject back unto the urgent matter at hand.
“You little shit—”

“Whatever information you need from me, I’ll provide,” Bartleby continued, ignoring Graves for the time being, “I came here straight after last night’s meeting. I can give you names and numbers. I can give you dates and plans of attack. I’ll give you everything you want s’long as kick Grindelwald in the ass.”

“Ha!” Graves muttered gruffly, “Kicking Grindelwald in the ass is the only reason I’m here.”

“Thought you was gonna punch him in the face, Mr. Graves,” Modesty murmured tiredly into his leg, wanting nothing more than to turn in for the night.

“You underestimating me, kiddo?” Graves snarked, picking her up into his arms and carrying her into Theseus’ bedroom, “Because if you seriously believe that I can’t do both then we’re gonna have words, kid. Words.”

Silence momentarily fell in the kitchen.

Until Hugin suddenly muttered, “I’ll help too.”

Theseus dropped his wand onto the floor.

“Grindelwald ordered me to brew an enormous amount of Polyjuice Potion for his followers so that they could pretend to belong on the other side,” he continued, sneering at the floor, “We have people in the Government. We have people in Foreign Ministries. I’ll give you names, ranks, descriptions, and all current projects—"

Theseus stared at him in surprise, not even bothering to retrieve his wand.

“Hugin—"

“Don’t you dare misunderstand me, Theseus. This changes nothing between us,” Hugin hissed sharply, his lower lip quivering, “I still believe everything I believe but perhaps… Grindelwald isn’t the answer I’d hoped him to be.”

“Finally,” Munin breathed a heavy sigh of relief, her over-burdened shoulders relaxing, “If B and my brother are helping, then I don’t see why I can’t join the cause either.”

“Three followers of Grindelwald defecting all at once. Huh,” Bartleby droned before turning to Theseus, “What a party. Do you happen to have any oatmeal in the pantry? Preferably with raisins or a jar of dried blueberries?”

Theseus stared, his brow raised.

“Nevermind,” Bartleby sighed.

“This is wonderful and all – don’t get me wrong – however,” Theseus rubbed his forehead, finally leaning down to pick up his wand off the tile floor, “Trusting you three is one thing. I’ll have a fleet of Aurors on you faster than you can say Abracadabra if you even think about betraying us… But, fighting against Grindelwald with a small handful of people is another. Where do we even start?”

“Well, whatever you do, I suggest doing it quickly,” Bartleby drawled, conspicuously slinking over to the nearest cupboard and opening the door in search for snacks, “Because Grindelwald is attacking Newt Scamander’s hideout in the next couple of days and he’s not holding anything back.”
Something feral violently clawed behind Credence’s ribcage. It thrummed with the steady beating of his hear and grew in intensity – in power – with each passing second.

The cupboard door slammed loudly shut.

“What?”

“Yeah, our people – sorry – his people have had your little hideout surrounded for days,” Theseus explained unbothered, moving onto the next cupboard – the need for snacks outweighing the innate fear of powerful Obscurials, “Remember those French Aurors following you around? Half of ‘em are his men.”

Wisps of black flickered from Credence’s fingertips.

He clenched his hands into fists.

“We were preparing to bring the fight to him. Take him by surprise,” Credence murmured through clenched teeth, closing his eyes tightly shut in self-restraint, “We were going to send letters out and gather up everyone we know to help us.”

“Cute,” Munin drawled, hanging her head back, “Grindelwald might not expect that. He’s never really seen the value in friends and family.”

She wrinkled her nose.

“He wanted the world to turn against you and Newt,” Munin rolled her eyes, “A plan like that doesn’t really work when people know who you really are and will stick by you no matter what anyone says.”

“What this means… is that we still have an element of surprise,” Theseus murmured, musing aloud, “But, who knows if we’ll – or anyone else for that matter – will be able to reach Newt on time?”

The doorbell ringed once again.

All eyes turned to Bartleby.

“What?” he shrugged his shoulders and returned to rummaging through the cabinets, “I don’t know who that is.”

“Credence, behind me,” Theseus commanded, and Credence had the vaguest sense of déjà vu as he pulled out his wand and followed him to the front door.

Only this time, when Theseus peered through the peephole, no one was there.

Suddenly, the bronzed mail-slot squeaked open and a loud, obnoxious, wondrously familiar raspberry was blown at them.

“Pickett?!”

Chapter End Notes

Sad Newt! Echolalia! New characters? Deaf characters! Poly characters! More Trans
characters! Newt's mom! Pickett and Prue going on an adventure? Grindelwald's followers defecting? An attack on Newt and Credence's beloved farmhouse? Oh boy oh boy, everything is happening so fast! How will all of this end?

Tune in next time (okay, we still have a couple chapters plus bonus content to go, don't worry) to find out!

Here's the point in the notes where I ask how I'm doing with my writing soooooo, how am I doing with my writing? Is there anything that I should improve upon? Anything that you'd like to see more of? Less of?

Please leave your comments and critiques below! I absolutely love love LOVE reading each and every single one of them! They are truly the fuel in which this series thrives upon! I couldn't make this happen without you! <3

Also, I made a Tumblr, my darlings! I haven't been as active as I'd like to be (re: depression) but, I'll be posting art and writings and other cool things on there so, go and interact with me! You might even see a bit of GM, DS art on there: https://darthpricklypear.tumblr.com/

Until next time!
The moment we've been waiting for has arrived with the beginning of the final battle.

Trust me, it'll all be okay. This story has a happy ending.

After a thorough surveying of every nook, cranny, and shadows of the abyss of the suitcase, one Newton Artemis Fido Scamander had come to three separate conclusions:

1. Pickett, Prudence, and Frank were missing,
2. They had likely gone off to rescue Credence in some ill-planned, absolutely reckless voyage.
3. There was nothing Newt could do to stop it.

As much as every bit of his instincts poured energy into his heart and legs to run after his creatures, he knew that he was needed here more than out there. That he just had to trust in Pickett, Prudence, and Frank and hope that, during their short time together, they had learned to hold themselves up and be strong without someone coddling over their impossibly black eyes and beautifully curly hair…

Merlin, he hoped that Credence was okay.

So, Newt stuck to his role and let everyone else stick to theirs. He worked diligently day and night, penning letters and sending them out via dearest Almasie venturing into the nearby wizarding town and sending them anonymously through the plainest owls they could find. Newt created portkeys in the form of follow-up letters – carefully warded in envelopes that would only open after a key phrase was spoken that only the recipient would know.

Newt tended to his beloved creatures and kept their enclosures tidied up to perfection. He worked on his notes, sketching soulful eyes and wisps of living darkness beside observations that were always curiously about Obscurials. He even cleaned the cabin.

Although, the results were nothing like when Credence did it.

Newt had tried making the bed.

Sprawled inelegantly over the mattress, hands and knees placed over the four corners, attempting to tuck in the ivory sheets and handmade quilts and blankets softer than sin itself only for wrinkles deeper than canyons to emerge twice-fold whenever he tried to smooth one down.

However Credence managed to form those neat, crisp creases at the end of the bed where sheets were tucked underneath the mattress was pure magic.

Pure. Magic.

Newt hadn’t slept since Credence left.

Unable to get comfortable in a wrinkled, poorly-made bed without Credence crushed to his side.
Vibrant indigo and violet bruises the color of the flowers growing in their meadow had sprouted underneath his green eyes.

His limbs trembled – his blood likely completely replaced with all the tea he’d been drinking. But, he couldn’t stop.

Because every time he closed his eyes, he was plagued by more ideas, more revelations, more thoughts of something more he could do.

“Take a walk, Newt,” Tina had suggested this morning over breakfast, the pair having arisen before everyone else.

Matching violet flowers sprouted underneath her eyes.

“There’s no time,” Newt had initially brushed her off with a practiced smile, “I need to monitor the Niffler eggs and fix the sink—”

“I’ll take care of the Niffler,” Tina had waved her hand dismissively in the air, “And I’ll get Jacob to look underneath the sink. Go take a walk.”

“There’s still plenty more for me to do—”

“Newt, go take a walk,” Tina had ordered firmly then, sipping her morning coffee as if it were the last drop of water in the middle of the desert, “Or you’re going to crash any minute.”

Much to his own surprise, Newt had found himself obeying.

So, he’d promptly pulled his coat off from the rack and climbed up the stairs into the barn. He’d played with the black-and-white striped spiders and found Credence Jr preening on his sparkly silver cobweb. He’d climbed into the musty rafters and sketched the owls Credence had named all after him.

Covered in ancient dust and spider silk, Newt had then ventured outside and strolled through the farm. He looked over the herbs and crops, caressing their leaves as he walked past with a fondness he didn’t know he’d had.

He continued walking until he’d reached the meadow where he’d had his last conversation with Credence.

Newt paused, staring thoughtfully into the quiet scene of fluttering butterflies, bumbling bees, and dancing dragonflies. Delicate songbirds chirped loving melodies in the trees above him, fluttering away in pairs when he’d looked up.

Sighing, Newt ventured into the peaceful meadow and sat down in the middle of the violet flowers, resting his arms behind his head and watching the clouds roll by.

Newt had traveled the world and had many fantastic adventures by his lonesome but, never before had a place felt like…

Like home.

If he ever retired – if that were even possible for a man like him – he’d quite like it to be here. Plenty of suitable habitats and room for the creatures to roam about freely. The farm sizable enough to feed himself and anyone he pleased for ages. The Mediterranean nearby a perfect place to observe Kraken breeding populations. This could be a place where he and Credence could be happy—
Newt closed his eyes and slowly drifted off to sleep.

Wondering when Credence had become synonymous with home.

“Prudence,” Credence cooed affectionately to the paper butterfly rapidly fluttering her ivory wings cradled between his palms, “I’ve missed you.”

A loud annoyed squeak came from his shoulder.

“I’ve missed you too, Pickett,” he grinned, shifting to place Prudence on his lapel and offering the huffing and puffing Bowtruckle his scarred finger to climb upon, “I’m still mad at you though for ignoring me. The both of you.”

Prue’s wings suddenly stopped fluttering.

And Pickett seemed to look guilty, crossing his arms over his thin chest and looking away. He seemed to debate something for a moment, puffing out his cheeks and making little sounds of disgruntlement, before gesturing Credence forward with a single finger.

When Credence curiously obeyed, the small creature reached out and hugged his nose.

“Oh,” Credence hummed softly, bringing his free hand around the back of the trembling Bowtruckle and gently hugging him back, “I forgive you, Pickett. I could never stay mad at you and Prue for long.”

He carefully pulled away.

“You’re my friends after all,” Credence smiled once more before it quickly turned into a frown.

“What are you doing here all alone anyways?” concern dotted his brow as he surveyed the empty porch from the safety of the opened doorway. Someone had to have escorted them. They were just too small and fragile to have traveled the world by their lonesome which had to have meant—

“Is Newt here with you?” he whispered, impossibly dark eyes shining with hope.

Before Credence could get a response, he was already running out the door into the freezing evening air looking around for sunshine in the middle of night.

All he found though were thunderstorms instead.

“Frank.” Credence halted to a slow stop, reaching the outskirts of the road where civilization bordered forested wilderness.

The golden-feathered beast lifted his exhausted head in acknowledgement, deigning him a brief nod, before resting his face between his claws once more and closing his eyes.

He started snoring shortly after.

“I don’t understand,” Credence whispered, his heart sinking more and more with each passing second, having thought that maybe—
He shook his head and raised his scarred hand up to his face, asking Pickett, “You came here alone? Why?”

Pickett’s entire demeanor changed then, his upper lip viciously curling into something close to a snarl as he pointed over his shoulder—

Glaring at Theseus Scamander now lingering in the doorway of his home, arms crossed firmly across his chest and broad shoulder resting against the wooden frame.

Prudence suddenly perked up, flying away from Credence’s lapel across the road only to smack Theseus across the cheek with her paper wing.

Credence’s eyes bulged.

Theseus, not knowing how to properly respond to being slapped by a paper butterfly, merely rubbed his cheek, “Ow.”

“Oh! Oh no, that’s the real Theseus,” Credence proclaimed to Pickett as he hurried across the road back to the house, returning the Bowtruckle to his place upon his shoulder, “Not the fake one. Oh dear, so that’s what this was all about? You didn’t have to come all this way— I mean, I really appreciate it. Truly, I do. But, I’m safe. I’m okay. You don’t have to worry about me so much.”

Pickett scrutinized Theseus.

To the sheer ridiculous point of scratching his green chin in deep Sherlockian contemplation.

“I’m telling the truth,” Credence repeated with an exasperated breath, “The real fake Theseus is right in there—”

And in that well-timed moment, Munin decided to appear right beside Theseus.

She casually popped her sore neck and rubbed her aching wrists with a gravely hiss, light black-and-blue bruises smattered around her wrists like a pair of unusual matching bracelets.

“You didn’t have to make the wards so tight,” she complained.

Theseus didn’t even blink an eye.

“You didn’t have to Crucio my brother.”

“Point taken.”

Pickett glanced rapidly between them, pointing at Munin with a loud squeak.

“Y-yes,” Credence responded absently, not having been prepared whatsoever to see Munin released so soon. Yes, she and her wicked brother had agreed to help them. He knew that conceptually; but, was Credence prepared at all to realize it? No. Perhaps never. “That’s the fake Theseus.”

Quicker than the blink of an eye, Prudence fluttered over and smacked Munin twice across the cheek.

Before promptly returning to Credence’s lapel and settling in with a final snap of the wings.

Munin rubbed her face, “Uhhh.”

“I’m never letting you forget this,” Bartleby stated, apathetically snacking on a tin of Oreos he’d
scavenged from the cupboards, “The great and powerful Munin! Defeated by a teensy wittle butterfly.”

“B,” Munin cooed, saccharine sweet, “I will snatch up your snacks right this instant and devour them in front of you.”

“Try it.”

“Or you could put those back in the cupboard where they belong,” Theseus groaned, pinching the bridge of his nose and closing his tired eyes, “They’re not mine and they certainly aren’t yours.”

“I’m pretty sure the munchkin won’t mind,” Bartleby yawned.

“I’m fairly certain Modesty wouldn’t care considering they’re Newt’s,” Theseus snapped, snatching the box of treats from Bartleby and heading back inside.

“B, you inconsiderate nitwit,” Munin groaned in exasperation and placed her hand on her hip, the other pointing into the house, “Go apologize to him.”

“But, Munin—”

“Now.”

“Alright, alright,” Bartleby sighed, slipping his hands into his pockets and doing as he was told, “I better get some oatmeal out of this later though.”

When he’d disappeared completely into the house, Munin’s sharp shoulders slackened and she slowly sunk down the length of the door frame. She grunted and rested an arm against her pointed knees, her hand sliding across her forehead and the back of her curly hair.

They remained there – silent, awkward – like that for a moment.

Credence lingering right outside the porch and Munin lounging in the threshold of the open door.

“I get it,” her softened scratchy voice pierced the air like knives dragged down a chalkboard.

“P-pardon?”

“Don’t pretend you don’t know,” Munin snorted between a self-deprecating laugh, “It’s written all over your face. You’re scared of me. I get it. Not like it wasn’t earned.”

“I’m not afraid.”

She paused, “What?”

“I’m not afraid,” Credence repeated, making unwavering eye contact with the woman he saw haunting every shadow no matter where he went, “Not anymore. I’m… angry. You’re a monster who has done nothing but lie, cheat, trick and hurt for your own desires. You’ve killed people. Lots of innocent people. You’re not so different from Grindelwald.”

Munin lowered her gaze, “I know.”

“And you’re not so different from me either.”

Her head whirled back up.
“Everything I hate about myself I see in you,” Credence clutched his chest, his voice cracking underneath the pressure of tears he refused to shed, “They say it’s not my fault. The things I did. That I wasn’t in control of myself, but I’ve hurt so many people. I’ve killed even more. I murdered my own mother! I did that. Me. I have blood on my hands because I’m just as much as a monster as you are.”

Credence gazed down at his shaking hand.

“And I hate it because I couldn’t stop myself.”

“You’re right.”

Credence looked back up.

“You’re just like me,” Munin hoisted herself onto her feet, wincing as her knees and spine popped back into place, “You’re also better than me, Credence. Because I don’t doubt that you would’ve let yourself continue to get hurt for your sisters if you weren’t an Obscurial. You would’ve died in that household protecting them. I value my life too much to do that – even for Hugin.”

“I… I don’t know.”

Munin wrinkled her nose and stepped forward.

“When did you find out about the Obscurus?”

“Y-you already know that,” Credence stepped backwards, uncomfortable, “In New York after… after Grindelwald abandoned me.”

“And did you ever once – once – knowingly lash out at your Mother before that?” Munin continued advancing, an annoyed sneer curled across her lips, until she was centimeters away from him, “Did you ever take a beating meant for your sisters?”

Credence swallowed.

“Y-yes.”

“Then, Obscurial or not, you would’ve continued like that until the day you died,” Munin ground her teeth, “Because you’re a good person, Credence, and you would’ve searched any alternative route to hurting others had that option not been taken away from you. You’re a protector – not a fighter.”

Credence didn’t know what to say to that.

So, he simply responded with, “…thank you.”

“Don’t mention it,” Munin stepped backwards and ran her hands down the length of her hair, “Now, if you don’t mind me, I’m going to sleep on a real bed. Sleeping straight up in a chair is a bit of a wanker.”

She glanced over her shoulder one last time and grinned, waving her fingers delicately in his direction before heading back inside, “Toodles.”

Credence stared at her retreating figure for a prolonged moment, overwhelmed by everything that had just come to pass, before turning around and plopping onto the porch steps. He leaned over and rested his palm against his weary forehead.

Too much had happened within the past couple days for him to process. Too much had happened
within the past hour for him to take. Too many emotions – both good, bad, and confusing – for him to focus on.

So, instead, he focused on Pickett.

He peered between his scarred fingers at the lounging Bowtruckle upon his shoulder, asking softly, “How did you find me?”

Pickett boredly pointed at Frank.

“‘Yes, I understand that Frank brought you here,” Credence frowned, “But, how?”’

Pickett puffed out his cheeks in frustration and blew an indignant raspberry at him, pointing at Frank before gesturing down to his feet.

Credence squinted at the dozing Thunderbird softly snoring across the road, not understanding until —

“Is that my sock?!” Credence scowled at the torn white fabric hooked around Frank’s sharp claw, “You’re worse than the Niffler, I swear. When you get back home, I’m banishing you from the cabin until you can control yourself around my laundry.”

As much as he complained, he couldn’t be too mad at Pickett since using the lingering scent on his clothes and the Thunderbird’s keen sense of smell was genius. However, it was the sheer principle of the matter and Pickett already had a big enough of a problem with thieving bits and pieces of perfectly good laundry.

He’d have to consult Newt about this as soon he got home—

Home.

Home with the creatures.

Home with the meadows.

Home with Newt.

Credence’s heart lurched.

He needed to return to Italy – to the barn, to the suitcase, to his home – and fix this horrible mess that he’d gotten themselves into. He needed to warn Newt of Grindelwald’s upcoming assault and protect the people he loved and cared for no matter the cost.

And he knew exactly how to get back.

________________________________________

The first to arrive were the Goldstein’s relatives.

Resembling a dissembled set of Matryoshka dolls – the three standing from small, medium, and large in an ascending order of a most ridiculously comical fashion.

The shortest of the trio was a stocky woman bearing the most resemblance to the Goldstein sisters,
with curly brown locks cropped above her shoulders in what Newt was now beginning to consider typical Goldstein fashion. Where Queenie was all sunny disposition and Tina all furious nerves, this woman was unobjectively stone-cold adamant. As she chewed on her turquoise-polished nails, Newt had the distinct feeling that he was being picked apart from the inside out.

The next up in height was the sole man of the group, yawning for the fifth time since their arrival mere seconds ago into his palm. Were he not looking like he hadn’t slept once within the past week, he’d be what most would consider unbearably attractive. Dark stubble shadowing his squared jawline. Dreamy hooded eyes, his skin a nice toasted brown with matching wavy hair curling just around his ears.

A debonair cowboy if he’d ever seen one.

All that were missing were the boots and a pair of leather chaps.

The tallest woman of them all, however, was like a walking stick with legs with the fluffiest chestnut brown hair he’d ever seen—

And she was rushing towards him with her arms outstretched.

Newt found himself regretting returning to the barn after his nap.

“You poor, poor dear,” she bemoaned, holding Newt’s face against her flat chest, “Targeted by Gellert Grindelwald himself, your name ruined, being forced to fight back or live your life on the run! Oh, you poor, unfortunate soul.”

“Clem,” Esther pinched the bridge of her nose, inhaled a deep breath in self-restraint, “What did we say about hugging people without warning?”

“That it’s rude,” Clementine pouted and released Newt—much to his relief—only for her to wrap her long, spindly arms around him once more, pressing her cheek against his, “But look at him! He’s so gosh-darned huggable and just look at that sad look in his eyes! I just want to wrap him up in a snuggly little cocoon and protect him always.”

“I’m old enough to protect myself, thank you very much,” Newt mumbled, twirling his hair between his fingers and growing more and more uncomfortable by the minute at being swaddled.

“You darling little green bean,” Clem merely continued to coo, rubbing her cheek affectionately against his.

Newt wondered if he’d ever escape this torture.

“I apologize for Clem’s… Cleminess,” Terrence drawled, gently pushing her out of the way and protecting Newt from her barrage of overwhelming affections by standing in front of him, “We haven’t properly introduced ourselves. The name’s Terrence. Just Terrence.”

“Terrence Goldstein,” Esther emphasized, sidling up beside them and picking at her thoroughly chipped nails, “You already met our wife Clementine. You have my full permission to squirt her with a water bottle if she gets too handsy.”

Clementine scowled, crossing her arms over her chest, “I’m not that bad.”

“I’m Esther Goldstein by the way,” she ignored her in favor of introducing herself, “But, I’d prefer it if you’d just call me Coach. Madame will also suffice.”
“Esther here teaches the Georgia Peach’s Quidditch Team for the little youngsters who aren’t old enough to go to Ilvermony yet,” Clementine preened, distracted by the thought of their cute little sunburned faces and adorable oversized uniforms, “We were just accepted to nationals!”

“Clem is, unfortunately, my assistant coach,” Esther sighed.

“I just love those little cutie-patooties so much!”

“We know, Clem,” Esther rolled her eyes, exasperated, before pausing to look at Newt up and down. She rubbed her chin critically, humming.

He squirmed.

“You ever play?” she finally – mercifully – asked after a solid minute of near-silent scrutiny, “Thin, nimble, and quick on your feet – I gather. A good head on your shoulders. Eyes focused on your surroundings instead of the people around you. Good. You have no need for distractions. You were a Seeker, weren’t you?”

“I get that a lot,” Newt smiled awkwardly, twirling his hair around and around and around his fingers, “More of a Chaser really.”

“Hmm, you’re small enough to be a Chaser,” Esther clicked her tongue before turning her back on him and walking through the expanse of the deceptively empty barn, “But, you’d be a much better Seeker. So, where’s my darling nieces?”

“I… uhm… thank you?” Newt blinked, uncertain whether to be offended or not.

“You get used to it,” Terrence mumbled, nodding off where he stood, “Clem’s all over-enthusiastic cheeriness and Esther’s blunter than a thousand-year-old knife. Like cats and dogs those two.”

“What does that make you?”

“Hmm?” Terrence’s eyes fluttered open, lolling his head to the side to properly look at him.

“If they’re like cats and dogs,” Newt clarified, “Then what does that make you?”

Terrence’s posture slowly straightened – his shoulders rolled back, chin poised high, and eyes sharpened. Regalness lessened only by how his hands rested lazily in his pockets.

For the first time since meeting him, Terrence seemed awake.

His lips slowly curled into a wolfish grin, sharp ivory canines glinting in the afternoon sunlight shining in from the weathered holes in the dilapidated roof. His dull brown eyes caught in the light, shimmering bright liquid gold that would’ve made any mortal man freeze in inexplicable terror.

Newt stopped twirling his hair.

Every inch of him fascinated.

“Well now, amigo,” Terrence suddenly yawned and looked back at his wives, “Yer just gonna have to figure that out yerself.”
The arrivals started swarming in shortly after that.

Right as everyone started climbing out of the suitcase, Clementine immediately swathing the Goldstein sisters and their lovers in bone-crushing hugs and kisses, did their next helper appear. Along with a handful of others.

“Daddy!” Alma scrambled out of Clementine’s affectionately suffocating embrace with surprising vigor and bounded to her father who turned around when his friends pointed, laughing, behind him. He had just enough time to open up his muscular arms when Alma launched herself full-force into his broad chest, using the momentum to twirl her around.

“My little lamb,” his laughter boomed throughout the entire barn in such a warm and loving manner that it didn’t set off Newt’s peculiarities. In fact, it had quite the opposite effect – filling him head to toe with endless gooiness.

Like a sheet of fresh chocolate-chip cookies taken straight out of the oven.

“I knew you’d come,” Alma kissed his cheek before peering around his shoulder, “And you brought Reginald! And is that Dashing Daphne I see? Ishmael, you shaved your hair! And oh! Hiya Comfort! Where’s Harris?”

“At home with the munchkins,” Comfort answered quietly in a husky voice, crossing her bulging arms over her chest.

“Yeah? And how’s Dido and Dolly doing?”

“Perfect lil plums, they are,” Comfort smirked, “Started walkin’ not too long ago.”

“Oh,” Alma’s eyes widened, “Oh no.”

“Oh yes,” she laughed heartily, “Harris’ got his hands full.”

“The poor dear,” Alma grinned just as her father finally set her down.

Captain Louis took advantage of that opportunity to point behind him, proclaiming in an accented voice sounding more Russian or Eastern European than any sort of American drawl, “I brought everyone from our old regiment, lamb. Comfort, Reggie, Ishmael, Daphne. Harris isn’t—”

Newt’s brows furrowed as the Captain obliviously repeated the same exact conversation they’d just held.

An ashamed expression crossed Alma’s otherwise pleasant visage, a frown tugging at the corner of her plump lips.

“I came as soon as I could,” Captain Louis turned back towards her, voicing his words aloud and simultaneously signing along with it, “Anything you and your friends need, we’re here for you.”

“Thank you, Dad,” Alma pressed her slender fingers against her rounded chin, extending them outwards, shortly followed by pressing the tip of her thumb against her forehead with her fingers flared. She paused before lowering her middle and ring finger, keeping the rest raised and shaking them back and forth, matched by her adoring smile, “I love you.”

Captain Louis mimicked the same sign with a matching smile, “I love you too.”

“What do you need from me?”
His smile faltered, continuing to both sign and speak aloud, “Reading lips is still challenging, but slowly getting better at signing. Reggie can translate for me.”

“Lieutenant Johnson,” Reginald saluted behind him with a lazy grin, “Reporting for duty. Oh, oh, oh!”

He waved his hands up and down excitedly.


“Pfft!” Alma snorted, her hands flying up to cover her face, “Really, Dad? The Argo?”

Captain Louis furrowed his brows.

“Sorry, sorry,” Alma lowered her hands and slowly signed between giggles, “The Argo?”

Captain Louis’ face flushed. He immediately turned around, stomping up to Reginald and smacked him.

“Ow!” Reginald pouted, rubbing the back of his head.

“I’ve made my decision,” Esther droned to her husband, slipping her hand into his pocket and linking their rough fingers together, “I like him.”

“You would,” Terrence yawned, leaning over and plopping his cheek on top of her head, “Just as spirited as you are, Plum.”

“Don’t call me that.”

“Okay, Danger Muffin.”

Esther smirked, “Better.”

“Goodness gracious me, that’s our sweet Almaisie darling’s father,” Clementine’s eyes blew wide, squeezing her nieces tighter and tighter against her sides, their faces slowly turning bluer by the second, “I never would’ve imagined it.”

“Imagined what?” Esther raised a brow.

“I always pictured a librarian or a quirky professor-type,” Clementine practically swooned, “Not a charming, strong young man.”

“And deaf,” Jacob nervously patted his sweaty forehead with his handkerchief, “Never imagined him to be deaf.”

“Yes,” Esther’s eyes narrowed, “And?”

“W-wouldn’t he have trouble… erm… y’know?”

“Argyle is a formidable opponent,” Tina escaped Clem’s crushing embrace, rescuing Queenie while she was at it much to her aunt’s disappointment. She stomped up to Jacob and pressed her finger pointedly against his chest, “He can do things you couldn’t even imagine so don’t you say another word.”
“But—”

“Founders be damned, just because he’s deaf doesn’t mean he can’t help out,” someone snarked behind Newt, causing him to stumble backwards onto the ground. “I’ve got a bum leg and Newt’s well…”

Hortencia wrinkled her nose and leaned against her cane, pondering.

“Nah,” she shook her head finally, “Newt’s perfect.”

“Orti,” Newt gazed up at her, palms covered in dust.

Hortencia winked down at him, offering her hand to pull himself up, “Long time no see, buddy.”

“You made it,” he whispered, brushing off the sleeves of his coat, “I didn’t think you’d come.”

“Geez, way to make a witch feel good about herself,” Hortencia rolled her eyes with a mock-offended scoff, “I may be an asshole, but I’m a loyal asshole. I wouldn’t leave you to the wolves.”

“I didn’t mean it like that—”

“Yeah, yeah. I know,” she brushed it off nonchalantly, “Tried to convince Klaudius to come. Sounded like you needed all the help you could. But, his wife—”

Newt’s eyes blew wide.

“He’s married?!”

“Caught me by surprise too,” Hortencia grinned wickedly – like a pup having torn up the couch pillows without the owner having realized yet – and waved her free hand in front her, “But, just wait. It gets even better. His wife went into labor with their first kid.”

“No.”

“Yes!”

“Bloody hell,” Newt ran his hand through his tawny hair, mussing up the locks with a genuine laugh, “I never would’ve guessed. Klaudius: a father! Would you gather he’s about our age then?”

“Fuck if I know,” Hortencia scoffed, “The guy’s an enigma wrapped in a paradox.”

“Newt, honey,” Queenie suddenly chirped, popping in between them with a smile, “Care to introduce us to your friend?”

“Oh, y-yes,” Newt bumbled, stepping off to the side and stiffly gesturing between the two witches, “Hortencia meet Queenie. Queenie meet Hortencia.”

“How do you do?” Queenie stuck out her hand charmingly, “It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

“Likewise,” Hortencia firmly grasped her hand, shaking it without ever once breaking eye contact, “You’re one of Newt’s American mates, eh?”

“You would be correct,” Queenie lilted, tilting her head and causing her golden curls to bounce, “And you’re one of Newt’s former schoolmates. Oh, even despite being put into separate Houses. Red and gold suits you.”
Hortencia blinked, sharply retracting her hand. “How—”

“Queenie here is a natural Legilimens,” Newt explained, tugging at his collar, “Ah, I forgot to erm mention that.”

Much to his surprise, Hortencia simply blushed.

“Oh,” she awkwardly rubbed the back of her neck and averted her gaze elsewhere, “Then you saw —erm. When I f-first saw you—”

“You’re so cute, honey,” Queenie giggled behind her hands in a manner that was nothing except adorable, “Don’t worry. Everyone thinks that whenever they first meet me. My sweet Jacob did that too. Oh!”

She suddenly stuck her arm into the air and excitedly waved him over.

“Jacob! Jacob, you have to meet Miss Hortencia here.”

“I dunno about that,” Jacob pulled at his collar nervously.

“Nonsense,” she bounced over and pulled him by the arm, “We’re all friends here.”

Friends.


Everyone talking amongst themselves and laughing together, all connected in some way or another to each other. So much history filling this room – to imagine that every event, every choice and individual decision had led to this moment of collision between different families, different heritages.

Muggles and Wizards and Witches working in tandem for one important goal.

To help.

It was bizarre, really. Newt was so accustomed to helping others whether it meant taking the blame for something awful he didn’t do, embracing lost souls without anyone else to turn to, or as simple as returning injured creatures to full health. He fed others. Rehabilitated others. Fought and cared for others.

It wasn’t often that others helped him.

Newt slipped his hands into his pockets and turned his gaze towards the exposed beams above him where the owls were nesting. Their tiny bean-like bodies remained almost motionless in their peaceful slumber, nearly resembling the dead were it not for their soft, feathered chests gently falling every other second with tranquil breath.

Everything turned blurry.

Newt had never considered himself a crier – emotional, definitely, but never a crier – but… how couldn’t he tear up when he was surrounded by so many people who cared for him?

The doors to the barn swung open.

The light blinded him.

As he rubbed his eyes, Captain Louis quickly shouted out orders to his regiment to have their wands
at the ready. Newt felt warm bodies swarm around him seconds later and a strong hand placed against his arm.

“It’s me,” Tina murmured, pulling him backwards, “Jacob. Queenie. Protect him in the suitcase.”

“Right,” Jacob said near his left ear as he was switched between persons.

“Wait—”

“Identify yourself,” Lieutenant Johnson ordered from his right, far closer than he’d been two seconds before, “Drop your wand and remove yourself from the Hippogriff. Slowly.”

A Hippogriff?

“Nonsense,” an all-too-familiar voice huffed, “I’ll remove myself once you lower your wands.”

Newt pulled himself away from Tina’s grasp, his vision clearing.

“Newt! Wait, stop!”

The majestic beast stood proudly in the barn doorway, bluish-white feathered wings arched elegantly towards the sky and it’s proud head held high. And on top—

“Mum.”

Newt slowly approached, bowing with utmost deference before the Hippogriff, advancing only once the beast bowed in similar respect. Everything around him melted away – the barn, his friends, all his troubles – until only he and his Mother remained. He extended his hand to her, helping her down.

“You came.”

Delia released her long, peppered auburn hair from her ponytail, tossing the messy locks until it fluffed back to life. She was the portrait of refinement and wilderness, adventure and composure.

It was rare nowadays that Newt saw her in proper riding attire – preferring to wear cashmere slippers instead of leather boots, floral dresses instead of crisp ivory blouses and khaki trousers – and seeing her now, decked in all of her former glory, made him feel like he was 5 years old again watching her fly through the sky for the first time.

Merlin, he’d been such a Momma’s boy.

“Anything for my darling son,” Delia smiled sweetly, tossing her taupe gloves carelessly behind her. And grabbed him sternly by the ear.

“Ow, ow, ow!” Newt hissed, being pulled close against her.

“Which is why I simply cannot – cannot – understand why you didn’t send for me sooner?” Delia sharply scolded, pulling him through the barn.

The Hippogriff boredly positioned itself beside the barn doors, standing guard.

“How come the first time I hear you have an apprentice is through the newspaper? The newspaper, Newt! I hear more about you from Wizarding Weekly than I do from you!”

“Sorry, sorry, sorry—”
“And another thing! Why didn’t you tell me you were in America! I could’ve arranged for your transport and a place for you to stay. Oh, I could’ve written Lisabetta. You remember Lisabetta, don’t you? You and her boy were inseparable,” she shook her head and continued chastising, “Hear I am reading about Grindelwald finally getting caught when I see your name – that’s right, your name – in bloody Wizarding Weekly, wouldn’t you know it?! Do you see a trend here, Newt? And thirdly!”

She pulled him closer, speaking directly into his ear now.

“Just look at you,” Delia suddenly whispered, cupping his cheek, “I haven’t since you like this since you came home from school.”

Newt averted his gaze.

“Mum—”

“Those eyes – so sad, so tired. Oh honey,” Delia pulled him against her chest, wrapping her arms around him, “What am I to do with you boys?”

“Sorry, Mum,” Newt rested his forehead against her shoulder, wrapping his arms around her back and clinging onto her as if he were truly a scared little kid again, “I’m so sorry. I didn’t want you to worry. But I… I can’t do this by myself.”

“Shh, I know, darling. I’m here now.”


“You know that isn’t true.”

“I don’t know what you and Theseus see in me.”

“I see a great man that is suffering,” Delia frowned sympathetically, lifting his head and caressing his freckled cheek, “Where is your brother anyways? I need to smack that boy for leaving before telling me that you need help.”

Newt furrowed his brows.

“Theseus isn’t here.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Theseus isn’t here,” Newt repeated, stepping backwards, “What do you mean he left early?”

Suddenly, the atmosphere of the barn changed.

Newt couldn’t explain it.

Perhaps it was the Hippogriff stiffening by the door, stamping its clawed feet into the ground and squawking loudly in agitation. Perhaps it was Mother falling silent and pulling him protectively behind her. Perhaps it was the heavy sense of foreboding blanketing the air.

Regardless, something or someone was approaching.

And something told him that it wasn’t friendly.
Much like any senseless battle, it began with no warning. No trumpets or drums heralding their arrival. No strongly-worded letters declaring war. Nothing.

Between hugs and reunions, introductions and laughter, the first spells shot through the air – blocked only by Delia’s quick thinking and even quicker counter-spells and the Hippogriff stampeding through the barn; and, the young French boy with sympathetic blue eyes, once a captor kind enough to fetch his bleeding ward a tissue, was tossed to the ground.

“Don’t hurt them!” Newt cried out, grabbing his mother’s arm and forcing down her wand as the French team of Aurors tasked with his arrest swarmed through the dilapidated roof – dropping to the floor and surrounding their injured comrade, “They don’t know what they’re doing!”

But Captain Argyle Louis barked ordered to his team and the group of people he’d met only minutes before on how best to the protect the barn – sending Comfort and Ishmael running to Newt’s side.

“They shot first,” Delia’s eyes narrowed, pulling her arm away and shoving Newt back behind her, “If they attack you, they attack us.”

“Don’t worry, boy,” Comfort pressed her hand against Newt’s shoulder, “We won’t kill ‘em. Not unless it’s necessary.”

Ishmael grunted in agreement.

“Death is never necessary,” Newt vehemently disagreed, “There’s always some alternative.”

“Ideal but impractical,” Comfort smiled firmly, “If it comes down to your life or theirs, we’ll have to make that choice whether you agree with it or not.”

“It’s not our right!” he still protested, having agreed to a fight – not a death match, “I can’t ask anyone to give their life for me.”

“That’s what soldiers do.”

“We’re not soldiers!”

“I am,” Comfort’s lips pressed into a thin line, “And I don’t know you, boy, but I’d lay down my life if it came down to it because that’s what I signed up for.”

An apothic green spell shot through the not unguarded entrance.

It flew past Newt.

It flew past Queenie.

It flew past Captain Louis and Hortencia.

Hitting the young French boy who had only just staggered to his feet.

The first casualty.

And Newt didn’t even know his name.
“That’s not one of ours! That’s not us!” Newt exclaimed in alarm, waving his hands frantically in front of him; but, perhaps it was the adrenaline coursing through his body or how quick everything was happening, that Newt didn’t realize he had forgotten to translate.

A mustachioed gentleman and a redheaded woman with a thin scar slashed across her brow rushed to their fallen comrade’s side, screaming in horror and gripping onto his body as the remaining members of the French Aurors surrounded them.

“Gaston!” the gentleman cried out, sliding onto his knees and shaking the youth’s shoulders, “Gaston!”

“Doudou! Non! Non! Gaston!” the young woman wailed, touching her shaking fingers to his cheek before casting her teary hate-filled gaze unto Newt.

He shrunk behind his mother.

“Monstre.”

This was it.

Grindelwald had achieved everything that he had set out to do. So much death had been forced upon Newt’s shoulders, sullying his good name. So many lives ruined – Muggle and Magical alike – all because an evil man wanted something that Newt had. This wasn’t the first of the casualties attributed to the fiend’s wicked desires – not by a long shot – but, this was the first time Newt had ever seen the fresh aftermath spilling over a loved ones’ eyes.

And it made him sick.

“Move. Boy, move!” Comfort shoved him forward as the French attacked all at once, painting a constellation of spells within the ancient barn, “You can feel sad later. Move!”

“My suitcase—”

“Leave it,” she hissed, “There’s no time.”

But Newt didn’t listen.

He darted fearlessly through the magical mayhem and chaos, diving deep into the open basement and grabbing the suitcase’s handle. He held it protectively against his chest, eyes darting back and forth and his mind thinking rapidly.

They weren’t safe here. They couldn’t fight where his creatures could get hurt. They had to do something. They had to get them safe—

“We’ll take them.”

Newt’s meadow-eyed gaze roamed up the basement ladder and found Jacob’s strong hand outstretched towards him. Dearest Almaisie protectively watched his back with her wand gripped tightly between trembling fingers.

“It’ll be dangerous,” Newt whispered.

“Ey, you’re talkin’ to a New Yorker here,” Jacob beamed nervously, the corners of his eyes crinkling with warmth and fear but also, most importantly, determination, “Danger’s my middle name.”
Somehow Newt couldn’t find himself saying no.

So, he passed over his life freely into the hands of a simple Muggle that he was honored to call his friend, trusting him to take care of his beloved creatures.

“Be careful,” Newt watched Jacob’s fingers wrap tightly around the suitcase handle, lifting it out of the basement, “Come back safe.”

He glanced over at Alma.

“The both of you.”

“Take care of yourself, Newt,” Alma smiled and then they were off.

Once they were gone, Newt temporarily rested his forehead against the ladder steps, taking only a second to just… breathe. There was no going back from here. They’d avoided the inevitable for too long and now the battle had come to them. They had danced with fate only to stumble into its suffocating embrace.

Newt ground his teeth together and climbed.

He emerged amongst a splattering barrage of color and spells – pigments beyond imagination, beyond comprehension. Delia had proudly mounted her Hippogriff, leading him into the horde of enemy combatants and tossing them aside like a child flinging rocks into a river. Hortencia hobbled on the outskirts, sending paralyzing spells from beyond the heat of the skirmish. Tina and Queenie worked in similar tandem while Captain Louis and his team – sans Comfort and Ishmael – fought in close combat.

Newt squinted, unable to locate Queenie’s aunts.

Curiously, he’d found Terrence hiding amongst the shadowed corner of the barnyard’s opened doors alone except for—

Oh. Oh.

Except for a magnificent and proudly majestic mountain lion baring its mighty fangs and a German Shepherd bouncing back and forth from paw to paw in eager excitement and anticipation flocking Terrence’s sides.

A family of animagi.

Nevertheless, that still didn’t explain why they were hiding in relative safety and not fighting amongst their peers – amongst their nieces.

That was until Terrence contorted sharply into himself with an ear-piercing scream so loud and agonizing that it made everyone, except for the deaf, shudder in primitive fear. He frenziedly clawed at his flesh and ripped off massive chunks with such sheer madness that sickening laughter ripped from his lungs and bubbled from his bleeding throat.

Terrence collapsed onto his hands and knees, now violently beating the floor, as his nose and jaw elongated into a skeletal snout of ivory teeth and fangs. His ears swept backwards, and his eyes hollowed into light-eating sockets of depthless despair with nothing but a candle’s flicker within. His limbs contorted and bones snapped, stretching out further and further into a nasty, nightmarish creature of claws and bone.
No, not a family of animagi. Not completely.

Animagi and a *wendigo*.

And Newt found that menacing canine skull and gnarled, gangly body vaguely resembling something that *used* to be human absolutely beautiful.

With the last member of their pack finally transformed, the beastly Goldsteins bolted into the fray with practiced precision denoting having done this a handful of times before – three vastly different creatures fighting as one single entity.

It made Newt believe that perhaps… just perhaps they could win this without further death on either side.

But, as soon as he’d stepped out properly onto the main floor with trusted wand raised, the barn he’d come to call home disappeared around him into a series of splinters.

And in the middle of the destruction, Grindelwald smiled.

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Alma and Jacob sprinted through the farm as if the Devil himself were following. Well, perhaps not the Devil per se; but, the two angry Frenchmen pursuing them were really quite the annoyance.

Jacob’s sweaty hands clung onto Newt’s suitcase for dear life while Alma pushed him forward, casting spell after spell behind him.

“Hurry hurry hurry!” Alma repeated quickly, like some sort of religious mantra recited during times of trouble and need, as they tore through plants and crops, diving into the thick forest of red berries and looming trees just beyond.

“Trying my best here,” Jacob wheezed gruffly.

The forest spilled out into a meadow, but no one dared to stop to marvel at it.

Plots of land were overturned into dirt but spells missing their mark. Violet flowers crushed underneath heavy feet. Various bugs and little critters dashed out of the way lest they too experience such a cruel fate.

Jacob and Alma could hear the sounds of battle emerging.

But still they did not stop.

They reentered the forest and ran as quickly as their legs could take them – jumping over small creeks, evading low-hanging branches, and avoiding frightened animals stampeding out of the way. Even when Jacob slowed and gasped from overexertion, Alma placed a stern hand upon his back and pushed him forward.

They never stopped.

That was until Alma tripped over an exposed root hidden underneath the fallen foliage and tumbled to the ground, her palms bleeding and wand tossed beyond her reach.
“Run, Jacob, run!”

“No! I’m not leaving without you!”

“There’s no time!” Alma pleaded desperately, “The suitcase is more important. Just go!”

The French wizards closed in on them, judging by the closeness of their footsteps as they crunched through dead leaves and snapped fallen twigs and branches.

The wizards closed in on them, judging by the closeness of their footsteps as they crunched through dead leaves and snapped fallen twigs and branches.

Jacob pressed his lips together, a stern look entering his eyes.

And he ran towards them.

And perhaps… just perhaps it was the sheer ridiculousness of the situation, the unexpectedness of a Muggle charging straight towards a pair of highly-trained Aurors, that gave him just enough of an advantage to land a swift uppercut across the closest wizard’s face.

This lucky happenstance gave Alma more than enough time to fetch her wand and scramble to her feet, disabling the other before they could react.

Alma and Jacob stared at the fallen wizards, one unconscious from magical spells and the other by surprise fisticuffs.

They looked at each other, chests heaving, and grinned.

“We’ll hide it here underneath the tree. Right here underneath this tree,” Jacob suggested, nodding towards the very one that had the audacity to have tripped Alma, “They’ll expect us to have continued forward when they wake up – not resort to what’s conveniently right in front of us.”

“Brilliant,” Alma breathlessly agreed as she rapidly carved out a plot of land with magic and buried the suitcase, covering it up just as quick and making it look smooth and untouched, “And they’ll never expect us to have turned back.”

“You thinking what I’m thinking, Almasie.”

“I believe so, yes.”

“Newt’ll be furious,” Jacob panted, sweeping off a coat of sweat from his forehead and flinging the droplets to the ground, “Queenie even more so.”

“Not to mention Teenie but…” Alma outstretched her hand, continuing when Jacob grasped it sweaty hand and all, “We can’t just leave them alone.”

“We’re in this together,” Jacob grinned, “So, I’ll punch ‘em.”

An unholy glint entered the typically timid witch’s dark eyes, a diabolical smile curling across her sweet lips.

“And I’ll slaughter them!”
Chaos.

Within a matter of seconds, everything had turned into absolute chaos.

Newt’s poor unfortunate nose throbbed viciously with the force of a thousand and one beestings and a suspicious ringing noise had entered his ears. The entire world had turned momentarily blurry. Dazed and confused, it took Newt an entire minute to realize where he was.

Comfort dragged him by the arm onto his feet alongside Queenie, whose bouncing golden curls and the entire right side of her head was covered in gushing blood. Comfort similarly hadn’t escaped the blast unscathed – her lower lip and left forearm split open.

Bodies laid – crushed – underneath the rubble of what used to be the barn; yet, the sheer number of witches and wizards seemed to have doubled.

No, tripled.

Was his vision playing tricks on him?

No time to think of that now.

The explosion had leveled the entire surrounding field into a barren wasteland belonging more to a proper dystopia than the world Newt lived in. The beautiful trees – likely hundreds of years old – that had once surrounded the barn now laid flattened to the point where the once hidden Mediterranean and the docks where he and Credence released Hope forever ago was now entirely visible to the eye.

Thick smoke filled the air, making it hard to breathe and even harder to see.

Yet Newt could still spot ice-blond hair and a wicked smile haunting him.

“Everyone pick yourselves up! Dust off your bruises and walk off your wounds,” Captain Louis shouted our orders, seemingly unaffected by the surprise blast except for a stark cut across his dark cheek, “Spartan formation!”

Quicker than the explosion that had caught them off guard, Captain Louis’ entire regiment surrounded Newt and Queenie in a thick circular shield. Hortencia and Tina locked shoulders in the back, wands outstretched and narrowed eyes scanning the crowds as their enemies picked themselves back together.

Captain Louis headed the front, signing fervently.

Comfort laughed heartily at whatever she read.

“What’s he saying?” Newt questioned.

“Don’t you worry your little heart now,” Comfort grinned, “The Cap’n got us covered.”

“I’d still like to know.”

“Shhh.”

Suddenly, they lurched forward and marched in tandem through the decimated fields, leaving behind the remnants of the barn that Newt once adored. The spiderwebs were nothing more than silk in the
wind. Nests abandoned, eggs smashed into pieces. The dock was covered in wooden debris – one of the owls from the Newt Coop impaled.

The impact of the explosion reached further than Newt had originally thought. Even the far-off trees dotting along the outskirts of the farm had been leveled down, revealing the meadow that had once been his and Credence’s secret. The forest was slowly disappearing around them – their shield, their safe haven spread thin.

Newt didn’t know what to do.

What course of action to take – what their end goal was – from this surprise attack. To flee and be pursued or to fight and to conquer.

Either way, he needed to survive.

So, when the maybe-innocent, maybe-not French Aurors and Grindelwald’s followers flung their first spells overhead, Newt knew exactly what he had to do.

He fought back.

As did everyone else.

Tina and Orti. Comfort and Queenie. Captain Louis and his companions.

Multiple people fighting as a single entity.

The Goldstein’s Animagi Aunts and Wendigo Uncle barreled ahead of everyone else, clearing the path through brute strength alone of enemy witches and wizards and making it easier for them to pass.

Until the Wendigo suddenly paused before a fallen woman bleeding heavily from her shoulder, slowly inching away on her hands and knees in fear of the frightening creature. The Wendigo’s long tongue hungrily unfurled from it’s skeletal mouth, thick drool dripping from fanged teeth, as he stalked his prey—

When the German Shepherd and Mountain Lion promptly threw themselves against either side of him, drawing his attention back unto the task at hand.

Meanwhile, at the front of the circle, Captain Louis was holding his own. He launched spells before others had the mere opportunity to whisper the first syllable. All of his spells – silent. The perfect offense to the circle’s defensive shielding.

It was after a moment of observation that Newt realized that the Captain was reading wand movements – predicting what was going to be cast by his opponent and countering before the spell could even be properly cast.

Genius. Effective.

But, while everyone was working near-seamlessly together, fighting for their joint survival—

Newt’s Mum was nowhere to be seen.

“Look out!” Queenie shouted suddenly, head whirling behind them as a blast shot their way through their defenses.

The same moment a pair of Hippogriff claws sank into Newt’s shoulders and tossed him onto it’s
back.

“I’m getting you out of here,” Delia hissed sharply after pulling Newt firmly – protectively – against her chest, flying them higher and higher up into the air, “There’s too many of them and too few of us. If Theseus were here, perhaps we’d stand a fighting chance but—”

“Theseus isn’t here. I am,” Newt couldn’t believe what was happening, “I’m not abandoning my friends, Mum.”

Delia furiously shook her head, gripping tighter onto the Hippogriff.

“Grindelwald is down there.”


“But Newt—”

“No,” he snapped, furious and hurt by his mother’s interference and non-belief in him; but, most of all, he remained firm in his convictions, “My friends are down there fighting for me.”

“They’re fighting for me.”

“Which is why we should leave!”

“No,” he snapped, furious and hurt by his mother’s interference and non-belief in him; but, most of all, he remained firm in his convictions, “My friends are down there fighting for me.”

“They’re fighting for me.”

“Which is why we should stay!” Newt countered, “I can’t abandon them now.”

“You’ll get yourself killed! You’re not a fighter, Newt,” Delia begged desperately, temporarily releasing her hold on the steadily rising Hippogriff. She cupped Newt’s face between her warm palms, tracing his freckles across his cheek with a single finger much like she once did when he was a kid crawling into her bed at night, frightened by a nightmare.

But, Newt wasn’t a child anymore.

And this nightmare couldn’t be soothed away by a mother’s protection.

Newt pulled his mother forward and kissed her cheek, an apologetic smile crossing his lips.

Before pushing away from her loving embrace and leaping off the safety of the Hippogriff into the chaos and war waging below.

However, Newt realized halfway through his fall that jumping down from a high height without first determining where he would land was a relatively bad idea. However, lady luck seemed to shine down upon him as his inevitable impact was met not with harsh earth but with a sudden crash of water.

The breath was violently knocked out of him, creating a soothing blanket of bubbles around him, as he floated down through the sparkling turquoise waters into the Kraken-infested depths below. The warm sunlight pierced through the surface, creating beautiful illuminating rays and fractals through the water. For a moment there, if he only closed his eyes and allowed the sea to take over him, he felt a bit of… peace.

But there was no time for such sentiment.

His lungs screamed for air.
So, Newt frantically swam for the surface until he broke through with a gasping, coughing breath; but, there was no time to stop now. He scrambled for the nearby docks, gripping the wooden planks filled with hazardous spikes of debris – remnants from the barn’s destruction – and pulled himself safely aboard.

He wheezed, spitting up salt water and doing everything he possibly could to regain proper functioning of his lungs, that he didn’t even notice that he had been quickly spotted by one of Grindelwald’s followers.

Newt slammed his fist repeatedly against his chest, oblivious to the wand slowly being raised behind him—

When Comfort rushed forward to his rescue.

With an elegant flick of her wand, she blocked the explosive spell and sent it backwards to the offending wizard instead. She smiled triumphant as he was blown through the battlefields, lost amongst the crowds, and stepped backwards—

Only to slip on the wet dock, impaling herself through a piece of debris.

Time slowed to a standstill.

Seawater dripped down from Newt’s tawny hair onto his freckled cheek underneath widened eyes while scarlet blood dripped from Comfort’s chest into a thick puddle underneath her feet.

Newt scrambled up, tripping once and harshly slamming his face into the ground, before rushing to her side and taking her trembling hand.

“I can stop the bleeding,” his mind worked rapidly, thinking of every possibly solution to save his new friend, “If we just—”

“Optimistic f-fool,” Comfort softly chuckled, a flash of wicked pain crossing her face from the movement.

“There has to be something I can do!” Newt refused to acknowledge defeat, “I can fix this. Don’t give up on me now.”

“It’s too late for me.”

“No!”

“Tell Dido and Dolly that I—I love ‘em and… tell my Harris—Ah well, he already knows,” here eyes slowly slid shut, her gasps for breath turning into strained wheezes, “Tell him to take his time. I’ll be waitin’.”

Her ashy hand fell from Newt’s.

A death rattle her last breath.

Newt squeezed his eyes shut, pressing bloodied hands against his face and loudly crying out. This was horrible – agonizingly horrible. What was he thinking? They were losing. Slowly being overwhelmed and there was nothing they could do about it except admit defeat.

His friends and their friends and family were dying because of him.

Why was the world – why were the people inhabiting it – so cruel? What was the pointing of fighting when there was so much wonder and life in this fantastic world? There was so much more to do, so much more remaining unexplored, so much more to learn and to love—

“It’s beautiful, isn’t it?”

Newt’s blood chilled – frozen within his veins – and he quickly scrambled to his feet, pulling out his wand and pointing it sharply before him.

Grindelwald didn’t even acknowledge him.

His ice-blond hair had been elegantly combed back behind his ears and his double-breasted charcoal trench coat with matching silk scarf was more befitting of an afternoon stroll through the park instead of a heated magical battle. Not even a spot of blood covered his shining leather boots.

“Witches and wizards fighting tooth and nail for their very lives and what they believe in. Putting everything on the line – like your fallen friend right there. Noble. There’s a certain sort of honor in it that debate and philosophy could never satisfy,” Grindelwald gestured outwards to the chaos and bloodshed unfolding before them, “Words can be so fickle but a battle? Oh, the results are inarguable.”

He slipped his hand back into his pockets.

“One victor! One side claiming glory! Moving forward in life and changing the world however they see fit. These winners will write the history books that young ones will learn from and be inspired by. Soon no one will debate who was right and who was wrong since, obviously, the ones who won were right. They will be what generations to come will consider the good guys. Revolutionaries daring to fight the established system,” Grindelwald smiled at Newt, “Do you see? What’s right is all a matter of perspective.”

“This… this is a game to you, isn’t it?” Newt stuttered out, horrified, “This is nothing more than a game of chess with us as your pieces.”

“And is there anything wrong with that?”

“Yes.”

“And yet it works for me so well,” Grindelwald gestured calmly to the battlefield as Newt’s friends were outnumbered and overwhelmed, slowly cornered by Grindelwald’s men and the innocent bystanders tricked to his side, “And it’ll all be worth it in the end once I finally get my hands on my prize.”

“Credence will never come to you.”

“Won’t he?” Grindelwald grinned, turning and gracing Newt with his complete, undivided attention now. He still hadn’t pulled out his wand – by all means vulnerable – and yet…

Newt couldn’t find himself with the ability to move a single muscle – struck frozen in what he assumed to be fear.

“He’s nothing more than a little boy – a child – searching for a master to guide him,” Grindelwald stepped forward and Newt still found himself unable to move, “I underestimated his abilities once before, but I assure you that I don’t intend on doing so again. Credence is a miracle. Only in my hands can he realize his true potential.”
“Credence is a man, not a miracle,” Newt affirmed, “And he can decide what he wants for himself.”

“Oh Newt, that’s what you don’t understand.”

Grindelwald pulled his hands from his pockets and gestured outwards like a conductor managing his orchestra.

“Credence has a weak soul easily influenced by whomever happens to be in the closest proximity. Easily influenced by whomever happens to show him the slightest of kindness,” Grindelwald pressed a hand against his chest, “Do you know easy it would be to turn him against you? The French Ministry is here. Plenty of innocents mixed in with my followers. After seeing what has unfolded here today, no one will ever trust our dear Credence ever again. No one will ever show him a kind and merciful hand again. He’ll be shunned. An outcast among outcasts. He’ll be mine and the greatest thing about it is that he’ll come to me willingly.”

“Then you don’t know Credence,” Newt swallowed, willing his hand to move, to cast a spell, to do something. “He isn’t even here.”

A dark shadow descended upon the battlefield.

Grindelwald smiled widely and pulled out his wand.

“Isn’t he?”

Mayhem and massacre.

Massacre and mayhem.

Never before had Credence experienced the scream-filled tidings of war. Having lived within a 12-block radius his entire life, how could he have ever imagined the bloodshed or the pain of innocent lives lost? The wails of family and friends clinging onto empty vessels of souls not-so-long departed? How could he have imagined the scars scorched upon the Earth? The death hanging heavy within the air, suffocating every remnant of good in the world?

Of course, Credence had felt Death’s cold embrace before. Had wielded the mighty scythe itself, reaping lives long before their time was up on the mortal plane.

But never before had he seen this.

Such… carnage.

Vomit crawled up his throat, restrained only by the sheer shock and horror of the crimes unfolding before him.

The meadow overflowed with raging rivers of blood – beautiful life replaced with death. Bodies scattered the battlefield and, in the distance, the barn which once served as a haven for lost souls blazed with smoke and flame.

The Devil himself roamed these fields with iron-hooves and gnarled claws, turning a sanctuary into Hell itself.
Because that was what War was: Hell upon Earth.

And yet, Credence still found himself searching.

For a freckled face and a tuff of tawny hair.

The light shining within the darkness.

“Newt!” Theseus suddenly called out, frightened eyes blown wide and shaking hands tightly grabbing Thunderbird feathers, eliciting a pained squawk from Frank.

Credence hesitantly followed the older Scamander’s line of sight towards the docks, hoping – praying – to find Newt’s familiar face amongst the still-fighting warriors instead of the recently departed.

Only to watch with bated breath as the Devil descended upon him.

Time slowed but didn’t stop.

There was no such mercy – no God – in these slaughter fields.

The Obscurus clawed and raged ferociously inside his chest, beating violently against his ribcage and snarling for release as Grindelwald waved his wand through the air with a Medieval Executioner’s flair and shot an unknown spell towards his best friend.

Liquid red ribbons slashed across Newt’s surprised face, wrapping around his chest and down his legs, dripping with nauseating viscosity until a crimson puddle stained the plywood underneath his feet.

Newt fell backwards, wand abandoned by his side.

Grindelwald stepped upon it, snapping it – snapping Credence – in half.

Credence didn’t know what happened next.

One moment he was soaring above the farm with Theseus and the others behind him, horrified at the unfolding scene below, gripping the golden feathers on Frank’s nape. The next he had tossed Grindelwald into the thick of the chaos like a ragdoll and pulled Newt into his arms smoking with living darkness, collapsing helplessly onto his knees.

Blood stained his fingernails and soaked into his shirt, dying ivory to red.


“Course I did,” Credence whispered, pressing his hands against his chest, his arms, his face, trying to stop the bleeding but oh God he didn’t know where one wound ended and the other began. There was so much blood—

“Gonna scold me for breaking my nose again?”

“What is this? The fifteenth time this month?” Credence shakily teased, pressing fingers against the long laceration arching across the bridge of his nose but quickly retracting when Newt cried out.

“You look like you haven’t slept in a week.”

“I haven’t,” Newt laughed quietly, wetly, “Couldn’t get comfortable around all the clothes.”
“I should’ve known you wouldn’t make the bed while I was gone.”

“I’ll have you know that I tried,” Newt pouted weakly, his lower lip trembling with every word, “I just couldn’t master your technique is all. How you get those blankets to lay flat and wrinkle-less is pure magic, Credence. Magic.”

“You hopeless idiot,” Credence laughed, choking on a sob threatening to escape his throat, “I’ll teach you as soon as we get back home.”

Newt smiled.

“My savior.”

He suddenly contracted in Credence’s arms and clutched at his torn shirt in agony as blood bubbled up from his throat, spilling down the corner of his chapped lips. Newt gasped for breath. When the wizard ripped off his scarf, Credence could only watch as he violently tossed the blood-stained fabric into the turquoise waters flowing gently underneath the dock.

Newt’s chest stopped heaving. His breaths came easier.

Less frequent.

Credence held onto him tighter.

“I can fix this. We can fix this,” his voice cracked, searching the battlefield waging ignorantly behind them for someone – anyone – who could help, “I’ll find a way.”

“Credence—”

“I’m sorry for leaving you,” his vision blurred, tears dripping down his cheeks like a thousand waterfalls, “I should’ve trusted you. I should’ve stayed. This is all my fault. I—”

“Credence—”

“I don’t know what to do! Oh God. Oh God,” he spluttered, his voice growing higher and more hysterical by the minute, “Alma can heal you, can’t she? I know! We’ll grab some herbs and she can brew a potion. I brought Theseus so, he can help with—”

“Credence!”

Credence fell silent.

Within those past couple of seconds, Newt had grown significantly paler. He had been pale before, of course, but now…

His ochre freckles faded indiscernibly into his skin, his once-warm pallor matching Credence’s natural ghostly white. His vibrant green eyes had dulled into a muddy gray; yet, just as stained with red as the meadows beyond. Newt trembled violently like a naked woodsman lost in a raging snowstorm and yet…

Peace and regret flashed simultaneously across his face. Dueling emotions of acceptance and fear.

So much fear.

Newt beckoned him closer.
Credence obeyed.

Newt pressed a warm, bloodied hand against Credence’s cheek, beaming a crimson-stained smile illuminating the dreary darkness of the battlefield with life, curiosity, and wonder – the pure essence of what made Newt Artemis Fido Scamander. He leaned forward, breath rattling in his lungs, and pressed his wet forehead against Credence’s.

“May I?” Newt whispered.

“Always.”

Newt reached up and threaded his fingers through Credence’s wild, impossibly black curls. He caressed scars that Credence once felt ashamed of, but now wore like a badge showing that he survived the worst of horrors, and pulled him into a most ardently devoted kiss.

Everything unsaid flowed freely between them.

*I’m sorry; I forgive you.*

*I love you; I know.*

*Don’t leave me; I’m yours.*

*I can’t live without you; ... ... ...*

“Take your time. I’ll be waiting for you.”

The hand against his cheek fell.

And all the light in the world vanished.

Chapter End Notes

Well, that happened.

I’m so sorry.

Tune in next time on Green Meadows, Dark Skies to find out how Credence reacts to THAT.

Anyways...

This where I ask how I’m doing with my writing and if I should look on making any improvements. How is my dialogue and scene transitions? Is there anything you'd like to see more of? Less of? Also, please leave your comments and constructive criticisms below. They are the lifeblood on which this fic thrives upon. What has been your favorite chapter so far? What was your favorite scene here or in general? I love hearing from all of you!!!
There is a time in every person’s life – mortal or immortal, man or beast – where the world stops turning and everything ceases to exist. There is a moment where the heart stops beating and something unimaginable crawls inside; a despair impossible to comprehend except by those unlucky souls whom have experienced it. People fight against it. Be it through denial, rage, or shameless begging, they fight tooth and nail to feel anything except the hollowness – the emptiness – of the ghostly fingerprint of another pressed into the very essence of their soul. But, most of the time, they feel just…

Nothing.

The world turns quiet and color dissolves into gray. Words become lost to the breeze, caught on a breath. Life is held on pause – the hand of the universe’s clock refuses to tick forward.

As if the moment hasn’t sunken in yet.

As if they are frozen in time.

This was that moment for Credence.

He had thought that he had felt it before: grief. Perhaps he had, in a way. Tasted that misery, choked on those heavy tears, burned by that blazing agony until he had naively thought that nothing remained within him that could be destroyed by its flames. But, all it had done was make cinder.

Credence had only experienced the loss of someone he had wanted so desperately to love but, had only received the crack of a belt and the sting of hateful words instead. Mourning his Mother was nothing compared to mourning Newt.

Losing a monster could never approach the agony of watching the veritable sun supernova and wither away into cosmic dust.

Credence slipped his hand down Newt’s spine and lifted him closer against him, resting his forehead against his bloodied one. He stared into vacant eyes as green as swamp muck and viscous algae, searching for any flicker or spark of sunlight.

“…Newt?”

Credence whispered his name like a prayer, hoping that whatever God above was merciful enough to listen. No soft and forgiving deity had ever answered his pleas before but, perhaps God had never intended or wanted to help a miserable creature like Credence who had blood on his hands and anger in his heart.

But perhaps…

They could save a pure and loving soul that shined with heavenly light. If there were such a thing as mortal angels, then by God was Newt the highest amongst them.
“N-newt?” Credence stuttered breathlessly, his lips curling into a desperate grin, “This isn’t funny.”

Newt cruelly didn’t respond.

Credence grasped for his hand, squeezing it tightly.

Nothing.

“Come on, come on,” Credence squeezed his aching eyes shut, barely holding back the emotion threatening to burst out from behind them, “You can’t do this. This isn’t supposed to be how it ends – your story isn’t over yet! You’re Newton Artemis Fido Scamander! Magizoologist extraordinaire! You take care of monsters and beasts for a living. You court danger. You flirt with adventure. You laugh at the impossible and worry me half to death at every turn. You’ve stood face-to-face with a man-eating mermaid and offered them your sandwich. You can’t be defeated by just a—a—a—simple person!”

Newt remained silent.

Credence clutched onto him tightly – pressing bruises into skin – and turned his gaze up towards the sky, desperate and pleading.

“Please…,” his voice cracked, “You can’t be—It’s impossible.”

“Artemis!”

Credence turned his head around just in time to see Theseus scrambling through the battlefield towards them. Frank and the others seemed to have been abandoned in the distant meadow and, yet, Credence found himself without any voice or heart to be angry about such carelessness. Modesty had Graves and Graves had Modesty.

So, instead, Credence just watched as Theseus pushed through friend and foe.

Nothing could stop that man. Even when frenzied, he slid elegantly through the mud like a debonair action hero. He cast spells all around him – vibrant silver and gold displays that displaced anyone who dared to get close. When one skilled witch managed to slip past his defenses, Theseus even landed a swift uppercut across her face.

He was a genuine force to be reckoned with and Credence could see now how Newt had admired this formidable wizard.

Had.

Theseus stumbled to his knees onto the docks beside him. Credence strangely found himself without protest as Newt’s body was promptly pulled out of his hands. He just watched as pale, freckled skin that used to crinkle with life-granting smiles and limp tawny hair that could never sit straight until now slipped through his fingers, helpless to do anything against it—

A sharp claw scraped down the underside of his sternum.

“And…” Theseus cradled his little brother’s marred face, searching his vacant eyes with frantic worry, “…Arty? Arty! Newton, speak to me!”

Upon receiving nothing but silence in return, Theseus’ voice sharply cracked. He hurriedly pressed his cheek against Newt’s unmoving chest, covering his quivering mouth to muffle any distracting noises while he listened for a single hopeful heartbeat or whooshing breath filling his strong lungs—
Tears spilled down Theseus’ strangely wide and frightened eyes. His visage was that of a man that had just witnessed his own immortal soul being ripped prematurely from his still-living body and flippantly tossed aside onto the blood-soaked docks where it now laid raw and gaping like a festering wound. The deceptively indifferent walls that the wizarding genius had built up now all came crashing down at seeing Newt here and now, hurt and bleeding, and unable to do anything to fix it.

“It’s alright. It’s perfectly alright, Arty. Big brother’s here. Shhh, I’ve got you now – don’t you fret,” Theseus soothed, a tremor stretching from voice to fingers as he ran his hands through Newt’s hair, “You’re safe now. Entirely safe. You have—”

Theseus swallowed thickly.

“You have nothing more to fear about, Newt.”

“Theseus, I—” Credence reached out, but Theseus only turned his back and pulled his brother closer against him.

“Don’t you dare touch him, you filthy little—” Theseus ground out through clenched teeth, his nostrils flared and eyes ablaze, “My little brother is dead, Credence, and it’s all because of you.”

Demonic claws enclosed around his heart, the pointed tips piercing through vein and artery, spilling blood into the minuscule area of his pericardial cavity.

“…Theseus?”

“Look at you crying, you—you—you selfish brat! Mourning someone that doesn’t even belong to you,” Theseus snapped with a snarl, trembling in either rage or sadness or a cruel combination of both, “I always told Newt that the LeStrange family would be the death of him. How naïve it was of me to assume it’d be Leta instead of her brother. Well, are you happy now, Credence? You killed him. You killed Newt.”

Credence didn’t understand. He didn’t understand anything.

Credence jumped to his feet and slowly stepped backwards. He threaded his scarred fingers through his wild curls, only acknowledging with a passing thought how the silver ribbon holding the dark tresses back slipped through his hair and fell daintily to the floor.

“You’re wrong… Newt—Newt can’t be dead,” Credence cracked a crooked grin, a hysterical laugh bubbling through his mysteriously raw, aching throat, “He wouldn’t leave his creatures behind like that. No, never. He still has his research and his book to finish—”

He was falling apart.

Minute by minute.

Second by second.

The blissful numbness was replaced with that of cold, brutal reality.

Credence’s lungs abruptly constricted, seemingly choking off his entire oxygen supply despite his breaths coming faster and faster, quicker and quicker. His bleeding heart thrummed rapidly against his gouged sternum, the increasing beat spilling through his eyes and down his cheeks, filling up his head with swimming liquid until he heard nothing but the thrum thrum thrumming—
Credence fell to his knees.

An unholy scream escaping his lips.

Before sweet, sweet oblivion washed over.

Credence catapulted into the midnight ocean. The churning waters engulfed him completely in their coffin-like embrace as he crashed through the foaming surface and sank deeper and deeper into the stygian abyss. Charon’s skeletal hands caressed his face and slipped through his pockets, demanding payment for his venture into Hades.

Credence didn’t fight.

Credence didn’t struggle.

Credence didn’t thrash about in frenzied panic as seawater filled his mouth and lungs, replacing air with stinging salt. He didn’t tread against the tides as the surface grew scarily farther and farther away from his reach. He didn’t scream for help.

There was no Hope left.

There was nothing to lift him up into the light except himself and the silence of the water. So, what was the point in struggling against inevitable failure?

Some small part of Credence wondered if this – these final moments – was what it felt like for the Sudanese girl whose Obscurus remained locked safely inside Newt’s suitcase. Had she too just… given herself up to the ocean? Allowed herself to be overtaken by the rocking waves? Succumbing completely to the parasite within?

Something stirred around him.

The depthless ocean – which had never been anything more than the darkest shade of black – turned red.

No.

Credence wasn’t finished yet.

“Take it all,” he whispered into the sea, sanguine bubbles floating – listening – all around him. He outstretched his arms in total submission, his soft heart hardening into stone and causing him to fall deeper into the void until he couldn’t even see the surface anymore. He didn’t care. He didn’t intend on surfacing again – not while he had one last task to do.

“Take it,” Credence arched his head back and closed his eyes, “Every last drop. Take it—It’s yours.”

It was time to end this.

To end the suffering. To end the lies. To end.

“Take it all, Obscurus. Take it all as long as you kill Gellert Grindelwald.”
The thundering voice boomed across the battlefield with a mighty gust of wind. The inhuman screech was so monstrous and overflowing with ferocity that it bordered that of a murderous God having climbed down from Olympus itself to smite the wicked – reviving the dead to witness their fury only to kill them twice over with a powerful flick of a finger.

It was an Obscurus-turned hurricane.

Abhorrent tentacles of living darkness swept over the once-beautiful grounds and crashed across the landscape, uplifting what little trees remained and throwing them against innocent wizards and followers of Grindelwald alike. The few survivors of the New York incident present for such a spectacle noted that this Obscurus seemed more beastly than before and over, at least, hundred times larger.

Staticky eyes the color of smog and smoke peered through the swirling mass of night incarnate. It’s mouth, which wasn’t completely a mouth as it had something just off about it, lolled open in ferocious animalism and dripped viscous oil and muck onto the ground. It reached out with dark, slopping claws and pulled itself forward with a mountain-shaking roar.

An Obscurus trapped within its final moments was always a veritable force to be reckoned with. For lack of a better description, such creatures went out with an actual bang as it devoured every last drop of magic in the poor soul it possessed.

But, this one…

This one seemed to have no end. No spectacular finale. No dazzling flash of fireworks. No ghastly applause signaling it’s inevitable doom.

No, it seemed to be growing.

Where is Grindelwald?

The Obscurus roared once again – its demonic screech sending plenty a wounded knee to the ground, wands carelessly abandoned, and hands quickly covering ears overpouring with the blood and fluid of burst eardrums.

Screams of terror spread across the battlefield as witches and wizards – regardless of which side they fought on – realized what was going on. Some sensible folk whom valued their lives more than their leader’s orders fled into the forest.

At least, what remained of it.

The Wendigo lifted its bloodied maw from the shredded abdomen of the fresh corpse it was snacking on, having been busily replenishing its energy with a large chunk of liver. Staring at the feral Obscurus stalking the fields, every thought and instinct inside it pulled the Wendigo to run in the opposite direction. Its entire being told him to flee and never return to this glorious, fattening feasting ground.

Foaming drool dripped from its exposed teeth.

The Wendigo huffed whined, pacing back and forth in wild indecisiveness. One silenced part of it knew that it should stay and fight. That it had a job to do. But, on the other hand—
A low growl from his left pulled its attention.

The German Shephard stared into its eyes, its furious glare boring straight into his very wizarding soul.

And Terrence knew exactly what he had to do.

As the Wendigo unleashed a preternatural howl into the wind and galloped forward alongside its Animagus companion, the ever-silent yet ever-watching mountain lion lingered behind. Its dark eyes were focused elsewhere, following a curious scene unfolding that wasn’t the monstrous Obscurus destroying everything by the docks.

Queenie Goldstein was being pulled by the arms away from the ravaged battlefield, slowly dipping in and out of consciousness. Blood smeared across her forehead stained her golden curls bright scarlet. Black and blue bruises smattered her arms and legs. She vaguely thought, as she gazed down at her thighs, that her femur shouldn’t be sticking out at the particular angle should it.

It shouldn’t be sticking out at all.

Queenie’s head lolled to the side of its own accord, bleary eyes turned towards the pitch-black cloud encompassing the horizon.

“What a pretty portrait,” she murmured, “Green meadows and dark skies.”

“What?”

That voice was familiar.

“Almaise? What’re you doin’ here?” Queenie slurred, her brows furrowing as she tried so, so hard to stay awake, “Where’s—Where is—Where is Jacob?”

“He’s with your sister,” Alma responded with a grunt, setting Queenie on the sidelines a good distance away from all of the fighting. At least here some of the forest still remained, giving the injured witch good cover to hide. “Mighty handy with his fists, he is. You’ve got a good man in that one right there, Queenie.”

Something about her tone bothered her.

Queenie struggled to pick herself up, failing tremendously since she had an actual bone sticking out of her leg.

“Alma—Almaise, darling,” she warned worriedly, “Stay with Teenie.”

“Why?”

“Your condition—”

“Oh.”

A flash of ivory teeth did nothing to assuage Queenie’s fears.

“What can I say? I can’t help it,” Alma grinned widely, nearly splitting her dark cheeks in half, “You know, when people say that when they see their friends get hurt or a—a—a—puppy get kicked, that their blood just boils?”

She leaned forward and lifted a single scarlet-covered finger.
“I can’t help it if my blood interprets that literally.”

“Alma, no—”

But the witch had already flounced off back towards the killing grounds, madness as well as a skip in her step.

Queenie cursed underneath her shaking breath. A nasty thing to do, certainly, but this horrid situation that they’d found themselves in certainly called for it; at least, if she had any say about it!

She turned her head to the side, her vision turning black at the corners.

But she could still only just make out the gaze of the mountain lion hovering beside her, a question and concern swirling around its thoughts.

“Watch over her. Please.”

And Queenie couldn’t tell whether her aunt heard or not as the darkness took over.

Grindelwald

The rampaging Obscurus boomed, making the terrified earth shiver and split amongst the seems from its power. Massive waves crashed against the shore and shook the docks. Vermillion tentacles reached out from its depths—

Where is Grindelwald?

Tina and Jacob stood back-to-back, one blocking off dangerous spells with a masterful flick of the wand while the other surprised magic-reliant followers with his fists. Each looked on in horror as the Obscurus continued to grow, blocking off all light from the skies above and shrouding the meadow in darkness.

Grindelwald

“Look at him,” Grindelwald marveled breathlessly as he retreated, wiping blood from his chin, “Look at my Credence. He’s magnificent—no, he’s thriving.”

“While that’s all fine and dandy, sir,” Bartleby droned from beside his master as Hugin led them forward through the blood-splattered brush towards the patiently awaiting Thunderbird and Munin fought off enemy witches and wizards from behind, “We need to keep moving.”

“Of course, of course,” Grindelwald cooed, “As loyal and worrisome as ever, B.”

However, could he really fault himself for being distracted by how powerful Credence had become at losing the one person he loved most? Everything was unfolding exactly as he predicted and there was a certain sort of indescribable satisfaction about it.

Shame that he hadn’t caught onto Credence’s gifts earlier.

That way he wouldn’t have had to have pushed Newt and Credence together like this – to bond in harshest adversity – only to take everything away. No, he could have just killed little Modesty Barebone instead. The Credence of the Second Salemers already had nothing and no one to rely on. Her death would have been the final nail in the coffin of thrusting Credence into Grindelwald’s warm and accepting arms.

Ah well, killing Newt had worked well enough in the end.
The results spoke for themselves.

*Grindelwald*

The fantastic beast shrieked behind him, still searching the crowds for its target and not caring what or who got hurt in the process.

*Where is Grindelwald?*


“Well now, isn’t this just déjà fucking vu?”

Grindelwald recognized that voice.

“My dear Percival Graves. What a pleasant surprise,” he elegantly purred just in time to see the very man in question step out from behind the lounging Thunderbird. Grindelwald smiled lazily and raised his chin into the air, “Isn’t it dinnertime?”

Graves stiffened almost immediately and a vicious cold sweat broke out across his pale forehead.

But the child Grindelwald once thought to be an Obscurus stepped out from behind him and squeezing his shaking hand.

“Remember,” Modesty’s eyes narrowed spitefully at him, sending a delightful shiver down his spine – a girl comprised of power and might. Shame that she was a Muggle otherwise he would’ve enjoyed melding that strength to its highest potential. “Kick his ass and punch him in the face.”

“Yes,” Graves outstretched his wand, gesturing Modesty back behind him, “It'll be my pleasure.”

“Cute. Adopted a pet, have you?” Grindelwald chuckled and leisurely stepped backwards, gesturing towards Graves with his hand and snapping his fingers, “Munin. Hugin. Take care of this for me, won’t you?”

Perhaps he would get to kill Modesty Barebone after all.

Munin and Hugin worked in unison. They outstretched their wands – matching pairs, how droll – and stepped towards Graves. They closed in like vipers slithering through the grass and, just when they were about to strike the fatal blow, they turned around and pointed their wands in the opposite direction.

Towards him.

Betrayal.

“Sorry, sir,” Bartleby droned beside him, his wand similarly pointed towards Grindelwald’s neck in the most startling act of mutiny, “But it’s time for this to end.”

“Oh,” Grindelwald smiled heartlessly, “Well, won’t this be fun?”

Sunshine and rainbows.
Pastel streaks of cotton candy pink, robin’s egg blue, and the warmest buttercup yellow were painted across the morning sky, transposing an intense sense of serenity across the scene. The sun’s gentle rays warmed Newt’s chilled skin. He could just faintly hear the far-off cry of a Ukrainian Ironbelly.

Newt hummed.

What peculiar circumstances he’d found himself in this time.

First thing’s first: he was floating high above the sky, which wouldn’t be so strange were he sitting on a broom instead of something absolutely bizarre and gob-smacking like, let’s say, a cloud.

Secondly, and perhaps even more worrisome, Newt had absolutely no idea how he had got here or when.

With a frustrated grunt, he flopped back and stared at the delicate colors mixing around, creating new shades above him. His hands quickly found his hair, twirling around a rather fluffy strand hanging just below his ear.

It was annoyingly peaceful up here.

Quiet.

Newt pondered that whomever developed the phrase ‘sleeping on a cloud’ surely must have visited here before since he would very much like nothing more than to curl further into its comfortable embrace and surrender himself to sweet, sweet slumber. Perhaps he ought to bring the Nogtail up to the wondrous place. Surely it would help with its chronic backache.

Newt sank deeper into the clouds.

Not even the finest set of down comforters could compete with such bliss.

On second thought, he should bring Credence up here too.

Newt hadn’t been poor exactly growing up. There had always been a roof over his head and he and his brother had been both well-clothed and well-fed. They had never gone without; however, there were certainly… richer families that he knew of. He wasn’t accustomed to the lavishness of, say, the LeStranges.

But, Credence…

Oh, bless his heart. He thought that Newt’s 10-year-old mattress with all its rips and tears and wayward springs was heaven. Sleeping on a cloud would be the most unimaginable luxury.

Besides, there was plenty of room here. Enough room, in fact, to bring up all his creatures from the suitcase if he so chose.

A great, big sleepover in the sky.

Yes, he would have to tell Credence about this at once.

Credence.

The fighting. The docks.

Grindelwald waving his wand.
Credence crying.

Newt quickly shot up, meadow green eyes blown wide as everything came back to him, and started running. He didn’t know where he was going. He didn’t know if there was even an end that he could reach, but he didn’t care. He needed to find him. He needed to find Credence and tell him that everything would be alright.

Hours passed.

Days.

Months.

Years.

But Newt found it.

And when he finally dropped to his knees, crying out in equal parts exhaustion and relief, and peered over the cloud’s edge—

All he found was an ocean twice as large underneath him.

Newt hung his head back towards the pastel-colored sky and screamed. It was never-ending – this limbo. It was quiet, which he liked sometimes, but Newt possessed the daring heart of an adventurer. He liked the thrill of danger and the unknown just as much as liked the peace and quiet. Being alone here with nothing but the clouds, sky, and now the ocean was madness and it was driving him absolutely insane.

He wanted his Mum.

He wanted Theseus.

He wanted Credence.

He paused.

And he stared down at the ocean again.

It was… different. Up here amongst the clouds and skies, everything was tranquil. Heavenly. But down there… it was an absolute hell if Newt had ever seen one. It wasn’t all fire and brimstone like one would expect. No, the black ocean foamed and raged – enormous waves crashing down with a thunderous clap. It dived and swelled, growing with it’s unending misery, and yet it seemed oddly… sad.

“Is that what you feel, Credence?”

“Pardon?”

Newt stood up.

“Do you feel… grief?”

His trembling hands clenched into fists, his lips pressed into a thin line of determination.

“Sometimes.”
Newt stepped over the ledge.

“I—I lose myself completely. It’s like... drowning. I don’t know where I begin and it ends. I can’t breathe. I can’t think. I can’t do anything.”

He crashed into the water. Vermillion tentacles shot up from its depths, encircling his thin waist and dragging him deeper underneath.

“I’m suffocating underneath a black ocean with no up or down and all I want is to get out but, I can’t. It won’t let me.”

Newt spluttered awake and collapsed unto his hands and knees. His throbbing limbs buckle dangerously underneath him while he heaved blood and mysterious liquids across the docks. His body shivered violently and he was cold. Oh, so very cold and—and wet. His hair hung limply over his face, droplets of water dripping down his nose and chin.

Newt watched with idle fascination as his injured hands trembling underneath him slowly knotted themselves together. Barely a trace remained. The lines invisible except for when they caught the light just right and shined silver.

Coughing through snot and blood, Newt glanced over his shoulder – a question in his eyes.

Green eyes met green eyes. Vermillion tentacles unwrapped from around Newt’s waist and sank back underneath the Mediterranean Sea.

Hope.

The Kraken.

Anticoagulant secretions.

“Looks like you saved me this time around,” Newt grinned weakly, his voice rendered down into nothing more than a wheezing, whispery whimper.

“How?”

Hope lifted something from the waters and dropped it before him.

His water-logged, most-definitely-ruined-beyond-repair Hufflepuff scarf.

Newt smiled fondly, “Thank you.”

“Newt!” “Arty!”

Suddenly, Newt found himself swathed in two crushing sets of arms.

“How could you be so senseless?” Theseus meanwhile chastised through tears – actual tears, “Taking on Gellert Grindelwald himself alone. What were you thinking? How could you be so stupid?”
Newt didn’t understand. He didn’t understand anything that was happening. All that he remembered were fluffy clouds and pastel skies and seeing Credence running towards him—

He jumped to his feet and looked around, searching.

“Where’s Credence?”

“Newt!” Delia hurriedly rushed to her feet, a worrying hand outstretched while Newt paced the docks frantically trying to find familiar eyes darker than the blackest night and hair curling wildly around porcelain pale skin, “Where are you going?!”

It didn’t help that the night sky obscured his view.

“Arty,” Theseus pleaded, “Get back here.”

“Where is Credence?” Newt turned on his heels, demanding and angry, “Where is he? What did you do?”

“Nothing,” Delia said defensively, “He sort of—”

“How long has it been since I’ve been out?” Newt interrupted, pointing accusingly above him while his gaze never once wavered from his mother’s, “Last I remember it was daylight.”

“Arty,” Theseus snapped, “That’s Credence.”

What?

Newt turned his gaze back upwards and squinted, really concentrating on the dark sky above.

Oh.

Oh fuck.

The Obscurus no longer resembled a beastly parasite. No, it had evolved into a hurricane. Destroying everything in its path, uprooting trees and sending people flying to their graves while sobbing sheets of rain from its all-seeing eye. Thunder became its grieving cries. Clashes of lightning, its anger.

The Obscurus was Achilles’ rage personified, wiping out Trojans and innocent bystanders alike in his bloodlust after discovering Patroclus’ untimely death.

“Here you have Achilles: this strong, charming man who is, by all means, a genius ahead of his time. He’s caught in the middle of this pointless war when his best friend is struck down. Killed. And... Achilles goes insane. Going on this bloodthirsty rampage that ends up getting himself killed too. Can you imagine that, Newt?”

It was ghastly and frightening, but most of all—

“His rage?”

It was mournful.

“No. His grief.”
Graves spat on the ground. Copper filled his sneering mouth, staining it deep cranberry red. He fought valiantly against Grindelwald, his former followers opposing the dark wizard they once called master. Two spies and another the head of operations paired with the skills of a MACUSA Auror. They should be able to hold their own.

But Grindelwald was quite a man to go up against.

During his recovery leave, Graves had occupied himself with meticulously reading over every report made in his absence. He followed Grindelwald’s mocking mimicry of his own hand, signing off on documents that all had to be reexamined and reclassified. He followed the Obscurus reports. He followed the downward spiral leading to Grindelwald’s demise.

All accounts pointed to the defeat lasting no more than a few minutes.

But perhaps Grindelwald had just been caught off guard. Perhaps Graves’ wand remained loyal to its master and had worked against him. Perhaps it had all been planned.

Regardless, Grindelwald of the present seemed all the more difficult to defeat.

Especially since—

“Modesty, stay with Frank,” Graves ground his teeth together, pulling the child hurriedly by the arm to avoid one of Grindelwald’s closer spells, “You’re going to get yourself killed.”

Modesty sneered.

A perfect mimicry of his own, damn her.

“I can take care of myself,” she tore away her arm and stepped backwards.

“Now isn’t the time for your stubbornness!”

“Aww,” Grindelwald cooed maliciously, sending Bartleby flying across the meadow only for the man to land harshly on his feet with a counterspell on his lips. Grindelwald effectively blocked it and placed his hand over his mouth.

Yawning.

“Trouble in the family, Graves?” he said as Hugin and Munin advanced together with matching battle cries, sending them crashing into the trees behind him with a lazy wand flick. Grindelwald spared a bored glance over his shoulder, humming, “I understand your plight.”

“Shut up,” Graves hissed, taking his eyes off of Modesty for no more than a second.

“Manners, manners.”

Grindelwald whirled around.

Modesty froze.

The large branch she had been in the middle of swinging at his knees exploded into splinters.

“Perhaps I ought to teach you how to properly address a gentleman,” Grindelwald grabbed her by the throat, raising Modesty off the ground up to eyelevel. “Starting with this one.”
“Let her go, you bastard!” Graves snarled, a *Crucio* half-formed across his lips.

Grindelwald pointed his wand at Modesty’s neck.

Graves stilled.

“Sentiment. Always a downfall,” Grindelwald shook his head disappointedly, barely reacting as Modesty clawed at her neck and gasped for air. “What a shame it would be if little Modesty Barebone met the same fate as that Scamander fool. What would you do to save your precious Muggle pet, hmm?”

“Let her go, Grindelwald,” Grindelwald found himself responding before he could put any thought to the question, “She has nothing to do with this.”

Grindelwald squeezed.

Modesty choked, her plump cheeks turning blue.

Graves sank down to his knees.

“I wonder how much more powerful my wonderful Obscurial would become watching his baby sister die right before his eyes,” Grindelwald continued to ponder, “I could crush her throat right now and find out. Would you care to see, Mr. Graves?”

“Please,” the words automatically left Graves’ lips, “I’ll do anything you ask. Just let her—Let Modesty go.”

“Hmm,” Grindelwald pretended to think, releasing his grip ever so slightly, “Beg for me. For old time’s sake.”

Graves swallowed thickly and hung his head in defeat.

“Please.”

“More.”

“Please…”

“Please what?”

“Please…,” Graves suddenly smirked, “Don’t miss, kiddo.”

“What?”

Everything happened within a manner of seconds.

Grindelwald didn’t have the time to react as Modesty suddenly chomped down on his thumb and kicked up her feet with surprising dexterity. The heel of her shoe impacted him straight in the face, shattering his nose and sending out a sudden gush of blood spraying everywhere.

Stunned, Grindelwald dropped her to the ground just in time for Hugin and Munin to disarm him of his wand and for Munin to magically bind his arms.

It just goes to show that, instead of villainous monologuing, one should really pay attention to their surroundings.
Spies.

Wonderful creatures, they were.

“What are you going to do now?” Grindelwald taunted, chin raised high even as he was forced to his knees, “Kill me?”

“No,” Graves answered, “Something far, far worse.”

He squatted down before him, arms casually resting over his knees.

“Gellert Grindelwald, you are hereby under arrest for crimes consisting of, but not restricted to, murder, defamation, espionage, and…,” Graves reared back his fist, “…being a smarmy bastard!”

And then he decked him in the face.

“Don’t underestimate the value of sentiment,” Graves sniffed as Grindelwald fell to the ground unconscious, quickly raising his hand seconds after to meet Modesty’s incoming high-five, “Nice work there, kiddo.”

Modesty puffed out her chest, “The Bronx didn’t raise no wimp.”

“Mr. Barnes, bring it over.” Graves said as he picked himself back up. He watched as Bartleby brought the very suitcase Graves had been confined in for Merlin knows how long and plipped Grindelwald inside, locking it with a sharp click.

“It’s over now.”

Modesty slipped her hand into his and faced the sky.

“Not quite.”

The Obscurus loomed frighteningly above them, a swirling concentrated mass focused on where Grindelwald had been moments before. It lingered there for a moment. Watching. Almost frozen in time.

Until a sudden roar sent them all to their knees.

Hugin and Munin found each other quickly, huddled together and trembling hands entwined. Bartleby curled up around the suitcase, hands pressed against his ears and face contorted in absolute agony. Graves remained on bended knee, trying to pull Modesty into his arms—

But she wasn’t having that.

“Now isn’t the time to be stubborn,” Graves hissed, eyes narrowed.

“That’s my big brother up there,” she wrenched her arm away from him, stumbling backwards but remaining on her feet all the while, “I’m not leaving him behind.”

Graves stared up at her for a prolonged moment – fire clashing against ice – and relented with an over-burdened sigh.

“Fine,” he said, “But I’m not letting you do this alone.”

Modesty smirked and offered him her hand.
Graves pulled himself up and they walked together – side-by-side, hand-in-hand – towards the center of the raging Obscurus. The violent winds pushed them backwards through the dirt and uprooted grass. Modesty’s trimmed hair loosened from its braid, but she just gritted her teeth and continued moving forward.

Graves positioned himself behind her, holding onto her shoulders.

“Credence,” Modesty shouted into the howling wind.

Grindelwald

Where is Grindelwald?

“I’m not running away this time, Credence,” Modesty continued forward, “I’m here and I’m not leaving you alone.”

Grindelwald

Grindelwald isn’t here

Where is Grindelwald?

“He’s gone, Credence. He can’t hurt us anymore.”

“Credence,” Graves addressed him now, holding Modesty upright no matter how hard the wind tried to push them away, “You can control this.”

Mocking laughter echoed throughout the storm. It brushed softly against their cheeks and cooed directly into their ears, sending involuntary shivers down each of their spines.

I don’t think I want to, Mr. Graves

A powerful gust of wind, like the mighty hand of Zeus himself, swept past them. Modesty screamed. Graves protectively enveloped her in his arms as they were sent flying backwards, only for their chaotic flight to run into a sudden halt. Munin and Hugin wrapped their arms around them, heels digging into the dirt. Bartleby supported them from the back, pushing them forward.

“Credence!”

That voice didn’t belong to them.

“Credence, honey. It’s alright,” Tina Goldstein called out from across the war-torn field, her hands cupped around her mouth as Jacob, Alma, and what remained of Captain Argyle’s regiment pushed her forward in a similar fashion, “You’re safe now. He can’t hurt anyone—he can’t hurt you.”

Grindelwald

Where is Grindelwald?

“I’m sorry I wasn’t there for you before, Credence,” her mournful voice was nearly drowned out by the screaming cyclones of the Obscurus, “I’m sorry that I couldn’t help when you needed it most. I’m sorry. I’m sorry I—failed to protect you. But I’m here now and I’m not going anywhere.”

Grindelwald

Where is Grindelwald?
Where is he?

“Credence.”

The Obscurus turned silent.

Everything… frozen.

The whispering tendrils of night incarnate. The calamitous hurricane of grief and vengeance. Everything just stopped as Newt Scamander stepped into the darkness.

“I’m here now, Credence. We all are.”

Newt didn’t shout. He didn’t yell. He whispered, somehow knowing deep in his gut that the man trapped inside could hear him.

You’re not Newt

A change from the chanting.

Newt is dead

Newt is dead

Newt is dead

Newt is dead

“I’m here, Credence,” Newt opened his arms – his heart – to the friend he knew was trapped in there somewhere. To the wizard he knew was in pain and suffering. To Credence Barebone, who was drowning underneath an entire ocean alone, with no one to turn to but himself. “I’m here and I’m not going anywhere.”

Liar.

The Obscurus returned to its destructive path with renewed vigor. Its tendrils slammed into the damaged and shattered ground, sending dirt and debris into the air and through the cracks in the Earth. It screamed in a piercing whirlwind of rage and agony, flattening everything it touched. There was no mercy here. Nothing except pain.

Newt turned to his family behind him.

“I need you to throw me in there,” he pointed into the eye of the hurricane, determined and strong, “As high as you can.”

“Absolutely not,” Theseus said, “No. Just no. We’re not doing that. You’ll die.”

“Been there, done that,” Newt smiled awkwardly, “Trust me, Theseus. I know what I’m doing.”

“I’m not letting you do this—”

“Oh bugger, I don’t like it. Oh no—not one bit!” Delia offered a wavering smile, uncertainty flashing
over her wearied expression, “But I trust you, Newton. If you think this is best, then I’ll—I’ll take you up there.”

“… Thank you, Mum.”

Delia placed two fingers with practiced precision into her mouth and whistled sharply. A matching cry sounded off in the distance. A flash of porcelain white and blue wings sliced through the air and faster than you could say Expelliarmus, the mighty Hippogriff landed before them with a booming thump. It lowered its head, waiting.

Newt bowed respectively and ran his fingers through its soft feathers. Just as he was about to hoist himself up, however, Theseus grabbed his shoulder.

“Theseus, I have to do this—”

“Is he worth it?”

Newt blinked.

Theseus hesitated, unable to meet Newt’s questioning gaze.

“Is Credence worth it?”

Oh.

Newt turned around to properly face his brother, placing a firm hand upon his shoulder and pulling him into a tight embrace. After a moment, he felt Theseus slowly return the sentiment.

He squeezed.

“Yes,” Newt answered, “Undoubtedly yes.”

Theseus chuckled.

“You never met a monster you couldn’t love, huh Newt?” Theseus pulled back and nodded his head at the Hippogriff, “Go get him.”

Newt grinned and pulled himself up onto the Hippogriff’s back. Delia whistled a low tone followed by a familiar melodic chittering, of which defined Newt’s childhood growing up on a Hippogriff Farm, and patted the creatures’ hind leg. The Hippogriff stretched out its wings and soared into the raging sky above.

They dodged through thick bands of animated darkness trying to throw them off their course. Newt tightly held onto the Hippogriff’s neck through the blistering wind that stung his eyes and summoned tears. He ground his teeth together, flying higher and higher. The Obscurus roared in its fury but Newt didn’t waver.

He didn’t care what happened to him.

He could endure the worst if it meant helping someone in need of saving.

The Hippogriff burst through the top of the Obscurus into the gleaming blue skies above. A brief moment of tranquility passed through Newt. The sparkling sun peaked over the horizon, warming his freckled skin. In the distance, he could faintly hear a bird chirping.

Slowly, with trembling arms and legs, he stood on top of the Hippogriff’s back.
And stepped off.

Falling from the heavens into the writhing ocean below.

Newt plummeted through the all-encompassing darkness, watching sunlight become swallowed by its endless depths until nothing more than a starless night remained. The wind screamed in his ears, pulling him in every direction until he couldn’t tell left from right, up from down. Was this what Credence saw when he went under? Was this the burden that he had faced himself all this time?

“I’m here, Credence,” Newt whispered and opened up his arms, “You’re not alone. Not anymore.”

He closed his eyes.

And breathed.

In and out.

The ground came closer and closer. Every agonizing second ticked by until the hands of the universe’s clock froze for just a moment. The Obscurus pulled its massive form together into a concentrated cloud and gathered underneath Newt, slowing his fall until Credence’s arms reached out from underneath him and wrapped around his chest.

They slammed into the dirt and grass below, the force of their impact sending dust swirling into the air around them.

The pair remained frozen there for a moment.

Silent except for their heaving breaths and rapid hearts.

“What were you thinking?!?”

Credence shoved Newt off his chest only to hover over him seconds afterwards. Credence grabbed his shoulders in a bruising grip, panicked impossibly dark eyes widened to the nth degree and long curls chaotically blowing across his pale face in the dying wind.

Credence frantically looked him over. He scrunched Newt’s cheek between his hands, turning his face back and forth with such intensity he thought his neck might snap. Credence felt down his chest and pulled up his shirt, searching for any signs of harm.

He found nothing but thin silvery scars instead.

Thick tears filled Credence’s eyes and dripped down his jaw onto Newt’s freckled skin. Viscous snot choked his throat and ripped a violent, relieved sob through his quivering lips.

Newt was hoisted up by the collar of his shirt.

And Credence slammed his face into his chest, shaking fingers gripping his back so tightly that the fabric ripped.

“You could’ve died.”

“Dying twice in one day?” Newt shakily teased, pressed a hand against Credence’s trembling back and tightly enveloping him in his arms, “Not even my luck is that bad.”

“Don’t joke about that.”
Newt softened.

“Okay.”

Credence shivered in his embrace, warm tears staining his already ruined shirt and uncontrollable cries slashing at his heart.

Newt pressed his face against the top of his hair as what few survivors gathered around them. He closed his exhausted eyes and breathed in the scent of green meadows and dark skies.

“It’s okay, Credence. I’m here. We’re all here.”

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One Week Later

Modesty wrapped her aching arms tighter around Credence’s neck, burying her face in the warm crook underneath his chin. She fought back a yawn, trying to hide her exhaustion by shifting in his grip, but Credence could tell. He’d been carrying Modesty to bed for years after all. The only difference between now and then was Modesty’s sudden growth spurt making her a little bit harder to carry.

Credence smiled fondly and pressed his face into her hair.

“Are you smelling me again?”

“Mmm,” Credence nodded, “I can’t help myself.”

“You’re so weird.”

“Yes, I am. And I’m perfectly happy to be so.”

Modesty pulled backwards and scrunched up her face judgmentally. Credence copied her expression because, well, that’s just what brothers did to annoy their little sisters.

“Ugh,” Modesty rolled her eyes and plopped her head back onto his shoulders, “Why do you even do that anyways?”

“It’s just how I make memories,” he said simply, switching Modesty into one arm so that he could pull back the blankets over Newt’s bed. He carefully laid her down, humming softly, “One of my earliest memories is feeling cold water over my feet and the sound of the ripples they made as I wriggled my toes. I don’t remember much else but it’s the first memory I have that was… happy. I don’t know. Maybe it influenced me.”

Credence leaned back and teased, “And years from now, I’ll remember how my dear little sister used to smell of Ivory Soap.”

“I do not!” Modesty immediately sat straight up and stared at him crossly.

“You do too.”

“No,” Modesty whined and flopped back in bed, gesturing upwards with her arms, “Why can’t it be something cool and intimidating like—like dragon’s breath!”
“How do you know that dragon’s breath doesn’t smell like Ivory Soap?”

“Ew, no.”

Credence laughed lightly and fluffed up the ancient pillows behind her. He had missed this. Modesty had always brought a smile to his face even during his darkest moments. She was the light of his life and, while he enjoyed Newt’s company, there was just something special about bantering with family that couldn’t be recreated.

He leaned over and pressed a kiss against Modesty’s forehead, ruffling her hair.

But just as he was about to leave, she spoke up.

“What are we going to do now, Credence?”

Her voice had turned so quiet.

So vulnerable.

He lowered his gaze.

“I don’t know.”

“Are you going to go away again?”

Credence hesitated as if this very question wasn’t something he’d been pondering himself these past couple of nights whenever he couldn’t sleep. He loved traveling with Newt. He loved learning about magic. He loved the new experiences and the adventures and there was no way he ever wanted to leave the magizoologist’s side. But Modesty was his sister.

And she needed her big brother.

“I don’t know,” Credence repeated and sat on the edge of the bed, scarred hands clasped in his lap. He remained silent for a moment before eventually shaking his head and putting on his most comforting smile, “But you don’t need to worry over that. The adults will take care of everything.”

“Adults are stupid,” Modesty pouted, “Adults are what got us into this mess in the first place.”

“Point taken,” he said and offered, “How about this then? I’ll talk everything over with Newt and Percival tomorrow and see if we can come with a plan that works out best for us all. But we won’t do anything that doesn’t have your seal of approval first. How does that sound?”

“I suppose…” Modesty shrugged, “Although, there is one thing you can do that’ll sway me over.”

“Oh?” Credence quirked a brow, “And what is that?”

“The thing.”

“You know…” Modesty emphasized with a huff of exasperation, cheeks tinged strawberry pink, “…the thing.”

“Oh, that thing,” Credence raised off the bed nonchalantly, taking a few steps forward and rubbing his chin in mock-contemplation, “I don’t know, Modesty. I’m not sure I remember all the words. It’s been so long—”
“Credence.”

He twirled around suddenly on his feet and gestured outwards dramatically with his arms, singing the bedtime song he’d sung to her nearly every night since she’d came to the Barebone household.

*Would you like to swing on a star?*

*Carry moonbeams home in a jar?*

*And be better off than you are?*

*Or would you rather be a…?*

“Crocodile!” Modesty shouted, delighted.

Credence contorted his face into a snarl – comically menacing – and slammed his arms up and down to mimic a crocodile’s jaws snapping shut.

Modesty laughed and clapped her hands excitedly together. Credence cherished these small moments when she shed off all those protective walls and showed just how much of a child she really was. Which was probably why he indulged her when she demanded another.

“All right, all right. One more,” he raised his index finger, eyes twinkling, “But this’ll be a special one.”

“Oh?”

*Would you like to swing on a star?*

*Carry moonbeams home in a jar?*

*And be better off than you are?*

*Or would you rather be an… Erumpent!*

Credence squatted down as bow-legged as a cowboy to half his height and stomped his foot on the ground, making ridiculous snorting noises that he had watched Newt make a couple times before that any child would find absolutely hilarious without context.

Hell, even with context it’d still be hysterical.

Modesty gasped and wheezed, laughing so hard that tears spilled down her reddened cheeks.

Credence grinned and tucked her back underneath the covers, “All right, off to bed you go.”

“Credence?” she grabbed him by the arm, still giggling and wiping tears from the scrunched-up corners of her eyes.

“Yes?”

“I love you.”

Credence smiled – soft and warm – and ran his fingers fondly through Modesty’s soft blonde hair. He leaned down and kissed her wet cheek one last time for the evening before stepping backwards.

“I love you too,” he quietly exited the bedroom, sparing a final glance over his shoulder, “Get some rest now.”
He closed the door behind him.

“I didn’t know you could sing.”

Credence flinched sharply. He banged his elbow against the closed door behind him, sending sharp jolts of electricity running down his arm. Spinning around on his heel, he found Newt leaning on the side wall underneath the cabin staircase. His sleeves were rolled up and his bare arms were crossed across his chest in a manner that was already attractive enough and didn’t need to be intensified whatsoever by the apologetic-yet-not-quite smile on his stupid beautiful face.

“Sorry, sorry,” Newt lifted himself off and approached, mercifully slipping his hands into his pockets, “Didn’t mean to give you a fright. What I meant to say is that I liked it.”

Credence flushed.

A mischievous look entered Newt’s twinkling green eyes.

“However,” he hummed thoughtfully, “Your Erumpent needs improvement.”

Credence’s blazing crimson red cheeks turned brighter and brighter in the utmost embarrassment. He pulled at his collar, loosening the buttons, and promptly changed the subject.

“What are we going to do, Newt?”

“I thought we were going to inspect the Niffler eggs unless I’m mistaken.”

“That’s not what I meant,” Credence stepped past him into the kitchen and seated himself at one of the empty spots at the dining table, hands clasped loosely before him and head hanging low, “What are we going to do?”

Newt didn’t immediately respond.

Instead, he approached with carefully muffled footsteps and silently pulled out the wooden chair beside Credence. He seated himself with a vampiric flair – displaying the elegant pensiveness and otherworldly nature of Count Dracula. There was nothing of the awkward happy-go-luckiness of the Magizoologist he knew. Newt wasn’t the brooding dark hero type and the fact that he was acting far more quiet and serious than normal worried him.

After another agonizing moment of uncharacteristic silence, Credence spotted Newt’s hand inch ed closer towards him out of the corners of his eyes. Thin silvery scars wrapping from fingers to forearm caught in the light.

Newt hesitated.

And he retracted his hand altogether.

“What would you like to do, Credence?” Newt asked quietly.

“I’d like to stay with you.”

“But?”

“But,” Credence repeated, burying his frustrated and oh so very tired face in his hands, “Modesty deserves a home. A stable family. A life. She should go to school and make friends with children her age. She should have fun. She shouldn’t worry about dark wizards or where her next meal will come. I want her to be happy. I want her to have everything—”
Credence paused.

Newt remained silent.

“Everything that I didn’t have, I want to give her and I don’t know how I can possibly balance my life with her and my life with you. I’m all she has left. But you—” Credence lifted his head and met Newt’s oddly calm and contemplative gaze. “You’re both too important to me.”

“So, choosing between me and her is—”

“Out of the question.”

Newt smiled slightly.

He never smiled fully anymore.

“And what about Mr. Graves?”

“What about him?” Credence furrowed his brows.

“When Tina and the others left to return to America about over a week or so ago to get Queenie proper medical attention, I couldn’t help but notice that he… remained. With us. By all means, with Grindelwald imprisoned and all his misdeeds coming to light, Mr. Graves doesn’t have any purpose to serve here anymore. Why didn’t he return to MACUSA? Shouldn’t his reports about what happened be more important than whatever it is that’s keeping him here?”

“I—”

“Furthermore, I couldn’t help but notice his closeness with a certain Modesty Barebone. Perhaps, once or twice, I’ve even heard her calling him Dad,” Newt pondered aloud, resting his chin within the palm of his scarred hand, “Don’t you think that what’s keeping him here is that… he’d like to remain in her life too?”

Credence remained quiet.

“You’re her brother, Credence. Not her parent. Not her father,” Newt said, “You will always be a part of Modesty’s life, but I think it’s up to Mr. Graves now to worry over her and decide how to best provide for his daughter.”

Credence didn’t know how to respond to that.

So, they sat there in silence. Both closed off in one way or another. Both hurting. Both changed. Credence just wanted everything to—well, not go back to the way it was. They were different people now with different experiences that weighed heavily upon their shoulders. No, they could never go back.

But they could move forward.

“Well then,” Newt stood up and placed his hands on the table, “There’s plenty of work to be done. Niffler eggs and all. I wonder if they’ll be hatched by the time we get to Mummy’s house.”

Credence groaned.

“Don’t tell me you’re not excited?”

“I would be,” Credence mumbled into his fingers, running his hands down his face, “If we weren’t
being forced to stay there.”

“We have to stay in one place,” Newt practically parroted the French Auror – Phillipe his name was – who had given them the orders, “So that we can be reached anytime during Grindelwald’s trial. Key witnesses and all.”

“I know, I know,” he sighed, “I just—I don’t like to be stuck.”

“Don’t worry,” Newt smiled that infuriating half-smile once again, “I’ll make sure you’re happy there, Credence.”

That’s it.

That was enough.

Credence stood in a flash, whirling around and focusing narrowed eyes onto Newt. He curled his fingers into trembling fists, intense conviction coursing throughout his veins.

“And what about you?”

Newt blinked.

“Uhhh—”

“Newt, we need to talk about it.”

“About what?”

“You know what,” Credence closed his eyes tightly shut and shook his head, “About how you don’t smile like you used to. About how you don’t talk to me anymore. About how when everyone else left – Theseus, Hortencia – you just went into your room and didn’t come out until three days later. Three days, Newt. I’m talking about that day you died.”

Newt lowered his gaze.

Credence softened. His voice, quiet.

“Tell me how to help you, Newt. Let me help you like you helped me.”

Newt’s lower lip quivered. Something dripped down his freckled cheek, catching the light for one single dazzling moment before disappearing as if it had never existed at all. A second later, Newt slumped forward, forehead resting against Credence’s shoulder.

Credence wrapped his arms around him and rubbed his back in soft, soothing circles.

“And what about you?”

Credence frowned.

“Pardon?”

“You don’t talk about that day either,” Newt’s already softened voice grew even quieter, muffled by the fabric of Credence’s shirt, “About what happened after I died.”

“Newt—”
“I was so scared,” Newt’s shaking hands raised and gripped Credence’s arms, “I… was alone. Beautiful beyond comparison and I’ve never known such peace; but, no matter how hard or long I searched, I couldn’t find anyone. I figured if I was dead then I’d at least see my Father. Dido died moments before I did, so maybe she would’ve greeted me. But…”

His fingers tightened in Credence’s shirt.

“I couldn’t find anyone.”

“Newt—”

“Suppose I was alive then,” Newt continued, seemingly unable to stop now that he’d started, “Why couldn’t I find my creatures? Why couldn’t I find Mum or Theseus? Where were the Goldsteins, I wondered. Where was Jacob? Where were you?”

Warm tears dripped onto his shoulder.

“And when I escaped and saw what you had become… You were just as alone as I was, weren’t you?”

“The ocean.”

“The endless ocean that drowns you and pushes and pulls you around like a toy. I remember,” Newt trembled, “Credence, I… have never needed anyone before. You know how hopeless I am around other people. I don’t have many… friends. But I was happy with that. I never wanted anything more than exploring the world and finding new and fantastic creatures. I was fine.”

Newt pulled away just a smidgen, his grip firm and meadow green eyes splotched with pink.

“Now I can’t imagine my life without you in it.”

He smiled weakly.

“I would still have my creatures, of course. My work would keep me very well occupied until I’m all old and gray. I would still have meaning. I would still have purposes. I could still go on, yes,” Newt admitted, “But I didn’t know what I was missing until the day I brought you into my suitcase and introduced you to my beloved beasts. I didn’t how empty my hands felt until I had yours to hold. Until I died, I didn’t know how much I wanted to wake up next to you every morning. I didn’t know that I didn’t want to be alone anymore.”

Newt shattered in his arms.

Subdued sobs that he’d tried so desperately to suppress emerged in small pathetic whimpers and cries. He clung onto Credence tightly – knuckles turned bone-white – and yet, he couldn’t meet his gaze. He couldn’t look into Credence’s eyes as he poured out his entire heart and soul to him.

But Newt didn’t need to.

“Newt, can I touch you?”

He nodded.

Credence gently pressed his scarred palm against Newt’s splotchy red cheek, stained with wet streaks of tears. He carefully rubbed his thumb across a splash of freckles against his skin and, ever so slightly, lifted up Newt’s face.
Credence leaned forward.

“I love you.”

Newt shivered.

“And I want to be with you. Forever.”

“Credence—”

“Newt, I’ve never been like you. Loneliness isn’t something I actively seek out,” Credence whispered, his thumb still caressing Newt’s cheek back and forth with such loving tenderness that Newt closed his eyes and seemed to lean into his touch, “I was scared of leaving Mother. Terrified. Even though she hurt me, I couldn’t imagine life without her. I followed Mr. Graves blindly. I sought out companionship at every turn. I became friends with a paper butterfly because I couldn’t bear to be alone.”

Credence pressed his forehead against Newt’s and smiled.

“I have freedom now. A choice and drive to do whatever I want,” he continued, “And I want adventure, Newt. I want to grow and explore everything that this world has to offer. I want to explore the jungles of Brazil and the African Sahara. I want to tread through the icy tundra of Russia and soar through the Swiss Alps. I want to learn how to use my Obscurus. I want to learn how to control my magic. I want it all and I want to do it with you.”

He paused and added, “That is, if you’ll have me.”

“Of course, I will,” Newt laughed and wiped his eyes, smiling that beaming smile that rivaled the intensity of the sun, “I love you, Credence Barebone.”

“I love you, Newt Scamander.”

“I would very much like to kiss you now. May I?”

“If it’s you? Always.”

Chapter End Notes

While this isn't our final chapter (not by a long shot), here's our official "ending" my darlings! We still have a post-face chapter to look forward to and extra content (likely around 3 or so chapters worth) but yes! We've made it! It's been a long journey of incredible growth and I'd like to thank each and every one of you whom have followed me on this grand adventure and given your support. Thank you so, so, so much. I couldn't have done this without you.

Now, with that being said, keep your eyes peeled for Chapter 25 and sneak peaks for the sequel! Yes, that's right - Green Meadows, Dark Skies is getting itself a sequel! I promise there will be more tooth-rotting moments of ooey-gooiness with our boys among other wonderful things.

Here's to hoping though I can squeeze out some special holiday episodes here in addition to an entire chapter of nothing but nsfw bonus content.
And now, here's the point in the notes where I ask how I'm doing with my writing sooooo, how am I doing with my writing? Is there anything that I should improve upon? Anything that you'd like to see more of? Less of?

Please leave your comments and critiques below! I absolutely love love LOVE reading each and every single one of them! They are truly the fuel in which this series thrives upon! Tell me about your favorite moments, your favorite lines, or scenes that just stuck out to you.

Also, go check out my Tumblr, my darlings, at: https://darthpricklypear.tumblr.com/

Come interact with me!
Epilogue - There's Something Strange Afoot

Chapter Notes

So, I saw Crimes of Grindelwald.

And I am ruined.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Sunshine caressed Credence’s cheek.

Comforting rays of liquid warmth trickled in through the just barely cracked open windows right above the bed. The threadbare cotton curtains aged into an antique gold swayed softly with the chilled morning breeze. The dainty melodies of tiny songbirds floated in.

Credence groaned and pressed his face further into the feather-down pillow.

He didn’t want to wake up only to find an empty bed, an empty cabin, an empty suitcase. Didn’t want to venture up those wicked stairs only to find a door locked against him. Didn’t want to fill his days silently chopping vegetables. Didn’t want to occupy his time reading through Newt’s shelves of cheesy romance novels. Didn’t want to be satisfied with the Doogle’s hugs.

He didn’t want to wake up alone.

So, Credence just took a deep breath of the scent of adventure lingering on his pillow and pretended that he wasn’t. He could make-believe that sunshine was the person that he wanted most to be near.

Credence rolled onto his side. His curls annoyingly tickled his nose which he promptly fixed by smoothing them behind his head; but his hand caught on something soft and squishy in the process.

He grimaced and opened his eyes just a smidgen to scold the Swooping Evil for climbing uninvited into bed again for midnight snuggles only to come nose-to-nose with the one and only still dozing Newt Scamander.

Who promptly snuffled in his sleep and loudly licked his lips, drool dribbling from the corner onto the pillow underneath.

“God,” Credence snorted into his hand, “I love you.”

That’s right.

He wasn’t locked in there anymore.

Credence casually propped himself up on his arm, palm framing his plump cheek, and marveled at the wonder that was Newt.

There were many wonderful things that he loved about Newt. The gentleness of his heart reflected in his outward appearance. The crinkling of his eyes whenever he smiled or merely looked upon any one of his many creatures. The way he would go to the ends of the earth for what he loved and believed right. That self-sacrificing devotion—
Credence stopped that train of thought.

He loved Newt’s awful taste in books. He loved how Newt would never ever forget about the care of his creatures and yet would constantly forget to take care of himself. He loved how he would forget to wash his face or change his clothes or even eat and sleep if it weren’t for Credence’s exasperated nagging.

He loved how hard Newt worked. How that devotion wasn’t only just for his studies but to prove himself in the eyes of the people he cared about. Newt wasn’t the type of man that desired power or fame. All he wanted was to be… recognized. To be seen. Acknowledged. If not for himself then for the beasts that he loved so dearly.

Credence reached out and gently brushed away a stray lock of hair – more fluff than actual curl – from Newt’s soft forehead. He followed with his thumb down the gentle curve of Newt’s nose. It wasn’t anywhere sharp or aquiline like Credence’s piercing features, but more warm and down-to-earth like a bunny rabbit or a—

No, a bunny rabbit was a good description.

The gentle fluttering of Newt’s pale eyelashes created beautiful shadows lost amongst the myriad of freckles smattered across his strawberry-tinted face. Credence’s thumb hesitated above Newt’s slightly parted lips, full and plump yet oddly always some form of chapped. He gently swiped away the dribble of drool leaking from the corner.

“You’re so hopeless without me,” Credence sighed affectionately and wrapped his arm around Newt’s waist, “Aren’t you?”

He then pulled Newt gently against his chest – close enough that he could hear every soft intake of breath – and buried his face into his wild tawny hair. Credence loved the sense of security and closeness that holding Newt like this brought.

A few moments later, Newt’s arms wrapped lazily around his back.

“Ev’rythin’ okay?” his muffled voice murmured against his chest.

“Mmm.”

“No nightmares?”

“None that I remember,” Credence confessed, rubbing his scarred fingers down the length of Newt’s spine and appreciating the approving hum he received in response. “You?”

“A few.”

Credence frowned.

“You didn’t wake me.”

“Tried not to,” Newt casually entwined their legs together and rubbed his cheek against the pearlescent buttons of Credence’s pajamas, melting so much into his body that it was nearly indistinguishable where one of them ended and the other began, “Didn’t want to make you worry. Means you suffer twice.”

Credence had to restrain himself from rolling his eyes.
“Then you’re always making me suffer, Newt.”

“Likewise.”

A pause.

“I don’t mean to.”

Newt pulled backwards just the tiniest of fractions and green meadow eyes instantly latched onto his. A sleepy smile illuminated by the streaming sunlight crossed his lips, sending tiny little butterflies swirling into Credence’s stomach.

“Likewise,” Newt touched Credence’s suddenly blazing cheek, lazily drawing circles into his skin, “May I?”

“Yes.”

Newt leaned forward and pressed his lips gently against Credence, a soft contented sigh escaping into him. This kiss was… slow. Appreciative. Nothing more than the melding together of two kindred spirits casually getting lost in one another. It was the sort of kiss that fitted perfectly with the hour of birdsong and morning light.

Credence found his hands sliding up Newt’s back and into his hair, perfectly content to spend the rest of the day just like this.

Which, of course, meant that they had to be interrupted by a sudden knock at the door.

“Breakfast’s ready, my darlings,” Mrs. Scamander’s voice announced cheerily.

Newt groaned and rested his forehead against Credence’s chin, holding him closer against him, “I don’t want to get up.”

Credence pulled himself up, earning a low, complaining whine from Newt, and pulled the sheets over him. As he tucked him snugly inside, a devious totally-not-suspicious-at-all smile crossed his lips, “You don’t have to.”

Newt was wide awake now.

“Credence—”

Within a manner of seconds, Credence hopped across the bed over Newt. He pulled the corners of the bedsheets along with him, trapping the startled Magizoologist inside a makeshift bag. Or carriage as Credence preferred to call it whenever he used the same trick against Modesty.

Newt laughed as he crashed onto the floor, limbs sticking out of the opening.

“Credence!”

Credence whistled innocently and opened the bedroom door with his elbow and some careful maneuvering, dragging the cocooned Newt along behind him.

Delia’s country cottage – Newt’s childhood home – was decorated from wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling with hundreds of moving pictures of the Scamander family. They’d already been living there for about three weeks now and Credence was still discovering new things every day. Some of the photographs were group portraits with both parents and children. One of them featured an infant Newt held in the beaming Delia’s arms with their stoic father in the background, one hand braced on
toddler Theseus’ shoulder.

These were few and far between, however, when compared to the photographs of Theseus and Newt together.

They were absolutely adorable when they were younger.

Theseus always seemed to be wearing some form of emotionless expression smeared across his face whenever he was pictured alone. He was so remarkably stoic. Hands firmly clasped behind his back with aristocratic dignity. Standing straight and tall, barely moving a muscle when he couldn’t have been older than five.

But whenever he was pictured with Newt…

It was more of the same, but there was just this—this shining light in his eyes that wasn’t present in any of the others. Whenever he gazed upon that ridiculous wild child Newt Scamander with those constantly plastered fingers and missing teeth proudly holding up a jar of worms or a fattened snake half his size, Theseus just lightened up as if he were in the presence of the very sun.

Not that Credence could blame him.

What he would have given to have grown up beside Newt.

“Good morning, Credence. You’re looking rather chipper today,” Delia pleasantly greeted when he’d finally reached the kitchen, furrowing her brows only a second later and looking curiously behind him, “Where’s Artemis?”

“Down here,” Newt raised his arm from the pile of bedsheets and waved it weakly, “Morning, Mum.”

“He didn’t want to get out of bed this morning,” Credence smiled innocently, “So, I helped.”

Delia ran her hands over her face and snorted with laughter.

“Well, he got up one way or another I suppose,” she shook her head and pointed at the dining room table, “Go sit and eat before the food gets cold.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Credence flushed, embarrassed yet touched by the motherly attention, “I already gained ten pounds since becoming Newt’s apprentice.”

“I already gained ten pounds since becoming Newt’s apprentice,” Credence flushed, embarrassed yet touched by the motherly attention, “Turns out that eating breakfast, lunch and dinner on the regular is a good thing. Who knew?”

“We’re both perfectly healthy as we are, Mum,” Newt declared between mouthfuls of egg and toast, “Credence makes sure I eat every day so you and Theseus both can stop worrying.”

“Hmm,” Delia thoughtfully tsked, “You could still do with more weight on your bones, though.”
“But I’m a Barebone,” Credence stated dryly, “Not a Meaty Bone.”

Silence descended unto the kitchen.

Until Newt loudly snorted bits of toast and egg out of his nose and had to scramble across the table for some napkins to maintain some semblance of dignity. Delia spluttered and color rose in Credence’s cheeks as he naturally bit into a slice of tomato, acting like nothing happened, “This breakfast is fantastic, Mrs. Scamander. I’ll have to ask you for your recipe book.”

“Yes—yes, of course,” Delia stammered out before releasing a soft oh! and hurrying back into the kitchen.

“Speaking of! Theseus stopped over earlier this morning. Didn’t want to wake you since he was only dropping something off. Oh, isn’t he just the sweetest?” she hummed about the kitchen, “Mentioned he’d be bringing Modesty over for a visit sometime soon for Thanksgiving. Never had one of those before, but she insisted and Theseus just couldn’t say no to that precious darling’s face. I wonder what we should make for it? Ah, no matter. We’ll figure something out. Now, where did I put that blasted thing—Aha!”

Now Credence knew where Newt’s rambling came from.

“Anyhow, he brought this over for you,” Delia returned and placed a familiar notebook into his hands, “Said you left it at his place.”

“That’s mine,” Newt curiously screwed up his brows and leaned over Credence’s shoulder, “From when I was a kid. Why is Theseus giving that to you?”

“He’s not. He’s letting me borrow it for the time being.” Credence clarified upon cracking it open, smiling at the ‘property of Newton Scamander’ scrawled messily inside the front cover, “He said that there was something important for me to see on one of the pages.”

“Why I never—” Newt puffed out his chest, “Every page is important.”

“I know, I know. You don’t have tell me,” Credence smiled as he flipped through near-illegible pages of spider mating habits and Bowtruckle colonies. Crayon drawings that were both mundane and magical alike littered these ancient pages alongside little, almost diary-like in nature entries of how Newt had come across them.

Day 17. I found an Alpine Newt swimming outside today!

Day 36. Mummy took away the tarantula I’ve been hiding in the shoebox under the bed.

Day 104. We’re going to the park for a summertime picnic. Ew. My shoes are too tight and everything is too scratchy. I just want to play with the Hippogriffs.

Having this glimpse into Newt’s childhood years made him all the more endearing. But Credence couldn’t help but wonder what exactly Theseus wanted him to see? Was there a specific page that he wanted him to look at? What could be so important anyhow? Were there notes on Obscurials that Newt had perhaps forgotten? Or—

Day 104 ½. I met an American boy in the woods today.

Credence paused.

His fingers hovering over the page.
I think I disappointed Mummy since we never made it to the picnic. I had one of my fits. Too much noise. Too many colors. Too much everything. Had to run away and calm down so I did. Didn’t stop running until I found myself surrounded by trees. It was so pretty! And there was a lake there too! So, I threw my shoes in. They were too tight anyways. Didn’t like them.

Anyways, I thought I was alone. Apparently not. The American boy found me and I thought I had come across a ghost since he was so pale! When he got closer, I could see his veins. I didn’t want him there at first. Everything was still too loud and I don’t talk so good. No one understands me. Not even Mummy or Theseus.

But he did.

I didn’t mind him so much after that. He asked me if he could join me in the water so I did. I showed him how to wriggle his toes in the water and find hidden rainbows. I like rainbows. He smiles like the sun. I liked it. I want to smile like that someday.

I’m glad we didn’t get to go to the picnic today because I made a new friend.

Although, he doesn’t know my name is Newton. I tried to tell him but my mouth doesn’t work like it should. He thinks my name is Newt. Newt is fine though. I quite like it.

“Hidden…rainbows,” Credence repeated slowly, widened eyes glued to the page, “Newt, who’s this?”

“Hmm?” Newt haphazardly wiped his mouth with a napkin and peered back over Credence’s shoulder at the journal entry, “Oh. Oh! That’s Hermes! Wow, I haven’t thought about him in years. He and I used to be best friends when I was—oh bugger, five? Six? We did everything together. Inseparable even.”

Newt leaned back in his chair and thoughtfully twirled around a strand of hair with his finger.

“Funny,” he smiled, perhaps not-so-surprisingly wistful, “I swear it felt like years that we spent together. But I think he was only here for about a week? Maybe two? He and his Mum stayed with us here for a bit before they went back to America. He promised that he’d write, but I never got any of his letters if he sent them. I wonder where he is now?”

Newt frowned and leaned his elbows on the table.

“Hey Mum? Do you know whatever happened to Hermes?”

A crash sounded from the kitchen.

Newt rose to his feet, startled.

Delia’s suddenly widened eyes stared out of the opened kitchen window, the plate she’d been washing having fallen out of her hands onto the floor. Her shoulders seemed frozen stiff. Her skin, ghostly pale. Her fingers trembled so violently that she had to clasp her hands fully together to keep them from shaking.


“Hermes,” Newt rounded the table and quickly headed into the kitchen, “Mum, are you alright?”

Credence knew that he ought to stand up and check on Mrs. Scamander too. Underneath more normal circumstances, he very well already would have. But something kept him seated at the dining
room table staring at Newt’s childhood notebook. Something that he suspected, yet couldn’t be true, made him flip the page with shaking fingers—

A photograph.

An enchanted black-and-white photograph.

Little Newt Scamander – no younger than 6 or 7 – beamed at the camera. He was missing two of his bottom teeth and his fingers, typical of all his childhood photographs, were covered in plasters. His frizzy hair hung messily in front of his face, nearly hiding his shimmering eyes filled with life and wonder. He was clothed in ridiculously muddy shoes and even muddier clothes, triumphantly holding a strange-looking fish with feet in one hand and in the other—

The hand of a toddler no older than 3.

The smooth, unscarred hand of a toddler.

His smile was made of sunshine. The very same one that Newt had mimicked to perfection and wore only around Credence. Oh, all the descriptions were spot on. The child’s skin was so ghostly pale that he looked undead even on camera; and, that wild halo of midnight black curls surrounding even remarkably darker eyes didn’t help.

Credence rose to his feet, hand covering his mouth.

The table rose with him. It hovered frighteningly high over his head for a prolonged moment as he absently stepped towards the kitchen. Only once he was out of the way did the table come slamming violently into the ground. The wooden legs cracked and shattered upon impact. The food was sent splattering all over the floor.

“Credence?” Newt took a step away from his mother towards him, alarmed. “Credence, what happened?”

“You know, Theseus said something strange to me,” Credence gripped onto the photograph, unable to tear his eyes away from the impossibility staring back him, “When you—When you died Newt. I didn’t think so much about it then. Didn’t really—Didn’t really remember it until now.”

He paused, standing only a foot away from Newt and his mother.

“He called me a LeStrange.”

Newt’s shoulders stiffened. Delia’s sickly white pallor paled even further.

“Why did he—” Newt swallowed thickly, his hands anxiously finding themselves in his hair, “Why did Theseus—”

“They went to New York, Mrs. Scamander,” Credence said quietly, “Hermes and his mother. They went to New York.”

He looked up from the photograph.

“Didn’t they?”

“Merlin,” Delia shakily whispered, gripping the edges of the kitchen counter so tightly that her knuckles turned bone white, “I thought I burned that photograph.”

“Mum?” Newt’s head whirled back around to her, his brows raised in concerned confusion, “What’s
going on? What are you talking about?”

“No one was supposed to find out,” she trembled, tears filling her eyes and spilling over her cheeks, “They were supposed to be safe. He was supposed to be safe. I didn’t know. Merlin, I didn’t know.”

“You know what’s funny, Newt? I told Modesty before we came here about one of the few things I can remember before I was adopted. The feeling of cold water over my feet. The sound of the ripples they made as I wriggled my toes,” Credence closed his eyes, shaking his head, “I never told her how I saw rainbows in the water.”

“Credence,” Newt was practically pleading now, “What are you saying?”

“This face? It’s the same one that’s on my adoption papers.”

Credence flipped over the photograph, revealing the names scrawled in elegant cursive across the back. Newton Scamander and the other—

He almost laughed.

“I’m Hermes LeStrange.”

Chapter End Notes

For anyone who would like to see how Newt and Credence first met, let me point you in the direction of Forgotten Memories, Unwanted Scars! We have kid!Credence and kid!Newt being especially cute. And we have some nonverbal communication and echolalia! Anyways, with this chapter, I leave you with a teaser as to what the sequel to GMDS will be about! Once again, there will still be a few special NSFW and holiday episodes coming up but, for all intents and purposes, that's the "end!"

I'm so incredibly happy that you all have accompanied me on this long journey. I truly couldn't have done this without you. I will be going back through the series edition some grammar inconsistencies and clarifying some plot-holes (plus, addition some additional content and crewt moments I mean whaaat?) so, keep your eyes peeled out for that, my darlings!

Since this is technically the end (special episodes aside) I would love to hear what you thought about the series! Is there anything that you would change or would have liked to see more of? Less of? What were your favorite moments of the series? I'd love to know anything and everything you have to say!!

Also, without further ado, here's my Tumblr: https://darthpricklypear.tumblr.com/ Come interact with me!
Delia Scamander fluttered around the kitchen. Her delicate, flower-decorated recipes flipped rapidly in the air in front of her frowning face, going from her Grandmother’s Opera Cakes to a Black Forest twist that she’d found in a magazine back when her boys were still in nappies. She gnawed on her thumb, the nail already worn down from years of similar abuse.

She read the names rapid-fire, a gift she had developed during her years as a student cramming for her O.W.L.S. Delia was proud to claim her 500 words per minute reading speed amongst her book clubs; and, as her recipes transitioned from elaborate cakes to simple pies, she found herself most thankful for this ability.

“Ah! Stop right there, dear.”

The cards came to a sudden halt before zipping behind her ear towards the stove, settling itself back on its wooden display stand beside it. Delia tied her graying hair back behind her head for what seemed like the umpteenth time that afternoon and glanced over the instructions for Pumpkin Pie.

The Scamander household had never celebrated Thanksgiving. It wasn’t their holiday, so why would they have? They’d heard of all the American festivities, certainly. Many of their customers abroad who had provided Delia regular business often sent over favors during the season. Mostly a fruitcake here and there.

Which Delia *promptly* discarded.

But now that she had guests who celebrated the holiday and who her old motherly heart ached to feed a proper meal, Delia had quickly researched everything there was to know about Thanksgiving. It’s history and customs. Who was invited and welcome. What foods were presented and what was to be expected of the host.

Thanksgiving was a bonafide feast.

Roasted turkey with rosemary stuffing, decadent New England pudding, a wonderful array of pies and brandy-soaked fruit cakes, jellied cranberries, mashed potatoes and gravy, and heartwarming spiced ciders. It reminded her of the lavish holiday feasts in the Great Hall shared amongst her dearest friends and professors.

Merlin’s Beard, she had been so proud when Newt was sorted into Hufflepuff.

Of course, learning that Theseus had been accepted into Gryffindor had provided her with incredible joy; but, to be comforted with the knowledge that her youngest and most delicate belonged to the same House she had been in many years ago was incomparable.

Oh, the sweet solace she’d found in her heart knowing that her little Artemis was safe and sound studying in the same cozy chambers she had once spent her formative years in. Where she had first met their father, the love of her life.

She’d have to ask Credence which house he had belonged to at Ilvermony.
Delia frowned. She half-stepped backwards and rested her arms against the counter, cradling her wrinkled forehead within her palms. Her age really must be getting to her. How else could she keep forgetting such important details about the life of one of Newt’s closest friends. Oh, who was she kidding? Credence was his closest friend.

And Credence had only known about the wizarding world for little over a year.

The same sweet boy who had first properly introduced himself to her with wide frightened eyes and a stutter upon his lips. Who had been born Hermes LeStrange and unlocked the voice trapped within her son. Who had apologized a thousand times over for what had transpired in Italy and a million times more for events that she hadn’t been present for, let alone understood. Who spoke about Newt’s creatures with as much affection as her darling boy. Who she had caught casually cleaning the cottage and doing chores without prompt or complaint.

Who stared at Newt whenever he wasn’t looking with the same stars in his midnight eyes that her husband had once given her—

Credence had missed out on so much.

He had never had the pleasure of shopping for first-year textbooks or purchasing his first cauldron. Never experienced the wonder of riding his first broom. Never spent those cold, winter nights huddled around the fireplace studying for exams. Never had chosen an owl, or toad, or ferret. Had he even experienced the sheer wonder and awe of having a wand choose him for the very first time? Credence had one, of course. A wand, that was. But Delia rarely saw him use it outside of mundane housekeeping spells. Was it not suited to him? Was it borrowed? Stolen?

Her heart ached.

Little Hermes LeStrange. What a sweet boy he had been with that thousand-watt smile and a penchant for running around barefoot. An absolute delight in the week he had spent here.

Why Delia remembered how he used to climb the trees in the backyard to try and catch the clouds. If she just looked out the kitchen window, she swore she could still see him there standing atop the branches, Newt pacing worriedly on the ground underneath.

And he had become an Obscurial.

The kind of life he had lived since he’d last left those cottage doors. Had she known, Delia would have insisted that his dear, kind mother stay with them. Forever. Would have begged for their happiness even though she knew very well the reason why they couldn’t remain here with her and her boys in the first place.

Delia’s vision blurred.

What would Lisabetta think?

What would she feel upon learning what had become of her beloved son? Of the pain and suffering he had endured all this time?

It wasn’t the life she had wanted for him. It wasn’t the life anyone would have wanted for their son. Liz would have fought tooth and nail for him to be happy even it meant costing her everything. And it had in the end, hadn’t it?
Delia’s lips pursed into a thin line, determination settling into her shoulders.

She couldn’t change the past. Couldn’t switch Credence’s bad memories for good. But she would be damned if she didn’t give Lisabetta’s child the best possible English Thanksgiving he had ever seen before.

All she had to do was grab something from the shed first.

“So, you and I used to play out here together.”

“Mmmhmm,” Newt nodded, standing bow-legged in the river, eyes focused on the running current underneath.

“And we used to be friends,” Credence repeated for, perhaps, the hundredth time that week ever since he’d found out about his history. He lounged back on the shoreline, gaze turned towards the softly swaying tree-tops, and swinging his bare feet in the cool water.

Newt subtly watched him out of the corners of his eyes.

How relaxed Credence looked with his arms behind his head and his trousers rolled up over his knees, baring ancient scars with a hesitant casualness that he had never shown Newt before. He had been through hell recently. They both had. But, in spite of receiving the news of a lifetime, Credence was trying so hard to keep things… normal.

Trying to keep Newt’s mind occupied instead of obsessing over his nightmares. Instead of being overwhelmed by what had happened to him lest he close himself off from the world again.

“We still are, Credence,” Newt smile a little, “Friends, that is.”

“We’re more than that now.”

“Mmm, you’re my friend first. Boyfriend second.”

“Newt.”

Credence’s arm came up and covered his face, undoubtedly concealing a gorgeous blush that Newt couldn’t see from his reclined position.

“And as your boyfriend,” Newt returned his gaze back onto the crystal-clear water, searching for his prize amongst the minnows and perch swimming between his legs, “I’m disappointed that we haven’t had our second date yet.”

“Oh, is that what this is? I thought you were just being weird again.”

“Oh hush, now. You joined me, didn’t you?”

“I’ve learned not to question when you drag me by the hand to God only knows where.”

Newt spotted a conspicuous flash of silver.

He dropped down into the water, nimble hands diving underneath his legs and scooping up what he
had been searching the better half of the hour for. The glistening fish, neither longer nor larger than
the size of his forearm, with two vaguely human-like feet sprouting from its belly squirmed in his
grasp.

Newt grinned triumphantly; and yet, it wasn’t out of any silent pompous boasting at his fish-catching
skills or out of any need to impress his landside paramour. Newt was just happy at the opportunity to
closely observe such a gorgeous specimen.

He placed his fingers delicately around the paper-thin fins without obstructing the gills, thus
rendering the creature easier to both handle and preventing it from accidentally hurting itself.

“There, there,” Newt cooed gently and rubbed the underside of its belly, activating its dual breathing
systems to switch from water to land use, “No need to fret. I’m not going to eat you.”

“How romantic. You caught me a fish,” Credence suddenly drawled from behind him in that lovely
American accent of his, “What is it?”

His warm breath curled around his ear. The unexpected sensation sent decadent shivers down
Newt’s spine and raised the tiny hairs on the back of his neck in a manner that was certainly not
unpleasant.

“It’s a reverse mermaid,” he explained, unbothered by how Credence had silently crept up without
his knowledge, “Also known as the Death-Head Monster.”

“It doesn’t look particularly gruesome.”

“That’s because it isn’t. They’re absolutely harmless,” Newt flipped over the creature and examined
its stomach, “You see these markings here above the anal fin? How, if you squint, they look like a
human skull? Over a hundred years ago, whenever fishermen would catch them in their lines, they’d
think it and its toddler-like feet were the mark of a witch and sever its head. They’d bury the remains
underneath their porch to ward off evil. They nearly went extinct once.”

Newt leaned down and released it back into the river water.

“I imagine you had a hand in rescuing them?”

“Goodness me, no,” Newt promptly shook his head, “After witch persecutions fell out of common
practice and folk belief replaced with science, the Deathies were just free to repopulate at their
discretion.”

“Hmmm,” Credence hummed, slipping his hands inside his trouser pockets, “Newt, why did you
really bring me out here?”

“Pardon?”

“I’m not entirely oblivious. That’s more your job,” Credence shook his head in mild amusement, “A
fish with feet. That’s what that was. The same creature you were holding in the picture—In our
picture.”

Newt looked down, wriggling his gray-and-yellow-striped socked feet underneath the water. It was
too deep to refract rainbows and yet…

“You don’t remember anything, do you?”

Credence frowned and shifted from foot-to-foot. His eyes turned downcast.

“I just wanted—” Newt swallowed thickly and found himself unable to look at him. He twiddled his fingers together, the faint silvery scars catching the sunlight yet going entirely unnoticed… except by Credence.

“I just—you see, I had a very pleasant childhood,” he smiled faintly, “We had—we had problems certainly. Mum doesn’t approve of the whole Magizoology thing; and, me and Theseus—Well, no need to rehash that whole plethora of issues, do we? But regardless… I was—I was at my—my happiest when I was with—”

“With me,” Credence finished quietly.

“That’s the thing!” Newt huffed in frustration and rubbed anxious circles into his forehead, “You might have been Hermes but Hermes isn’t you anymore. It’s like—it’s like Jacob. He was obliviated. He has no memories of the times we shared in New York. I remember him as he was. I remember our friendship, but I can’t treat him like that. He’s a new person and I want to make friends with who he is now and not the—not the memory of who he used to be.”

Newt hesitated, his voice growing soft and indistinct.

“And I—I want to do that with you, Credence.”

“Oh, Newt.”

“I’m sorry,” he shook his head, covering his face with growing embarrassment coloring his cheeks, “I know it’s dumb and I should’ve asked you first—”

“Newt.”

“But I—Oh, please just forget I ever said anything! This never happened and I—”

“Newt, look at me.”

He did.

And his breath promptly caught in his throat.

Credence’s beautiful scarred hand shakily covered his mouth. His shoulders trembled and a tender stream of tears flowed down his pale cheeks, but this was nothing like when he normally cried. There was no sadness or fear. No grief or anger. This was different. This was… awed.

“Can I hug you?”

“Yes.”

Credence’s arms wrapped around Newt’s shoulders, one hand curling into the back of his shirt and the other settling in his hair. Newt hated people touching him. It had never felt comfortable and always seemed to make him awkwardly antsy afterwards; but, with Credence… All his endless nervous energy seemed to be locked away and replaced with a single moment where he felt warm.

Newt leaned into his touch, eager to prolong the feeling, and smelled his hair. Oh, it was weird. Tremendously so. But Credence had done it so many times to him before that he wanted to share this experience with him too.

“What do I smell like?”
Newt flushed.

“You noticed that?”

“I’m flattered. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery,” Credence teased, smiling into his neck, “What do I smell like?”

“Do you not know?”

“Have you ever tried smelling yourself before?”

“Point taken,” Newt rested his head upon his shoulder, sighing in content, “You smell like—like calm water on the night of a full moon. Like a night-blooming flower unfolding. Like a shooting star falling from the heavens.”

“You’re trying way too hard.”

“That obvious?” Newt laughed softly and admitted the truth this time, “You smell sweet.”

“Just sweet?”

“Oh hush. Not all of us can have the nose of a bloodhound, Credence.”

“I love you,” Credence laughed into his neck. The sensation indirectly tickled him, causing Newt to bite back an involuntary snort lest Credence take advantage of that knowledge again. “You’re positively hopeless.”

“Oh thanks.”

“I find it endearing,” Credence only continued, “Nearly as much as I find your kind-heartedness and thoughtfulness endearing. You’re wonderful, Newt. I don’t know how I can ever repay you.”

“Showing you common courtesy is nothing to be repaid for, Credence,” Newt affirmed; however, after a brief moment, he couldn’t help himself teasing, “But if you insist… you could sing me Modesty’s song tonight.”

Credence flushed from head to toe, embarrassed, “Absolutely not!”

“But Credence,” Newt pouted childishly, “I want to see your Erumpent impersonation again.”

“Do you think Theseus will mind switching seats with me during Thanksgiving dinner tonight?”

“Oh. Low blow, Credence. Low blow.”

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Thanksgiving evening.

A time-honored American tradition celebrated towards the end of November when Autumn transitioned into the first chills of Winter. A holiday of gathering around friends and family for a glorious feast. A holiday of sharing memories and reflecting upon everything that they were thankful for. A holiday of laughter and merry-making. A holiday of dancing, of singing, of happiness. That’s what it was supposed to be.
That’s not what it was in the Barebone house.

Mother never celebrated Thanksgiving in the traditional sense. The better half of the morning was spent kneeling down in their bedrooms, praying to God and thanking Him for all his blessings. Mother would be down in the kitchen roasting a turkey and, when it came time for dinner, called down each of her three children.

They would sit at the rounded table and she would place the 25lb turkey before them, dripping with fat and overflowing with stuffing.

And told them not to eat.

Thanksgiving was a gluttonous holiday that sanctioned sinful behavior. So, instead of participating, they were to practice the opposite. Self-discipline instead of self-indulgence. But after fasting all day, forced into prayer, it was more torturous than anything else.

Credence could remember the smell of rosemary in the air and the mouth-watering crinkling of crispy skin as Mother carved into the turkey, placing the still-steaming slices onto their plates. He could remember the ache in his stomach and the tremble in his fingers as he resisted—

Modesty squeezed his hand beside him and brought him back into reality. Brought him back to the bustling Scamander kitchen as everyone gathered round for the feast that was to come. Somehow, she had sensed the direction his mind was going – most likely because hers was going there too.

Credence smiled down at her.

She smiled back.

They never spoke during these moments. Never needed to. As long as they had one another to hold onto, they could survive whatever trials and tribulations they were facing because they were no longer facing it alone.

“Will Ms. Goldstein and the others be joining us this evening?” Delia’s fretting voice pulled his attention.

“Queenie’s still on bedrest,” Newt responded, twirling his hair around his finger, “But they would like to make a fire call at some point during the evening to wish us a Happy Holiday.”

“Mmm,” Delia hummed thoughtfully, tapping her chin and resting back against the kitchen counter, “We’ll Floo them some leftovers this evening then. Wish her a well recovery.”

“Do you think she’ll be okay enough to come for Christmas?” Credence asked quietly, regretting saying anything in the first place as all eyes suddenly landed on him.

“We can ask them tonight,” Delia waved him off, “But I’m sure they’d love to.”

“One problem,” Graves drawled from beside him, causing Credence to flinch and Modesty’s hand to tighten, “They don’t celebrate Christmas.”

Credence blinked.

“Pardon?”

“The Goldsteins are Jewish.”

“Oh,” Credence amended, “I wouldn’t mind spending Hanukah with them.”
Graves crossed his arms over his broad chest, regarding him with a raised brow and critical eye. Credence didn’t like the analytical gaze whatsoever. It felt like he was being stripped naked and there was nothing he could do to stop it.

“Huh,” Graves eventually broke the quiet, “You really want them over.”

“They’re my friends,” Credence’s voice dropped further until it was nothing more than a whisper, “They’ve done—They’ve done a lot for me and I want to show them that they’re appreciated. Especially after what happened in Italy—”

“Ah-ah! Remember the rule,” Delia interrupted sternly. She placed her weathered hands upon her hips, donning a similar expression and tone whenever Credence wanted to get Newt to do something. “This is a time of cheer and food. We can think about all that tomorrow.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“In the meantime,” Delia continued, “Let’s go feast.”

“I regret to inform you, Mrs. Scamander,” Graves dryly gestured outwards with his arms at the empty kitchen and dining room, devoid of food but filled with people, “There’s nothing here to eat unless we’re suddenly fine with breathing air.”

“Shush,” Modesty sharply elbowed him in the ribs, “No need to be rude.”

“Why you little shit—”

“Language, Mr. Graves,” Delia sharply interrupted, eyes narrowed into a hawkish glare and lips set into a firm line, “We’ll be dining outside this evening. I realize our table is too small to accommodate all of us, so I prepared a tent in the front yard. So, unless you prefer breathing air for dinner, I suggest you follow me.”

And then she promptly exited the kitchen door, the screen slamming shut behind her.

“Uh-oh,” Modesty snickered and abandoned Credence’s hand in favor of Graves, “You’re in trouble.”

“Oh, shut up,” Graves snarked and escorted her outside, “Or no dessert for you tonight.”

“Oh no, whatever will I do?”

As the door closed behind them, silence temporarily entered the Scamander household. Newt lingered around the attached dining room, Theseus remaining ever-silent by his side. After a moment’s hesitation, he reached out to touch his younger brother’s shoulder—

But Newt had already started walking towards Credence.

Theseus stared at the empty spot his brother had once been, at the outstretched hand still poised in the air, before slowly lowering it back into his trouser pocket.

“Credence,” Newt’s suddenly close voice pulled his attention, “Are you alright?”

“Hmm?”

“You get all quiet when you’re bothered. Is there anything that I can do?”

The sheer amount of affection that swelled in Credence’s heart couldn’t be measured it was so large.
Newt, always so oblivious to what was going around him, always seemed to be so in tune with Credence’s state of mind.

“I’ll be fine,” he reassured him and glanced over his shoulder, “I’ll meet you outside in a minute. I’d like to talk with your brother real quick.”

Newt’s brows furrowed together and he cast a curious glance towards Theseus; but, trusting Credence above all else, he conceded and left through the kitchen door without complaint.

An awkward moment passed between them. Ever since the incident happened, Theseus looked just… awful. At least, awful by Theseus standards. His hair, normally combed so properly, lately always had at least one strand conspicuously standing out of place. Faint purple spots had started blossoming underneath his eyes and he seemed… quieter than normal.

“Always so concerned about everyone else. When will he start worrying about himself,” Theseus sighed quietly and pinched the bridge of his nose, “How’s he doing?”

“The nightmares are getting worse, but he’s… coping,” Credence answered, casting his gaze unto his shoes, “He’ll talk more once he’s ready. We just have to be there for him when he is.”

“He won’t talk to me. Never has. I suppose I’m thankful that he has you now for that.”

Theseus paused.

“I’m… sorry for the things I said that day.”

“We both did and said things we regret.”

“But I crossed a line.”

“Theseus, there’s nothing to forgive. We saw what we saw. We reacted how we reacted. We grieved how we grieved,” Credence’s gaze softened as he headed to the door, his scarred hand lingering on the archway for a moment, “So please… stop beating yourself up about it so much.”

He stepped outside and walked towards the front of the Scamander cottage. While the house was decently small, the yard was enormous since they were in the middle of the country hours away from civilization. However, while the backyard was filled with vegetable gardens and forests cut into with various streams and creeks, the front yard was nothing more than plains as far as the eye could see.

And, in the distance, faint pens and barns dotted the horizon. Filled with flying horses Newt called Hippogriffs.

This was where Newt had grown up and, somehow, everything about him made perfect sense now.

Speaking of Newt…

He stood by a humble canvas tent that shouldn’t fit two people let alone six. He was wringing his hands nervously, pacing back and forth until he spotted him.

“Credence—” Newt began when he approached, a question in his tone.

“Talk to your brother tonight,” Credence interrupted gently, “He feels left out.”

“I thought he was avoiding me.”

“I don’t think it’s intentional. He’s worried about you.”
“…worried? He’s worried about me?” Newt somehow seemed surprised by this and twirled his hair around his finger, “Why?”

Credence gave him a look.

“Oh,” Newt said, “Alright, I’ll—I’ll talk with him.”

“If you need me to be there, I can—”

“No, no. I can do this,” Newt smiled that quirky little half-smile that he so enjoyed since it was so perfectly Newt, “But I’d appreciate it if you could be nearby, just in case.”

“I’ll be there,” Credence offered him his hand, “And I’ll bring your scarf too.”

Newt slipped his hand into his, their fingers entwining as naturally together as if they’d had years of practice instead of just these few precious months.

“And Pickett?”

“And Pickett if I can pry him away long enough from Prue.”

“I’m glad he’s gotten attached. He needed companionship outside of you and me. I do miss having him in my pocket though. Kept it warm and cozy,” Newt smiled, “Everyone’s already gone inside. Are you ready?”

“For our next adventure?” Credence lightly teased, “What does this one involve this time? Dragons?”

“Oh, Heavens no,” Newt retorted, “That’s for Christmas.”

“Oh, my mistake,” Credence grinned and squeezed his hand, “I’m ready.”

Newt lifted the canvas flap and escorted him inside.

Somehow, Credence was instantly transported back to Diagon Alley. Not in the literal sense, but back to that exact moment he first stepped foot in the proper wizarding world and found himself surrounded by magic. That same feeling of open-mouthed wonder filling him up so much inside that he thought he could fly on giddiness alone.

“Oh,” even Newt stood awed beside him, “Oh my.”

The wooden table stretched as far as the eye could see, filled with golden dinnerplates and goblets. Wine filled the magnificent chalices alongside mugs of apple cider magically stirred with cinnamon sticks and crystal flasks of water. Different types of puddings adorned the table beside every single roasted vegetable he could dream of and, at the table’s center, stood a massive turkey with skin as crisp and golden as the dinnerware it sat upon.

A thousand candles floated above them. As Credence cast his gaze upwards, he found the ceiling, stretching up into the very heavens themselves, showered with dazzling shooting stars and swirling galaxies.

Credence didn’t understand it.

Didn’t understand how seeing this… filled an aching gap in his heart, but it did.

Newt’s hand tugged him over to the head of the table where he leaned over his Mother’s shoulder.
“Mum, this is Hogwarts.”

Hogwarts. The Wizarding School that Newt had attended. Where he too would have gone had he stayed here.

“A recreation of it,” Delia clarified, promptly folding her hands in her lap, “We can’t have a proper feast without the Great Hall; and, I figured since only we Scamanders have seen her majesty before, we could share a bit of that magic.”

“What’s Hogwarts?” Modesty asked from across the table.

“A rather famous School of Witchcraft and Wizardry,” Graves explained from beside her, rolling his eyes as if he didn’t understand the hype only emphasized further when he then added, “Second only to Ilvermony.”

“Hogwash,” said Newt as he sat down across from them, “Hogwarts offers the finest education in the world. It’s been around for hundreds of years—”

“Exactly!” Graves pointed, “You’re old and outdated.”

“Why I never!”

“There’s… wizarding schools,” Modesty repeated. Her eyes had blown conspicuously wide and she held her head in her hands. “Credence, are you going to one?”

Credence shook his head simply while seating himself beside Newt, pinching the tender area from behind the knee to reassure himself that he wasn’t dreaming.

He wasn’t.

“I’m a little too old for one.”

Modesty quickly slammed her hands on the table, eyes suddenly twinkling, “I’ll go in your place!”

“As much as I’d pay good money to see you raising hell at Hogwarts,” Graves snorted and casually swept Modesty’s hands off the table back into her lap, “No-Maj’s aren’t allowed.”

“Ugh, that’s so dumb,” Modesty slumped in her seat, puffing out her cheeks and crossing her arms over her chest, “Of course there’s a rule like that.”

It was so… nice seeing Modesty at ease like this. Free to act however she pleased and not forced into the role of a dignified lady. The short wheat-blond hair cut sharply below her jaw gave her such a rebellious edge that Mother would have thrown a fit at and the fire in her eyes no longer remained hidden behind a mask of pious servitude.

Credence was glad to see a side of Modesty out in the open that he had only seen behind closed doors.

He remembered finding that toy wand under her bed. Back when he was still searching for an Obscurial child he believed to be dying. Credence hadn’t wanted it to be Modesty. Couldn’t dream of what it meant. Couldn’t imagine what it be like looking into her eyes knowing that she was knocking on death’s door. So, he hadn’t dared to suspect her until—

Credence caught Modesty’s gaze from across the table.

“Since when have rules ever held you back before?”
Modesty’s lips twisted into a mischievous grin.

“You’re right,” she tilted her chin up challengingly in the air, “I’ll go and—and, I dunno, you’ll find a way to be invisible or something and you can do all the magic for me! It’s a win-win! You get to learn and I get to go to school.”

“Merlin’s Beard,” Newt breathed, “She’s a Gryffindor if I’ve ever seen one. The blatant disregard for rules—”

“Not to mention the reckless bravery,” Delia added.

“Or crossing an entire ocean to find her brother.”

“And what about hopping into my second-story window and kicking me in the nuts?” Graves rolled his eyes, “Screw Gryffindor. She’d make a great Wampus.”

Modesty turned to look at him.

“Is that what you are?”

“It’s only the best house at Ilvermony,” Graves puffed out his chest proudly.

Modesty rolled her eyes and focused her attention onto Newt.

“And what about you?”

“Me?” Newt pointed at himself, brows raised in surprise.

“Yes, you,” Modesty said, “What House are you?”

“I’m a Hufflepuff.”

“Oh, that explains… so much,” Graves blinked and rubbed his forehead, “What about you, Credence? What do you think you’d be? I say you’d make a great Thunderbird but—”

“Slytherin.”

Everyone turned when Theseus entered the tent.

His eyes briefly glanced upwards towards the vaulted ceiling and the faintest of smiles quirked at the corner of his lips as if in recognition. He had probably attended Hogwarts too with Newt, so it probably was. He strode over, squeezing his mother’s shoulder as he passed by, and took the empty seat beside Graves.

“Slytherins are characterized as ambitious,” Theseus continued as he slid his seat in, “And I’ve never met someone as ambitious as you.”

Credence fidgeted, uncertain.

“I don’t know…”

“Oh, but you are!” Newt interrupted enthusiastically, seemingly hyperfocusing completely on Credence. He seemed to even forget that they were in the presence of friends and family by how widely he beamed and the extravagance of his swooping arm gestures.

Which, given how awkward Newt was 99% of the time, was certainly a sight to behold for anyone
that wasn’t Credence.

“Look at you and everything that you’ve done,” Newt clasped his shoulders, pulling a smile across Credence’s face, “You’ve been studying and practicing magic nonstop. You’re so smart that I’d pin you for a Ravenclaw at first especially with how much you love to learn. You go to bed every night reading your textbooks. You even love the History of Magic.”

“I still don’t see what’s so boring about it,” Credence shyly shrugged.

“You’re so precious. I love that about you,” Newt openly teased, “But you don’t just learn for knowledge’s sake. You learn it so you can use it. Improve upon it! You don’t just study and take things for what they are at first glance. You take initiative. You ask questions.”

“Like with the Occamies.”

“Precisely! And let me tell you that once you set your sights on something, you will do anything to achieve it no matter the cost.”

“The meadow,” Credence winced at the memory of their first big argument, “I’m still sorry—”

“And you’re incredibly loyal,” Newt continued, quieter now, “You’re loyal but only to a select few that you would do anything for. You don’t let many people see into your heart; however, the ones that you do, you would endure anything in the world for them. You’re a Slytherin, Credence. Be proud of it.”

Newt’s hands slipped from his shoulders.

Credence smiled, freely and open without a care in the world as to who could see it.

“…thank you.”

“Well now,” Delia cleared her throat after a prolonged moment and stood up. She picked up her golden goblet and tapped her knife against it, signaling a toast was about to commence. “Now that everyone’s here, we can move forward onto the feasting—”

“Finally!” Graves reached for one of the dinner rolls only for Modesty to slap his hand, earning a sharp glare in response.

“Thank you, Modesty,” Delia smirked.

Modesty grinned and shot her a two-fingered salute.

“Now, where was I? I’ve never held one of these Thanksgivings dinners before. Obviously,” she looked around the table, “But can I say how honored I am to have been chosen to host such a cherished American holiday? This is a special occasion where food brings us all together and all the love that has been cooked into it, the same love that has connected us across time and country. This is a day where we join hands and reflect upon our year and everything good that has happened in it. And so, before we begin, I’d like to go around the table and say what we’re all thankful for. I’ll go first…”

Delia paused and closed her eyes.

A heavy breath escaped her chest and a moment of vulnerability crossed her face. Her wrinkles smoothed out and her shoulders slackened, taking off at least five years and bringing her back to a time when the world hadn’t hurt her so much. But then she pursed her lips into a thin line,
determination setting in, and reopened them.

“I’m thankful to have my two boys here with me,” she raised her goblet towards them, “Theseus, Newton... you’re the lights of my life; and, even though you’ve brought me nothing but gray hairs and wrinkles, I wouldn’t trade anything in the world to have it any other way. I’m blessed to have known your father and that he gave me you. I’m thankful for every moment we share.”

Delia took a drink from her cup and sat down, looking to her right.

“Modesty?”

“Erm,” Modesty squirmed uncomfortably in her seat and reached out for her glass of cider. She stood up, her chair scratching loudly against the wooden floor and causing Newt to cringe.

Credence subtly took his hand underneath the table.

After a moment, Newt started tracing his scars and his shoulders, ever so slightly, began to relax.

“Uhm, I’ve never done one of these speeches before. Credence and I—We never really had a family for Thanksgiving before. It’s funny really, uhm...” Modesty sucked in a powerful breath, “We don’t come from a place as nice as yours. My real Momma never had enough food for my brothers and sisters on a regular day let alone—y’know. And when Mary Lou adopted me, it was somehow even worse.”

Credence stiffened.

Newt squeezed his hand, somehow comforting him now.

Modesty chewed her lower lip, her gaze darkening at the memory; but, as soon as it appeared, Modesty quickly shoved it off as Modesty only could.

“So, I’m thankful for you, Mrs. Scamander for being a good Ma. I’m thankful to have been welcomed into your family with open arms. I’m thankful for Credence — my brother not by blood but by heart. I’m thankful for Theseus saving my life. I’m thankful for—for my dad dealing with all my shit and by, some miracle, wanting to make that a full-time job and I—”

She closed her eyes.

“I’m thankful for you, Newt. For helping my brother smile again,” Modesty grinned and plopped back down in her seat, “And I’m thankful for all this food! So y’all better hurry up so I can get to eating.”

Graves shoved her shoulder and stood up then, raising his glass.

“I’m thankful for Modesty being there to eat my peas.”

He sat back down.

“That’s it?” Delia raised a brow.

“That’s it.”

Theseus gracefully rose to his feet and briefly adjusted his cuffs for a moment before picking up his goblet of wine. He peered inside, swirling around the contents instead of meeting anyone’s gaze at the table.
He remained silent for such a prolonged period of time that Newt started rising from his seat, brows knitted together in concern, “Theseus?”

“I’ve always envied my brother,” Theseus spoke simultaneously, “Having survived the darkest of wars with a kind soul and smile. He looks at beasts and monsters, regarding them with the same love and affection as one would for a cat or dog. I’m not one to say this lightly but nevertheless, Newt has a genuine heart of gold—no, a heart of yellow and grey. And he is someone who I aspire to be like one day.”

Theseus finally looked up and caught eyes with his brother, who stared widely into his.

“I’m thankful that he’s still here with us. The world cannot function without a Newt Scamander traveling around the world, having beastly adventures.”

He sat down.

Credence felt uncomfortable following a speech like that. Couldn’t fathom what he could possibly say in response or what would even be appropriate. He nervously twiddled his thumbs around one another, smoothing over his half-moon scars.

Newt reached over underneath the table and rested his hand over his.

Credence glanced over him out of the corner of his eyes and found all the support he needed.

Breathing in deeply, Credence stood up.

“A couple months ago, I was dying.”

Great start, Credence.

He winced and quickly cast his eyes down unto his leather shoes, staring at his reflection. He remembered that haunted face of a half-starved, half-dead man gazing back up on *The Wailing Whirlwind’s* deck as the ship left its port. He remembered how lost he had been. And alone.

That man wasn’t what stared back up at him now.

“I—I was being consumed by this darkness. It was eating me alive, destroying everything I was and everything I loved. I was drowning in the deepest part of the ocean and I didn’t know how to swim and no one—*no one* was coming to save me;” Credence squared his shoulders and looked up.

He cast his gaze across Theseus and Graves. Over Modesty and Delia.

Before finally landing on the man sitting, enchanted, beside him.

“But then a hand stretched out to me and offered me a life jacket.”

Newt’s face crumbled; however, Credence wasn’t done yet. Not even close.

“None of you were there, but when I first met Newt in New York, it was during perhaps the lowest moment in my life. I had lost *everything*. I had no one. I didn’t know who or what I was and I had just—I fled into the subway where I could be alone and—and I was so lost and afraid, yet also… angry and confused. And before I knew what was going on, a stranger who I didn’t know and who didn’t know me, crouched down in the middle of the rails and asked if he could come over to me and help. It’s funny,” Credence smiled wryly, “No one had ever done that before. *Asked.*”

“Credence.”
Newt was now hiding his face behind his hands, skin flushed and hands shaking.

“And then he introduced me to a world of magic. He opened my eyes and taught me how to swim and, before I knew it, I didn’t find myself drowning anymore. I’m thankful for Newt Scamander and everything he has done for me,” Credence lifted his gaze and went back around the table, gesturing to each and every person, “I’m thankful for Mrs. Scamander for giving Modesty and I a family on Thanksgiving. I’m thankful for Modesty for never giving up on me even when I failed as a brother. I’m thankful for Percival for being the father she deserves. And I’m thankful for Theseus and that caring heart of his that I know is underneath all that stone. Thank you all for everything.”

Credence slumped down.

“Oh sweetheart…” Delia raised her trembling fingers to her lips, tears swelling in her eyes, “You’re a part of this family now. No matter what happens, we’ll always be there for you.”

Credence’s face turned cranberry red in embarrassment. He hadn’t intended for all that to come out, but he had just been so caught up in the moment and it had been such an emotional past couple weeks—

“Credence,” Newt moaned, “There’s nothing I can say after that.”

“I’m sorry—”

“No, no. We’ve talked about this, so don’t you even start now. I’m giving it a try anyways,” Newt shook his head and breathed in deeply through his nose. Perhaps it was to summon his courage. Perhaps it was to give him a moment to recompose himself.

Even more likely, it was to soothe his nerves from speaking in front of (what was to him) a large number of people.

Newt stood up then.

His meadow green eyes focused on the starry-night ceiling and he repetitively rocked back and forth on his heels. He tapped the side of his thigh repeatedly at first before apparently deciding that he ought to go with the time-tested twirling of his hair to distract himself.

“Erm, hello! I—uh, I’m Newt Scamander.”

“You don’t say,” Credence drawled dryly, “I thought you were Pickett.”

“Oh, hush you,” Newt pouted, but by his small smile, he seemed to appreciate what he was trying to do.

“Where was I? Oh right, what I’m thankful for. Let’s see,” Newt pondered for a moment, “I’m thankful for my creatures, for one. I’m thankful for my Nifflers whose eggs are about to hatch. I’m thankful that Hope was reunited with her family. I’m thankful for Pickett and Prudence finding each other. I’m thankful for Death-Head Monsters and Lauriosauros. I’m thankful for the Swooping Evil and Dougal. I’m thankful for the Occamies. I’m thankful for Thunderbirds. And I—”

His voice lowered and he glanced beside him.

“And I’m thankful that I can share them with someone who loves them as much as I do,” Newt smiled, bringing sunshine to the evening, “Happy Thanksgiving, Credence.”

Credence stood up and, with a permissive nod, embraced him.
Warm and loved. He felt so very warm and loved.

“Happy Thanksgiving, Newt.”

Chapter End Notes

Happy Thanksgiving, my darling darlings and loveliest lovelies! I hope that everyone who celebrates the holidays enjoyed plenty of wonderful food.

Please leave your comments and criticisms below! I love hearing from you!!

((I'll probably come back and leave a proper end notes section, but first, a nap takes precedent lol. Toodles!))
Greetings everyone ! ! ! 

This is our first NSFW-exclusive chapter and has absolutely nothing to do with plot development; so, for all of my readers who don't want to read such material, don't worry. Nothing that happens here will affect further chapters (except the second NSFW chapter because I'm deciding to do another since this one is sweet first times and love-making and not DOWN AND DIRTY FILTH). So, if anyone wants to skip this chapter, you're not missing anything!

And now, without further ado, enjoy ! ! !

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“The Doxies were tamer than usual today.”

Newt removed the thick, layered cowhide handling gloves and leather apron from his body, tossing them haphazardly upon the cabin’s kitchen table. While he ran his hands through his hair, shaking out the dirt, Credence casually hung the protective gear back up on their respective hooks.

Newt noticed this over his shoulder, his cheeks glowing pink with apology.

“What the Doxies were tamer than usual today.”

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Newt noticed this over his shoulder, his cheeks glowing pink with apology.

“Have I ever told you how much I appreciate everything you do?”

“Wouldn’t complain hearing more of it,” Credence drawled; but Newt was so used to him by now that he could tell whenever he was summoning his dry humor as opposed to being actually annoyed. “Do you think the cold weather has anything to do with it? The Doxies, I mean.”

“Perhaps,” Newt hummed, climbing up the suitcase stairs, “Now that I think about it—”

“You? Thinking?” Credence snorted behind him, “Now that’s funny.”

“Oh hush, you,” Newt said, “As I was saying, the Doxies have been particular gluttons lately. Hibernation behaviors maybe? Tomorrow, remind me to check their burrows. I need to see their nests for closer inspection. See if they’re preparing for winter and whatnot.”

“As if you’d need reminding.”

“True, but I’d appreciate it nonetheless.”

Newt pushed up on the suitcase lid and hoisted himself out into his childhood bedroom, offering his hand to Credence as he followed.

Credence, however, didn’t let go as soon as he stepped through.

He stared intently at him. So much so that Newt’s cheeks slowly darkened from a light embarrassed pink to a deep infatuated rouge. He averted his gaze to the curve of Credence’s ear as he was promptly pulled closer. Credence’s bumpy fingers ghosted across his burning cheek – not quite
touching, yet still intimate.

“Erm,” Newt squirmed awkwardly, “Credence?”

“You need a bath,” he ultimately tutted, “You’re covered in grass stains and dust.”

“I thought you liked that about me.”

“I said that I liked that you smelled like grass and dirt. Doesn’t mean you have to go about wearing it,” Credence rolled his eyes in exasperated affection and led Newt by the hand towards the bathroom. Or more like, dragged him along against his will.

“In my defense, I tripped!”

“Mmmhmm, likely story.”

“You were there,” Newt puffed out his cheeks, mock-offended, “And if I do remember correctly, you stood over me and laughed. Rude.”

“Yes,” Credence looked over his shoulder.

Oh, how Newt admired that wondrous spark of mischief in his eyes. Like stars sparkling in the middle of the night. How completely Slytherin of a look it was only closely followed, perhaps, by Gryffindor spirit.

“But I helped you up after I was done, didn’t I?”

“I suppose you did,” Newt admitted.

*Be grudgingly.*

Credence laughed and tugged him into the bathroom.

Merlin’s Beard, how Newt loved this room. It was seriously so much larger than the modest one he had become accustomed to in the suitcase. This bathroom took up around the same space as his cabin bedroom, covered in wonderfully cold white tile that Newt used to love laying on half-naked as a kid. His back would stick to the floor in the most peculiar way and, during the mind-bogglingly hot summers, the cool temperatures were a godsend.

Glow-in-the-dark stars still stubbornly clung onto the ceiling that lit up something *wonderful* whenever the lights were turned off and the tub—

*Oh, the tub.*

Large enough for the entire Scamander to take baths together. Newt’s Mum and Dad used to take Theseus in here to wash him when he was a baby. Newt joined in when he was born and Theseus was a toddler; although, neither brother remember much of this time together obviously. And the family baths had stopped soon after his father died—

The point was that the bathtub was large and sentimental.

Credence finally released his hand and kneeled down on the floor, reaching over the porcelain edge of the tub to turn on the faucet.

Meanwhile, Newt untied and kicked off his boots. He hoisted himself onto the marble counter surrounding the sink where he pulled up a knee and crossed his arms over it. Resting his cheek in the
palm of his hand, Newt watched Credence at work. Admired him.

One of his favorite pastimes.

It didn’t matter how mundane it was. Credence could make the simple task of running a bath utterly fascinating.

Newt watched how Credence’s midnight black brows raised slightly in concentration. He enjoyed following the slight curves of his spine and how his sharp shoulder blades moved across his back, tightening the fabric of his shirt. Credence ran his scarred hand underneath the water, testing and adjusting the temperature when appropriate.

Steam slowly filled the bathroom.

Strands of Credence’s curly hair clung to his forehead and a droplet of sweet condensation dripped down his pale cheek.

Just as Credence found the right balance between hot and cold and reached down to fasten the plug, Newt found himself speaking before he could truly comprehend the entire meaning of what he asked.

“Would you like to join me?”

Credence froze.

His beautiful eyes opened wider and wider with every passing second. His plump pinkened lips, so kissable that it was honestly ridiculous, parted ever so slightly. Every exposed inch of his skin turned such a dark shade of crimson that Newt nearly wondered whether he’d gotten bit by a rogue Doxy—

“…Newt,” Credence’s voice had turned all worrisomely soft and squeaky, “Are you asking me—Are you asking me if you want to h-have—Do you want to touch me?”

“Oh. Oh.”

Newt flushed half as red as Credence and buried his boiling face in both hands.

“I didn’t mean it like that, Credence, I assure you,” he added hurriedly, “Not to say that I don’t want to. I’m just not ready for that right now and do you—would you want to do that with me? No, you don’t have to answer that. Forget I say anything. I just—I just wanted to take a bath together. I thought it’d be nice to relax… with… you…”

“Oh.”

Oh, Merlin’s Pants, what had come over him?

Of course Credence would be uncomfortable with such a request. He’d been raised a Muggle and, even worse, underneath a radical American Christian household and everyone knew how fragile their sensibilities were. Credence had automatically assumed that getting naked together meant something sexual. Bodies were just bodies, no matter how handsome they were.

“It’s alright, Credence,” Newt swallowed finally lifting his head, “You don’t have to—”

“If it’s just a bath…”

Credence wasn’t looking at him. Facing the filled bathtub instead, he switched off the running faucet and pulled himself back onto his feet. His blush had simmered down into a lighter shade of red and
his breath had turned soft yet heavy, his chest notably moving with each and every inhale and exhale. He was so cute when flustered.

“If it’s just a bath,” Credence repeated, “Then, I suppose… I don’t mind.”

“Credence.”

Credence nervously glanced over his shoulder and Newt swore that he was staring straight into the eyes of a mortal angel. Merlin, he was so beautiful.

“If you get uncomfortable for any reason or none at all, remember that you can back out at any time,” Newt twirled around a strand of auburn hair, choosing each and every word carefully, “If your ‘I don’t mind’ turns into a ‘wait, I’m not sure’ know that you have the power to stop it all, okay? You’ll never find judgement from me.”

“I have the power to stop it all,” Credence repeated and cracked a small smile, “You say to the person who decimated half of New York.”

“Ah yes, but you’re Credence first. An Obscurial second.”

Credence picked himself up and stepped over to the sink. He casually placed both arms against the counter on either side of Newt and leaned over him, staring into his eyes in such a manner that Newt – normally off put by such intensity regardless of the person – found himself unable to look away.

“As long as you remember that you can stop it too.”

Newt blinked.

“Pardon?”

“If your ‘I offered this’ changes into a ‘wait, I’m not ready yet’ then—” Credence murmured, casting his gaze down now and stepping backwards away from him, “Then you can change your mind, okay? I won’t judge you neither.”

His heart warmed and a beaming smile pulled across his face.

“Okay.”

Newt proceeded to loosen his bowtie and tossed it onto the floor. He slipped off his suspenders one-by-one and slowly unbuttoned his shirt. It was only after he had taken it off and proceeded to hang it from the corner mirror that he felt eyes intently gazing upon him.

“I still don’t know how you do that, Newt.”

Newt looked at Credence, who had only managed to take off his shoes thus far.

“Undressing so… confidently,” Credence clarified a moment later, “Even before we were together, you never batted an eye at it.”

“You and I had different upbringings, Credence. Nudity isn’t frowned down upon as much amongst witches and wizards. Did you know that there are joint bathing areas at Hogwarts? Separated by gender and whatnot but that’s besides the point,” Newt hummed thoughtfully and hopped off the counter. He approached Credence and held out his hand, “May I?”

“What are you going to do?”
“Undress you.”

Credence’s face turned three shades redder again and Newt cursed his never-ending stupidity.

“What I meant to say was,” Newt explained, “I’d like to help you unbutton your buttons, if you don’t mind.”

“O-okay.”

Newt frowned.

“You don’t sound too certain.”

“Newt,” Credence’s voice turned heartbreakingly soft, “I don’t mind. I trust you’ll stop if I tell you I’m uncomfortable.”

Blessed Merlin, Newt loved him so much.

Newt closed his eyes for a moment and breathed before reaching out. He undid the first pearlescent button and paused. He watched how Credence’s Adam’s Apple bobbed up and down underneath his pale flesh as he swallowed. How Credence’s impossibly dark eyes watched his hands as he moved down his shirt.

Newt undid another button. Two buttons turned into three. Three buttons into four, and four into—

“Newt, wait.”

He paused and looked back up at him.

“Thank you,” Credence’s already softened voice turned even quieter, “I think I can take it from here.”

Newt stepped backwards as Credence finished unbuttoning the last couple and slowly slipped out of his emerald shirt, carefully folding it and moving to set it on the counter.

Showing Newt his back and all the scars he hid from everyone in the world. Except him.

Oh.

“Are you uncomfortable?”

Credence paused.

“A little,” he admitted but added reassuringly, “But not because of you. It’ll just take some time before I can accept the—the—”

Credence turned around and lightly frowned, crossing those marred rope-burned arms over his chest of gruesome constellations.

“It’s better than before. The scars—They’re a part of me and there’s nothing I can do to change that. I don’t think I want to either,” he lowered his gaze and his lips quirked just a little at the sides, “They remind me of where I’ve been and how far I’ve come from there. Shows I’m strong, doesn’t it?”

“Yes.”
Credence shot him a small smile before his cheeks colored again. His hands twitched nervously and then he reached down, unbuttoning his trousers—

Newt swallowed thickly and followed suit, somehow managing to slide his off first. He was already deep within the process of stepping out of them and not falling when he heard Credence’s exasperated groan.

“I don’t take the time matching your socks for you to do that to them, Newt.”

Newt glanced down at his feet, one of them covered in gray with yellow polka dots and the other striped green and black. He grinned and wriggled his toes. “What can I say? They’re comfy.”

Credence laughed and slipped off his trousers, folding them into a neat square that Newt could never recreate no matter how he tried. And oh, how he tried.

“You’re hopeless, Newt.”

“Hopelessly in love with you.”

“Oh,” Credence rolled his eyes, “That was awful.”

“I dare say that it’s cheesy.”

Credence laughed and wrapped his arms around himself. One hand delicately resting around his ribs and the other covering his mouth. It was adorable. How Newt yearned for one of his sketchbooks right now so that he could draw him. Capture that twinkle in his eyes, the mirth shaking in his shoulders.

“You’re so precious, Credence,” Newt said as he slipped off his underwear and lowered himself into the tub.

_Oh_. Credence really knew him too well.

The water was perfect. The temperature akin to wrapping oneself up in a thick down blanket in the middle of summer but the comfort of doing so in winter. What absolute bliss.

Credence’s laughter gradually fizzed out into silence. Newt glanced over the side of the bathtub, a question tugging at his lips. Credence hovered nervously. His arms had become tense and his gaze pointed at the tile floor.

“Talk to me,” Newt rested his arms on the tub edge, “What’s going through that head of yours?”

“Could you close your eyes when I get in? And not—” he hesitated, “And not uhm look down?”

“Certainly,” Newt repositioned himself and squeezed his eyes comically shut, raising his hands over them for added measure, “I won’t open them until you tell me to.”

“Promise?”

“Promise. Magizoologist’s honor!”

There was a sudden shuffling around of padded feet against the tile floor. The slip of fabric across skin. Moments later emerged the muffled softness of shaking hands gripping the porcelain bathtub and the subtle clink of trimmed nails against it. A gentle intake of shuddering breath. A splash of water, followed by its subsequent rising as another body displaced it.
The hands left the tub’s edge.

“Okay, you can look now.”

So, Newt did.

And seeing Credence sitting there across from him rendered him breathless. Funny how he only felt that way around him.

His scarred arms rested underneath the water in such a peculiar manner that his hands just had to be either folded in his lap or awkwardly pressed against the bottom. Given his slightly hunched over position, Credence’s curls had found the conditions favorable enough to spill over his beautiful bare shoulders and over his eyes that were currently gazing up at him from underneath a row of dark eyelashes.

“Beautiful.”

Ah, there he goes speaking without thinking again. Bugger.

But it brought a smile to Credence’s face; so, Newt supposed, that it had been worth it.

They awkwardly sat across from one another in the tub. The hot water brought warmth and color to their bodies, or perhaps it was because they were sitting in such close proximity with one another.

Newt twirled his hair.

Credence sucked in a breath and pressed himself against the tub’s edge. He opened his arms wide in invitation and looked away, asking, “Would you like me to hold you?”

Newt released a breath, relieved.

“You know me too well.”

He shifted through the tub, sinking into the space Credence had created beside him and plopped his head against his chest. Credence’s arms wrapped around his waist with surprising familiarity. Somehow, even with the awkwardness between them, sitting together like this was as natural and comfortable as when they were clothed.

“Newt, have I ever told you how pretty you are?”

“In brief,” Newt hummed, content, “But I wouldn’t complain hearing more.”

“Mmm.”

Credence’s eyes fluttered shut. His arms squeezed tighter around Newt for a moment before exhaling a relaxed breath that was everything. His fingers traced across his freckled chest, blindly following the dips and swells of old scars that Newt wore proudly and newer ones that Newt didn’t know what to think of.

“You’re prettier than I am, Credence.”

Newt took one of Credence’s hands into his own and laced their fingers together. He closed his eyes, completely settling into him.

This. This was what he had wanted when he had extended that invitation.
“I doubt it.”

“My sketchbook says otherwise.”

“You’ve drawn me?”

Newt could hear the smile in his voice.

“Remember when I let you feed the Occamies by yourself for the first time? You looked so happy… enshrouded in this perfect halo of light and iridescence. I couldn’t help myself,” Newt then added softly, “That was the first time I drew you and when I first realized—uhm, certain feelings that I had towards you.”

“Oh, Newt,” Credence sighed and melted into him, “How are you so perfect?”

“I’m the most flawed person in existence, Credence.”

“Precisely.”

They relaxed together: Magizoologist and Obscurial Apprentice. No troubles. No worries. Certainly no scrubbing of the dirt covering Newt’s hair like they had initially set out to do. But the water was just so warm and they were together.

And, honestly? Those were the only things that mattered.

“Newt, may I ask you a question?”

“You can ask me anything, Credence.”

Credence’s arms nervously stiffened and his chest tightened underneath Newt’s cheek. Newt squeezed his hand, supportive, and waited patiently for whatever it was plaguing his friend’s thoughts.

“Have you—Have you ever h-had—Have you ever had sex before?”

“Yes.”

Newt didn’t blink, which would’ve been quite the feat itself since his eyes were closed.

“Just a few encounters when I was younger,” he elaborated, “Men. Women. Others.”

“And,” Credence hesitated, “What did you think of it?”

Newt snorted and lounged further back into him.

“Decided it wasn’t worth all the hassle. I’d rather spend my time elsewhere being productive. Caring for my creatures and seeing the world.”

“What?”

“I never really enjoyed it,” he explained further, “I didn’t like it, but I didn’t dislike it. Does that make sense? Having sex was like—like drinking alcohol for the first time. There were all these new and unfamiliar sensations. Nice for what it is. But I don’t look at a bottle of Firewhisky and find myself thirsty.”

“Oh.”
A brief silence.

“Would you… mind trying it with me?”

Newt mulled over the question and reopened his eyes. Credence wasn’t looking at him again. That tell-tale quivering of his lips indicated the sheer nervous vulnerability of this moment.

“…If you don’t want to, that’s okay,” Credence added hurriedly, quietly, “I wouldn’t pressure you to do something like that.”

“I know you wouldn’t,” Newt said sincerely. He reached up and hooked a rogue curl poking out from underneath Credence’s ear, twirling around the silken strands between his fingers. “I wouldn’t mind trying it with you. Maybe it’ll be different. Maybe it won’t. Either way, I like making you happy.”

“Newt,” Credence leaned over and buried his darkened face in Newt’s dirty hair, “You’re so wonderful.”

“So I’ve been told. Plenty of times. Mostly by you though which is making me wonder whether or not you’re biased.”

“Oh hush.”

“Never,” Newt teased soon replaced with an undertone of seriousness, “Am I correct in assuming you’ve never had sex before?”

“Y-yes, you would.”

“Have you ever touched yourself?”

Credence gave him a look. Point taken.

“Alright,” Newt thought it over, “Wet dreams then?”

“Wet… what?”

“When you have involuntary sexual fantasies in your sleep and you end ejaculating in your sheets.”

“That’s—that’s normal?” Credence pinched the bridge of his nose and breathed in, “I thought I was—I don’t know. I thought it was something that only happened to me. Because I was a freak. Wait.”

Credence’s eyes widened and his cheeks returned to that lovely shade of peach pink.

“Does that—” he swallowed, “Does that mean that happens to you too?”

“Oh yes! Certainly,” Newt answered, paired with nothing more than a casual shrug as if the topic wasn’t that big of a deal – which it wasn’t, “Especially during my teenage years. Everyone does it. Happens to women too, I imagine. Just not much to clean up afterwards.”

He gave Credence a couple moments to process that before continuing.

“Credence, if we were to have sex, I’d want you to be comfortable,” he spoke slower this time, “Is there anything – anything at all – that you wouldn’t be okay with?”

“What do you mean?”
“Being sexually active doesn’t necessitate enjoying every element that sex has to offer. There’re limits for everyone,” Newt explained, “I’m not too keen on biting, for example. Scratching or anything like that either. Hair-pulling is simply off-limits for me. Hair-holding is alright enough, just don’t use my hair as you would a rope. In summary, I just don’t like anything potentially painful. However, I’m fine with most forms of sex. Hand jobs. Oral too, giving and receiving. Penetrative sex is fine as well. I wouldn’t mind being top or bottom, whatever you’re comfortable with—"

“Wait, wait.” Credence squeaked, “What is oral?”

“When a person puts their mouth on your genitals or vice versa.”

“When a person puts their mouth on what?”

Credence removed his arms and hands away from Newt entirely. Pulling up his legs firmly against his chest, he buried his tomato red face behind the sanctuary of his fingers and hid behind his knobby knees.

“Sex is more complicated than I thought,” he moaned.

Newt frowned, sympathetic.

“We don’t have to talk about this now—"

“No! No. It’s fine. I’m fine. I’m just… realizing that there is a lot that I don’t know,” Credence mumbled into his palms, “I’m glad I have you, Newt. Thank you. I mean it.”

Newt leaned forward, fingers hovering over his forehead, “May I?”

Credence nodded.

Newt swept his hair out of his eyes and tucked the wayward curls behind his ear, “You’re my apprentice, are you not? Whatever you don’t know, that’s what I’m here to teach you.”

“And as my boyfriend?”

“And as your boyfriend,” he smiled, “To practice what I teach.”

Credence lounged in one of the wide armchairs before the crackling fireplace.

The flickering flames created dancing shadows across the yellowed pages of an old copy of Newt’s Madame Camembert books. Credence had nothing else to do that evening, so he figured that Newt wouldn’t mind his raiding of his bookshelf. Besides, as much as romance novels weren’t Credence’s favorite genre, they provided him with more material to use on Newt.

He liked quoting the dumb lines. Newt just got all flustered and cute in all the ways that Credence adored.

He tugged the tweed knitted throw blanket closer around him, tugging his feet underneath him to keep warm.

Newt’s bedroom was, suffice it to say, weird. Or maybe it was weird because Credence didn’t know
what actual furnished rooms were supposed to look like.

It looked small on first glance, but that was only because it was so packed with stuff.

There was the large queen-sized bed, of course. Dead center of the bedroom with its wire-framed headboard pressed up against the wall with the wide curtained window hanging above it. Two nightstands covered in chipped white paint and stained with a rainbow of other colors were on each side. An old black trunk covered in a thin film of dust that looked like it belonged to a kid instead of an adult laid half-opened at the end of the bed.

Black robes with an indistinguishable crest and fabric consisting of nothing more than gray and yellow spilled out.

That was normal enough.

There was a quaint reading nook tucked away in the back with French windows opening up to the backyard’s gardens. The wooden bench was covered in pillows, large and small. There was also this flopped stuffed animal the strangest color of purple that, no matter how many times Credence turned it around, could never tell what the hell the thing was supposed to be. It was such a smattering of stitching and arms and legs.

Cherry bookcases filled the walls on either side of it. So grandiose that they literally took up half the available space of the bedroom.

Lots of Madame Camembert filled its shelves, but there were plenty of other books too. Children’s stories with the spines broken and worn down. Old spiral-bound sketchbooks with crinkled paper haphazardly sticking out the tops. Used textbooks that had seen better days. A few classics that Credence recognized the names of.

Most of them, he didn’t.

There was the modest cast iron fireplace, of course, set in the very front of the room with two plush chairs on either side. A mahogany coffee table rested between them, covered with one of Newt’s manuscripts. A wicker basket full of every sort of blanket Credence could imagine was nestled underneath it.

Near the front door was the paneled closet – the wood also painted a chipping white. It was cracked open just enough that Credence could see inside. He really didn’t want to ask about the nest of pillows in there.

Everywhere in the room, however, were drawings. Childish diagrams of creatures and life-like dioramas hanging down by pieces of string from the ceiling. Faded containers of colorful candies were stuffed in various corners, usually accompanied by stacks of violet cards featuring moving pictures of people Credence didn’t recognize. There were a few different sized brooms stuffed away in the corners and even a magazine here and there.

This was what a wizard’s room looked like.

This was what Newt’s room looked like. The very one he had grown up in.

And that’s what made it weird.

Newt opened the bedroom door a few minutes later, balancing a silver tray of hot cocoa that he’d declared was a necessary indulgence for such a cold night.
Credence continued reading his book.

He listened to the gentle wind moaning outside and the faintest melodies of a swaying wind chime. The clumsy sounds of Newt shuffling in and closing the bedroom door behind him muffled it briefly. There was a sharp clink of metal mugs against the platter as he set down the tray followed by the littlest intakes of breath.

A finger suddenly hooked around the top of the book, gently pushing it down.

Credence looked up and found Newt’s soft and mesmerizingly thoughtful face so incredibly close that his heart skipped a beat.

“Sorry,” he apologized with that adorable little awkward smile that was so incredibly Newt it hurt, “You just looked so beautiful sitting there that I had to come say hello.”

Credence’s eyes widened, his cheeks turning involuntarily red.

“See?” Newt’s innocent smile turned into a teasing grin, “Madame Camembert lines work on you too.”

“Oh no,” Credence groaned because he just knew – knew – that Newt would never let him live this down. He slipped the leather bookmark back between the pages, placing the book down on the floor beside them, “If I kiss you, could we forget this ever happened?”

Newt snorted.

“Only one way to find out.”

Credence laughed lightly, placing his fingers over his mouth for that short second.

And then he leaned forward and gently cupped the back of Newt’s head. Credence gazed into those dazzling eyes greener than springtime itself and brushed away that tuft of tawny hair that always seemed to obscure them. He pulled Newt towards him.

Until nothing, not even air, separated them.

Kissing Newt was always like kissing him for the first time. Credence’s heart throbbed against his chest so loudly that it was practically deafening. Butterflies fluttered around in his stomach and escaped into his veins.

With practice, they had become more attuned with what each other liked. No more clumsy mashing together of mouths and teeth; although, that was certainly perfect in its own imperfect way. Credence found that he liked the feeling of closeness the most. Of Newt’s lips moving against his and whispering his name like a prayer. More than a prayer. And how, on certain occasions, Newt would slip his tongue into his mouth and send shivers down his spine.

Like now.

Needing him nearer, Credence wrapped both arms around his shoulders and pulled Newt onto the chair with him.

“One second,” Newt broke the kiss with a low breath, “Need to adjust.”

Credence took advantage of this opportunity to pull out his cramping legs from underneath him since it was becoming rather painful to sit on them what with the added body weight. Newt tossed his own
gangly giraffe legs over the cushioned arm of the chair and settled comfortably into Credence’s lap.

“Better?” Newt asked.

“Better.”

Newt’s fingers threaded through Credence’s hair and guided him back down to his lips, each staring into one another’s eyes until the moment they touched.

Newt’s gentle hand remained twisted inside his curls, neither tight nor controlling but applying just enough pressure to perhaps suggest remaining exactly in this position. The other cupped Credence’s burning cheek. Newt’s equally warm palm encompassed it entirely and framed the entire left side of his face with those silvery scarred fingers of his.

“Credence,” he breathed.

Credence whimpered.

He tightly wrapped his arms around Newt’s thin waist. His trembling hands curled firmly into the thin fabric of his shirt, holding the wizard close against his chest and rapidly beating heart.

But then Newt did something unexpected.

He broke the kiss and lovingly pressed his lips against the sharp line of his jaw.

“…Newt?”

“Sorry,” Newt removed himself from him, his voice sincere, “Is this fine?”

Credence swallowed. “Yes.”

“Could I go lower?” he asked, his wonderful hand leaving his cheek in favor of ghosting across the side of Credence’s neck over the visibly beating artery, “Here?”

Oh God.

“You may.”

“If I make you uncomfortable,” Newt emphasized, staring deep into his eyes, “Stop me, alright?”

Credence smiled.

“Alright.”

Newt stared at him for a prolonged moment. His kiss-pinkened lips parted and that enchantingly thoughtful expression crossed over his face once again. He caressed Credence’s cheek slowly and murmured, “I love it when you do that.”

“Do what?” Credence quirked a brow.

“Smile.”

Before he could respond, Newt returned to kissing him. Not on the mouth this time, but his tender neck instead.

Newt’s hands were now completely occupied with that section of skin. The delicate fingers in his
hair having slipped down behind his neck and caressing the sensitive flesh there. He didn’t even notice when Newt’s hands passed over that puckered scar behind his ear.

And his mouth—

Oh, his *mouth*.

It was just heavenly. Newt’s lips revered and his tongue worshiped. Swirling and sucking scripture into skin and pulling pleasure into his already electrified nerves. Delicious sparks tingled down Credence’s spine and into his hands which gripped Newt’s back, the other threading through soft tawny hair.

His eyes involuntarily fluttered shut, seeing stars behind them.

Hot little breaths escaped his suddenly parched mouth.

The heavy sound of books being flung onto the floor behind them went unnoticed by both wizards.

“*Newt.*”

Newt shivered in his arms, but somehow, Credence suspected it wasn’t in a bad way.

“Tell me how you’re feeling,” Newt whispered against the curve of his Adam’s Apple, causing Credence to swallow thickly in response.

“…It feels… nice,” Credence couldn’t find his words, “I like it.”

Newt smiled against his skin.

“I’m glad.”

“Does it feel nice for you too?”

Newt lifted his head, looking at Credence curiously. He cupped his cheeks with both hands and rested his forehead against his. Newt sighed into him, closing his eyes with such a sense of peace – so rare of an expression for Newt – that Credence found himself instantly committing it to memory.

“Yes. It very much does.”

Credence smiled.

“I’m glad.”

“Could I ask you question?”

“You just did.”

“Oh hush,” Newt’s lips curled, amused. He opened his eyes, staring straight into Credence’s naked soul and asked hesitantly, “Could I—Could I open your shirt? Just the first three or four buttons?”

Credence’s entire body burst aflame and the fireplace crackled loudly in response.

“Are you going to kiss me there?”

“With your permission.”

“Show me where.”
Newt leaned backwards and, barely touching him, traced down the curve of his shoulders. He followed the dips and swells of his collar bone before coming back up to rest against his neck.

Credence’s toes curled.

“You may,” he breathed, “Nothing lower.”

“Nothing lower,” Newt repeated and smiled like the heavens. He traced along Credence’s hair-line and kissed him right above the brow, murmuring against his blazing skin, “Have I ever told you how much I love kissing you?”

His lips moved to press a reverent kiss against the side of his nose.

Onto the curve of his cheek.

“You get so warm to the touch and your voice becomes so soft it’s heartbreaking. I can hear your every breath. Your every sigh and whisper….,” Newt pressed a delicate kiss against his mouth, growing quieter with such awe that Credence could scarcely move, “I like how you watch me with these—these stars in yours eyes. It’s like—You see—I’ve only seen a look like that when a Niffler spots a diamond necklace hanging in a jewelry store window. It makes me feel—I don’t know. There’s no words to describe such a feeling.”

Newt slowly unbuttoned Credence’s collar. Those lovely piano fingers that Credence had once dreamed would caress and hold his hand parted the fabric with such surprising dexterity that he could hardly believe it was Newt doing it. Newt who regularly tripped on air.

He moved onto the second and third buttons. True to his word, Newt stopped after the fourth and slowly pulled Credence’s shirt apart, exposing the upper-half of his pale chest to him. Credence shivered.

Newt marveled at him.

“I feel flustered like I don’t know what to do,” he whispered a confession, “And yet… simultaneously, I don’t doubt myself. Do you find that strange?”

“No,” Credence smoothed his thumb over Newt’s lips, gaining the prize of his warm gaze, “You make me feel the same way.”

Newt smiled and took his hand into his, pressing a kiss against his knuckles.

Credence’s vision blurred, his voice cracking.

“Do that again.”

“Credence,” Newt’s voice turned concerned, “Are you alright?”

“Yes.”

And he meant it.

Credence closed his tear-filled eyes and settled back into the plush comfort of the armchair. His lips quivered and something wonderful wrapped their arms around his heart. It fused into his soul and filled every dark and hollowed spot with the warmest feeling of being completely loved and accepted for who he was.
“I liked that,” he said softly, “I liked it a lot. Could you—Could you do it again?”

A gentle intake of breath.

“Of course, Credence.”

Newt – handsome and wondrous Newt – pressed his lips against his knuckles again, sending a shudder through him. He kissed the raised half-moon scars with utmost gentleness and flipped his hand so that he could give his palm similar attention.

Credence trembled.

Newt murmured something against his wrist that he couldn’t quite hear.

Newt leaned down and kissed his lips once again. Credence arched his head back in response to the kisses trailed down his neck onto his bare shoulder. Something about it seemed so… intimate. Worshiping scars and untouched skin alike. As if Newt truly appreciated every part of him, no matter how ugly or beautiful.

“Credence,” he whispered his name into his collar, “How lucky am I to be loved by you?”

“Newt.”

Credence raised a trembling hand to his face as if that could somehow suppress the blush unfurling across him like a Phoenix spreading its fiery wings. As if it could somehow hide the hot, shuddering breaths passing through his parted lips.

Credence was burning alive.

As if someone had dumped an entire canister of gasoline over him and struck a match. Every inch of his body was covered head-to-toe in flames and Credence enjoyed it.

His mouth hung unashamedly open now. Soft breaths turned into gasps and trembling moans. His eyes opened and turned to the ceiling yet, he couldn’t see anything except darkness. More books flung themselves from the shelves behind them. The fireplace roared and snapped. The window shutters slammed against themselves.

But neither wizard noticed.

Too wrapped up in each other.

“Newt.”

It was warm.

Too warm.

Credence reached over and snatched Newt’s hand, weaving their fingers together in absolute desperation. He needed to ground himself. Needed to hold and to be held. Newt squeezed his hand with matching intensity and grazed his teeth across his throat.

“Newt, I feel—” Credence could scarcely speak, “I feel—”

He squirmed underneath him and the sudden tightness of Credence’s trousers matched with the electric spark shooting up his back made his eyes widen in horrified realization. A noise that wasn’t a gasp or whimper, but a surprised squeak escaped him.
So unexpected that Newt quickly raised his head in alarm.

“Credence, are you okay?” his voice was so suddenly frantic and worried that it made his heart burst, “Did I hurt you?”

Credence clamped his hands over his mouth, eyes still posed towards the ceiling and every part of his skin burning tomato red. He shook his head rapidly back and forth.

He couldn’t speak. Didn’t want to.

But it only made Newt all the more distressed and attentive.

“Credence? What’s wrong? Talk to me.” Fear choked Newt’s voice and he hurried onto his feet—

“No—no—” Credence attempted to protest, gathering the tweed blanket together in panicked frenzy and pushed it down over his crotch. He slammed his legs up to his chest and buried his face between his knees, hiding every shameful part of him because he was hard and it was embarrassing. “Don’t look—Don’t look at me.”

A sharp intake of breath.

“Oh.”

“Sorry. I’m sorry,” Credence was absolutely horrified with himself, “I didn’t mean to. It doesn’t mean I want to—Not right now. I— You have to believe me, Newt.”

“Credence.”

He stopped talking.

“Credence, all this means is that you’re aroused. Nothing more, nothing less,” Newt said, quiet and understanding, “It doesn’t mean you have to proceed with it. Sometimes the body reacts independently of the mind. Sometimes it responds in a manner that you don’t want or aren’t ready for… Sometimes people get aroused when kissing. It happens. It doesn’t mean that they have to stop and do something more intimate.”

There he went again.

Normalizing everything that Credence was embarrassed of.

“But I do,” Credence blurted out, much to his horror, “To be with you like that. Intimate. I just—I don’t want that this second. I want it to be right. Not—Not heat of the moment. You know… candles and roses and stuff. Like in your books.”

“You want to be wooed?”

There was a smile in his voice.

Credence groaned.

“You know what I mean.”

“Credence, can I touch your face?”

He took a moment to consider it before nodding, allowing Newt to lift his chin and meet his kind meadow green eyes.
“When we have sex, it’ll be because you and I both want it,” Newt emphasized, “And it’ll be romantic. I’ll cook—”

“Please don’t,” Credence drawled, “We don’t need the house burning down.”

“I’ll buy some cheese and crackers,” Newt amended with a small grin, “We’ll make it our next date. Lounging together in front of the fireplace, trading stories and whatnot. Maybe a little music and dancing. And, if you want to have sex after, that’s fine. If you don’t want to, that’s fine. It’s a decision that we’ll make together once we get there.”

Credence smiled softly.

“How lucky am I to be loved by you, Newt?”

“Hey,” Newt puffed out his cheeks, “That’s my line.”

“Mine now,” Credence laughed, “I love you, Newt.”

“Love you too, Credence.”

________________________

Another day, another disappointment.

Credence dragged his hands down his face and trudged through the cabin. He unceremoniously kicked off his muddy boots, the pots and pans hanging above the stove crashing against each other as he walked by, and threw his Slytherin green coat onto the kitchen table. With a practiced flick of the wrist, his wand slid out of his sleeve.

He muttered a quick spell and the leather boots magically shined themselves to sparkling perfection. His coat flew past his ear towards the front door, hanging itself upon the metal rack next to Newt’s.

Spick and span it was. Simple domestic charms and spells like that were easy for him.

So, why was everything else so damned hard?

It frustrated him. Credence could perform spells – that wasn’t the issue. The problem was learning to restrain himself enough so that he didn’t blow locked doors into smithereens when casting a simple *Alohomora* or creating an uncontrollable tsunami when casting an *Aguamenti*.

Ugh.

Credence pulled back his hair and fastened it with silver ribbon before climbing up the ladder. All he wanted was nothing more than to collapse into Newt’s lap and vent about his troubles; but, when he poked his head out of the suitcase, he was welcomed to a scene that was certainly not Newt’s bedroom as he’d left it.

Credence squeezed the bridge of his nose.

“Did you buy out the entire flower store?”

“Hey,” Newt puffed out his cheeks, setting down a pot of begonias half his size, “You said you wanted flowers.”
“I didn’t mean you had to bankrupt the flower industry.”

Somehow Newt had managed to bring the outside indoors. Grandiose rose bushes of every shade and color coated the expanse of the bedroom. Sweeping vines of magenta bougainvillea crawled up the walls and draped down from the ceiling. Carnations, lavender, chrysanthemum, sunflowers and marigolds.

There was even an orange tree sapling settled adjacent to the fireplace filled with budding ivory blossoms. However, what Credence noticed the most, aside from just how many plants Newt had brought in, was that they all remained in their pots and planters so that they could replant them outside if they so wished.

Somehow, Credence’s heart swelled more at that than the extravagant display.

“How’d you manage to fit this all in here?” he asked.

“Magic.”

Credence rolled his eyes, “Typical.”

“Handy thing it is,” Newt grinned that awkward little half smile, “How did practice go this evening?”

“Horrible,” Credence groaned and buried his face into Newt’s shoulder, “No improvements.”

“Oh no.” Credence could hear the frowning sympathy in his voice. “Let’s go sit down and you can tell me all about it?”

“I’d like that.”

He permitted Newt to lead him to the fireplace. Much to Credence’s chagrin, Newt’s arms quickly left him in favor of gathering an enormous quilted blanket – fit for an entire army of men let alone two – and spreading it out across the floor. Credence only now noticed that the table was gone as well as the plush armchairs, nowhere to be spotted in the room.

Magic.

Newt squatted down on the floor, resting back comfortably on his forearms.

“Would you mind ever so terribly if I asked you to…” Newt nodded his head towards the fireplace.

“Oh. Yes, of course.” Credence slipped out his wand and pointed it towards the pile of freshly chopped pine.

“Incendio.”
A bouquet of flame unfurled. The scarlet petals scattered forward upon an unseen wind and built a burning brush of life within the hearth. Credence slipped his wand into his back-pocket and turned, finding Newt absolutely enchanted by him.

He froze.

There was something about the wizard that he just couldn’t quite put his finger on. Newt looked normal enough. His work-sleeves rolled up to the elbow. His suspenders naturally clinging onto his shoulders and his perfect little bowtie was as adorable as ever.

Shadows from the fireplace danced across Newt’s face.

Highlighting the plump arches of his cheekbones. The gentle curve of his jaw. Illuminating little sparks of gold hidden within green irises.

He was irresistible and yet he looked at Credence as one would a work of art.

“What?” Credence shifted awkwardly on his feet.

“Nothing,” Newt blinked and pulled at his collar, as if he only realized just then that he’d been staring.

“I just—It never ceases to amaze me how far you’ve come since I first saw you handing pamphlets out on the street corner. I’m so proud of you, Credence. You’ve accomplished so much.”

The fire sparked loudly at that precise moment.

“Newt.”

Credence groaned, helpless and blushing, and collapsed onto his stomach. He crossed his arms underneath his chin and rested against Newt’s lap. “Now I feel horrible for complaining.”

“Oh!” Newt hurriedly waved his hands before his face, “That was never my intention and I’m terribly sorry for having that effect. Please tell me what you’re feeling.”

“Please don’t apologize. The disappointment I have in myself has nothing to do with you. I—You make me feel a little better about it actually,” Credence murmured and exhaled a soft breath, “I’ve tried everything I can think of, but nothing works. I looked through textbooks and guides. Whatever I can find. But there’s only notes on how to power up your spells. There’s never anything about dialing it back.”

Credence’s eyes shut, groaning at a memory.

“All I want is to open a locked door without, you know, blasting a hole in the wall.”

“Well, the door did end up getting open—”

“Newt.”

“I know, I know.” Newt’s ever-attentive fingers found their way into Credence’s hair and stroked his scalp in a soothing manner that he found particularly enjoyable. It was soft and delicate. Like what one would expect when petting a purring cat. “Next time we’re in town, I’ll go to the library and do some research there.”

“Newt, there are wizarding libraries?”
“Erm,” his hand paused, “Yes?”

“And you never told me about this until now?” Credence exclaimed, incredulous, “You’re taking me there on our next date.”

“We’ve barely even begun this one and you’re already planning for the next,” Newt teased. Credence snorted. He flipped over and rested his arms over his stomach, gazing up at Newt.

“Tell me about your day.”

“I worked on more of my field notes,” Newt babbled about his creatures as per usual. Credence didn’t mind in the slightest. He loved those creatures. Even if he didn’t, hearing about something that Newt was just so passionate about that he couldn’t contain his energy and practically vibrated with sheer enthusiasm for the subject— Well, Credence could just listen to him talk for hours.

“Updated the Doxy section. Reclassified them as a hibernating species. You should see their nests, Credence! Speaking of which, the Niffler eggs are developing splendidly. Looking closer and closer to being fully formed with each passing day,” he beamed, “They should be hatching any moment now.”

“How can you tell?”

“I’ve never done this with you?” Newt pulled back, looking truly bewildered, “When you hold up an egg to candlelight in a dark room – completely dark, mind you – everything is illuminated inside. When an egg is early in development or unfertilized, everything’s bright and clear. A few stages further, you can see veins and, when it looks completely dark and shadowed, you know that there’s baby in there. Doesn’t work so well with Occamy eggs though. Coated in silver and all.”

“Tomorrow could you show me?”

“We can go right now if you’d like.”

Credence laughed and shook his head.

“Tried levitating one of the griffin feathers earlier. Hasn’t come down yet and I don’t want to be there when it does.”

“Alright,” Newt hummed, “We can stay up here then.”

Credence reached up and dangled his fingers besides Newt’s cheek, only touching when he permissively leaned forward. Credence slid the backs of his fingers across his brow, looping around a lock of hair hanging over it.

No wonder Newt did this so much – hair twirling. It was surprisingly relaxing. The mindless repetition, the smooth texture slipping between his fingertips.

“What do we have planned this evening?”

“Cheese and crackers,” Newt answered, “Grapes from the backyard and fizzy fruit juice.”

“Fizzy… fruit juice,” Credence raised a judgmental brow, “What kind of juice?”

“I don’t know,” he shrugged, that awkward smile reappearing, “I only drink it, Credence. I don’t make it.”
“You’re absolutely hopeless,” Credence drawled, letting his hand fall back against his chest, “Could you pass me some grapes?”

“Shall I feed some to you instead?”

“If you insist.”

Newt reached around behind him and pulled out a small, wicker picnic basket that had somehow escaped Credence’s notice earlier. He rummaged inside. His arm reached down further than humanly possible without some sort of assistance from an Expansion Charm and brought out a beautiful vine of ripened grapes the color of mulberry wine.

Newt picked off a ripened berry and hesitated.

Credence opened his mouth and Newt silently slipped the grape past his lips. It was only once Credence had chewed and swallowed did they smile at one another before Newt picked off another berry.

Funny.

They never would have been able to relax together like this when they had first met. Never willingly would’ve allowed the silence to stretch.

Credence had been so guarded back then and yet simultaneously needing of attention at every turn, unable to stand even the thought of being alone. If he was being honest with himself, he still was to a certain degree. But he had tasted independence. Made decisions on his own – some that he stood by, some that he regretted, some that Newt had disagreed with.

Credence was his own person. He was free to explore who he was. But he loved it more whenever Newt was by his side.

They took turns feeding each other grapes. At one point, Newt tried throwing one in the air to get Credence to catch it. But there Credence was lounging on his lap with his mouth open, trying to determine when and where the grape would land, when it hit Newt smack dab in the eye. Credence had quickly covered his mouth, unable to breathe he was laughing so hard.

Newt maturely responded by sticking his tongue out.

After the vine was finished, Newt moved out from underneath him and stood up. He approached the bed and reached underneath, sliding out the basket of blankets that normally sat beside the coffee table.

Credence flopped onto his stomach, watching Newt pull out an armful of blankets. At least 6 or 7.

“What are you doing?”

“Making ourselves comfortable.”

He dumped the mountain of blankets beside Credence and went back only to spread open the paneled closet doors now. Newt clumsily stacked up pillows taller than he was and started recreating the once-hidden away nest in front of the crackling fireplace. Once he was finished, Newt stood proudly over his creation with his hands on his hips and firm nod of pride.

And then he crawled inside like one of his creatures.
Credence blinked.

“Newt?”

“Please refrain from any and all judgement until you come here and join me.”

Credence shook his head in affectionate exasperation. Somehow, Newt’s weirdness still managed to surprise him. At first, he had thought all wizards were that peculiar. But, after being exposed more and more to the wizarding world, he quickly learned otherwise. Newt’s little oddities were bizarre even by wizarding standards and, yet, it made Credence love him even more.

Because Newt wasn’t weird for weirdness sake.

Every quirk had a reason. What looked incomprehensible from the outside, made perfect sense to Newt and as he showed Credence more and more of his world – not the wizarding world, but his world – Credence realized just how small of a worldview he had.

So, Credence got up and joined him inside the nest of pillows and blankets.

And it was warm. Comfortable. Like laying on a genuine cloud.

Credence sighed in content and buried his face inside the fabric.

“So?” Newt slowly asked, the delight shining in his voice indicating that he already knew the answer, “What do you think?”

“It’s… cozy,” he admitted.

_Begrudgingly._

“That’s what I thought.”

“Do you do this in the closet too?”

“Yes, I suppose. Although certainly not as much as I used to,” Newt hummed thoughtfully, “Used to drive Mummy crazy. When I was a toddler, apparently I spent more time in there than I did out here. What can I say though? I liked the darkness. The peace and quiet… Whenever things got too loud, I’d go in there and block out the world for a few hours. Might even say it was a sanctuary. Ah, developed a bit of an addiction for hoarding pillows though because of it.”

“Explains a lot,” Credence leaned on his shoulder, resting his cheek within the palm of his hand, “What’s the story on the stuffed animal? The one on the bench between the bookcases.”

“You mean Army?”

“Newt,” Credence asked seriously, “Did you name it that because it has a lot of arms?”

“I’ll have you know that I was _seven_ when I named him.”

“Once again, you’re not allowed to name things. Ever.”

“Oh hush,” Newt pouted, loosely crossing his arms over his chest, “Theseus made me that actually. Haven’t the foggiest idea what he was setting out to do, but I liked it so I kept it. All those arms just mean that he’s great at hugs.”

That… was the _cutest_ thing he had ever heard.
“Speaking of which,” Credence stretched out and opened his arms, “Would you like one?”

Newt’s shoulders slumped.

“My answer to that question is always yes.”

They relaxed there together for the longest moment just reveling in silence. They watched the fire lazily dancing within the hearth. They fed each other cheese and crackers. Credence even tried that fizzy fruit drink that Newt brought.

He didn’t know how. He didn’t know why. But somehow, someway, it tasted exactly like the color purple.

Credence didn’t like how it bubbled and how he could taste it all the way up in his nose, but it was all in good fun.

It was only when Credence’s legs were comfortably entwined with Newt’s, holding him close against him and resting his cheek against that fluff of tawny hair that he realized that this wasn’t just any typical date. This was the date.

He pressed his suddenly burning face into Newt’s hair.

Credence wanted this.

He’d been… fantasizing about it ever since their first kiss. Oh, Credence never permitted his dreams to delve into anything explicit because he was embarrassed; but he couldn’t deny that Newt was gorgeous. Even when having rescued him from the seas with a frightened Kraken infant stuck to his face, Credence had thought that he was the most beautiful man ever.

He loved getting flustered by Newt. However, Credence also liked flustering him. He remembered when Newt was trimming his hair and his face had, for some reason, turned bright red. Stuttering word vomit left his lips and he’d backed himself away so quickly that he clumsily knocked into a table. Seeing that and knowing that he had caused such a reaction stirred something in Credence.

He had pictured pinning Newt against the bedroom wall, kissing his neck and rendering him inarticulate goo. He imagined leading Newt into their meadow and making him gasp out his name between whispers and moans. Credence wanted to see flowers in his hair while making him turn as red as roses. He wanted to take more baths with him and make his voice reverberate against the walls like a sweet siren song.

He wanted Newt.

But Credence was inexperienced and shy and Newt wasn’t. It intimidated him. Made him even more nervous and knowing that Newt had never really enjoyed sex before yet was still open to trying it with him made him all the more panicked.

Credence had vowed right then and there to himself that after trying it, he’d never pressure Newt into continuing if he found out that he didn’t enjoy doing it with him either. It wasn’t something necessary for their relationship to grow and continue. There was such a thing as love without sex.

But if Newt did enjoy it, what then?

God, Credence was pathetic and incompetent and horrible and—

Newt slipped out of his arms, looking at Credence curiously.
Credence stiffened. Did he somehow know what he was thinking? Oh God, were they going to start? Credence’s heart thumped wildly against his chest. The Obscurus wrapped its shadowed hands around his ribs, pulling them painfully apart. He knew, didn’t he? Newt knew and he was going to think so much less of him for such indecency—

Newt looked straight into his eyes.

And snorted.

Loudly.

Credence blinked, worries forgotten.

“Newt, did you break?”

He didn’t answer. Instead, Newt crawled out of the makeshift nest in an excited frenzy that instantly made Credence unequivocally concerned and suspicious. There was just something about that mischievous twinkle in his eyes…

Newt promptly hunched over and placed a hand upon his back, letting the other hang before him like a gentlemanly suitor asking a noble maiden to dance. But Newt didn’t ask for Credence’s hand or spin elegant poetry in attempts to charm him. No, he merely drew a jagged line with his foot and graaah-ed at him.

Credence slammed his hand against his mouth, wheezing in realization as Newt twirled around and started wagging his rear at him.

He doubled over in hysterics, practically falling out of the nest of pillows and blankets, one arm wrapping tightly around his ribs because they were aching so much. Not from the Obscurus this time but from laughter.

“Newt,” Credence gasped, tears springing to his eyes, “When I said I wanted to be wooed, this wasn’t what I meant!”

“Hmmm, are you certain?” Newt grinned over his shoulder and galloped sideways, making various snorting noises that caused Credence to break out into another fit of giggles, “The Erumpent goes crazy over this.”

“That’s because she’s an Erumpent!”

Credence pulled himself onto his feet, struggling to bite back his laughter, and crouched down.

“Credence?”

He placed a hand upon his back, looking lovingly into Newt’s eyes, and snorted before dragging his foot zigzaggedly before him.

A sudden laugh burst out of Newt and everything that he did, Credence copied. Newt side-galloped, Credence side-galloped. Newt graaah-ed, Credence graaah-ed right back. Newt wagged his rear in a circle? Credence did the same. When they both rolled around, they crashed into each other in a laughing ball of tangled arms and legs.

Newt was pressed into the ground underneath him. Their chests both heaved, gasping for breath between snorts and tear-eyed hysterics. They messily kissed each other. On the nose, the cheek, the lips. Everywhere and anywhere they could touch.
Credence rested his forehead against his.

It was perfect. This moment was absolutely, without a doubt perfect.

“Consider myself wooed.”

Newt paused, his breath catching.

“Does that mean—?”

Credence nodded, feeling shy once again but infinitely less insecure because he was with Newt. He would never judge him. The man had no shame or judgmental bone in his body. “Only if you’d still like to try it with me.”

Newt gazed up at him.

“I would.”

Credence’s face burned. He thickly swallowed.

“How do we—Erm, how do we start?”

“Would you like me to take the lead?”

Credence thought about it. Lately, all that he’d been doing was becoming flustered by Newt. He enjoyed it in its own peculiar way, but he wanted a change. He wanted to explore and to find his own confidence instead of having someone lead him by the hand to pleasures he’d never before experienced. Not to say that wasn’t wrong, it was just that Credence wanted something… different.

“No, I think I’d like to,” Credence eventually admitted and ran the backs of his fingers down Newt’s cheek, “Should I kiss you then?”

“I would very much enjoy it,” Newt mimicked Credence’s touch, his voice softening, “I can see those thoughts buzzing around your head. Remember than we can stop or slow down at any time. Don’t overthink it. Just… be you, Credence. I trust you.”

Newt trusted him.

“God, I love you so much,” Credence leaned down and kissed him.

Everything that Newt had done to him before, he tried out. Every single drawn out caress and every mind-numbing lick, suck, and kiss, Credence repeated. Their lips moved together in practiced harmony, neither breaking apart until they were both rendered without breath. Even then, Credence didn’t stop and moved his attention down Newt’s jaw.

With gentle fingers he lifted Newt’s chin and kissed his exposed throat. Credence hummed in blushing approval as he felt Newt swallow and suck in a sharp breath in response. Newt’s trembling hands slowly came up and gripped the back of his shirt.

“Credence,” he breathed shakily, “I like that.”

Something warm stirred within him.

No, that wasn’t right.

Something burned inside him.
“Want me to do it again?”

“Yes.”

Newt arched his neck backwards and Credence placed his lips back against his throat, trailing a line with his tongue down to the crevice of his collar. Newt shivered underneath him. His fingers tightened against his back.

Credence boldly pressed a kiss along the sensitive crook between Newt’s neck and shoulder. He sucked a deep blooming red mark there that, when he closely looked at it, resembled the petals of a rose perfectly.

When he leaned back up, Newt was staring up at him, wide-eyed and scarlet. His lips were parted and quivering. Every breath heightened just enough to be audible. Credence smiled down at him and smoothed back Newt’s hair so that he could better see his face.

He decided he rather liked this look on him.

“You okay?”

Newt nodded dumbly.

“Do you need a minute?”

“I—” Newt swallowed, “I’d like it better if you continued.”

Heart beating rapidly inside his chest, Credence rubbed his thumb around Newt’s burning cheek. He savored this moment. Committing the way he looked, how he felt, and every sound he made to memory.

“May I take off your shirt?”

“Please.”

Credence reached down and tugged on the corners of Newt’s bow-tie, watching it unfurl between his fingers. He flung it over his shoulder in favor of unbuttoning Newt’s shirt. Credence expected to feel his heart beating in his fingertips or for his face to burst aflame with nervous energy. But something about seeing Newt responding to him like this…

It gave him just enough confidence to overpower his insecurity.

Credence leaned backwards on Newt’s lap and watched as Newt similarly leaned forward so that he could slip his arms out, tossing the shirt behind him. When he laid back down, Credence couldn’t help but marvel at him. He’d seen Newt shirtless plenty of times before but never quite like this.

“You’re so beautiful, Newt,” Credence murmured, “Can I touch you?”

Newt didn’t respond immediately; instead, he reached up and found Credence’s hand, entwining their scarred fingers together. Credence brought their hands up and pressed his cheek against their knuckles, closing his eyes with a contented sigh.

“Credence, you can touch me wherever you like.”

Credence shivered.
And kissed Newt’s knuckles.

He brought Newt’s hand away from his cheek and gently flipped it. Credence touched him, fingertip-to-fingertip, and smoothed down from palm to wrist. Every callus and silvery scar belonging to Newt like paint splattered against a canvas. Each brushstroke, an artist’s gift.

Credence slid his worshiping hands down the expanse of Newt’s arm, watching the curve of muscle mostly hidden underneath clothes on a typical day. On first glance, Newt may not have seemed one geared towards strength. All long limbs and the gracefulness of a newborn foal. But there was power lying underneath that deceptively soft exterior.

One used only for the care of fantastic beasts.

He placed a kiss upon the groove of his elbow.

Credence didn’t stop there though. He ran endlessly adoring hands down ancient harpy scars carved around Newt’s shoulders and suck rose petals to life underneath the tender skin. Attentive to every reaction and repeating everything that made Newt quiver and gasp. Newt’s trembling hands gripped at Credence’s back, his quiet little breaths and halting whimpers encouraging Credence to go further.

Credence didn’t disappoint and revered a row of freckles shaped like Orion’s Belt right above Newt’s heart.

He paused.

And pressed his cheek against it.

Credence had teased about Newt’s heartbeat before. A cheesy line quoted in their meadow that, at the time, had made them laugh. Now though… now Credence wouldn’t dare make such a joke. He knew just how precious that heartbeat was.

Newt’s fingers found his hair.

“Credence?” he asked, his voice quiet and tender.

“Have I ever mentioned how much I like doing this?” Credence murmured, “It’s… soothing. Hearting it beat over and over. Although, it’s much more rapid than usual.”

He shifted and casually rested his folded arms against Newt’s chest, gazing up at him with a teasing smirk tugging at his lips, “Now why is that?”

“Oh hush,” Newt’s face reddened, “You’re rather—rather talented at flustering me, I’ll have you know.”

“So, you’re enjoying this then?”

“More than I imagined I would,” Newt frowned as if he was pleasantly surprised by the unexpected turn of events, “It’s… different with you. All the motions are the same so, it’s not a matter of talent. Maybe it’s because you’re—well, you’re special to me, Credence.”

Credence blinked.

“Have you never liked any of your partners before?”

“Liked them?” Newt repeated thoughtfully, “Yes. Felt a connection with? Now, that’s something that I’ve only experienced with two people before and you’re one of them.”
“Oh, Newt.”

Credence reached forward, meaning to stroke his face. However, something about the movement jarred him and made a sudden laugh rip from Newt’s throat.

Each wizard froze.

Until a devious smile curled across Credence’s lips.

“Credence,” Newt sat up sharply, “That wasn’t what you thought it was.”

“It wasn’t?” Credence leaned backwards and wrapped his hands around Newt’s waist, satisfied by the fit of giggles that moving his fingers elicited, “Because if I’m remembering correctly, you’re insanely ticklish.”

“Credence!” Newt wheezed, violently trembling with laughter as Credence mercilessly tickled him now, “Need I remind you that we’re rather occupied at the moment?”

“A little detour never harmed anybody.”

“Credence!”

Credence ran his hands up and down his exposed body, finding new areas that he hadn’t known about before where Newt was ticklish. Underneath the arms, around the neck, over his shoulders, even the small of his elbow. It was ridiculous and yet, Credence found Newt’s light-hearted laughter and cheek-splitting grin the most attractive thing in all existence. It was only when Newt suddenly flipped their positions, hovering over Credence, that the two paused.

And then Credence’s arms were wrapped around his neck and their lips crashed together.

Newt’s hands buried themselves into his hair and untied the silver ribbon holding it back. His mouth found Credence’s neck, sucking rose petals and whispers of adoration into his blazing skin. Credence arched into him, his eyes fluttering closed. He heard Newt asking permission to remove his button-down and Credence heard himself answering wholeheartedly yes.

Nimble fingers moved down and Credence aided him, hurriedly slipping out of sleeves and tossing the shirt behind him. He didn’t care whether it was folded or not.

He quickly pulled Newt back down onto him and ran his hands down the curves of Newt’s spine, shivering at the sharp shoulder blades and how they moved as Newt worshipped him. Underneath him, Credence didn’t feel ugly. His scars didn’t burn with shame, reminding him of his time in Hell. How could he feel anything excepted loved when Newt stared down at him with sunlight glinting in his dazzling eyes?

Credence clung onto him, their legs intertwining.

It was only when he felt something hard pressing into his thigh that Credence froze.

Newt was immediately attentive, pulling back and holding his face worriedly between his hands.

“What’s wrong?”

“Newt,” Credence glanced down between them and, swallowing thickly, he asked, “Can I remove your trousers?”

Somehow Newt became even darker red.
“Yes.”

Newt carefully pulled himself away and took a comfortable seat upon the now messy pile of blankets and pillows. Credence nervously rubbed his hands together, hesitant eyes glancing down once between Newt’s legs and the telling bulge hidden away underneath a swath of fabric.

“Credence,” Newt occupied himself by twirling a lock of tawny hair, gaze averted away from him, “Would you like me to instead?”

“Would you?” he breathed, shoulders slumping in relief.

Newt slowly unbuttoned his trousers, the movement nothing sensual and heartbreakingly romantic like what was described in the Madame Camembert books. No, this was more like the awkward fumbling of too-long limbs used by an even more vastly uncoordinated user. Credence couldn’t help the quiet laugh that escaped him as Newt kicked them off with such a sense of finality and pride that he shot Credence a grin over his shoulder.

But now he sat there naked before him like he had been in the bathroom.

But this…

This was different.

Credence’s hand – trembling with equal amounts anxiety and excitement – reached out of their own accord, but he quickly hesitated. Casting a repeating glance between Newt’s absolutely lovely blushing face and down below, he quietly asked, “May I?”

“Yes.”

Credence’s fingers touched the tip of his cock with feather-light delicateness, following down a greenish-blue vein that disappeared completely into the skin the further it got to the base. Credence smiled at the tuft of auburn hair, as wild and untamed as the ones covering Newt’s head.

Newt shuddered, his hands curling tightly into the blankets underneath him.

“How do you feel?”

“Amazing,” Newt’s chest heaved, eyes fluttering shut, “Don’t—Don’t stop.”

Credence gripped his hip and wrapped his hand entirely around him, earning another shuddering breath from Newt. He moved back and forth, slowly at first as he became used to the sensation of the soft smooth skin that was simultaneously, most certainly hard. He rubbed his thumb once, twice in a circle around the head, the pink skin a fascinatingly different texture than the rest.

“Credence!”

Credence looked up, initially alarmed and prepared to back away in case he had done something wrong.

But Newt gaped down at him, golden flecks sparkling in his beautifully wide eyes. His blush having traveled down his neck, blossoming across his shoulders and chest in beautiful scarlet splotches. Newt loosely covered his mouth, but Credence could still see how it hung parted underneath – his breath heavy and hot.

Credence repeated the action and Newt arched his head back, a whimper gracing the air.
Oh. Oh, Credence liked that.

He moved just a little faster now, watching every little thing that Newt did. The rosy redness of his cheeks and the growing crescendo of his voice. When Credence experimented and slowed down his pace, Newt’s head sharply snapped down and gazed at him with such a helplessly pleading look that Credence couldn’t hold back a smirk.

“Yes?”

However, it seemed like Newt couldn’t speak. A frustrated whine slipped past as he desperately tapped his throat, the sound transitioning into a groan as he extended his arms exasperatedly at Credence.

“One tap for yes, two for no: Are you okay?”

Newt tapped once against his shoulder.

“Is there anything I can do to help?”

Two taps.

“Do you want me to stop?”

Two taps. Firm. Quick.

Credence smiled.

“Would you like me to continue?”

One tap.

Credence leaned forward and slipped his scarred hand behind the back of Newt’s neck, the other slowly resuming stroking his cock. Barely a centimeter remained between them as Credence looked directly into Newt’s hooded eyes. He could feel his shuddering hot breath across his cheek, the electricity sparking between them. His parted lips only just ghosted across Newt’s, savoring the whimper it elicited.

“I love you,” Credence closed the distance between them, fire spreading through his body, “So much.”

Newt tapped twice against his shoulder.

Credence quickly stopped and pulled back.

But Newt shook his head. He emphatically thumped at his chest before pointing between Credence’s legs. Credence didn’t understand what he was trying to say at first, but when Newt sighed and touched his thigh—

“O-oh, yes.”

Credence traded spots with him, suddenly plagued by dueling feelings of nervousness and excitement once again, because touching someone else was vastly different from having someone touch him. He moved to unbutton his trousers, unable to look Newt in the eye, when silver-scarred hands covered his.

Credence stopped and looked up.
And Newt made a heart with his hands, pressing it against his freckled chest and pointing at him.

The fireplace released a shattering crack that briefly coated the bedroom in a splendid display of white light. Credence flopped backwards into the blanket nest, covering his burning face.

“Newt, that was—you’re just—” Credence groaned because that was just perfect and everything that he’d needed in that moment.

Newt drew a swooping line around his navel and it took Credence a moment longer than necessary to realize that what he was drawing was a question mark. He glanced through his fingers and, upon noticing that he had gained his lovers’ attention, Newt tapped the black button of his trousers.

Credence flushed, nodding with permission.

He watched with barely constrained fascination as Newt hovered over him, undressing Credence with much more ease than undressing himself. Credence’s heart slammed inside his chest. He pressed his nervously trembling hands firmly against his face and yet he was unable to tear his gaze away.

Newt tapped his leg once. Paused. Then twice.

Yes or no?

Credence nodded his head quickly.

Newt pressed his lips against his cock.

Credence slammed his eyes tightly shut, his breath catching in his throat. It was such a simple action. Nothing that they hadn’t done before albeit on different, less erotic parts of the body. But Credence couldn’t help himself thinking that of course, the first time Newt touched him there had to be a goddamned kiss!

Newt kissed the innermost parts of his thighs, applying gentle pressure to ease his legs ever so slightly apart. His fingers enveloped the base and his wonderful lips wrapped around the side of his cock. Newt flattened his tongue up the length of him, Credence choking on a surprised gasp, before taking the tip into his mouth and showing him what heaven felt like.

Oh.

Oh.

Everything glowed brighter behind Credence’s eyelids. He witnessed stars breathe to life and then suddenly collapse into vibrant supernovas, filling the vast emptiness of space with aftershocks of color and light. His hands gripped the blankets underneath him, the fabric tearing too easily. When Newt sank lower down on him, enveloping Credence in velvety wet warmth, his toes curled and his back arched.

His body trembled, coated in a thin sheet of sweat. He gasped for air, clawed for something to hold onto.


Newt immediately interlocked their fingers.
Credence had never felt this good before. He had known happiness, moreso within these last couple months than all his years combined, however happiness and bodily pleasure were two completely different things. Credence’s flesh had only ever tasted pain before. The crack of belt against his knuckles. The screaming stings of a whip against his rear. The searing burns of flame licking his back.

But this?

This was absolute torture in all the best ways. And, before Credence knew it, he was crying.

Attentive as ever, Newt noticed right away.

“Credence?” he had found his voice again.

Credence opened his eyes and, even through heavy waves of tears, smiled brightly. He slipped his hands behind Newt’s neck and pulled him downwards against him, pressing their foreheads together. Credence inhaled deeply, breathing him in and that enticing scent of grass and dirt, of freedom and adventure.

But now, it was strangely accompanied by something more. Something different. Like honeysuckles and night-blooming jasmine.

“I’ve never felt that good before,” Credence whispered, “Ever.”

Newt rubbed his thumb underneath Credence’s eye in complete and utter awed adoration. His freckled expression soft, gazing upon Credence in the same exact manner as when he had cast a simple spell to light the fireplace.

“Would you like me to continue?” he eventually asked.

Credence flushed.

“Could we do… more?”

“What would you like to do?”

“I’m—I’m not certain,” Credence confessed, dropping his head and resting it upon Newt’s shoulder, “I liked seeing you flustered underneath me. I enjoyed that. A lot. But I—I want to feel closer to you. As close as possible like when you were—when you were doing that—that—Can we do something like that? But something that isn’t that?”

Ugh, wasn’t that the most ineloquent sentence ever?

“We could try penetration?” Newt suggested, running his hands through Credence’s hair.

“How does that work?”

“I’ll show you,” Newt hopped off him and looked around. He placed his hands against his narrow hips, frowning, before spotting the wicker picnic basket hiding behind the begonias. He leaned down and rummaged through it.

Credence totally didn’t take advantage of that opportunity to admire his rear.

“I packed lubrication for this very possibility,” Newt retrieved a rather inconspicuous bottle with a charming *a-ha!* He glanced over his shoulder and something about how the fire illuminated his stark-naked figure and his vast variety of scars – caused by creatures and man alike – paired with that
adorable awkward grin made something inside Credence positively melt.

“It takes a little bit of preparation,” Newt returned and knelt before him, “But I think you’d enjoy it if you want to try.”

“I do,” Credence hesitated, “Do you want to?”

“Credence, I’ve never felt this good before either,” he confessed, casting his gaze away, “I want this. Perhaps just as much as you do.”

Credence smiled and pressed a kiss against his cheek.

“How do we do this?”

Newt unscrewed the bottle and poured the contents onto Credence’s fingers, coating them generously in lube. The consistency was thicker than what Credence expected. He experimentally rubbed his fingers together and they glided across each other with surprising smoothness. Newt guided Credence’s fingers down between them towards his entrance and Credence found his cheeks burning pink again.

“Slowly now,” Newt guided him softly, rubbing Credence’s fingertips up and around in small circles, “Never take this part too fast.”

“Why?”

“Hurts like a bugger and you already know I’m not too fond of painful sex,” he grinned that awkward little grin, sending butterflies fluttering through Credence’s stomach. “Alright. What you’re going to do is apply the faintest bit of pressure here. One finger only, up to the knuckle. No more than that.”

Credence did as instructed.

Newt released a small breath and licked his lips, “Now thrust a little in and out. Slow. Very slow.”

Credence followed everything Newt said as he helped stretch him out. He slowly eased into it by adding another finger and then moving up a knuckle, gradually increasing in length and quickness. He trusted Newt’s instructions completely and never moved forward without him explicitly telling him to do so.

Newt quickly ended up clutching onto Credence’s shoulders, head lolling to the side and his hair falling over his face in a manner he found most attractive. Those beautiful scarlet splotches reappeared over his body and his shuddering pants became quicker, heavier with every passing second.

Credence liked this.

Rendering Newt completely defenseless. Turning him literally into putty in the palm of his hand.

“Credence,” Newt trembled, “Curve your fingers up a little—ah!”

Newt collapsed forward against his chest, pressing his sweaty head against his shoulder as Credence rubbed up against his prostrate. Credence curiously repeated the action and Newt simply just wrapped his legs firmly around his waist, the position resulting in their cocks pressing together. Credence boldly reached between them and rubbed them against each other.
Newt cried out in response, fingers sinking into his back.

Oh, Credence liked this.

He liked it a lot.

Newt shuddered against him as Credence thrust his fingers faster inside him, Newt’s permanently opened mouth hot and heavy as he gasped into his flushed skin.

“Do you like that?”

“Mhm,” Newt nodded furiously against him, sentences replaced with noises more heated and primal in nature, “Credence.”

Electricity sparked inside him.

“Say that again.”

“Credence,” Newt whimpered desperately into his neck, pressing Credence as close against him as possible, “Please. I—I—I want—”

“What do you want, Newt?” Credence pressed his lips against the stretch of skin beside his ear.

“I want you.”

Credence smiled.

“You already have me.”

“No,” Newt shook his head furiously back and forth, barely suppressing a heavy whimper as Credence curved his fingers upwards once again, “I—I want you inside me.”

Oh. Oh.

“Tell me how.”

“Lay me back.”

Credence stopped all activities with his fingers and wrapped his arms supportively around Newt’s waist. He shifted positions, Newt clinging onto him all the while, and carefully laid him against the now verifiable mess of half-shredded blankets and pillows.

“C’mere,” Newt gestured him forward and gently wrapped his hand around Credence’s cock. He retrieved the bottle of lube, emptying it over him and smoothing it down from tip to base until the thick substance dripped onto the fabric underneath. He guided Credence up to his thoroughly stretched entrance, pressing the tip against him.

“Press forward,” Newt’s voice was hushed and trembling, “Slow. Just the head.”

Once again Credence obediently followed his instructions, trusting Newt completely to guide him in this area that he was wholly inexperienced with. Newt frantically grabbed the fabric underneath him and arched his neck backwards, gasping out Credence’s name and sending blazing sparks through his spine. Newt guided him, inch by inch, little by little, until he was completely inside.

Both wizards panted and gasped, staring wide-eyed at each other.
“S-slow,” Newt swallowed, “Very slow like before. Take your time. Build up to it.”

“Like this?” Credence placed his hand against Newt’s sharp him and carefully moved inside him. The feeling was absolutely fantastic and nothing that he had ever felt before: warm and wet, but most importantly, the feeling of loving closeness heightened to the nth degree. Everything that he had ever wanted out of sex – out of sex with Newt – but didn’t know how to describe.

He reached over and tightly grabbed Newt’s hand, needing the support.

“Yes,” Newt breathed and interlocked their fingers, squeezing.

He reached forward with his free hand to sweep back a rogue curl behind Credence’s ear. But his fingers lingered, pressing his palm against Credence’s cheek. “Yes, exactly like that.”

Newt’s voice dropped, heartbreakingly so.

Fingers trailing across Credence’s face and tracing his lips with his tender thumb, “May I kiss you?”

“Always,” Credence leaned down and closed the distance between them.

Their fingers quickly became entangled in each other’s hair, unable to stand being apart from one another in any manner no matter how small. They squeezed their entwined hands, gasping and groaning into blazing lips and skin as Credence increased his pace. Newt hooked a leg around him and Credence swore he saw stars.

Everything was bliss.

Everything was Newt.

Something large and heavy crashed loudly against the far-off wall, sounding as if Hercules himself had lifted a mighty boulder and cast it aside. Flower petals swirled amongst the air within a forceful gust of wind, encircling them in a tornado of color. Fabric ripped underneath him and pillows burst into a disastrous array of feathers; but neither wizard noticed nor cared, too wrapped up in the wonder of one another.

Credence’s arms trembled and, through a half-lidded gaze, vaguely noticed wisps of night incarnate leaking from his fingertips and covering the entire expanse of floor. The world slipped into a gray-tinged haze, but that ocean of darkness didn’t consume him. He remained here.

Here with Newt.

And, frankly, that’s all that mattered.

Credence rocked into him, quick and hard. Newt writhed and cried out Credence’s name.

Newt desperately clung onto his back, staring up at him wide-eyed and trembling. He pulled Credence down into a kiss, their lips crashing together and melding together into one.

“I love you, Credence.”

With a sharp, surprised cry of Newt’s name, Credence climaxed.

Flowers shattered around them in one large destructive wave, filling the bedroom with petals and vibrant emerald leaves. Darkness exploded from Credence’s back and enveloped the two wizards in its sparkling embrace. Stars burst into supernova over and over, casting waves of dazzling rainbows across them.
Credence needed him. He needed him like air to breathe and water to drink.

Credence’s hand moved quickly between them and wrapped around Newt’s cock, moving rapidly back and forth until Newt shuddered underneath him, crying out into his mouth.

Credence pulled out and collapsed against him, slipping his arms around Newt’s back to ground himself. Both wizards breathed heavily, staring into each other’s eyes in equal parts shock and awe.

Eventually, it was Newt that broke the silence.

“Wow.”

Credence couldn’t help himself.

“That’s it?” he laughed, “Wow?”

“Oh hush,” Newt pouted and puffed out his cheeks, “I’ll have you know that I’m a little tired out here. Words aren’t at my best right now.”

Credence leaned up onto his arms and teased.

“As if that’s any different from normal.”

“Mean,” Newt tutted and ran his fingers through Credence’s hair, “Was it good for you?”

“Was it good for me?” Credence repeated with a breathless laugh, “I feel like I could conquer the world. Was it good for you?”

“Thoroughly. I dare say that I look forward to doing this again with you very soon,” Newt beamed that smile of pure sunlight down at him, “That is if you’re up for it.”

Credence burst into a cheek-splitting smile and eagerly moved forward to kiss him; however, Newt seemed to have the same exact idea and moved at the same time, their heads crashing harshly into each other.

“My nose!”

Credence laughed.

“God, I love you.”

Chapter End Notes

Credit to thelesbiansentbycyberlife on Tumblr for the Erumpent Mating Dance suggestion and dealing with my subsequent suffering.

Please leave your comments and constructive criticisms below!
If you would like to follow GMDS updates in real time or just hang out, you can find me on Tumblr at: darthpricklypear
Newt and Credence lounged in the bathtub.

As awkward as the first invitation had been, this had quickly become one of their most favorite activities to do together. The intimacy of washing each other provided a feeling of closeness that neither wizard had experienced before.

Newt savored every moment where he could take care of Credence for a change.

He would gather Credence up in his arms and lather his hair in unscented shampoo. He’d scrunch up those wild curls, delighting in how sudsy they would become.

Sometimes Newt lost himself in the process.

Enchanted by the feeling of Credence’s smooth hair slipping through his fingers. Positively bewitched by the little rainbows reflected in the impossible darkness. Enraptured by just… everything.

He’d only catch himself when Credence would suddenly burst into laughter.

And Newt would look down every time, oblivious.

Only to loudly snort in surprise at the beard of bubbles coating Credence’s chin.

He’d quickly wash it away.

And then they would just relax.

Most of the time, neither Credence nor Newt spoke a single word. They would sit there, taking turns enveloping each other in their arms, covered underneath a blanket of steaming hot water.

There was nothing sexual about it either. Just because they were naked didn’t mean that they had to touch each other. They didn’t have to or want to in order to achieve that same level of intimacy.

Their entire relationship was defined by such values.

They usually ended up just sneaking around the house like teenagers, snogging on the living room couch until Mother walked through the front door. They’d quickly duck into the hallways, grinning
and blushing like absolutely fools.

Newt particularly enjoyed waking up to Credence’s cute face every day and starting each morning with the best hugs he’d ever received in his entire life. He felt just as warm and loved here as he did whenever they took it a step further.

Which Newt enjoyed more than he thought.

He just didn’t want it as often as Credence did, which was fine with the both of them. Credence had been so accepting of him already. Merlin, he had been content with the prospect of never having sex again ever if it turned out Newt didn’t enjoy it with him.

But there was something different with Credence.

A connection that had been missing in all his past encounters.

For once in his life, Newt fantasized about doing things with Credence more than just the occasional make out session and he honestly didn’t know what to think about that.

Credence squeezed Newt against him, placing a kiss against his sweaty forehead.

“Mmm,” Newt hummed, eyes closed, “What was that for?”

“Just because.”

Scarred fingers slipped underneath his chin and lifted it up. Lips gently pressed against his.

“That one’s because I love you.”

Newt’s eyes were wide open now.

“… go on.”

Credence smiled and slid his fingers down Newt’s arm, entwining their hands and bringing it up to his lips. He kissed his knuckles and closed his eyes for just a second.

“That’s because I can’t get enough of you.”

He kissed the pair of matching freckles underneath his wrist.

“That’s because you’re amazing.”

Credence shifted around and hovered over Newt, resting his arms on either side of his shoulders. His lips — softer than Newt’s persistently chapped ones could ever be — ghosted over his ear lobe.

“That’s for the way you’re looking at me right now,” he whispered, quiet like a prayer, “Have I ever told you how attractive you are?”

“Yes,” Newt swallowed, his own voice low and breathy and in sharp contrast to Credence’s, “Many times.”

“Have I ever gone into specifics?”

Newt could feel those ugly little red splotches blooming across his chest and, yet, all that he could do was dumbly shake his head no.
“Your lips are so beautiful.”

Credence pressed his thumb against them, tracing the outline.

He always seemed to touch him with such aching gentleness. As sweet as Newt found it, it almost seemed like Credence was frightened to do anything more. As if any wrong move could hurt him or push him away.

“I like the way they dip down right here,” he lingered against his cupid’s bow, “I love touching them. Sometimes I feel like I just want to kiss you all day and not do anything else.”

“We’ve already done that once.”

“I’d like to do that again.”

Newt shivered.

Credence ran his hands lovingly across his scalp, smoothing the wet hair backwards so that Newt’s face was entirely exposed with nothing to hide behind. Droplets of water slid down his forehead and dripped onto his chest.

“I like the little waves in your hair. How it hangs over your eyes. If I just brush it away—” Credence drew his thumb underneath and breathed out a sigh so filled with genuine adoration that Newt’s heartbeat quickened, “I get to look at you.”

Newt took Credence’s face between his shaking hands.

And pressed their lips together.

Sometimes he wondered about how lucky he had been. How the stars must have aligned just right to have sent him walking up those steps of The Wailing Whirlwind to see Credence standing there on the edge. They had found each other when they needed it most. That’s how it had always been ever since Credence had first outstretched his hand to him all those years ago, asking if he was alright.

“It’s like you have freckles in your eyes,” Credence whispered against him, “Merlin, I love them. I’ve always wanted freckles like yours.”

He used Merlin for the first time.

“You have one.”

Credence blinked.

“I do?”

“Mmm. Right here,” Newt kissed the side of his nose, murmuring against his skin, “I love your little nose freckle.”

Credence crashed their lips together.

Newt wrapped his arms around his neck, holding him close.

Everything about Credence was incredible.

He mastered anything and everything that he put his wonderful mind to — and quickly too! The only problems that he ever encountered were that he was just too good at everything he did. He executed
flawless *Reparos* and overpowered *Accios* that transformed flying objects into dangerous projectiles. His raw talent was extraordinary. His finesse, not so much.

Newt would never tell him this.

Credence was so disheartened already.

But what an amazing problem to have: not knowing how to tone down his incredible power.

He wasn’t just gifted in magic though.

Credence just seemed to soak up knowledge wherever he went, eager to learn wherever possible and wherever impossible. Newt couldn’t blame him either. Credence had spent so much of his life being told that everything outside his home was sinful and forbidden. It was no wonder that he had become the perfect student.

But why did he have to get so good at kissing him so quickly?

“Credence,” Newt groaned.

“Every time you blush, I get this— this feeling squirming in the pit of my stomach and it’s strange and weird, but I don’t want it to stop,” he continued with renewed fervor, worshiping his mouth and cradling his face with all the carefulness in the world as if he were handing fine china instead of Newt.

“Credence,” he shivered.

Merlin, he would never get tired of gasping out his name.

“I love the roughness of your hands, the softness of your thighs. And your rear? It’s perfect,” his sweet voice sent fire burning through him, “Sometimes I stop and admire it whenever you bend over. Is that alright?”

“Yes, Credence,” he couldn’t answer quickly enough, “Yes, that’s alright.”

Everything always led back to him. Every road Newt had been on, every mistake he had made, and every success he had all had been leading up to Credence.

And, Merlin, was he *worth* it.

Credence smiled against his skin.

“I love you, Newt Scamander.”

Flames flickered dangerously through Newt’s veins. His entire body was engulfed in fire and there was nothing within his power to stop it.

Not that he wanted it to.

The burn was intoxicating. Singed his scarlet skin raw and left him aching for more of its sweltering embrace. He wanted more. He wanted to share this feeling with Credence and make him feel as good as he was—

A sudden surprised ‘oh’ pulled him out of his haze.

Credence started leaning back.
“Wait.”

Credence froze.

“Don’t stop,” his voice faltered, low and breathless, “Please.”

Credence didn’t respond right away.

Instead glancing down between them, a peculiar look flickering over his expression. Both thoughtful and soft yet, blazing with that same wicked fire coursing through him.

“… what would you like me to do?”

Newt shuddered and leaned his head back against the tub.

“Keep talking,” he murmured, covering his embarrassed face, “And maybe— that is if you wouldn’t mind too terribly. You’re not obligated to just because I— If you don’t want to, that’s fine.”

“Newt.”

Right. Babbling doesn’t make for such good communication.

“Could you, erm, touch me?”

A sudden sharp intake of breath.

And, after a moment of agonizing silence, Credence was straddling his lap again and running gentle fingers through Newt’s hair. He repeated the action, as if he were petting him. If Credence continued like this, Newt swore that he might actually purr.

“Could you look at me?”

His voice was so soft.

Newt hesitated for a moment, before slowly sliding his hands down his face.

Green eyes met black.

A sensual shudder passed through Credence, sending electric sparks shooting through Newt wherever their skin made contact. Credence leaned closer against him, chest to chest, and rested his arm on the bathtub rim behind Newt’s head.

And then Credence slipped his hand down between them, taking the entirety of Newt around his fingers.

Newt nearly slammed his eyes shut, keening into his touch, but forced them to stay open. A staggered gasp came out in its stead. His hands gripped the sides of the tub, his knuckles turning bone white. The many bumps and ridges of Credence’s scars made the sensation heavenly, especially when he slowly started stroking. It was almost too much for him to take.

But Credence had asked Newt to look at him.

There was no way he was going to take his eyes off of him now.

Credence’s hand moved faster.
Newt found it difficult to think.

“I love that,” Credence murmured. “When you look at me like that. As if I’m the only person that exists in the whole, entire world.”

Newt found himself mesmerized by his voice.

Credence’s voice was quiet and soft, but not in that heartbreaking way it typically was. There was just enough of a difference that even Newt could notice. It was sultry and deep. Credence’s voice penetrated his very soul, pulsing with such subdued power and intensity that it could send any man to their knees.

And it was all focused entirely onto him.

Merlin fuck.

“That’s because you’re my world, Credence.”

Something from the general direction of the sink toppled over onto the ground as Credence flushed red from head to toe. His mouth opened and closed for a moment.

Newt liked seeing him flustered like this.

Newt slipped his arms around his shoulders. He pressed his lips against his neck, drinking him in and feeling his pulse jump in response.

Credence rewarded him by quickening his pace.

Newt clung onto him, pressing his forehead against his chest. His mouth hung unashamedly open and his breath came in hot and heavy gasps.

“I like this side of you,” he managed to say between groans and soft whimpers, “Confident. Unbound. Comfortable in your skin.”

Credence pressed his face into his hair.

“You haven’t seen me unbound.”

Dark thoughts flooded Newt’s mind.

“Show me.”

Credence’s hand froze.

Newt whimpered.

“Newt—”

“I trust you, Credence.”

Newt wanted to know every part of him: the good, the bad, the ugly, everything.

There was absolutely no part of Credence that he didn’t already love with every ounce of his heart and soul.

Newt had witnessed him broken and crying out for help and he loved him. He had seen him playful
and stretching out his hand in kindness and he loved him. He had seen him slowly growing with confidence and finding himself and he loved him. He had seen him fight and disagree with him and go off on his own and he loved him. He had seen him enraged and lost to the world and he still loved him.

Newt wanted to see Credence unrestrained.

In this moment, he didn’t want Credence to touch him like he was going to break. As if he were fragile. He wanted Credence to give him his all.

“If you change your mind…” Credence averted his gaze.

“I’ll use Fizzle Whiskers then,” Newt leaned backwards and smiled at him, pressing his hand against his warm cheek, “And I know you’ll stop if I do.”

They remained there for a moment.

Quiet. Contemplative.

Credence mulling over his offer and Newt lovingly caressing his face.

That was until Credence suddenly looked up, dragonfire illuminating the darkness of his gaze, and crashed their lips together. Newt’s heart pounded rapidly inside his chest as Credence lifted him out of the tub, arms sliding around his back and underneath his legs.

“Credence!” Newt quickly grabbed onto his shoulders.

Credence grinned and spun them around, droplets of water splashing all over the place.

“Credence,” Newt laughed and pressed his face against his neck, “You’re getting the bathroom wet!”

“Oh no,” he drawled in that intoxicating manner that Newt just adored, “Whatever will we do?”

Credence balanced Newt on top of the sink and grabbed his wand from the floor, casting a quick heating spell on them both to dry them off.

The water evaporated within a matter of seconds.

Newt watched as Credence’s curls came bouncing to life and brushed delicately across his shoulders as he leaned forward.

Newt pressed his back against the fogged-up mirror.

Credence seemed to devour him by gaze alone.

Never before had Newt felt so naked. They had been nude together plenty of times before however, this was somehow even more raw. More intimate. As if Newt was being studied. As if he was been read like a book written in some long-lost language that only Credence knew how to decipher.

Credence pressed his palm firmly against Newt’s chest.

And he just melted.

One trembling hand gripping the side of the counter and the other balled up into his mouth. Newt watched, helpless, as Credence explored every inch of him as if he were seeing it for the very first
time. He smoothed over every scar andlavished his blazing skin with blooming red marks.

But no matter how much attention Credence gave to his body, he was even more focused on Newt’s
each and every expression. Watching him writhe underneath his touch and listening to every sharp
breath and groan that escaped his lips. Sometimes, whenever he made a certain reaction that
Credence liked, he would focus all his attention there and send Newt’s toes curling.

Credence guided his legs apart and placed his lips against his thigh.

For a second, Newt couldn’t breathe.

Newt arched his head back against the mirror and slammed his eyes shut. His hands fumbling,
burying themselves in Credence’s hair.

He wanted to look at Credence. He wanted to keep gazing into those impossibly dark eyes that
pierced his heart and soul. But he couldn’t keep his eyes open any longer. Everything was just too
much for him to handle.

A *good* too much.

“Credence,” Newt managed to choke out in a strangulated voice that, had he had half a mind about
him, would have found most embarrassing, “Credence—*ah!* Credence, love. Don’t stop.”

All the faucets suddenly switched on.

“All again.”

“Credence,” Newt gasped, “Credence, love please—”

Credence slipped his hand around Newt’s aching cock and slowly moved up and down, every
agonizing stroke sending fire licking through his core. Newt was rendered completely defenseless
and at his lover’s mercy. All other words having long abandoned his inner dictionary except for
Credence’s name.

Then Credence started using his tongue.

And Newt lost himself completely to his bliss.

Somewhere in the back of his thoughts, Newt knew that Credence was taking his time with him.
Could tell by the torturous slowness of his hand and the smirk across his lips. He was drawing this
out as long as possible, prolonging the inevitable. There were so few opportunities to make him
crumble like this that of course Credence was going to take advantage of it.

Newt could hear the fumbling open of the drawers. The sudden popping of a bottle cap and the
feeling of his entrance being stretched—

Newt’s eyes slammed open just as his mouth slammed shut. Although, it made no difference to
muffle his cries. He arched into Credence’s hand, pulling him up hurriedly by the shoulders and
covering his mouth with a sloppy kiss.

Newt’s hold on him tightened as Credence rewarded him with an upwards curl of his fingers.
Everything collapsed into itself as Credence stretched him out, increasing his pace. Newt stared into
Credence’s eyes, open-mouthed and unintelligible except for the occasional frenzied muttering of his
name.
It was how Newt could pinpoint it, down to the very last second, when Credence’s eyes turned
ghostly white.

Darkness enveloped them both.

Newt had witnessed this once before during the first time they were intimate. He remembered that
bright unfurling of eternity from Credence’s pale white back, washing them over in cool liquid
night. Credence hadn’t seemed to notice then just as he didn’t seem to notice now.

An Obscurus had a tendency to unleash itself upon the world during periods of high emotion.

However, this was far different from the other times Credence lost control.

Whatever this was, it wasn’t out of pain or loss or anger. The curling wisps neither lashed out against
him nor raised a threatening hand. On the contrary, the Obscurus seemed to just… embrace him. As
if it sought out Newt’s touch just as much as Credence did.

Newt stared into milky white eyes.

He pressed his hands on either side of Credence’s face, pressing their foreheads together.

And smiled.

“Hello beautiful.”

The look that Credence gave him took his breath away.

Credence delicately brushed away his hair from over his eyes and just whispered with all the love in
the world, “Newt.”

He didn’t need to say anything more.

Newt reached down between them and stroked Credence’s cock before guiding him inside him.

The moment he thrust into him, Newt felt like a song.

Like a Mozaritan melody that had finally reached its momentous crescendo. Like the standing round
of applause after the closing notes of a heart-wrenching aria. Like a captivating siren song weaving
around a poor sailor’s ears and causing them to dive overboard. Like the sorrowful pull of a bow
across the strings of a Stradivarius.

Credence gathered Newt’s wrists into a single hand and pinned them above his head against the
glass. He gripped onto his hip and thrust inside him. Newt wrapped his legs around his waist and
sunk his heel into his spine encouragingly.

Credence pressed his lips below his ear.

“Say my name,” he whispered, dark and seductive.

Newt shivered.

“Credence.”

“Say that you love me.”

“I love you, lamb,” he whimpered, his back arching, “I love you so much.”
Credence passionately kissed his neck and sucked rose petals into his skin, sending fire coursing down his spine and burning up his core in an all-encompassing inferno. Newt’s fingers curled and uncurled above him.

“Say that you need me.”

“I need you.”

Every inch of him trembled.

“Say that—” Credence’s voice warbled, “That you’ll never leave me.”

“Never, love. Never,” Newt all but whispered, “I’m yours.”

Credence wrapped his arms around him and lifted him off the sink. Newt quickly clung onto him.

“C—Credence…”

“I’ve got you,” he murmured soothingly.

Credence lovingly smoothed down Newt’s hair and pressed his lips against his temple the same moment he pressed Newt’s back against the wall. The darkness followed them, enshrouding them completely until nothing else remained in the world except him and Credence.

Newt slipped his hands down Credence’s back where the Obscurus flowed out from between his shoulder blades. It was a rather strange consistency. A living being that ebbed and flowed, a confusing fusion between thick gasoline and smooth silk.

The Obscurus wrapped around Newt’s fingers, holding onto as tightly as he held onto Credence. Which quickly turned into his nails sinking sharply into Credence’s tender skin when he started moving inside him again.

“Credence—ah! Sorry,” that came out more strangled than he intended it to be, “Am I hurting you?”

“I like it.”

Oh. Oh.

Newt’s legs trembled violently. He tried desperately to keep himself from collapsing, but Credence had him. He always did.

Credence managed to lift him up ever so slightly, hooking Newt’s legs around his broad shoulders. Newt clung onto his neck for balance, hooking his ankles comfortably around each other. It was only after they were well into the position that Newt wondered when Credence had become so strong?

Thoughts for another time.

At this particular moment, Newt was more concerned with biting his lower lip in a desperate attempt to muffle his cries. But it seemed that Credence had other thoughts about the matter.

“Let me hear you.”

“I’ll get loud,” Newt lowly hissed, trying hard to keep himself together.

But Credence, the bastard, just smirked and kissed him.
“I know.”

He thrust into him sharply.

Newt cried out into his mouth.

So, Credence wanted to hear him?

He already liked looking at him and feeling as close to him as possible. If Credence wanted all that, then by **Merlin’s saggy y-fronts**, Newt would give him everything he asked for and more.

Newt held onto him tighter and leaned in so close that their noses touched.

He stared straight into milky white eyes that, in any other situation, would have been frightening. But here, they were enchanting. Drawing him in. They glistened and glimmered like opals, filled with iridescent color and light.

Newt let his mouth hang shamefully open and allowed Credence to hear every singly cry and pant and moan he made. He let him have everything he desired.

But now it was Newt’s turn.

“**Harder.**”

Sweat dripped down Credence’s forehead.

His cheeks all flushed red and gorgeous.

“What if I break you?”

He seemed genuinely worried.

Newt kissed him with all the confidence and trust he had in him.

“Then break me.”

Credence’s breath hitched.

And the darkness of the Obscurus suddenly overflowed across Newt’s shaking arms and down his sweat-slicked back. He had no time to react or gather his thoughts, however, as Credence gave him exactly what he desired.

Credence’s heartbreakingly careful grip on his hips became bruising.

Credence worshiped his mouth, his tongue creating miracles out of nothing. Like water into wine. He revered his freckled throat and the little hooked scars on his shoulders. Every sense in Newt’s body seemed flammable, doused in gasoline, and just awaiting a match.

Tears of indescribable ecstasy filled his eyes and spilled down his cheeks. His voice grew sharp and loud to the point where his voice **cracked**.

Along with something else in the room.

But Newt didn’t care because he was one step away from heaven. He just needed something. Anything. He was so close—
“Credence?”

“Yes?”

Merlin, Newt loved how quiet and deep Credence’s voice got whenever they had sex. It was the type of voice that poets dreamed about. It was the seductiveness that enchanted young maidens down from their towers and into their strong arms. It was the power of a man unrestrained.

The complete opposite of the veritable mess that Newt was.

“Bite me.”

“I thought you said you didn’t like pain.”

“I know what I said,” he whimpered, almost pleading, “And I’d like you to bite me.”

Credence sank his teeth into his shoulder.

And Newt swore that he saw stars bursting into supernova in the darkness. Wave after wave of mind-numbing pleasure rocked through his body to the point where he could barely hold onto Credence. He stared into those wonderful milky white eyes as he came, rendered open-mouthed yet silent in his ecstasy.

Credence’s eyes widened and, a few moments later, joined him in his climax.

The Obscurus burst around them in a swirling hurricane, sending towels and clothes and exposed toiletries clattering through the bathroom, before centering back into Credence with a booming crack.

His eyes turned back to black.

They sunk down onto the floor together.

Newt clumsily unhooked himself from around Credence’s shoulders and made to stand up. But he promptly lost all balance and dropped. Credence was there to catch him though and held him comfortably in his arms as Newt trembled and shook.

Words didn’t exist in this world.

Nothing except for Credence.

Newt took Credence’s warm face into his hands, focusing his attention onto him and quickly tapped his throat.

“It’s okay,” Credence whispered, “Take all the time you need.”

Merlin, he loved him.

Newt smiled bright as daylight and made a heart with his hands, pointing at Credence’s chest a second after.

And positively delighted in the pinkened blush that spread across Credence’s face and how he buried his face in Newt’s hair.

They remained like that for a while. Newt curled up in Credence’s arms as they both recovered. Neither one uttering a sound except for their heaving breaths and the occasional kiss to the cheek or forehead.
Eventually, Newt breathed, “Wow.”

“Good wow or bad wow?”

“Credence, with you it’s always a good wow.”

Credence laughed and kissed his hair.

“Newt?”

“Yes, Credence?”

“I love you, sunshine.”

Newt squeaked — squeaked — and hopped onto his feet, covering his mouth with his hand.

“You called me sunshine.”

Credence blushed and stood up.

“Newt, I—”

But Newt was already bursting through the bathroom door, grinning with such incredible happiness that he swore he could fly if he tried.

“Mum! He called me sunshine!”

Credence chased after him, laughing.

“Newt, for the love of God, put some clothes on!”

Chapter End Notes

I’m not that much of a smut writer tbh. I’ve dabbled in it a couple of times before but it’s not really my forte, I feel. So, I would really like to know your feedback on this!

Please leave your comments and constructive criticisms below! If you would like to follow GMDS updates in real time or just hang out, you can find me on Tumblr at: darthpricklypear
“Do I have to go?”

“You already accepted the invitation,” Alma rolled over and caressed a line down Tina’s back, “It would be rude not to.”

Tina groaned into the pillow and turned her head, a single eye poking out from underneath that dark mess of hair. Alma gently brushed a few strands away to see her better and smiled.

“I accepted because it caught me by surprise. Since when did Credence find out we were Jewish? Ugh, here I was preparing myself for a Christmas invitation or to be wished a joyous Solstice,” Tina flopped her face back into the pillow, pathetically murmuring into it, “I didn’t have the heart to tell him that I stopped practicing after the family moved down South.”

“You can tell him now, Teenie,” Alma frowned and propped herself up, “He can’t possibly know unless you say something.”

“I know, I know.”

“Tina.”

“I do!” she rolled over so that she could dramatically thrust her arms into the air, waving them around, “It’s just that Uncle Terrence and the Aunts are already over there. I ain’t gonna subject him to that by backing out last minute. And we’ve already made plans.”

“Doesn’t mean that you’re obligated to go.”

“I know,” Tina ran her hands down her face, “But I’m going to anyways. I’ll tell him after the hustle and bustle of the holidays are over, okay?”

Alma quirked up her brow.

Tina pouted.

“Alright, alright,” she eventually sighed and leaned over, pressing a gentle kiss against her forehead, “Promise me that you will. I don’t want you backing out last minute.”

“Almailsie—”

“Promise me.”

Tina stared up at her for a moment.

And smiled.

Alma’s heart skipped a beat as Tina’s arms wrapped around her neck and pulled her against her bare chest. She pressed their lips together, smoothing her thumb against her suddenly blazing skin, before sighing.

“Promise.”
“Really? You sealed it with a kiss?” Alma laughed and curled comfortably into her side, shoving her shoulder, “You sap.”

God, Alma loved her.

She loved those rare nights spent enveloped in each other’s arms, nothing else existing in the world except the two of them. She loved those smiles that Tina showed only to her and the breathless way she sighed her name into her hair. She loved how Tina’s body was built so perfectly that Alma could fit seamlessly into her side. She loved how safe she felt with her nearby.

After the events that had happened overseas, Tina was always there to keep the nightmares at bay. Provided a shoulder to cry on at Dido’s funeral. Kept her mind away from her *Fury* that had taken so many lives—

Alma stiffened.

“List all my favorite flowers,” Tina murmured, holding her close, “Reverse alphabetical order this time.”

She buried her face into the crook of her neck, shaking.

“Tina—”

“You’ll feel better.”

“I know, but—”

“Almaisie, darling.”

She closed her eyes and breathed in.

“Yellow Bell, Wisteria, Violet—”

“Mmm,” Tina hummed and rubbed soothing circles into her back, “I love that color on you.”

Alma smiled softly.

“Tulip, Poppy, Peony, Marigold—”

“I want our first kid to be named Marigold.”

“You’re gonna have to marry a lady first before that happens, Teenie. Now, where was I?” Alma furrowed her brows, concentrating, “Hydrangea, Hollyhock—”

“Is that what you want for Christmas, darling?” Tina kissed her shoulder, sending shivers down her spine and thoroughly distracting her, “A ring?”

Alma blushed.

“I—uhm,” she stuttered, “Daisy and, uhm, Astilbe.”

“You’re not answering the question.”

“Porpentina Goldstein,” Alma leaned up, face burning like boiling honey on a hot summer day, and stared down at her, “Are you asking if I want to marry you?”
“Depends,” Tina hesitated, “Is that a yes?”

Alma flopped back against the bed, feeling so happy that she could cry. She pressed her trembling knuckles against her mouth.

“Tina, honey,” her voice warbled, “I’ve had a crush on you since our first-year and you sat next to me when no one else would. I’ve been in love with you since that day you found out about my—my hot blood and I was nearly expelled cause I bit off Theodore’s ear. But you came marching up to my rescue, broken nose and all, saying I was just protecting you. I remember feeling so scared and you just hugged me, staring down at me with stars in your eyes. Tina, I knew you were the one since forever. Of course, I’ll marry you.”

Tina crawled over her, dark eyes filled with so much love and happiness that Alma felt her heart bursting because she knew it was all geared towards her.

Tina leaned down.

“But!” Alma held up her finger before their lips could meet, “You’re making it more romantic than that.”

Tina blinked, brows slowly furrowing in confusion.

“…what do you mean?”

“I want to be wooed, Teenie. You’re gonna have to do better than a lazy morning in bed.”

“But, Almaine darling,” she whined.

“No ifs, ands, or buts about it!”

Alma cheerily rolled out from underneath Tina and hopped off the bed, grabbing her wand from the nightstand. Her undergarments from last night flew through the air and wrapped around her — buckled, clasped, and cinched wherever necessary — as she pranced over to her closet.

Alma shifted back and forth from foot-to-foot before pulling out a pastel pink dress embroidered with beautiful white lilies around the collar and slipped it on. She flicked her wand daintily in the air and twirled around as ribbons weaved back and forth through her hair, tying back her braids.

As she slipped on a pair of matching pink Mary Janes, she couldn’t help but feel like a princess.

“And Teenie, darling,” Alma sing-songed, skipping over to the vanity and sitting down, “You ought to start packing. You need to be leaving soon.”

“Ugh, do I have to?”

Alma laughed and pulled out a drawer, searching for the perfect shade of lipstick to match her outfit.

“I could have sworn we already had this conversation.”

Tina slipped out of bed and wrapped her arms around Alma’s waist from behind, resting her chin against her shoulder.

“I’m going, I’m going,” she murmured and kissed her cheek, “Expect a proper proposal when I get back.”

Alma had the fleeting thought that she ought to forgo the blush today. Her cheeks were doing just
fine producing their own.

“Mmm, I’ll act all surprised too.”

“Good,” Tina smiled against her neck, “I’ll bring you your favorite flowers if you do.”

“Oh! Snapdragons?”

“Of course.”

Alma turned around in her chair and framed Tina’s face between her hands, kissing her deeply. She closed her eyes, savoring the warmth and taste of her, wondering how she had been so lucky to find someone like Tina that wanted to spend the rest of her life with her.

“I love you, Alma Mae,” Tina whispered against her lips.

Alma smiled.

“I love you, Porpentina.”

“Not as much as I like you.”

“It ain’t a competition.”

Tina pulled back and grinned, sending butterflies fluttering all throughout Alma’s stomach. That was a look that she only gave her and Alma just basked in it.

“But if it is,” Tina hummed mock-thoughtfully, “I’m winning.”

Alma burst into laughter and turned back around to do her makeup.

God, how she loved her.

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Tina released the trembling portkey the moment they dropped in front of the Scamander household.

Transcontinental Portkey Authorization Forms were always in such high demand during the holiday season. The Floo Network consistently broke the previous season’s congestion records and everything was just a chaotic mess. Fortunately, Tina knew her way around a paper and quill and managed to take care of all her affairs quicker than you could say lickety-split.

And if no one was made none the wiser when a certain no-Maj just happened to tag along, well it was no sweat off her back.

Speaking of…

“Oh. Oh, that was…” Jacob heaved forward and looked a little green around the gills. He rested his hands against his knees, “I think I, uh, like the fireplace thing better. That was—”

He placed his hand against his mouth.

“Please don’t lose your breakfast on the Scamander’s front porch,” Tina drawled.
“Teenie! That was his very first portkey ride. The poor dear was bound to feel a little queasy,” Queenie chittered and flounced to her paramour’s side, affectionately rubbing his back, “Just give him a couple minutes.”

Tina rolled her eyes.

She shifted her overnight bag from shoulder to shoulder and glanced back up at the Scamander cottage.

It was nothing like what Tina had imagined.

She had half-expected an untamed jungle, like an extension of Newt’s suitcase times ten. She wouldn’t have been surprised to find a Norwegian Ridgeback barreling out of the woods with Newt grinning dopily on its back and waving in greeting. She had expected something wild, untamed.

What she found instead was something warm.

Homey.

Tina walked up the porch steps. She dragged her gloved fingers down the wooden posts, watching the chipping paint flutter and pirouette through the air like snowflakes. History and cherished memories were etched into this home. Every creak of the wooden floorboards and every scratch upon the window frames told a story.

A family’s home.

Passed down from generation to generation.

A small frown tugged at her lips.

“Tina!”

She turned around.

And her breath caught in her throat.

Credence waved down at her, beaming with the force of all the stars in the sky condensed into one. An arm was wrapped tightly around Newt’s waist. The Hippogriff they were riding sharply dipped down, stretching out its claws and preparing itself for landing.

*Great and Powerful Merlin*, Tina would never get used to seeing Credence like this.

She had watched him so many times from afar.

Standing at that freezing street corner, his head bowed and shoulders hunched. His quivering hands glowing red with new cuts and handing out pamphlets to people who passed him by without so much as a second glance.

And here he was smiling.

Tina stepped down the porch into the front yard and waved up at him.

“Credence! Down here!”

Newt guided the Hippogriff lower but Credence, it seemed, was far too eager to wait.
He burst into a swirling storm of black dust and barreled through the skies.

Tina’s heart slammed into her chest at the sight of the Obscurus and reflexively stepped backwards. Her hand inched for her wand, but then Credence reappeared before her. His eyes shining with captured moonlight. Smiling that breathtakingly beautiful smile. Reaching out for her hands but hesitating at the last moment.

Doubt and worry crossed his expression.

Tina inwardly cursed at herself for causing such a wicked thing.

“You came.”

“’Course I did, sweetheart,” Tina shifted awkwardly from foot-to-foot and shot him a tiny smile, “Wouldn’t miss this for the world.”

“Oh, don’t you two be standing there all stiff and stuff!” Queenie practically skipped over and gathered the pair into a hug, squeezing them tightly, “We’re family now. Get on in there.”

She playfully ruffled Credence’s hair.

“Look at you all handsome-like! It’s good to see you, honey. How’ve you been?”

One day Queenie would learn the meaning of boundaries.

Tina shrugged apologetically at Credence.

But, much to her own surprise, he only seemed to beam and wrapped his arms around them both tightly in response.

“Never better,” Credence said, “How is your leg?”

“All healed up, wouldn’t you know it? I can finally bring out my dancing shoes again,” she wrinkled her nose, “So sorry, dear, that we weren’t able to make it for Thanksgiving.”

“It’s okay, Queenie. There’s always next time.”

Tina stood there, silently watching their conversation. Her overnight bag digging uncomfortably against her side. Trapped within a group hug that seemed to have absolutely no intentions on ending anytime soon.

Of course Credence wouldn’t be embarrassed by something like this.

Tina was used to her sister’s antics. Ooey-gooey family moments like these were commonplace in the Goldstein household. Queenie was always gathering Tina up in a hug or kissing her cheek or doing something cute that Tina much rather preferred she didn’t. Public displays of affection defined Queenie one hundred percent.

But Credence had never had a family to be embarrassed by.

He had never been cutely referred to as sweetie-pie or honey while leaving for work. He’d never been dragged into a department store and been forced to tag along while his sister loudly gushed at all the cute things on sale. He’d never been swept up into an awkward hug after an important meeting in front of all his colleagues.

Hell, he had never had normal hugs let alone awkward ones.
Tina softened and slowly wrapped her arms around them too.

“Credence,” she quickly observed, “You’ve gained weight.”

He pulled away and blushed, pulling nervously at his collar.

“I—uh… Mrs. Scamander likes to feed me.”

“Good,” Tina placed her hands on her hips and gave a firm nod, “Someone needs to make sure you’re fed. Getting a well-balanced meal and all. Sometimes I worry, you know. That you’re so busy taking care of Newt that you forget about taking care of yourself.”

“Can you blame me?” Credence drawled and glanced over his shoulder at the now grounded Hippogriff. Newt had hopped off its back and was currently leading it back to its pen. “Look at him.”

In that precise moment, Newt tripped and fell face-first into the dirt.

Tina snorted.

“Point taken.”

Credence pinched his nose and sighed.

“That’s the man I’ve chosen to love right there.”

Time stopped.

Tina’s eyes widened, a shuddering breath escaping her throat.

“Credence… honey,” she forced herself to remain calm and composed, “What do you mean by that?”

Credence froze and slowly looked at her.

His hands tightened into trembling fists. A potent dusting of rouge gradually spread across his pale cheeks until it encompassed his entire face in tomato red color. The darks of eyes were pinpricks compared to the overwhelming whites of his sclera. He looked down once or twice, his entire body shaking, and squeaked out.

“I thought—I thought you knew. After that day. And uhm…”

“Credence,” Tina stretched out her hand but thought better of it, “Hugging Newt after he decided to literally take a death dive from the sky doesn’t mean anything.”

“That’s not what I meant,” Credence seemed to grow more anxious by the second, “I thought that—that everyone saw when we—when I—uhm. Oh! Look, Newt is calling me. I better, uhm, go.”

He burst into the Obscurus.

The smudge of darkness soaring across the fields at lightning speeds.

“Credence!”

Tina stepped forward to chase after him because they certainly weren’t done talking yet. Not after whatever that just was.
She had so many questions swirling around her head. What was he talking about? What had happened the day Grindelwald attacked? When had these feelings started? Were they in a relationship now or was it one-sided pining? There were so many things that she needed to know and Credence was the only one that had answers—

Queenie suspiciously stepped backwards.

Tina whirled around on her sister, mouth agape in betrayal.

“You knew about this?”

“Whatever do you mean?” Queenie said sweetly, “I have no idea what you’re talking about, honey.”

Oh, so we’re playing that game huh?

“Teenie, this ain’t nothing of the sort—”

“Jacob,” Tina stomped up to him and gripped his shoulders, eyes narrowed sharper than a pair of Basilisk fangs, “Did you know about this?”

Jacob nervously patted his sides.

“Well, I uh… you see, it’s a funny story—”

“You did!” Tina gaped, “And you kept it from me!”

“It was supposed to stay a secret,” Queenie slipped her arms around Jacob’s shoulders and pressed her cheek against his, “Jacob here found out because I can’t keep nothin’ from him. You know that.”

“But I’m your sister!”

“Credence asked me not to.”

Tina froze.

And averted her gaze.

She didn’t know why she was getting so riled up about this.

Credence was an adult. A man. He wasn’t some child who couldn’t make his own decisions.

They weren’t even related by blood, so Tina couldn’t just chock it up to some overacting sense of familial protection. Even though some part of her would have been more than happy to brush off that Barebone and replace it with Goldstein.

Maybe she was just worried that Credence was getting taken advantage of.

But then Tina just had to remind herself that he was infatuated with Newt of all people.

Newt was too nice. The type of man that would rather wield a pen instead of a sword. One of those rare people that looked upon all the hate and injustices in the world and decided to be kind instead of hardened into stone.

Like Tina was.

She shook her head.
It wasn’t like he and Credence were bad for each other either.

They were great friends. They teased one another constantly — most often Credence being the initiator at Newt’s expense. They had inside jokes. They could hold entire conversations without saying a word. They were always talking and asking for permission and they were just so good to one another.

Credence was perfectly in tune with Newt’s triggers.

And Newt was in tune with his.

Newt had managed to talk Credence down from a rampaging Obscurus back into a man more than once. No matter what, he always saw the person inside the monster and approached him, not with fear, but an outpouring of concern.

Newt always stuck up for Credence too. How many times had he reminded Tina that Credence was a wizard who could think for himself? That he shouldn’t be infantilized or pitied or protected because of what he’d been through? If there was any cause for concern, then asking Credence himself how he wanted to proceed was far better than keeping him in the dark.

And Newt stood by it even whenever Credence disagreed with him.

Credence had really come into his own underneath Newt’s tutelage. But, at some point, what had begun as an innocent friendship had transitioned into something more.

And if Newt returned his feelings…

Tina nearly snorted.

Of course he did. Who was she kidding?

With the way they looked into each other’s eyes — as if they were gazing into the very sun — it was impossible that they weren’t together. It was just Tina who had been blind to it before.

“Are they—” she eventually asked, eyes to the ground, “Are they happy?”

Queenie gently approached.

And enveloped her in her arms.

“Oh Teenie,” she soothed, running a hand through her hair, “You’re gonna have to ask them that yourself.”

Tina glanced over her shoulder.

Credence was laughing as Newt made funny faces at him. Newt hunched over ridiculously, flipping the ends of his coat upwards, and stomped his foot into the ground.

Credence leaned against the Hippogriff pen, hand covering his mouth and shoulders shaking.

Tina smiled.

“Somehow I get the feeling that I don’t need to.”
Before they knew it, night had fallen.

With the time difference between them, Tina had basically just started the morning only for night to sneak up on her like a thief and punch her in the face.

To think that a few hours ago, she had been cuddling next to Alma in bed. And a few hours before that, kissing down her back and running her hands over her hips, between her legs, and making her positively sing her name.

Tina smiled.

Alma Mae, her soulmate.

Tina would never dare mention the word out loud, and yet she couldn’t help but wonder how lucky she had been to have found someone like Alma to have and to hold.

She was the sun to her moon. The light to her darkness. The fire to her ice. She was the reason Tina woke up in the morning and the reason why she laid her head down at night. They balanced each other out. They brought out the best in each other.

“What’re you thinking about, mi sobrina?”

The couch dipped as Terrence sat down beside her, his arm resting around the back.

The bags underneath his eyes had deepened, smudges of violet turned into indigo. Those dark eyes held secrets and mysteries that Tina couldn’t even begin to understand. But the sadness? Oh, she knew that quite well.

It’s funny, now that she thought about it.

He reminded her of Credence.

Uncle Terrence had only been a part of the family for a couple of years and, yet, it seemed like he had been here forever. Abandoned at thirteen by his Mother and been living on his own ever since. He had never known who his father was although, apparently, he was a member of the Northern tribes. Which one? He didn’t know.

And then… when he just turned eighteen…

Uncle Terrence had started exhibiting his bloodlust.

The parallels were uncanny.

“Family,” Tina confessed and averted her gaze, “The meaning of it and all.”

“Complicated topic.”

She snorted and nudged his shoulder, “You would know.”

“Yeah, I would. Wouldn’t I?” Terrence covered his mouth as he yawned, “If this gets too difficult for you, say the word and I’ll steal the Challah. No questions asked.”

As entertaining as the thought was…
“Why would anything be difficult?”

“Your aunts and I talk from time to time, I’ll have you know. Said that you haven’t practiced since y’all separated. Queenie comes down for every holiday but…”

“I make firecalls, don’t I?” Tina grimaced, wanting nothing more than to switch topics, “You know that I can’t take time off of work that easily.”

“Queenie does.”

“Yeah, but she’s Queenie. I’m just… me.”

“Tina.”

“It’s just not the same without my parents, okay?”

Tina stiffened and tightened her grip on her knees, letting her head hang low. No, she shouldn’t be feeling like this. She couldn’t. Not here and certainly not now. Not when everyone was gathered together and having fun. Not when Credence had invited her because—

Why had he invited her?

“It… hurts too much sometimes,” Tina swallowed thickly, “I know it’s been— it’s been a while. I know I should just get over it. I know. But whenever we do things that we used to do together, the memories come flooding back and it hurts.”

She remembered how Dad used to carry her on his back with little Queenie wrapped around his ankles. He’d pretend to stomp around the living room like a monster, the sounds of their giggles drowning out his roars. She remembered Mom chasing him with a wooden spoon when he’d taken her by surprised and pinched her arm. She remembered the smell of Mom’s latkes frying and how she would lead them in prayers around the table.

Her voice had been so beautiful.

“Oh Tina,” Terrence’s voice softened and placed his hand against her back, “My offer to steal the Challah is still on the table.”

Her lower lip quivered.

But then, laughter drifted in from the kitchen.

Tina turned her head to look.

And watched as Delia twirled around the room decorating and sending witchlights into the air. Watching Queenie and Jacob kneed dough together. Watching as Queenie laughed as Jacob tried teaching her Polish expressions his Grandmother had taught him when he was young. Watching as Newt and Credence bantered as they set up the table. Watching her aunts arguing in Yiddish.

Her lower lip still quivered.

But she couldn’t hold back the smile that grew across her face.

“No, it’s okay,” Tina lifted herself off the couch, “Because you know what, Uncle Terrence? I still have family.”

Losing her parents hurt. No matter how much time passed, that sorrow would always linger deep
within her heart.

But the past was in the past. Tina would always cherish the time she had together with her parents, however she couldn’t let that prevent her from making new memories in the now. Not when she was surrounded by all the people she loved most in the world.

Well, almost everyone.

But she would see Alma again soon enough.

Tina headed towards the kitchen, hesitating at the very last moment. She didn’t know what strange, mystical force in the world had taken hold of her, but she found herself glancing down and noticing an inconspicuous leather journal sitting on top of a side-table.

She brushed her fingers across it.

And spotted the white edges of a photograph sticking out.

Tina knew that she shouldn’t snoop. She didn’t even know who the journal belonged to. But curiosity overruled her better judgement and she pulled out the photograph.

Coming face-to-face with a young Newt Scamander.

There were pictures of him and his brother all over the place, so this hadn’t come as much of a surprise. However, this one was different from all the others because he was with a friend.

Strange how the boy looked vaguely familiar.

Something about those curly locks and the way he looked so happy to be around Newt. Those haunting dark eyes peering out from behind ink and paper in a manner that was positively heartbreaking—

Tina froze.

And slowly looked into the kitchen where Credence was bringing down a platter of rugelach to the table.

Tina quickly flipped the photograph, searching for something — anything — to disprove what she had just discovered.

Newton Scamander. Hermes LeStrange.

Tina knew about the LeStrange family.

The news about their missing son had been plastered across the front pages for a straight week. But his name had been Corvus, not Hermes. Had they lost another child and kept it out of the press out of fear of a second scandal? No, not even a family like that could have hidden such tragedy from the eyes of society.

Tina pressed her hand over her mouth. Did Credence know?

She looked back into the kitchen.

And found Credence staring at her, eyes wide and afraid.

Oh sweetheart...
Tina slipped the photograph back where she’d found it.

She crept inside the kitchen, making her way into the dining room, and stopped inches away from where Credence stood silent and shaking. Tina reached out, moving slow enough for Credence to stop her if he wanted to, and wrapped her hands around his.

“Credence.”

He flinched.

“You’re Credence and that’s all that matters. Everything else are just minor details,” Tina murmured and looked up into his eyes, squeezing his hands, “I love you, sweetie.”

They stood like that for a moment.

Until Credence’s shoulders dropped and his arms were suddenly wrapping around her.

“I love you too, Tina.”

She squeezed him tightly against her before pulling back, “Come on, let’s go light the candle.”

Everyone gathered into the living room. Her aunts brought out her mother’s hanukkiah and carefully set it upon the hearth. Tina watched as Queenie lit the shamash and led them in prayer, the familiar notes telling the tales and struggles of her people.

They sang and danced and rejoiced because this was her story. This was their story. This was the story of triumph in the face of adversity.

This was the story of family.

And hers had never felt fuller.

Hanukah had been amazing.

Having been raised in a strict Christian household, Credence had obviously never celebrated the Jewish holiday before. He knew only as much as he did from brief conversations he’d overheard on the streets. So, having the Goldsteins and Jacob share their heritage with him and include him in their family had been something… wonderful.

But now was time for Christmas.

It was his turn to share his holiday with them.

They all reconvened at the Scamander household on Christmas Eve. The Goldstein sisters along with Alma. Jacob had taken time off from the bakery to be here. Theseus brought Graves and Modesty earlier that morning. Everyone who could make it was here and it made Credence feel warm inside to share this celebration with everyone he cared about.

Mother had celebrated Christmas.

They’d attended Midnight Mass together and joined hands in song. Credence and his sisters would
decorate a beautiful evergreen every year with popcorn strings and paper-craft stars covered in gold glitter. Mother would wrap presents in newspaper, one for each of her adopted children, and tuck them underneath the tree. She would bake a Christmas pie and allow them to go caroling down the street.

Not everything had been bad in the Barebone house.

Sometimes Mother could be nice.

But those were thoughts for another time.

“Credence, y’ain’t paying attention!”

“I am! I am!” he playfully stuck out his tongue out of the corner of his mouth in mock-concentration and continued rolling up the base of the snowman, “Patience.”

“No, my name’s Modesty.”

Credence snorted and shot a look over his shoulder at her.

Modesty just grinned.

God, Credence would never get used to seeing her like this — so healthy and alive.

Modesty’s cheeks were no longer deathly pale and sallow, but plump and filled with rosy red color. Her eyes shined brighter and happier than before and her trimmed hair had warmed from the color of wheat to a vibrant gold.

Funny how having breakfast, lunch, and dinner every day instead of on occasion could do that for you.

Modesty flopped back in the snow, spreading out her arms and legs.

Graves had recently bought her an entire wardrobe of winter clothes. Every day she was clothed in something new and luxurious.

Today she was wearing a proper mulberry coat with matching scarves and gloves. A fur-lined hat that looked ridiculously warm and cozy and leather boots that shined black against the stark white of the freshly fallen snow. It was decadence compared to the threadbare blankets that she and Credence had wrapped around themselves in the dead of winter and the newspapers they had stuffed in their oversized shoes for some form of insulation.

“You’re not even doing anything,” Credence pointed out as Modesty stood up to assess her snow angel before flopping back into the snow to make another one.

“I made the head, didn’t I?”

“Oh, is that what that is?”

“Rude,” she pouted, “I think I did pretty well considering I’ve never made one before, thank you very much!”

Credence laughed and finished up the base of the snowman, packing the snow tightly in. He pushed it into position onto the large bundle of snow he had made earlier and finally lifted the misshapen head on top. He wrapped his scarf around the neck and placed a pair of branches on either side to make the arms. Carefully, he pulled out a set of smooth obsidian stones and formed them into a
smiling face.

“You’re right,” he hummed and pivoted on his feet, scooping Modesty into his arms, “I’m a real Scrooge. Bah humbug.”

“Credence!” Modesty laughed.

“No, my name is Ebenezer.”

Credence grinned as Modesty shoved his shoulder.

He lifted her up in front of the snowman and watched her stick the carrot nose firmly into the center of its face. At the very last minute, Modesty took off her hat and put it on top.

“What’re we gonna name him?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” Credence set her down onto her feet, “What do you think?”

Modesty opened her mouth to answer, but it wasn’t her voice that came out.

“I vote Snowy.”

Credence groaned.

“Modesty,” he slowly pinched the bridge of his nose, refusing to turn around and acknowledge the set of crunching snowy footsteps approaching from behind, “Since when did you start talking in Newt’s voice?”

“Credence,” Modesty rolled her eyes, “Don’t be ridiculous.”

“But how else could you explain Newt answering when I specifically asked you a question?”

The footsteps stopped behind him.

“Sorry, love,” Newt apologized, but Credence could hear the smile in his voice, “I couldn’t help myself. But you have to admit that Snowy is a most appropriate name for a snowman, don’t you think?”

“Newt,” Credence groaned, “We’ve talked about this.”

“I know, I know. I’m not allowed to name things.”

At least he acknowledged it.

But then Modesty stared intently into the snowman’s eyes, as if she were looking deep within its very soul searching for its one true name, and declared with all the certainty of an evangelical preacher…

“I like Snowy.”

“Betrayal,” Credence placed his hand dramatically over his heart, “From my own family.”

“It’s a cute name.”

“You’re cute,” he emphatically pointed out, “But is your name Cuteness?”

“Bold move from someone named Credence.”
“Says the little girl named Modesty.”

Modesty crossed her arms over her chest and stared up at him. She batted her eyelashes all sweet-like, her eyes slowly widening. Tears pinpricked the corners. Her lower lip quivered.

“Really? The beggar girl look?” he quirked up a brow, “You’re using that on me?”

And yet, Credence still found all his defenses crumbling.

He sighed.

“I suppose… we could name it Snowy.”

Modesty cheered, wiping away her fake tears, and made to step forward.

“But, it’s time for you to head inside now,” Credence slipped his hand into hers and made to turn back to the house, “I don’t want you catching something by staying out here too long. Newt, could you—”

Splat!

Something cold and wet collided into the side of his face.

Credence wiped his cheek and stared at the snow stuck onto his glove.

He lifted his head and stared eye-to-eye at Newt. Who innocently raised his hands and pointed at the Niffler on his shoulder.

“He did it.”

“Modesty,” Credence looked down at her, a knowing smirk already spreading across his sister’s face, “Maybe we can stay outside for a little while longer.”

It was a Christmas miracle.

Newt had woken up before Credence.

Out of all the mornings that they’d spent together, Newt could count the number of times he’d managed such a thing on a single hand. Credence always seemed to wake up either hours or mere moments before he did. There was no in between.

But on the rare occasion that Newt woke first, he cherished every moment.

Because that meant that he could look at Credence.

At those hypnotizing eyes of volcanic ash and heavenly sweetness hidden behind ghostly white eyelids. At the petal pinks of his flushed cheeks. At his wild hair messily sticking up all over the place. At how he would he would fold himself up to half his size no matter where he slept. At how he tucked his hands all sweetly underneath his cheek, scarred fingers curled ever so slightly.

It was funny.
The last time he had admired Credence like this, Newt had confessed to him. Little had he known that it would lead to the start of something new and wonderful beyond his wildest dreams.

Then again, he had never been that good at Divination.

Newt had tried dating before.

Everyone in his House had seemed to couple themselves off after the initial waves of puberty hit. Break-ups and make-ups had been the norm. Theseus had somehow caught the eye of many a student, House loyalties be damned, when he’d been attending. Many girls and boys, and a couple of those who didn’t quite identify as either, had come up to Newt asking him for advice on what his brother liked in a potential suitor.

Newt usually froze up.

His tongue sticking to the roof of his mouth and his heart beating a mile a minute. He’d stand there, awkward and smiling, even though his thoughts were screaming.

Leta would always come to his rescue in the end.

Telling them to piss off and that, if they were so damned interested in Theseus, to go bother him instead of Newt.

Oh, Leta.

He imagined that he would have liked to have dated her.

But she had never seemed to reciprocate his feelings, which was fine! Newt valued their friendship more than his one-sided infatuation and he figured that he could find love elsewhere anyhow. So, once he had been expelled, he finally tried jumping into the dating pool. It wasn’t like he had anything else to do.

Men, women, those that were men sometimes and women other times. They’d all been pleasant enough company.

But it was awkward and weird.

It’d never felt… right.

But then he had found Credence and Newt suddenly discovered that dating someone you actually liked was incomparable to dating someone you found just in pleasant company.

Newt reached over to caress his cheek.

To whisper a hushed, *I love you.*

However, he found his movement quite limited.

Modesty dozed between them, curled up into Credence’s side.

That’s right.

After yesterday’s snowball fight — which Newt had quickly realized, after he was nearly buried underneath a snowdrift, that challenging a brother and sister at the same time was not the smartest of ideas — they had retreated inside and flopped onto the living room couch in front of the fireplace.
They’d pulled a blanket across the three of them, warmed themselves up with fresh-brewed cocoa, and relaxed.

Credence began telling stories about Santa Claus and his elves. He spun the tale of Ebenezer Scrooge so vividly that Newt swore he could see the story unfolding before his very eyes. Once or twice, he had to look over his shoulder to ensure that no Christmas ghosts were lingering there waiting for him.

Seeing this side of Credence had taken him by surprise.

And made him fall even more in love with him.

He was such a good big brother.

At some point during the night, somewhere between the Ghost of Christmas Future and Tiny Tim cheering out, ‘God bless Us, Every One!’, they had fallen asleep.

Newt carefully slipped out from underneath Credence’s feet and stood up.

Modesty’s eyes fluttered open.

“… Newt?”

Thinking quickly on his feet, he raised a finger to his lips and nodded his head towards her brother.

Glancing down at the still-sleeping Credence, Modesty quickly got the message.

Newt leaned over and Modesty loosely wrapped her arms around his neck. He carefully pulled her off the couch and carried her into the kitchen, certain not to make any noise.

“I’m going to put you down now,” he murmured, “If that’s alright with you.”

She nodded.

Newt gently placed her onto the counter.

Modesty yawned and leaned her head against the ice box.

“Do you want to go back to sleep? You can take my bedroom if you’re still tired,” Newt offered between selecting a pan from the bottom cupboard and striking a match to start the stove, “There’s lots of pillows and blankets in there. Very cozy.”

“Mmm,” Modesty’s eyes fluttered closed, struggling to stay awake, “Sleep is for the weak.”

“Modesty.”

“'m not goin’ back t’ bed.”

Newt sighed and took out a mixing bowl.

“Very well,” he hummed, trying to find the whisk between the million drawers in front of him, “Would you like to help me with something instead?”

“Depends,” Modesty mumbled, “Whatdy’a need help with?”

“How would you like to help me play Santa and make breakfast for everyone?”
“Can’t you just magic it up?”

“I could,” Newt grimaced upon finally finding the whisk and setting it on the counter. “But I’ve yet to get a wand replacement.”

“Can’t you just use Credence’s?”

“Excellent idea, love.”

And he meant that genuinely.

“Your brother suggested that too. Wands are picky things. Their loyalties lie with their chosen wizard but, on certain occasions, they can be used by family members or people they love,” Newt crossed the kitchen, grabbing the tub of flour and other essentials he needed, “However, Credence’s decided to give me a little zap when I tried going near it. I’d rather like to keep use of my fingers.”

Modesty snorted and scooted closer.

“Fingers are important,” she ultimately decided, “What’re we making?”

Newt set the ingredients on the counter.

“Pancakes.”

Modesty noticeably perked up.

“Can we make them into smiley faces?”

“Of course. We can make them into anything you’d like.”

“Can you make them into dragons then?” Modesty’s eyes twinkled, all traces of sleep gone, “Please, please, please? Can you make them into dragons, Newt?”

Newt was taken aback by her enthusiasm.

But he soon smiled and tapped his forehead conspiratively with his thumb and forefinger, “I think that can be arranged.”

They gathered the remaining ingredients onto the counter and mixed them in a bowl. Newt helped Modesty measure out the flour and sugar and carefully let her crack the eggs into the mixture. They whisked together the batter and soon transferred it into a piping bag.

Then, Newt proceeded to grease the frying pan and created dragons out of thin air.

Dragons with mighty wings arched high above them. Rounded snouts pointed proudly into the air. Tails curled tightly around themselves as they snoozed. Jaws opened wide as they roared flames of fire.

“You’re really good at this.”

Newt smiled.

“I should hope so,” he said while designing a Hungarian Horntail raised on its hind legs, “I used to work exclusively with dragons.”

Modesty’s mouth dropped.
“No way.”

“Oh yes. Magnificent creatures they are.”

“Do you have one in your suitcase?” she asked excitedly, “Can you take me to see them?”

Newt considered it.

While he’d been jumping at the chance to take Credence to see his old friends, Credence was a budding wizard and powerful Obscurial that could handle the risks of such an encounter. A nine-year-old that, while incredibly feisty, had little means of protecting herself in front of such beasts? Probably not the best of ideas.

“No and maybe someday,” Newt ultimately decided, “It’s nothing personal, understand? Dragons are finicky creatures, moreso than Hippogriffs, and it takes considerable time gaining their trust. I’m one of the world’s foremost experts on dragons and their social habits. I’ve slept in their caves among their elders. I’ve protected their eggs from harm. I’ve nursed their injured back to health and raised their young.”

He looked up and met Modesty’s eyes.

“And I still ended up on the receiving end of a wave of dragonfire.”

“Oh.”

Modesty dropped her gaze momentarily before looking back up again, determination forged anew.

“What about wyverns?”

Newt blinked.

The scent of beginning-to-be-burnt pancakes wafted through the air.

Newt quickly returned his attention to the task at hand.

“You know the difference between dragons and wyverns?”

“Yes,” Modesty nodded firmly and swung her feet back and forth underneath her, “Credence snuck home a book from the library about them once. Wyverns and Dragons. Wyrms and Drakes. He’d read them to me and then I’d pretend to rescue him from a castle riding a wyvern named Charlie.”

“A most appropriate name for a wyvern. Maybe I should’ve made you my apprentice instead,” he teased and nodded at her hands, “Plate.”

Modesty held it out and he flopped another pancake onto the already massive tower.

The sound of footsteps entered the kitchen.

“I see how it is,” Credence yawned from the entryway, resting his shoulder against the arch, “My own sister. Conspiring to take my job away from me.”

Modesty grinned and puffed out her chest.

“Can’t help if I’m better than you at it.”

“You never mentioned that Modesty here was a bonafide dragon expert,” Newt hummed, “I might
end up paying her a consulting fee in exchange for helping me on my book.”

Modesty’s eyes bulged.

“You’re writing a book about dragons?!”

“On fantastic beasts and where to find them, more or less. Dragons and wyverns will be a feature,” Newt answered and turned off the stove. He wiped off his hands on the dishtowel hanging across the oven handle and lifted Modesty off the counter. “How about you go put those on the table for me while I clean this up?”

“Sounds good to me.”

Modesty ran through the kitchen and bolted past Credence. However, something made her quickly backtrack and run back to her brother, saying something that Newt couldn’t quite hear.

Credence’s cheeks turned red.

Modesty grinned and returned to the dining room.

Newt quirked a brow but ultimately chose not to say anything as he gathered up the dirty dishes and dropped them into the sink. He switched on the warm water and haphazardly rolled up his sleeves.

A shadow dropped over him.

“I’m not really replacing you,” Newt clarified softly, scrubbing the dirtied mixing bowl and other utensils, “I was just teasing.”

Credence smiled.

“I know. Thank you.”

“So, what did Modesty say?”

Credence rested his head against Newt’s shoulder, wrapping his arms tiredly around his waist.

“It seems you’ve left quite the impression. She said that she wouldn’t mind, and I quote, having another Barebone in the family,” he answered, his voice light in amusement, “I don’t know if she wants to marry you or adopt you.”

Newt spluttered.

His cheeks warmed.

“I— uhm— I don’t know what to say.”

“Should I be jealous?”

“Credence, I—”

“Leaving me on Christmas of all days.”

“Credence, love—”

“And for my own sister no less.”

Newt laughed and nudged his side.
Credence lazily pressed his lips against his neck and squeezed him.

“Sorry, I’m only teasing,” he murmured, “I’m used to the strange things kids say. Modesty doesn’t do it too often though.”

“I don’t pretend to understand the minds of children.”

“Hmm, for someone who doesn’t understand them, you’re pretty good with them,” Credence’s voice lowered, soft and sweet, “It was nice of you to do this, Newt. It was… a nice thing to wake up to.”

“You needed the sleep,” Newt hummed, “And she needed something to do and we all needed breakfast. So, I just suggested that we make something that I actually know how to cook.”

“Oh, so that’s why the house hasn’t burned down.”

Newt puffed out his cheeks.

“Oh hush.”

Everyone slowly gathered into the kitchen as they woke up.

Queenie was the first to enter. She cheerily fawned over the platters upon platters of pancakes overtaking the table, dragging a still half-asleep Jacob behind her. Theseus, dressed fancier than anyone ought to be on Christmas morning, entered next soon followed by Delia.

Her eyes widened and she looked Newt tidying up the kitchen with such a heartbreaking fondness that Credence had never seen before. She pressed a hand against her mouth but didn’t say a word.

They began eating when Alma and Tina entered, hand-in-hand.

As everyone took their seats at the table, Modesty proudly puffed out her chest and proclaimed that she made them. Credence spotted Newt smiling over at the sink.

It was nice seeing this side of Newt.

Not to say that he didn’t love that chaotic bundle of energy that he normally was. He did. But seeing Newt acting like a patient older brother to Modesty… it meant something wonderful to Credence. As if everything was finally sliding into place exactly how it should be. His two worlds were melding together and getting along better than he had ever imagined.

The couch had a direct line of sight to the kitchen.

So, when he had woken up that morning, Credence had watched Newt and Modesty interacting together for, perhaps, the first time without him.

He’d watched as Newt patiently guided Modesty through all the steps of making pancakes. Teaching her how to hold the whisk without hurting her wrist, how to crack an egg with a single hand, the secret to making the best pancakes ever being a dash of vanilla extract and cinnamon.

He’d watched as Modesty accidentally dropped a bit of eggshell into the batter.
How she hurriedly apologized. How she looked up at Newt in fear and alarm. How she held her hands against her chest.

Credence’s scars ached.

Modesty may have been a headstrong little girl, but she too had lived in the Barebone household. There were certain things you just did not do and one of those was making a mistake.

But Newt just scooped it out with his fingers and loudly proclaimed that a dropped eggshell meant good luck. His excitement rubbed off on her and, soon enough, Modesty was laughing instead of cowering in fear.

And it made Credence fall just a little more in love with him.

A sudden thump came from the living room.

“Hey kid,” Graves’ voice drawled, “Get your ass over here! I’ve got something for ya.”

Modesty scrambled out of her seat.

Credence quickly followed and Newt did too. Soon enough, everyone’s curiosity piqued and slowly reconvened in the living room around the Christmas tree.

Only to find one Percival Graves standing in the fireplace, wearing an all-too-familiar red coat and hat.

“You— Graves, you—” Modesty wheezed, laughing so incredibly hard that she flopped down onto the floor and wiped away tears from her eyes, “Y’know I don’t believe in Santa Claus, right?”

“No shit,” he snorted and knelt down before her, “But considering that what I’m giving you is the best goddamned gift in the world, I figured I’d get into the holiday spirit.”

“Queenie, quick. Get a camera,” Tina murmured, “We have to show everyone back at work.”

“Remember that time I was locked in a suitcase, Miss Goldstein,” Graves drawled, “And you didn’t notice?”

Tina groaned.

“You’re still going on about that?”

“As long as you still feel guilty over it? Absolutely.”

Graves promptly turned his attention back to Modesty and grabbed something from his back pocket. He hesitated for a moment. Doubt crossed his stern features, making him seem more young and vulnerable than he really was. But it was gone as quickly as it appeared.

“Here,” Graves shoved the piece of paper into her hands, “If you don’t like it, I can have it reversed. It wouldn’t be too much of a hassle—”

“Mr. Graves, shut up,” Modesty hands trembled as she looked up from the paper, “Really?”

That vulnerable look again.

“Only if you want me to.”
“One condition.”

“You name it.”

“I get to call you Dad from now on.”

Graves swallowed thickly and pulled at his collar, “I guess I’ll allow it.”

Modesty beamed and jumped onto him, wrapping her arms around his neck. Graves hesitated for a prolonged moment before holding her close against him, the tiniest of smiles crossing his face.

Credence didn’t know how to feel about this.

On the one hand, he was glad that Graves finally took the plunge and made what they all knew official. Modesty deserved a father like him. One that encouraged her feistiness but also knew when to step in. One that could provide for her and make sure she never spent another winter cold and hungry. They were happy but Credence—

He was all alone now.

Modesty would forever be his sister. That would never change.

But there was nothing except their bond and shared life experiences linking them together now. They were neither siblings in blood nor ink.

“Don’t think I forgot about you, kid.”

Credence looked up.

And found Graves standing in front of him.

“… I don’t understand.”

“I ain’t the type to break up families,” he muttered and thrust something into his hands, “So, if you want to…”

Credence looked down and his heart stopped.

“You’re adopting me?” his voice cracked, “But I’m old and— and you don’t have to if you don’t want to. I wouldn’t want to impose—”

“Nonsense,” Graves interrupted and placed his hands firmly upon his shoulders, “I’m not just gonna adopt a daughter and leave her brother behind. You’re my kids.”

Credence dropped the papers to the ground and tightly embraced him.

“Oh,” Graves shifted awkwardly, “You’re a hugger too.”

“Thank you,” Credence’s voice warbled, “Thank you.”

He wasn’t being left behind after all.

No.

His family was only growing.

Graves slowly wrapped his arms around Credence and, after a moment, gently patted his back. God,
was this what having a Dad felt like?

A camera suddenly flashed.

“Queenie,” Graves instantly pulled back and snarled, “If that roll of film isn’t in my office by the
time we get back, you’re fired.”

“I work in a separate department, sweetie, so you can’t fire me without justified cause,” she giggled
and escaped into the kitchen, “Besides, proof that Mr. Graves is a big ole softie is genuine promotion
material. Oh! The Santa Suit is just a guaranteed bonus right there.”

“Fuck,” Graves ran his hands down his face, “I’m already regretting this.”

“Too late,” Modesty tugged on his coat and teased, “You’re stuck with us now, Dad.”

“Double fuck,” he groaned, yet he couldn’t hide the smile tugging at his face, “Go open the rest of
your presents, kiddo, before I change my mind.”

Graves stepped around them and headed towards the kitchen, cupping his hands around his face.

“You hear that, Queenie? It’s present time. Go open your goddamned gift before I throw it at you.
Don’t you give me that smirk, Porpentina. Alma Mae, I’m disappointed in you. This is no laughing
matter—”

Credence placed his hand against his chest, still hardly able to believe what just happened.

He looked down at Modesty who grinned in similar disbelief. He gestured in the direction Graves
went and she just nodded furiously, raising her hands in the air.

“Santa Claus…” Credence breathed, trying so hard not to laugh, “Just adopted us.”

“I know, right?” Modesty giggled.

“Did that just really happen? Modesty pinch me.”

“I’d rather not.”

“Okay, I’ll pinch you then,” he grinned down at her, hands outstretched, “And you can tell me if
we’re dreaming.”

“Credence!” Modesty laughed and bolted underneath his legs to the other side of the living room.

Credence chased her around the couch and scooped her up into his arms, mercilessly tickling her
sides. He was so happy. He swore that he could fly to the very moon and back if he tried.

“Credence?”

He paused and looked up.

Tina was standing there, awkwardly shifting from foot-to-foot. She held something long and thin that
tapered out at the end, wrapped up in brown paper and tied together with tightly wound strings. She
hesitated for a moment longer before thrusting it out to him, “Merry Christmas. I hope this is…
alright.”

Credence set Modesty down, who bolted towards the Christmas tree, and accepted the gift.
“Tina, I—” he started.

“Open it first,” she smiled softly, “Please.”

He untied the strings and unwrapped the paper.

His breath hitched.

“Is this— is this what I think it is?”

“Yes.”

Credence didn’t know what to say.

So, instead, he caressed the curved wood underneath his fingertips with all the reverence of a saint towards the Holy Book. Delicate amber bands wrapped around the handle, the words *Cirrus 1925* carved in bronze lettering just underneath.

“My very own broom.”

“I talked to my aunts too,” Tina scratched the back of her neck, her cheeks turning pink, “They offered to give you lessons. Free of charge. All you gotta do is let them know you’re heading over ahead of time.”

“Tina,” Credence held the broomstick close to his chest, his eyes watering for the second time this past minute, “Thank you.”

Everything felt like a dream.

Everyone became preoccupied with exchanging gifts quickly after that.

Newt practically threw off his boots and quickly slipped on the embroidered socks that Credence got him. He showed them off to Theseus who nearly laughed at the words *left* and *right* scrawled across them so that Newt didn’t have any excuse to wear them mismatched.

Delia cracked a smile at the chocolates she’d received from Modesty. Alma gushed over the violet cashmere scarf Tina got her. Jacob’s eyes grew comically wide at the enchanted mixer he received from Newt.

Everyone was just so happy.

Credence received an old family recipe book from Jacob and a wide-brimmed hat from Theseus. Delia had knitted him a Slytherin-styled scarf with his initials in silver and Alma presented him with a set of Thunderbird house robes lined with a silk interior. Queenie got him a pair of the softest slippers ever.

Credence looked over all his presents from his friends and family. A warm, fuzzy feeling wrapped him up from head to toe.

Anything more and his heart would burst.

So, of course, that’s when Newt approached and handed him a metallic green box covered with a large scarlet bow on top.

“Merry Christmas, Credence.”
Credence removed the lid and his heart promptly seized up and atrophied inside his chest to make room for the sheer overwhelming wave of emotion filling him up from the top of his head to the soles of his feet.

Inside was a beautiful leather journal, detailed with a white opal butterfly in the middle.

Credence lifted it out of the box.

“If I may…” Newt nervously fiddled with his hair, averting his gaze, “I’d recommend looking inside.”

Credence looked at Newt briefly and, slowly, opened the journal.

Charcoal eyes met his.

Inside were sketches and they were all of him.

Sketches of Credence gazing wistfully out a train window, of him chopping vegetables with his hair tied back, of him making faces at the Kraken when his hair had barely touched the bottoms of his ears. Sketches of him asleep in Newt’s bed, of him curled up in a chair reading A History of Magic, of him balancing Modesty on his shoulders.

Sketches of him when he had fed the Occamies on his own for the first time, a smile at his face that looked remarkably like Newt’s.

Credence’s cheeks felt mysteriously wet.

He flipped through the journal and witnessed his entire life with Newt thus far unfolding out on paper. And then, no more than five or six pages in, he found a note addressed with his name.

_Credence,_

*If there is one thing, I could give to you in this life, it would be the ability to see how I see you. If I could lend you my very eyes, I would plop them out right now and offer them to you on a silver platter just so you could realize how special you are. You have come so very far since I first saw you standing on that street corner handing out leaflets to whomever would accept them. I’m so incredibly proud of you.*

*I once mentioned something along these lines to you before: the greatest of adventures start with ‘you shouldn’t have done this’ and even greater ones start with helping someone else.*

*So, I want you to take a good look around you and see all the good that you’ve put in the world, all the lives you’ve touched. And then, once you’re done, take a good long look at the mirror because there is no greater person that you’ve helped than yourself.*

*These past few months, all their ups and downs and zig-zags, have been the best moments of my life. You have been my greatest adventure, Credence.*

*Now, it’s time for you to start writing yours.*

_Yours most ardently,_

_Newt Scamander._

Credence’s hands trembled.
The tears wouldn’t stop falling.

He lifted his blurred gaze and fell entirely in love with Newt all over again, if not even harder and deeper this time around.

“Is it too much?” Newt continued avoided his eyes and twirled his hair so intensely that Credence feared it might break off, “I’m well aware of my tendency to go overboard. I just wasn’t certain on what to get you—”

“Newt.”

“And everyone else got you all these nice, meaningful things. And I just—”

“Newt.”

“I hope you like it, but if you don’t, I can get you something else—”

“Newt, look at me.”

Newt lifted his gaze and instantly clamped his mouth shut.

Credence held the journal against his chest, embracing it liked he would a lover — like he would Newt.

He knew very well that he was ugly crying. That his face was flushed and that his lips were quivering and that snot dripped from his nose down his chin. But he was just so happy that he couldn’t stop even if he tried.

“It’s perfect.”

Newt stepped closer and lifted his hand to his cheek, hesitating until Credence leaned into his touch. Newt’s thumb brushed along underneath his eye, wiping away the tears even though it was quickly replaced with more.

“May I?” his voice was soft, gentle.

Credence almost laughed.

“Even when I look like this?”

“Why wouldn’t I want to kiss you when you look beautiful?”

Credence blushed and wiped his nose before silencing him with a kiss.

Newt Scamander.

Savior.

Friend.

His heart and soul.

Merlin, he loved him so much.

A sudden cry traveled through the air pulling Newt and Credence away from each other, making them look towards the Christmas tree.
Tina had dropped down onto one knee and was opening up a velvet box before Alma. Alma was vigorously shaking her head yes and Tina grinned as she slipped a shining silver ring onto her finger. An engagement ring.

As the pair flew into each other’s arms and Queenie snapped a picture of the occasion, Credence looked towards Newt.

And smiled.

Now, wasn’t that a thought?

Chapter End Notes

THIS IS IT EVERYONE ! ! ! THE FINAL FINAL CHAPTER OF GREEN MEADOWS, DARK SKIES.

This fic started out as a little blurb on Google Docs about Credence and a paper butterfly. Little did I know that it would turn out to be so much more than that. I have learned so much about myself as a writer and what I want to put out into the world because of this fic and the lovely people who have supported me throughout this entire process. This was my first completed work of fanfiction ever and you all have provided me so much guidance and inspiration. You all truly made this all happen and I'd like to take this moment to thank all of you.

So what comes next?

I'm taking a brief break before moving onto the unnamed sequel to GMDS. In the meantime, let me point you in the direction of Forgotten Memories, Hidden Scars which tells in detail how Newt first met Credence. I also have another fic that I'm working on called Bleed Into You which is a renaissance vampire crewt AU. So, if y'all want to see vampire!Credence who thinks he's terrifying but always ends up crying in the end and artist!Newt being literal sunshine, go check it out! There's also bat!Pickett if that tickles your fancy.

I'll also be doing some fine editing on GMDS after the start of the new year! So, keep your eye out for a couple of new scenes and additional content.

And without further ado, please leave your comments and constructive criticism below! What are your predictions for the GMDS sequel? What has been your favorite chapter or moment of the series? Which scenes made you laugh, cry, curl up in a ball because of all the cuteness? Everything that you have to say, I eagerly await!

My tumblr is: darthpricklypear if y'all want to come talk and hang out with me! I post live updates on my fics, fantastic beasts content, and other miscellaneous things that usually, somehow, always lead back to crewt lol. Hope to see y'all there!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!