**The Greatest Minister in History**

by Dunuelos

**Summary**

The Lone Traveler arrives on the even of Fudge's election. Instead of pelting Dumbledore for advice, the new Minister listens to a new viewpoint. Much is changed.

**Notes**

"The Lone Traveler: Young man who tried to change the past and save those he loved… plan failed and became the Lone Traveler, wandering through time and reality, making a difference wherever he went… very powerful… defeated a powerful Dark wizard styling himself a Lord… swept along the path he walked by a spectacular aura of blue light."

'Legends & Myths of the Wizarding World' by Gertrude Yolanda
Cornelius Fudge sat within his new office, basking in the feel of victory.

He had come a long way from the Department of Magical Maintenance. He knew that he was not the favorite candidate for most anyone, but he was the best compromised between the pureblood factions and the "light" side.

He sighed. Neither one of the sides seemed to hold much expectation of him. He was also not that good of an administrator – preferring for others to do the actual work.

Now that he was Minister for Magic, he had to ask himself: What would he do now?

Suddenly, in front of him, a bright light appeared. He was so shocked that he didn't even consider calling for the protective detail that was always on call.

The blue light changed into the form of a man and then suddenly winked out. Before him stood a man in muggle clothes – he looked vaguely familiar. "Who are you?"

The man looked around and then at him and said, "I'm known in many times and places as the Lone Traveler. Have you ever heard of me?"

Cornelis gasped. "That's a legend! A fairytale!"

The man grinned. "Consider me a legend come to life then." The man paused, "What exactly is the date and what exactly were you doing?"

"It's July 2, 1990. I was elected to the position of Minister for Magic during the election held at the Summer Solstice and took my oath today. I'm trying to decide what to do next."

The man sighed. "I see. Well, I should probably tell you that you have heard my name: Harry Potter. And if you make the same cock-ups that you did in my world, you'll end up being forced out in disgrace in a few years. But, since I usually appear pretty close to whomever I'm supposed to help, I guess the Universe has decided that it needs change. Are you willing to accept my advice?"

Cornelius considered that. He had learned about the tale of the Lone Traveler as a child. According to everything he knew, the man was a force of good and whomever had dealings with him usually came out ahead. It wasn't a hard decision. "Where should I start?"

Cornelius Fudge sat within the Wizengamot chambers and listened to the various arguments for and against the different people that were named to different posts. The Ministry Elections often brought vast reorganization and this one was no different.

The Traveler's first advice was to listen and to learn. The first problem with most magicals, he was told, was that they had no common sense. The ability to do magic seemed to engender the inability to follow logic.

And the truth of that was very obvious in a number of arguments made. Finally he stood up and, upon the Chief Warlock getting control of the chamber and giving him the floor, Cornelius Fudge finally spoke. "Before the Wizenmagot completes the final naming of new directors and officers or the upholding of the previous ones, I would like to speak to a matter which has become more apparent as I learn more and more of my new position as Minister."
"The matter at hand is this: The Ministry for Magic is extremely complicated and confusing." There were murmurs of agreement and disagreement throughout the chamber. These still when the Minister started talking again. "The problem that I have seen is that the Wizengamot and the Ministers before me have seemed to make arrangements on the basis of one crisis or another, tacking on this office or that to handle the problem at hand. While this has fixed the immediate issues or at least brought them under a semblance of control, it makes the whole Ministry structure … unstable.

"Now, I am a traditionalist. While I recognize that we need a government in place to ensure the health and wellbeing of our citizenry, I also think that we try far, far too hard to control the actions of said citizenry. A wizard or a witch should be able to live unencumbered by unnecessary control. The Ministry for Magic is charged, at its base, to ensure the smooth working of our society and to ensure that we do not allow problems which might infringe upon the lives of our people. The Statute of Secrecy, in a way, is the overriding purpose for much of what we do.

"We spend Galleon after Galleon to fix this problem or that and do not set up the organization to effectively manage the issues without eating up more and more resources. My god, the amount that we spend on just parchment is staggering. While I am certain that the parchment providers quite enjoy the profit we give them, I'd like to be a little more reasonable about the funds that we collect in taxes and fees. I'm certain that most of you don't enjoy paying so much in taxes for every little thing." The humor in the Minister's statement did engender a few chuckles here and there.

"To that end, I would like to begin to propose changes to the structure of the Ministry so that we can ensure a more stable, efficient, and – dare I hope – cost effective structure without the place falling apart at the seams. The first step is to start up the top: What are the main purposes or sections the Ministry – or at least what should they be? In my understanding, they are 1) Internal Governmental structure, 2) National Magical Laws and Regulations, and 3) International Law and Cooperation. Is there anything that we are supposed to do that isn't included in these three categories?" Cornelius paused and said, "Oh – and we'll put the Department of Mysteries away from this. Long standing tradition gives them autonomy to ensure that they can handle the magical cockups that our normal government ignores, creates accidentally, or can't handle in the normal course of business. We aren't likely to reorganize THAT can of nifflers so I am going to leave it alone. Anyway – as I asked: Is there anything that doesn't fall under these three areas?"

There were murmurs and small discussions, but, in the end, there was no one who could disagree with the Minister's analysis. "Very good then. I am having the clerk distribute my immediate proposal. While he hands out the parchment – Merlin, there's always parchment – I will explain my basic proposal: The Ministry of Magic will reorganize as follows: There shall be three main sections within the Ministry.

"Section 1 will be the Ministry Management controlled by an Undersecretary for the Ministry. I have no name for this position as of this moment and, therefore, I shall have to do this myself until one is named - although Augusta Longbottom IS a witch of good standing and long lineage who I am certain would love to get the place under control. Anyway, this overdivision, if you will, would include the Wizengamot, Wizengamot Services, Department of Magical Maintenance, Department of Finance – someone's got to control the money – and any other office, division, or section which has to do with the internal workings of the Ministry.

The second overdivision would be Magical Law and Regulation, the position of Director of Magical Law Enforcement would be relabeled as the Undersecretary for Magical Law. This would include the Auror Office, regular law enforcement, licensing offices, Magical Creatures, Improper Use of Magic, Magical Transportation, and anything which basically affects the average wizard on the street or has to do with enforcement. So Azkaban would be in this overdivision. This is, as the
Department of Magical Law Enforcement is currently, the beefy part of the Ministry – handling the reasons we actually exist in the first place. Amelia Bones as the new Director of Magical Law Enforcement would be installed as the new Undersecretary.

"And finally, the last overdivision would be International Law and Cooperation with two Departments: The Department of the Exterior for dealing with foreign governments, trade, coordination, etc. The Director of the Exterior could be Bartemeeus Crouch, currently named as Director of International Relations. The International Magical Trading Standards Body, International Magical Office of Law, International Confederation of Wizards, British Seats – these would all be in that Department so there is no real change from now.

The second Department would be the Department of the Interior. By the way – these are quite similar to the Muggle government agencies. So if anyone every slips up and a muggle hears the names – no problem with the Statute. Anyway, the Director of the Interior would handle all matters which have to do with foreign governments within Great Britain and Ireland. This is mostly the muggles – he'd be the Liaison to the Prime Minister instead of myself. This department would deal with accidental magic, Muggleworthy excuse committee, Obliviator Headquarters – with a liaison from the Magical Law area to coordinate. Misuse of Muggle artifacts would be under Magical Law as this has to do with magicals mucking around with the Statute – something we want to avoid. The Interior would also hold the Goblin and Centaur Liaison Offices."

There were immediate protests. Finally one overriding one came out, "They are magical creatures and should fall under that area as they do now."

Cornelius sighed. He knew this one was going to be one of the hard ones. "I know. And the reason is, of course, is Clause 73 of the International Statute of Secrecy: 'Each wizarding governing body will be responsible for the concealment, care and control of all magical beasts, beings, and spirits dwelling within its territory's borders. Should any such creature cause harm to, or draw the notice of, the Muggle community, that nation's wizarding governing body will be subject to discipline by the International Confederation of Wizards.' Have I got that right?"

There were murmurs of agreement. "Well, I'm sorry to burst your bubble but the goblins, according to treaties we have had with them for centuries, do not fall within our legal borders. According to treaty, Gringotts and the areas that goblins control are separate. And they stay strictly away from muggles anyway – as do the Centaurs. Try to tell a Centaur or a Goblin what to do – I'm certain the arrow or knife you get in your gullet will be most educational. The Centaurs don't care and the goblins don't care. Why should they? They don't violate the treaties. Why are we spending gold on trying to deal with something that isn't even a problem? And if you DO have a problem with Gringotts, wouldn't you like a person with a bit more pull to help you sort it out rather than the worker in a sub-sub department of Magical Law Enforcement? And, IF they violate the International Statute of Secrecy – THEY can pay the penalty, and not the Ministry."

There were a number of small conversations and comments around the chamber, but no one could refute the Minister's position. "Anyway – we have to talk about this before we vote on it. I want to give us … 40 days. By then we can work out any issues with this. Oh, and my suggestion for Director of the Interior is Arthur Weasley. The man, according to reports, loves muggles. I say: Let him deal with them. He'll take them off the plate of Magical Law which should be helping our citizens. Anyway, once we approve – IF it gets approval – I'd then propose the new Undersecretaries to put forward a proposed structure for their areas so that we don't have to spend all of our time in these chambers arguing things that are rather below our station. So, here's my proposal. Do I have a second?"

The Chief Warlock moved forward and said, "We have a proposal for the Ministry Restructuring
Bill to be voted on in 40 days. Do we have a second?"

There were several wands lit about the chamber. The new Minister's proposal was interesting enough that many wanted to see where it went.

Amelia Bones, recently names as Director of Magical Law Enforcement, was sitting with the new Minister for Magic. "Minister, your proposal came out of nowhere."

Cornelius smiled. "I know. Mostly this is about clear lines of structure, chain of command and all that. Want to know a secret?"

Amelia looked at the new Minister. "Certainly."

"Mostly it's to contain Dumbledore."

"Dumbledore?"

"Yes. While I admire the man greatly and he has done great service for our people, it's a little disconcerting when I noticed exactly how much control that one man had of our society. While I am just as likely as anyone to get advice from the man, he's only ONE man. I can't have the entirety of the Ministry beholden to one man when he's also supposed to be teaching our children AND to deal with foreign politics. So, while the position of Chief Warlock is mightily important, I don't want it to have undue influence in all areas of life."

Amelia considered that and nodded. "Taking the Wizengamot out from under the Director of Magical Law Enforcement creates problems."

Cornelius asked, "Who will hear criminal cases?"

Amelia nodded.

"If my proposal goes through, we're going to have to make up judicial panels to hear crimes separate from the Wizengamot. We name five Wizengamot members as the Judiciary for criminal cases; five members for a Civil Law panel – lawsuits and disagreements and all of that; individual members to run preliminary hearings; a nine-member panel as an appeals panel – the Chief Warlock can run that panel – and, finally, if a situation isn't resolved with that structure, the entire Wizengamot can be petitioned to hear a case. This way the Wizengamot as a whole doesn't get bogged down hearing about petty theft, but the average citizen can be assured of his rights if he's arrested. There will be a section for prosecutors so that you don't have to do all the work on that – your position is too valuable for that as well and Aurors should be out catching criminals, not speaking to the Wizengamot."

Amelia gave Cornelius a thoughtful look. "You've actually considered these things."

"I received … inspiration, let's just say. Anyway, as to why you're here …"

Amelia nodded. "Yes. According to law, the Ministry has to do an annual inspection of Azkaban. And that's traditionally mid-July. I wanted to coordinate the schedule."

Cornelius sighed. "Not an experience I'm looking forward to."

"I should think not."

"Well, alright then. I'd suggest 16 July – that's two weeks from yesterday. That should give you time to make preparations. Oh – and it should also give you time to get together a list of prisoners
and their dates of conviction and whatnot."

Amelia cocked her head. "What do you mean?"

"Well, if I'm going to be checking to see if prisoners are being properly controlled and all of that, I want to know what exactly they were convicted of, when the Wizengamot sent them, when their time is up, are they being housed in the correct section – minimum vs. maximum security – and whatever else is relevant. I don't want to find a muggleborn witch given 90 days for apparating without a license being exposed to dementors 24 hours a day and I don't want to see someone like Rebastian Lestrange being served tea and crumpets by his personal house elf. I have a responsibility that criminals are properly punished but I have responsibility to the convicts that they aren't being needlessly tortured."

Amelia looked surprised. "I don't think the previous Ministers ever even thought about that."

"Well, Amelia, I'm the Minister now. And I'll do the job as I think is appropriate."

Amelia gave the Minister a respectful nod of acknowledgement.

Cornelius Fudge made his way into his home via the floo. He exited into his study – only his office had this connection and it was new. He wondered where his wife was at the moment.

"Hello, Minister."

Cornelius jumped and then caught his breath. "Potter, I just got to the post of Minister. I'd rather you not assassinate me with fright."

"Sorry. I've been keeping out of sight as we agreed. How did things go?"

"Well, the reorganization vote is scheduled. I confided in Amelia the reason behind it. She didn't seem to disagree," the Minister said while sitting at his desk. He poured a brandy for himself and his guest.

"Amelia always does seem to have a good head on her shoulders. I've not met any who were venal and stupid." Harry accepted the glass provided.

Cornelius took a sip and said, "By the way – that matter about Black has been started."

"Oh?"

Cornelius nodded. "Amelia came to schedule my annual visit. I told her to get the records together of the various prisoners, dates of conviction, and scheduled release dates. She seems bright enough to run across what we need her to find without further prompting."

Harry sighed. "We can always hope. Oh, and I happened to be in Gringotts when word of your proposal filtered through gossip."

Cornelius couldn't contain his curiosity. "And what was the general reaction?"

"They seemed to realize that your comment about them violating the Statute and paying the fines for it was political manoeuvring. Your suggestion to have a wizard trying to order them about and getting knife in their gullet for their trouble made them very amused. Overall, they seemed quite thoughtful about it all."

Cornelius sighed in relief. "As long as I'm not about to precipitate another Goblin rebellion, I can
live with it."

Harry chuckled. "You're likely to be preventing the next one actually."

Cornelius held his cup out for Harry to toast with him. "Here's to calm goblins."

Harry clinked his glass. "I can agree with that." They both drank.

Cornelius said, "I'll have to stop in when I visit the shops this week."

"So you're taking that suggestion as well?"

"Yes." Cornelius paused with a thoughtful look. "I've never really considered what would happen to the economy without the muggleborn entering every year. Or realized how poorly it affects us to have them disappear after leaving Hogwarts."

"The only way to increase the economy is to increase the number of people spending money. I've never understood the pureblood mantra about getting rid of the new entries for that reason alone."

Cornelius nodded.

Cornelius Fudge found himself at the Leaky Cauldron. It was Thursday morning about 10:00 and there were a few patrons. Two bodyguards stood ready if needed, but it was unlikely.

Tom, the barkeep, called out, "Minister! What can I do for you today?"

Fudge walked over and said, "Well, I'll have what they're having." He pointed to two run of the mill wizards who were having a tankard.

Surprised, Tom filled the order. "On the house," he said as he pushed the tankard over.

Cornelius chuckled and dropped a Galleon on the table. "Not today, Tom. Today I'm going to taking some of your valuable time. I'll accept another time." Cornelius took a sip. It took him back to when he first started working at the Ministry and ale was all he could afford. "Now, a question: How's business?"

It was noticed by many in Diagon Alley and Hogsmeade that Cornelius Fudge did not disdain getting out and talking to the average wizard or witch. Many shops saw the new Minister come in and look around. Some saw him pay for small things for his wife, children, and grandchildren. Every proprietor spent a few minutes with the Minister taking an interest in their store.

Many positive comments about Cornelius Fudge could be heard around Britain that night.

One visit was very different.

Cornelius Fudge walked into Gringotts Bank and, to the surprise of the other witches and wizards present, got into line. Everyone noted that he left his guards outside, waiting.

The goblins were not slow and very soon a goblin dressed perhaps a little more finely than most approached. "Minister Cornelius Fudge. How can we help you today?"

"Ah, my good banker, I have a few small inquiries to make regarding available services. I had hopes of setting up an appointment for a consultation."

The goblin looked at the man and glanced out to see the wizard's protection detail waiting beyond the bank's doors. "Come this way, please."
Cornelius nodded and followed the goblin.

The goblin led him to an office which was rather stark and sat down at the desk. He invited the Minister to take a seat with a wave of his hand.

"Thank you," the Minister said as he sat down.

"Would you like refreshment?" the goblin asked.

The Minister looked squarely at the goblin and said, "If you are taking refreshment as well, I won't say no. But don't put yourself out on my account."

The goblin looked at him for a moment and, without looking away, called out a word in his own language. From another door, another goblin came in with a small tray. It had a decanter and two glasses.

The new goblin put these down and retreated. The one who had led the minister to the office poured into the two cups and then motioned for the Minister to take one.

The minister did. Murmering his thanks, he took a sip even as his host did. The Minister put down the glass and said, "Good water."

"Yes." The goblin sat his own glass down and asked, "Do you mind if I asked a question before we begin?" The goblin looked as though he couldn't care less, but was being polite.

"Yes, go ahead."

"We have heard rumours as to a restructuring of your Government and who proposed it. Is there a reason we were not consulted?"

Cornelius smiled and replied, "I am certain that your people do not waste your time trying to talk to us when you propose changes in your own organization, even when it deals with magical humans. I didn't think you'd find it necessary for me to do so. And do your people really care what we wizards do outside of your doors?"

The goblin paused for a moment and then nodded. "There is that. Now: How can I help you today?"

"I need to know if certain services are available and their possible costs."

"Which services?"

"Can your people ward an area that might contain objects cursed with dark magic in such a way that the taint does not extend past the ward barrier?"

The goblin paused. "It can be done."

"And how much?"

"50 Galleons per square foot for an area less than 20 square feet. 20 Galleons per square foot for an area up between 20 and 100 square feet. 10 Galleons per square foot for any area between 100 and 900 square feet."

Cornelius nodded. "So, anywhere from 50 Galleons to several thousand – depending on the area. Now, can your cursebreakers remove any dark magic that might have tainted a child or adult that has spent any time around dark objects?"
"Yes. 200 Galleons."

"Good, good. And can you certify such proceedings when completed?"

"Yes." The goblin paused. "Why do you ask?"

"Throughout Britain there are hundreds and perhaps thousands of items that have, at one time or another, been enchanted. Many enchantments might be dark. I am going to propose an amnesty for ownership of any such item with the caveat that any item that has been cursed must be contained within a ward that prevents dark influences from leeching out. The ward must contain an age line so that underage wizards and witches cannot be exposed. Any child that lives within a home that has contained a dark object must be cleansed so that any negative influences do not seep into their developing magical cores. If this is going to work, however, I must be certain that items can be contained and, if necessary, cleansed of any taint."

"You did not ask about the last."

"Because I know you can do that. Your people retrieve many items from history, some of which were cursed. I know you have the means to clean them as needed."

"It is as you said," the goblin nodded his head.

"Will your people object if we make a law which requires such wardings or cleansings to be certified by your people as completed?"

The goblin's eyebrows rose. "You would accept our word?"

"Whatever can be said of your people – they do not lie about magic."

The goblin considered the man before him. "I will have to ask my leaders."

"That is fine. I will return in thirty days for an answer. I will not propose it without your agreement."

"You honor us," the goblin said.

"Thank you – but it is merely pragmatism that drives me. Now, on to another matter: The economy. Gringotts holds many vaults that have become … you might say, quiet … due to the lack of a current holder?"

The goblin nodded warily.

"And such can become active again under what circumstances?"

The goblin replied, "If a magical test finds an applicant which qualifies."

"And where do these applicants come from?"

"Claims come from those that your Ministry labels muggleborns and halfbloods; sometimes, a pureblood due to being the last magical relation when a line dies out."

Cornelius sighed. The Potter Traveler had been right. "And how much for such a magical test?"

"10 Galleons."

Cornelius sighed again. "Not immediately, but in the future, I might be looking at making such a
test a requirement for any Muggleborn getting a Hogwarts letter. If I mention that I recommend it to current citizens of magical Britain, would Gringotts be offended?"

"I can see no objection from our side."

"Good. Then I have gotten what I came for."

The goblin nodded. He called out another word and the goblin who had brought water returned with another tray. He gathered up the water and put out a bottle of brandy with two snifters. He once again retreated.

As the goblin reached for the bottle, Cornelius said, "Oh! One other matter before we finish." The goblin paused and waited. "You have objections to certain … taints … more than others? I was led to believe it was so from a mutual friend."

"Who is this friend?"

"Maraak Ilumian."

The goblin sat back. "You know this man?"

Cornelius chuckled. "Let us say that magic provided me with the inspiration for many of my recent actions and leave it at that."

The goblin nodded. "I can accept that."

"I asked to be the one to inform you of a certain matter."

"And that matter is?"

Cornelius sighed. "One of your vaults contains a stolen item, tainted with this most objectionable magic. I wish to inform you and allow you to act as you see fit."

The goblin took on a harder face. "What item, what vault, and who stole it from whom?"

"Hufflepuff's chalice, the Lestrange Vault, Tom Riddle aka You-Know-Who, Hebzidah Smith."

The goblin sat back and gave Cornelius a thoughtful look. "You have no objection to us dealing with this?"

"No personal objection. The Ministry has no knowledge of it. And seeing that I would see the man not return? I certainly won't be telling them, if you get my meaning."

The goblin nodded. "Wise." He once again reached out and began pouring the brandy. "You humans do not toast with water."

"That's right."

"Then this will do." The goblin waited for the minister to take the small glass. He reached his own cup out, "To good business."

"To good business!" the Minister replied as he clinked his cup with the goblin's. They both drank. When they were done, the goblin stood. "I am Slipnose. I will be assigned as your Account Manager. When you come to Gringotts, ask for me and I will help you."
The Minister stood. "Thank you, Slipnose. I look forward to a long and profitable relationship."

The two left the office.

Daily Prophet

6 July 1990

New Minister Out Amongst the People

Yesterday found a very unusual sight for magical Britain: The Minister of Magic walking along Diagon Alley and visiting Hogsmead without a specific appointment.

The newly elected Minister, formerly Director of Magical Maintenance, spent his time talking to the average witch or wizard on the street as well as the proprietors of the different shops in the area.

Said one witch, "Seeing the new Minister out and about talking to the regular people was a sight I'd never expected in all my life. Usually the ones that run the government act too good for the average magical. It's good to see a Minister who's not afraid to get out amongst us."

Tom Mockenridge, barman at the Leaky Cauldron, agreed: "The Minister sat down and had a tankard. I was going to give it to him but he insisted on paying for it. He asked me about business and was interested in the ways that we could increase the number of customers and the revenue. When I joked about taxes, he chuckled and said that taxes increasing because there was more money around was better than trying to raise the rate on the average wizard. He also said if we could raise revenue high enough, he wouldn't be against dropping it (the rate). Good man, the new Minister."

It was hard to find anyone who had anything bad to say about the man who was actually in the alley. One anonymous Wizengamot member did deride the Minister wasting the taxpayer's time. Asked to comment, the Minister, who was contacted at the end of the day, replied, "Well the taxpayer, in a way, is my employer – at least that's who pays me in the end. I felt it was important to go out and speak to the people who pay me and find out what I could do to help them. Help them, help us all. It's just good business."

We at the Daily Prophet will be watching for further developments.
It was Monday morning again and the Wizengamot was in session.

Cornelius watched as various items were argued and debated. It was, with his new vision, rather boring.

Finally something sparked his interest. A new bill was put forth. Lord Avery stood up and said, "I am putting forward a bill to limit the ability of Muggleborn wizards and witches to purchase enchanted items." The man's assistant delivered the proposal to the clerk who began passing out the parchments.

"I find it reprehensible that a casual fancy of an item from a curious wizard or witch can put our world at risk."

Cornelius motioned for the floor. "The Chamber recognizes the Minister for Magic," Dumbledore said from his position.

"I have a few questions: First, Madam Bones. As Director of the DMLE how many reports has your department received that indicates wizards being careless amongst Muggles with enchanted items?"

Madam Bones stood. "I would need to get the records, but I am not aware of any particular complaints. There are a number of muggle items that have been enchanted which cause problems. The Department of the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts deals with those."

Cornelius nodded. "That's fine and from what I can see falls outside of this proposal." He turned to the member who was proposing the bill. "Lord Avery. Are you aware of specific complaints about enchanted items falling into Muggle hands?"

Avery had been taken aback that anyone had objected – especially the new Minister whom he had helped elect (as a compromise, of course). "Well, no one complaint but it has been historically a problem."

"I see." He turned back to Madam Bones. "Madam Bones. Are there laws on the books to deal with enchanted items falling into Muggle hands? Criminal charges that can be filed against those responsible? Procedures to recover such items and ensure any violations of the Statute of Secrecy are handled?"

Madam Bones nodded. "There are, in fact, such laws already in place."

"Thank you, Madam Bones." He turned to the chamber at large. "Then I will have to say I object to this bill on the basis that existing law deals with the matter sufficiently and putting new laws in place is a waste of time and money." He sighed. "This goes to the heart of the matter than caused me to propose reorganization: Wasting money and time, specifically OUR time. The Ministry Coffers are large, but they have to be in order to ensure our security. The Wizengamot passes laws to ensure that problems are dealt with. This is all to the good. But for a new law to pass without my personal objection, three questions must be asked: 1) Is there a clear and present situation which is systemic? 2) Is existing law insufficient to deal with the situation without new problems being created? Or are existing laws conflicting on the matter? 3) Is the matter under the purview of the
Ministry of Magic and Wizengamot? This bill passes on the third point but fails on the first two: There is no clear and present situation – only the worry of past problems; and, there are existing, non-conflicting laws to deal with it. Therefore, a new law is ... well, it's unnecessary. I cede the floor back to the Chief Warlock." He sat down.

There were more murmurs of approval at this argument than there had been on the Minister's first day.

Cornelius was reviewing a few items when Lucius Malfoy was announced. He had his secretary send the man in.

"Lord Malfoy! A pleasure to see you this fine day. How can I help you today?" Cornelius shook the man's hand.

"Well, first of all, I wanted to offer my congratulations on your new position." Lucius took the seat that the minister offered even as the man sat down himself.

"Well, thank you. You are kind."

"I also wanted to quietly bring up a matter of concern. My colleagues and I feel that you might not have fully understood the purpose behind Avery's bill."

"Oh?"

Lucius nodded. "While it might be impolitic to say outright, there are many of us that are concerned about ... new and radical influences to our society. The problem we have is that we worry that our culture is being diluted by those who arrive and fail to show the proper respect for the society in which they are arriving. To curb such problems, we – from time to time – attempt to put forth laws which will ensure our traditions are upheld."

"I see." Cornelius said. "And I am a traditionalist, as I said before."

"Yes. You see our concern."

Cornelius sighed. "I hope not to offend, but I believe I have to be blunt: Lord Malfoy? How do you make your money?"

Lucius was taken aback but answered the question – it was well known anyway. "I have various ventures: Acromatula silk, production of quills, other matters. I also breed magical creatures."

"Very good. Quite proper for a pureblood lord. Now, let me ask you this question: Why do you want to cut your own throat?"

Lucius was shocked. "What do you mean?"

"Look. Your customers are, outside of perhaps the quills you make, Elite. Is that correct?"

"Yes. Absolutely."

"Very good. And it's quite proper for a pureblood lord such as yourself to deal with the Elite and not the common riff-raff."

"Quite correct," Lucius preened.

"Well then, you must ask yourself: How do your customers make money? How do you ensure that they have the resources to buy your products? Many of them make the items that are sold to the"
everyday wizard and witch. A good percentage of these are muggleborn, another percentage are pureblood, and the vast majority are halfblood – which of course requires that there are muggleborn. If we tried to sell only to the pureblood, running the muggleborn out, where will our new money come from? Eventually there will be only purebloods – but you’ve just killed 80 percent of the economy. Do you really want to be poor? Or maybe, you have the luxuries you’ve always enjoyed but your grandchildren are poor. Personally, I believe you want your family to always be recognized as what it currently is: Elite. How can you be Elite if there ARE no ‘average wizards and witches'? Am I wrong?"

Lucius’ face took on a look of concentration. "A matter I have not considered previously."

"Well, think about it and get back to me. About our culture: I agree. I think it would be proper for new arrivals to be required to take a class on Wizarding culture and traditions. We teach new students about goblin rebellions and all of that, but I’d rather they learn proper respect before teaching them about respecting goblins and such."

Lucius' face took on a look of interest. "Now that I can quite agree with. I just don't think that the … wizard who runs Hogwarts would agree."

"Well, start getting people behind it. Your argument can be that if Hogwarts can teach a class about Muggles, CERTAINLY they can find the space to teach a class about Magical Society. Why should OUR world be given short shrift? As a matter of fact, we should reorganize the Hogwarts history classes: One year of Wizard History and Tradition, One year of the History and Tradition of Magical relations such as goblins and centaurs and the rest, One year of the Muggle interaction with the Wizarding world, and then two years of wars and magical inventions and great wizards in history. I'm not a teacher so someone should put together the class who knows more than I. But if you want a law which teaches new wizards and witches proper tradition, I'll back it. But you have to give something back."

Lucius was very interested. "Oh?"

"Yes. The Muggle studies at Hogwarts is abysmally out of date. We teach things that Muggles did 50 or 100 years ago. Do you know that Muggles have visited the Moon – and that was 20 years ago?"

Lucius was shocked. "That's impossible!"

Cornelius chuckled. "No. It's widely known in the Muggle world. They have devices that could destroy London in about 2 seconds. They have planes that fly faster than sound. They have devices which speak around the world instantly – with something small enough to hold in your hand. I think I'm tired of Wizards being looked at like idiots by Muggles because we refuse to educate ourselves. If we can't curse them or throw our superiority in their face, at least we should show ourselves just as intelligent and knowledgeable when circumstances require it."

Lucius looked at the Minister for Magic. "You might just have something. I will get back to you on these things."

Cornelius stood with Lucius following. "Please do. I look forward to your next visit." He stuck out his hand and Lucius shook it. As Lucius got to the door the Minister stopped him. "Oh, Lord Malfoy."

"Yes, Minister?"

"I believe that your family motto is something like: 'Nos solus arcum ad Magia.' Is that right?"
"Yes," Lucius looked back, nodding his head.

"I hope that your family remains true to this from now on. I know in that last conflict you were forced to violate that by a madman. If that madman ever returns, your family would be forced to violate its own history once more. I hope that I can trust you not to allow or create that situation again if you can prevent it?"

Lucius looked at the Minister carefully. "If I can help avoid it, I will."

"Good."

Cornelius went back to work. Soon, however, he was interrupted again. His secretary announced Arthur Weasley.

Once again, Cornelius stood to greet his visitor. "Arthur Weasley. Hello. Welcome to the Minister's office. How can I help you today?"

The head of the Office for the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts shook the Minister's hand nervously and said, "Thank you, Minister. I wanted to speak to you about your proposal."

The two men sat down. "Well, alright. What is the problem?"

"No problem, as it is. Just curiosity: Why did you suggest me to run the Interior?"

Cornelius smiled at the man. "I know that you have a reputation as being a bit odd with your fascination with Muggles and that has perhaps held you back a bit. I also know that you are aware but have ignored this. Yes?"

Arthur gave a small smile. "That's true. I don't really much care."

"That's fine. Everybody has their interests. In looking over the way we do things, I noticed that we deal with Muggles in far too many places in the Ministry and it really should only be in once place. Your office hasn't had any complaints against it other than those who you catch disliking being caught. This tells me that you can do the job. You also are a family man. You have four attending Hogwarts now?"

"Yes, that's true."

"Yes. And in a couple of years that will be five. In my mind, if I want to get this Ministry more efficient I should put people in charge who can do their jobs. And if you make a bit more money and can give your family a bit more because of it? It's all to the good."

Arthur nodded, feeling emotional. "Thank you, Minister."

"You're welcome. There is, however, a problem."

Arthur got nervous again. "Oh?"

"Yes. While you are fascinated, unfortunately you have a tendency to go on and on about things that you don't fully understand. I know you want to learn things, but sometimes you put off the people around you."

Arthur blushed. "That's true. It's a bad habit."

Cornelius chuckled. "Well, we're going to fix that." Cornelius took out a parchment and wrote a letter. "This is a letter authorizing you to take a month of paid time to learn about Muggles. It also
authorized 300 Galleons from the Minister's office discretionary fund for you to purchase books from Muggle stores dealing with basic Muggle things as well as proper manners and etiquette from a Muggle point of view. Whether this bill passes or not, you understanding Muggle things better will only help in your job – the old one or the new one. Now, I suggest contacting Minerva McGonagall at Hogwarts and asking for the name of a recent Muggleborn graduate who would be willing to teach you about Muggle things for the month. The letter adds a 100 Galleon consulting fee to pay whomever you find who can help you. I will need receipts and records and all of that for the accounting office to ensure you're not spending the money frivolously, but any necessary expense to do what I am asking is acceptable. I can authorize up to 200 more Galleons if absolutely necessary but would prefer that you keep costs down – as long as the job is done properly. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Minister. Thank you." Arthur accepted the parchment and stood up. "I won't let you down."

"I know you won't. Oh, and I would suggest that at most 100 Galleons of that goes to taking your family to a Muggle amusement park or some such thing to really see how Muggles live – make them all leave their wands at home except you and your wife of course – I don't need the Obliviators called out if there are mistakes. As long as your records indicate it's a Muggle thing, it will be fine. If your consultant joins you, they'll have to pay for it out of the 100 Galleon consulting fee. I'm certain Gringotts can convert Galleons to Muggle money as necessary."

Arthur shook the Minister's hand vigorously. "Thank you, Minister. I can't say how much this means to me."

"You're welcome. Now go on now, get moving on this. I want you ready if this reorganization bill passes."

Arthur left in high spirits. Cornelius chuckled and went back to work. After another half an hour, he was interrupted again.

"Welcome, Amelia. What can I do for you today?" The Minister once again invited his guest to have a seat.

Amelia Bones sighed. "We have a problem."

"Oh?"

"You know the list of prisoners and such that you asked for before your inspection?"

"Yes."

"I found that one prisoner has no record of being convicted." Amelia looked worried.

Cornelius tried to look shocked – he mostly succeeded. "Do you mean that there is someone in Azkaban who wasn't tried before the Wizengamot?"

"Yes. Not even charged as far as I can find."

"Who is it?"

"Sirius Black." The Director of the DMLE was expecting fireworks. She was pleasantly surprised.

"Oh, Merlin. That's going to be a problem."

Amelia nodded. "What do you suggest?"
Cornelius gave a little shrug. "Well, neither one of us was in charge when he was put in. So when it becomes public we can honestly say we found it on a standard review. We're going to have to get him a trial."

"He's been there for 9 years!" Amelia said. "I don't even know if he's sane. And there will be people upset if we open up this can of nifflers."

Cornelius looked at Amelia and said, "Don't care. I … don't … care. This Ministry for Magic is not in the business of revenge or in acting because it's convenient or popular. We follow the law. Get Black put quietly in Minimum Security and get him cleaned up. Put people you trust on it who won't talk. Get together all of the evidence you have and any available witnesses and get ready to put him in front of the Wizengamot in three weeks. That should give him enough time to recover from heavy Dementor exposure if he can. He'll have to testify using veritaserum. If anyone complains that we're wasting time or money, they should be told that doing our job properly can never be considered a waste and that every witch or wizard deserves to be treated according to the law. Justice is not vengeance. If he's guilty, we can tell the public that we're making sure that the Law is followed fully and that no witch or wizard is put in Azkaban without a fair hearing. If he's innocent, we can tell them the same thing and that we fixed a problem we inherited."

Amelia considered the Minister thoughtfully. "I was very nearly expecting you to want to keep the Ministry from looking bad."

The Minister chuckled. "Well, I think covering it up would be worse for us. I think the average witch or wizard will be satisfied that their government is willing to do the right thing even if they own up to making a mistake. It let's them know we'll do the job right even if people disagree and that they won't be railroaded into Azkaban falsely."

The Minister sighed after Amelia left. It had taken all of his willpower not to order it covered up but the Lone Traveler had been adamant when they talked about it.

Cornelius did notice that people were treating him with more respect since he started following the man's advice.

Finally, there was one more visitor for Cornelius to deal with. "Madam Longbottom. Welcome to my office. How can I help you today?"

When the two were seated, Augusta Longbottom spoke. "Your proposal was startling. Especially your suggestion at my appointment. I was wondering why. I was not one who voted for you."

The Minister chuckled. "I know. And that's fine – everybody is entitled to an opinion. However, I am the Minister now and I have to see to it that the Ministry is run well. History has no shortage of finding those named 'Longbottom' in service. You are also, according to my knowledge, one who doesn't suffer fools gladly."

The Dowager Longbottom gave a small smile. "That is quite true. Any number could give testimony to that who have found themselves at the end of my wand – or tongue."

"Yes. And if the Ministry is to run well, we will need voices of great conviction ensuring that it remains that way. The Undersecretary of the Ministry will even have to deal with the Chief Warlock at times as the Wizengamot will follow under that area. I know that you respect the man but are not one of his toadies."

"Yes. While my son and daughter in law followed him in the last conflict, I was more … skeptical. I thought giving the Aurors stronger teeth was more appropriate."
Cornelius nodded. "Of course. And, by the way, I am heartily sorry for the price that your family, especially your son and wife, has paid in service to this nation. How is the rest of your family?"

"We are well. It has been much better since we became certain that my grandson will be invited to Hogwarts."

"Oh? Was there a question that it would be so? I find that hard to believe."

Augusta sighed. "I should tell you that this is private, but we worried for a number of years that he might be a squib. He hasn't had much accidental magic."

Cornelius' face took on a look of confusion. "Now that just doesn't make much sense at all."

"What?"

"Your son and daughter-in-law were quite powerful. And not closely related. I find it hard that such a two could produce a squib or someone who might be close to one."

"Well, as I said, we were worried."

Cornelius' face took on a look of concentration. "Your grandson was found with his parents after they were attacked?"

"Yes." The Minister could tell this was painful. "Alice shielded him with her body to prevent his being harmed."

"I am sorry for your family's losses. But, has your grandson ever been cleansed of any Dark residue from the attack?"

Augusta looked interested. "Cleansed? What do you mean?"

"Your grandson was cleared by a cursebreaker I hope after the attack," the Minister said.

"No. He was cleared by St. Mungos."

"Oh, that will not do. Can your family afford a 200 expense?"

Augusta was curious. "Quite easily."

"Good. For your grandson's benefit, please go and retrieve him and meet me at Gringotts in," the Minister looked at his watch, "let's say 30 minutes."

Being very curious as to what the Minister was on about, she stood up and replied, "30 minutes then," and left.

---

Thirty minutes later found the Minister standing outside of Gringotts with his two guards. Madame Longbottom, in her traditional dress, was accompanied by a young boy.

"Ah Madam Longbottom. So this is young Neville?"

The Dowager Longbottom nodded. "Yes. Neville, say hello to the Minister for Magic, Cornelius Fudge."

Nervously the boy put out his hand. "Good to meet you, sir."
The Minster shook the boy's hand. "And good to meet you. No need to be nervous. Did your Gran tell you why I asked you here?"

"Er. No, not really."

"Well, we can explain inside. Shall we?" The minister offered the lady his arm which she took in a proper manner.

The group went in. Madam Longbottom asked curiously, "Your guards stay outside?"

Cornelius chuckled. "Yes: Nothing safer than Gringotts of course. I think that if they wanted to hurt me, two wizards wouldn't do much to stop them. I'm not really worried though."

The guards who overheard hid their smirks as they opened the door for the party. The Minister was correct that two wizards were not much of a challenge.

Augusta was surprised when the Minister got in line just like anyone else who visited the bank. Shortly however, a goblin appeared and invited them to follow him. "This is Slipnose: He's my account manager. Very helpful he's been."

Augusta nodded. "It is good to do business with you, Slipnose." She didn't get to her position by being stupid.

The goblin nodded. "And good business to you as well, Madam Longbottom."

Very soon they were in the goblin's office, which was different than the room the Minister had met the goblin in before. "What can Gringotts do for you today, Minister?"

"Yes. Thank you. Anyway, it has come to my attention that young Neville here was present when his parents were attacked. He was just over a year old. Per our earlier discussion, you have the means to ensure no Dark residue is left. Madam Longbottom has the means to pay for the necessary procedure and I wished to facilitate it."

Slipnose observed the nervous boy and said, "I will take you to one of our healers and they can verify."

Madam Longbottom nodded in agreement, actually feeling somewhat relieved. Since the Minister had asked, her stress had been going up and up. "That's fine, thank you."

"Minister, my leaders were interested in the matter you spoke of on your last visit."

"That's good, Accounts Manager. And I will be willing to return to speak of it, but the health and well being of a child, I believe, takes precedence over business matters."

Slipnose stood up, waiting for the group to follow. "It is as you say."

"I will be return next Tuesday at 5:00. Is that acceptable?"

"Yes. Follow me."

The goblin led the group to a large room. On one side were a number of beds, most sized for the smaller goblin stature. A few were larger. On the other side of the room, it was blank rock.

The goblin present spoke to Slipnose for a moment in their own language. The healer then turned. "Young one, I am Breakfist, Healer. You will follow my directions?"
Neville looked to his Gran nervously, who nodded. Neville replied, "Yes. Er. I'm Neville. I'll do as you say."

"Good. Follow me."

The goblin led Neville over to the almost empty side and stood between four stones set into the ground before a small stone table. Neville stood nervously as the healer retrieved a cup full of some liquid, a blank parchment, a quill, and a small knife.

"Cut the pad of a finger with this knife and place 7 drops of blood within the cup."

Nervously, Neville did as he was asked. He counted out loud as the blood dripped. When he was finished, he pulled back his hand.

"Give me your hand." Neville put it out and the healer pushed it against a stone from his pocket. When the stone was pulled back, Neville's finger no longer bled.

"Now, stand still." Neville stood as still as possible while his Gran and the Minister watched. The healer chanted over the goblet for half a minute and then the four stones lit up. After two more lines, the cup, too lit up and then the light disappeared. The quill was put into the cup and the healer stood back.

Suddenly, the quill lifted from the cup and began writing on the parchment. Neville recognized none of it. When the quill was done, the healer took the quill and cup over to a fireplace and threw the quill in. He then put the cup within the fire, allowing it to burn away the residue. "Not good to have freely given blood sitting around," the healer said.

Augusta Longbottom nodded. "That is wise, healer."

The healer grinned at her. He then returned and took the parchment and read it. He made various noises. "Young one. You work with earth and soil and plants?"

"Yes. I, umm, we have a greenhouse and I work there most days when I can."

The healer nodded and turned his head to the witch. "Your family is wise and blessed. While your grandson had some taint from the attack, the constant exposure to earth and soil over the years has pulled the taint away from him. His available magic has been working to push the taint out since he got it. I recommend that he continue the practice at least until he begins his formal education. He will have no permanent effects from the exposure."

Augusta was suddenly both relieved and upset with herself. She had long complained that her grandson spent his time gardening. She hadn't been aware that doing this was helping him. "Neville. I hereby withdraw any negative comments I may have had regarding your desire to work in the greenhouses. I was not aware that it was your magic's way of cleaning itself."

"Er. That's fine, gran. I didn't know either." Neville was actually quite happy to follow the healer's advice — and his Gran wouldn't be saying anything against it anymore! It was a good day for the boy.

Augusta then realized something. "Healer? You said 'Available magic'? Does he have magic that is unavailable?"

The healer glanced down at the parchment. "Yes. He has two child locks on him: Quite common to see such things from parents who have children with strong accidental magic as a baby. I thought you were aware."
Augusta's face drained. "No, I wasn't. Can they be removed?"

"Oh, quite easily. Should I do so?"

Both Neville's and Augusta's voices were heard in unison. "Yes, please."

"No problem." The healer went to a recessed stone area and took another stone and brought it over. "This time, just prick your finger. One drop is all we need."

Neville enthusiastically did as he was asked. The wound didn't even need healing.

The goblin placed the stone on the table and chanted over it. Soon, all five stones (four on the ground and one on the table) as well as Neville's body flashed a blue light.

Neville almost moaned at the sudden feel of his magic flowing through him.

"There, all done." He turned to the Dowager Longbottom. "Make certain that when he begins his formal education that he has his own focus, properly attuned. I know that some families use legacy foci but such would interfere with the young one's growth. His magic is very strong and if he is to learn control he will need a proper focus. Do you understand?"

Augusta nodded. "Thank you, healer. You have done our family a great service."

"It is my job. It will be 60 Galleons total – less than it would have been had he needed a cleansing."

"I will pay immediately."

"Then we are done."

Cornelius, however, had a question. "Healer? You say that working within the earth and soil cleanses Dark magic?"

The goblin became enthusiastic as he spoke on matters of his craft. "Oh, yes. Very effective! It is always interesting to see how much cleaner the magic is with witches who work a garden everyday or the children of families who don't have enough to pay for servants to work the land. Wizards of the past knew this – your people used to have various gatherings and celebrations at the equinoxes, solstices, at the Harvest, etc. Such things used to take the place of the need to work the land to clean their magic. It's a pity that such things have fallen away in the last few decades. Your people would enjoy much cleaner and stronger magic otherwise."

Augusta and Cornelius looked at each other in something akin to horror. Augusta said, "Dumbledore has been trying to get rid of the old ways for almost a century. Does he know how much damage he could be doing?"

Cornelius replied, "I don't know. But something must be done. It's coming clear why we've seen more dark wizards in the last couple of centuries – less people work the land and we've been ignoring traditional celebrations."

Augusta nodded. "What do we do?"

The Minister turned. "Healer? Can you provide written testimony to what you just said? And possibly any references from Wizarding books of the past that verify your statements? I will be happy to pay for your time and expertise to do so."

The healer considered the Minister. "I know it isn't very like my people, but I will provide this at
no cost. I am a healer first and it pains me to see suffering because of ignorance. Do something about this and I will consider the bill paid."

"I will do whatever I can." He looked at Augusta. "We're going to have to go against Dumbledore about this – we need to plan thoroughly."

Augusta nodded. "Let's get your bill passed first. I will need the extra leverage to help you. We don't want to give up any hints before we are ready to act."

"Agreed."

The two magical humans turned to the Healer. "Breakfist, you have our thanks. I will begin working toward this within 40 days – when we have curtailed some of the Chief Warlock's power to prevent it."

Slipnose, who had stood back and watched, gave the healer a respectful nod. "Another matter to bring before our leaders. My thanks as well, Healer Breakfist. Good Health and Wealth."

"Good Health and Wealth to you as well, Accounts Manager."

Augusta signed over payment once they had returned to Slipnose's office and took her grandson out to Fortescue's to celebrate. The Minister and Slipnose spoke briefly in preparation for their next meeting and the Minister withdrew.

Harry Potter, Lone Traveler, watched the family of three grasping on to each other in relief and happiness. He had been just in time to prevent the greater tragedy and little Luna Lovegood, he hoped, would not grow up without her mother's love.

He felt the call as he watched. "Mr. and Mrs. Lovegood?"

"Yes? What can we do for you to whom we owe much?"

"Enjoy life. Also, please tell the Minister, Cornelius Fudge, that I have moved on. I've taken care of most of the problem but he'll have to take care of the main piece when it shows up on July 31, 1991. Can you pass of the message?"

The couple nodded enthusiastically as their little girl clung to them. "Then I wish you a happy life."

Chapter End Notes

The Traveler was working on Harry's situation out of sight. This is about the Minister being far different because of meeting the Lone Traveler. The Lovegood/Harry deal was peripheral.
before anyone complains about the "unethical" deal between Fudge and the Goblins, remember that the mores of Magical Britain are not the nice Christian/Muslim/Jewish/Patriotic/Other mores that you grew up with. This is the man who, in another timeline, was perfectly willing the accept bribes and didn't make much effort to hide the fact. And no one ever charged him as a criminal for this, even when they kicked him out of office.

It was the 16th of July and Cornelius Fudge found himself staring up at the foreboding structure of Azkaban prison from the boat used to reach it. Along with his was Amelia Bones, Director of Magical Law Enforcement and a squad of Aurors who had the ability to cast the Patronus charm.

The new Minister wasn't above making certain he would not suffer unnecessarily.

The Warden met the group at the landing. "Welcome, Minister, Director. We're ready for the inspection."

Cornelius nodded. "First, the High Security area – I want to get that out of the way." The Warden nodded unhappily and led the Minister to the High Security cells. The Minister listened and watched, taking note of circumstances.

Most prisoners were fairly lethargic, but there were exceptions. Bellatrix Lestrange made every attempt to goad the Minister. Finally the Minister looked at the woman and said, "Madam Lestrange, I am heartily sorry that your criminal actions have necessitated putting you in this miserable place. It is, indeed, a terrible shame to waste such magical ability as you were known to have because you were unable to live up to the basic standards of society. I wish I could hate you, you know, but I find myself feeling nothing but pity and regret. I hope whatever higher power that judges our souls when we finally pass on sees that you were punished enough in this world so that you are not consigned to torture everlasting."

To the shock of those with the Minister, this actually shut the woman up. The tour of the High Security area – almost exclusively filled with Death Eaters from the war – was completed and the Minister sighed in relief to get away.

The minister continued on throughout the prison, speaking to this inmate or that, attempting to find out how effective putting these people in prison actually was.

The Warden supplied the names of a few prisoners who had model behaviour and whom seemed to be actually regretful for the harm they caused. The Minister's questioning seemed to bear up the Warden's observations.

Finally they reached Minimum Security. These were the inmates deemed the least likely to create problems and those with the shortest sentences. It also was the least unpleasant area of the prison.
The prisoners were surprised that Minister of Magic, as soon as he was given their name, seemed to know exactly what each was in for and for how long they would be there. For people who were usually treated with somewhat mild disdain by their guards, the casual civility of the man and his seeming sympathy actually made them feel more regretful for their past actions which put them there.

A surprising number of prisoners made personal resolutions to accept their punishments as just for the crimes they committed and never return to prison. The number of re-offenders would see a decent drop – an anomaly which seemed to occur every year that Cornelius Fudge was Minister for those who were imprisoned during his annual inspection.

If anyone had noticed, they would have seen the subconscious feeling that they would never be better than they were seemed to disappear in the kind treatment from such an important man. It was unfortunate that no one ever correlated the two pieces of information, but wizards were not known for keen observation.

Finally they reached the cells for those who were kept somewhat apart. The lone prisoner was Sirius Black.

"Sirius Black. Supposed traitor the Potters. I am Cornelius Fudge, Minister for Magic. How are you doing?"

Sirius looked at his visitor curiously. His rusty voice asked, "Aren't you frightened to be in the same area as mass-murdering scum such as myself?" The bitterness wasn't as hidden as Sirius would have liked.

"Well, if you are mass-murdering scum. To be honest, I don't know that you are. It seems that you never received a trial – something that I ordered to be rectified as soon as possible," the Minister replied calmly.

Sirius hadn't been informed of the reason for his transfer to these cells. "I'm finally going to get a trial?"

"Yes. I ordered you moved here so that you could recover a bit from the Dementors. I'd like you as coherent as possible so that you can aid in your own defense."

"I'm going to be able to defend myself? You'll give me Veritaserum?" The desperate hope of the man was obvious.

"If you submit to it, we'll give it to you. I find that law and justice are far better served by finding the truth than bowing to political convenience. You're for the Wizengamot in about two weeks. So get yourself as healthy as you can – you're getting your day in court."

The emaciated man broke down in tears. "Merlin bless you, Minister. I had almost given up hope of every being able to tell my story. I guess an old dog like me doesn't have to lay down and die."

Cornelius chuckled. "Not that old, Black: You're only thirty. If you're found innocent, you have quite a few years to enjoy life. Let's hope for your sake that the truth makes that possible." Sirius nodded, unable to speak. "I'll be seeing you soon."

As the party left the cells Cornelius observed, "From that reaction, I find myself doubting the man's guilt more and more."

Amelia nodded and sighed. "I have to agree with you. We better get ready for the shitestorm."
"At least WE didn't cause it, and WE are fixing it. Take comfort in that, Amelia."

She nodded in reply.

It was early on Tuesday when his secretary announced the Chief Warlock. Knowing that this was coming, Cornelius took a calming breath and raised his rudimentary mental shields. He had been practicing for two weeks at the suggestion of the Lone Traveler – Fudge had taken the warning about Dumbledore to heart.

He stood up as the venerable wizard entered. "Chief Warlock! Or should I say Headmaster. I'm actually confused as to which title I should use. Anyway, welcome to the Minister's office. How can I help you today?"

Albus Dumbledore chuckled and said, "You should just call me Albus. We'll be working together and it will be easiest. I have come to say hello and to find out how you're settling in."

"Oh, it's been a Gringotts cart ride to be certain, but I seem to be doing alright," Cornelius said.

"Some of your recent actions have been … inspired. Your objection to the bill presented by Lord Avery."

Cornelius chuckled. "Just trying to do my part to prevent needless bureaucracy."

"Certain factions didn't seem to like your position." The Chief Warlock looked at the Minister carefully.

Cornelius was confident as he looked back. "I know. I had a member of a certain faction mention that to me. I explained the lack of foresight in driving away certain members of our society in terms that I hope were understood. I'm a traditionalist but I'm not a supremacist – that's a path toward failure."

Dumbledore nodded. "I heard that you performed the Azkaban inspection. How did it go?"

Cornelius sighed. "It was somewhat depressing. A waste if you ask me. I DID find a few prisoners in Medium Security who seemed to be truly repenting whose continuing punishment would be counterproductive. I'm thinking of putting a bill before the Wizengamot to institute the idea of parole if a prisoner is deemed rehabilitated by recommendation of the Warden and the DMLE. We'd have to get verification by testing and a magical oath to not reoffend, but continuing to try to achieve a result already achieved seems wasteful of the taxpayers' money."

Albus nodded thoughtfully. "I can see that. And how about Maximum Security?"

Cornelius felt the brush against his shields but it was quickly withdrawn when he allowed a brief, seeming unconscious, facial response to it. "I can truly say that those I saw in Maximum security should be there. As I said to Bellatrix Lestrange as she tried to goad me, I'm regretful that their actions against society's rules requires that we separate them from the rest of us in such miserable conditions for the good of the rest of us. But that's the price they and we pay for their refusing to follow the basic rules of society. It's a waste of magical potential but there it is. I did express my desire to her that whatever judgment occurs when we pass over takes into account the fact that she has already suffered much in this world. We can always hope that their souls can be redeemed after this life."

Albus nodded in seeming satisfaction. "A commendable attitude. Anyway," and the Chief Warlock stood up, "I was just checking in and seeing how you were settling in. I will not take any more of
The Minister stood as well. "I appreciate your coming by. If you need anything from this office, be certain to let me know and I will see what I can do."

"I'll do that. Good day, Cornelius." The Chief Warlock swept out.

Fudge took a moment to look at the door and huff. Under his breath he couldn't help but comment, "Condescending todger."

Cornelius Fudge walked into Gringotts Bank. It was very near his scheduled time to meet with Slipnose. He observed when he walked in that his account manager seemed to be waiting. And so, rather than get into line, the Minster walked over to him and stopped a respectful distance away. He nodded his head and said, "Good day and good business, Accounts Manager. I hope that you have not inconvenienced yourself waiting for me."

Slipnose nodded back. "No, my time has been well spent. I've made the necessary arrangements for our appointment. Follow me, please," the goblin said almost perfunctorily.

The Minister didn't take offense as he followed – goblins were surly as a rule.

Soon the two were, once again, in the Managers office. "We are here to discuss your inquiries as to dark artifacts and cursebreaking."

"Yes." The minister pulled out a folded piece of parchment and placed it on the table before pushing it across. "This is the most of the proposed text of the law I mean to get passed. There are a whole slew of records and facts and studies that back up the law, but this is the main gist of it. Before I propose the law, I want to ensure that you can deliver."

Slipnose reviewed the document. It was substantially the same as the Minister originally outlined. When he was finished, he looked up. "My leaders may be willing to agree to this. What limits on how much we can charge per item?"

The Minister sighed. "You know far more than I how much it costs to actually perform the service. And, I am certain that you can calculate a reasonable and not exorbitant profit. I do not think I am knowledgeable enough to try to tell you what to charge. But there is one thing I am knowledgeable about."

"Oh?" the Accounts Manager asked.

Cornelius grinned. "In any business deal, there must be something for every participant. You know that and I know that. And your people do not respect those that just give things away without a reasonable exchange."

The goblin hid a smirk. "And of what bearing are these facts?"

"This proposed law will bring much profit to your institution. The Ministry will want a cut of it."

"And what would you consider a reasonable, as you call it, cut?"

"Well, either 50% of the profit or 20 percent of the cost – whichever you prefer."

The goblin took on a hard look. "Our profit calculations are goblin secrets."

"Fine then. 20% of the full amount charged."
"20% is quite unreasonable. It will leave little profit for us. 5% is acceptable to us."

"Little profit is not 'no profit' – 15 percent might be acceptable."

The goblin could not hide the small smirk – his people truly loved negotiating. "I can, perhaps, convince my leaders that 7% is justifiable but it will be a hard sell."

"7 percent is a pittance and you know it. 14 percent might be acceptable to the Wizengamot when I argue it, but they won't like it."

"9 percent, and that is a gift to your political position because you are not as offensive as previous holders of your office."

"13 percent. And that's a bow to your people's sensibilities. That's about as far as I am willing to go." Fudge's face became resolute.

The goblin gave the minister a hard look. "12 percent – no more. We both make a profit but neither becomes rich from this one agreement."

Cornelius gave a thoughtful look. "12 percent … of every service that you deliver under this law – including the warding and rituals." The Minister's face took on a look of fierce glee. "But it's officially 10 percent to the Ministry. That leaves one point for each of us as commission for striking this agreement: 1 percent to your clan and 1 percent to my family paid for as expense and not profit. We both ensure that this is claimed as income within our respective governments. I will not be party to tax evasion – it would ruin me if found out."

Slipnose looked at the Minister with agate eyes and then barked a laugh. He called out a word in his own language. A number of older, better dressed goblins entered the room. The Minister respectfully stood.

The oldest walked over and said, "You bargain well – for a human."

"Thank you. To whom am I speaking?" the Minister asked politely.

"I am Ragnok. I run this bank."

"Then hello and Thank you, Director. I will say negotiating with your goblin there has been educational." Cornelius said this with a smile.

The goblins in the room barked a laugh together. "We will promise to not 'Rebel' while you are Minister – as long as you deliver what is agreed. If you fail, things will remain as they have always been: Armed watching between us."

"Make that my incumbency and that of my chosen successor and let that fact slip publically after I announce the bill and I can guarantee it passes."

The Director laughed longer and harder. "You negotiate even now at the moment of your success! It is truly a shame you were not born among us. We slip that such will be during your Ministry. Your chosen successor will have to be part of the next profitable venture you bring to us."

Fudge held out his hand with a grin (no teeth showing), "Done."

It was a historic and little known moment when the Director of Gringotts Bank shook hands with the sitting Minister for Magic.
Cornelius Fudge quietly sounded out various members of various factions regarding the law he wanted to propose. There were times when it paid to be shocking and times when it paid to be subtle.

The different "light" Wizengamot members were swung by the sheer number of Dark items that would be locked away or made safe, never again to threaten their children. The "Dark" members were gleeful about the ability to display such items for such a nominal cost, without the fear of being prosecuted. The "Neutrals" were won over by the fact that the agreement would not cost the Ministry any money from existing departments and projects but would likely increase the available budget – and increase employment.

Albus Dumbledore was not sounded out – he was busy with Hogwarts.

The Wizengamot meeting of 30 July was underway when the Minister stood up to speak. The Chief Warlock ceded the floor.

"Good afternoon. While I have been enjoying the debates on my proposed Ministry Reorganization Bill, the matter I wish to speak to you about today is something else entirely.

"I have, since taking office, began to look toward those situations which present difficulties to current Ministry operation or a threat to the magical world. I am saddened to report that such a matter has come to my attention.

"In speaking to various staff at St. Mungos, I have found that a significant portion of injuries that require extreme care are caused by one magical or another coming into contact with items that contain a curse or other 'Dark magic'. I have spoken to various people and come to the conclusion that Wizengamot action is necessary in this matter.

"The three points of my standard for Ministry action are as follows: 1) Is there a clear and present situation which is systemic? The answer is, unfortunately, yes. Numerous injuries every year. The items described are sold willy-nilly as far away from Ministry observation as possible so as to avoid those involved from getting into trouble. It's a systemic problem which is currently not sufficiently dealt with.

"2) Is existing law regarding the situation insufficient or conflicting, or will application of current law create future problems? Once again: Yes. Many items that contain such curses or Dark magic are, to be frank, heirlooms. One wizard or another inherits them quite legally as family heirlooms but then is presented with the problem that is illegal to own such items. What is the average wizard to do?

"3) Is it under the purview of the Ministry for Magic or the Wizengamot? Once again, the answer is: Yes. Protecting our citizens and Muggles from malicious enchantments definitely is a matter for us to deal with.

"These three points satisfied, I consulted several people as to possible solutions. The result of my findings is the proposed law that is being passed out to you all now. I will wait a moment until each member receives the proposal and a copy of the relevant background information."

Very soon, each member had received a small bundle of parchments containing the proposed law and the relevant background investigation showing the need for it.

"Everyone have a copy? Good. The proposed law is as follows: (A/N: Text at the end of this chapter)."
"I cede the floor to the Chief Warlock so that this bill can be argued as needed."

Fudge sat down.

To the surprise of many, a motion was put forward to vote on the bill as submitted immediately without further debate as all of the relevant background was included in the packet.

Cornelius, to the shock of many, bounced up to object. "While I am appreciative of Lord Runcorn's faith in my documentation, I am quite certain that there are a number of members who wish enough time to thoroughly review the packet before voting. Let it not be said that pressure for speed prevented proper review of even my proposals before passage. I would ask Lord Runcorn to modify his motion to this Friday – thus giving members at least two days to review the data."

That the two days were needed for the rumour from Gringotts to become public knowledge was something that Cornelius Fudge would take to the grave outside those who were in the know. Slipnose would later tell the Minister of his leader's amusement with the cunning savvy displayed by the Minister.

The sounds of approval throughout the chamber were no longer murmurs but were actually heard quite clearly. The members were impressed by the almost militant fairness of their new Minister. Lord Runcorn respectfully nodded to the Minister and modified his motion as requested. There were several seconds amongst almost all factions.

Gringotts was quite busy the next day. One reason for that was a number of people who were curious as to the Bank's reaction to the Minister's proposal. Many found the goblins less then forthcoming.

Early in the afternoon, however, there was a small disturbance. One of the reporters from the Daily Prophet happened to be in line when a goblin teller snarled at a customer. No one actually had ever met this teller previously but no one commented or realized this fact.

The teller's remarks were fairly easily heard. "Human! Mind your tongue! Only my Director's word that there shall be no rebellion during your Minister's tenure if his bill is passed prevents me from calling my clan out to march on your family to utterly destroy them!"

A watching Executive Teller snarled out a word to the teller. The executive was furious. "You give …" The Executive Teller stopped, looked around, and then snarled another few words at the teller.

The teller glared at the wizard in front of him and then withdrew through a door in the back.

The executive came over. "Wizard! You are no longer welcome to do business here today. If you somehow miraculously learn manners you might be allowed to do business tomorrow but you will have to make the attempt – if you dare. Now … Get … Out!" The wizard quickly withdrew as fast as he could. The Executive Teller looked around and snarled out another word. Suddenly all the tellers quickly returned to their current transactions. The Executive Teller went to the door the disgraced teller was seen to enter.

The Executive Teller's face turned into a wide grin after the door closed. He turned to the waiting goblin. "Well done, warrior. You shall find your bonus with your weekly salary delivered to your vault."

"Thank you, Clan Chief. I live to serve."

The disgraced wizard in question was seen later that day to be drinking morosely in the Leaky Cauldron. That he paid for his drinks with only a small number of the Galleons he had been given
earlier in the back offices of Gringotts no one was aware. Those were curious never did catch the man's name and most, when asked, admitted they didn't know him. Then again, none saw the glamour drop after he disappeared.

Needless to say, the newspaper articles the next day assured the quick and easy passage of the Minister's bill, dated to be put into place on 15 August. It gave Amelia two weeks to staff the place.

Regulation of Magical Artifacts

0) All Laws regarding possession, sale, use, and disposal of items containing a curse or Dark magic currently extant are superseded by this Law.

1) The Ministry of Magic hereby orders an AMNESTY re the possession of all items that might be cursed or that might contain Dark magic upon the passage of this bill as Law.

2) The Office for the Regulation of Magical Artifacts shall be created within the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. If the Ministry Reorganization Bill passes, this shall be a Department level office.

3) Any item currently in the possession of any magical witch or wizard may be registered for a fee of 10 Galleons. The registration must include a description of the item in full including all known enchantments. This shall prevent the arrest of any magical witch or wizard regarding the ownership of said item. The owner of such an item has 90 days to register the item under this Law.

4) Within 90 days of registration, the owner of any item must provide certification from Gringotts Bank that the item is housed within a ward to prevent any Dark magic from affecting those who are in the presence of the item. The ward must contain an Age limiter so that no minor can come into contact with any such item. The safety of our magical heritage in the form of our children is paramount. The cost for such warding and certification shall be the responsibility of the owner of the item and not the Ministry nor Gringotts Bank.

5) Any item so registered and then later sold MUST be disenchanted from any curse or Dark magic before the sale can be considered valid and legal. The cost for the necessary cursebreaking shall be a matter of agreement between the buyer and seller. The Office for the Regulation of Magical Artifacts shall be notified that the item no longer falls under its authority and records of such items shall be archived and held for no longer than 5 years from the notification and no less than 1 year. This ensures that certification of any item as safe was not premature.

6) Any minor who resides within a home which currently contains any such item must be cleared of any Dark magical residue and certified as clean of foreign taint by Gringotts or any licensed cursebreaker. The cost of this shall be born by the homeowner. The homeowner has 180 days to certify compliance.

7) Any false certification under this law shall be considered fraud and prosecuted as such. The maximum penalty for conviction of Fraud under this statute shall be no more than 500 Galleons and 180 days in Azkaban per item or incident of fraud.

8) The failure to register any item which is cursed or which contains Dark magic shall cause the owner to be charged with the crime of Possession of Cursed Item. Conviction for this charge shall be maximum 200 Galleons and/or 90 days in Azkaban for each unregistered item found in the possession of a witch or wizard.

9) Any registered item which later causes damage to any magical witch or wizard other than the
owner of said item shall cause the last registered owner to be charged with the Improper Housing of Cursed/Dark Items. The maximum penalty for conviction shall be 250 Galleons and/or 120 days in Azkaban for each such item or charge. Damage which causes permanent disfigurement or death shall be prosecuted under statutes dealing with Disfigurement/Death in addition to this Law.

10) Any item that is currently being stored as part of an unclaimed inheritance shall not fall under this law until the inheritance is delivered to its rightful inheritor. The current holder of such an item must ensure it does not cause damage to others. Violation shall fall under clause 9 of this Law for the holder, not the inheritor. The inheritor has the full 90 days to register any such items from the date he/she accepts the inheritance.

11) Any cursed/Dark item which harms a Muggle shall be investigated. If a witch or wizard passes such an item to any Muggle after the date of this bill in order to avoid the fees or penalties or specifically to harm the Muggle, the offending magical shall be charged under the clauses of this Law AND Laws dealing with violation of the Statute of Secrecy. Magical society must be protected.

12) Items that cannot be sold and which a magical wizard or witch wishes to get rid may be sold to Gringotts as scrap for 50% of the value of the material the item is made of. Removal of curses/Dark magic shall be the responsibility of the buyer.

13) Any goblin-made item which falls under this Law may be maintained by its current owner as long as it is housed as Clause 4 of this Law demands. However, sale of any such item to another magical witch or wizard is strictly prohibited. Such items may only be sold to Gringotts for the value of the materials which make up the item plus 20 percent. Responsibility to remove any curse/Dark magic shall fall to the buyer. Gringotts is bound to accept the sale of said item under these conditions or relinquish all future claims to it in perpetuity. The item could then be sold to any magical wizard or witch who wishes to buy it as long as Clause 5 of this Law is satisfied.

14) All registration fees and 10 percent of any charges by Gringotts Bank to perform the services required under this law shall be earmarked to fund the Office for the Regulation of Magical Artifacts. Any fees/percentages collected beyond the budgeted amount necessary to run this Office shall be turned over to the Ministry General Operations Account and be available for the General budget. Magical Law Enforcement shall enjoy priority for any such available funds.

15) Should the fees/percentages collected be insufficient to run the Office for the Regulation of Magical Artifacts, especially due to the lack of new items which fall under its authority, the Office shall be downsized until the current fees/percentages are sufficient to fund the Office. Should the Office fall below two (2) employees, its functions shall be folded into the Auror division and its records shall be turned over the DMLE Records division.
Amelia Bones and Cornelius Fudge were meeting in his office. It was July 30th – two weeks after the Minister's inspection of Azkaban and the day that Cornelius had promised to Sirius Black that he would see his day in court.

"What evidence have you uncovered about his innocence or guilt?" the Minister asked.

Amelia looked at the Minister with a serious mein and said, "Normally, I wouldn't be telling anyone not of the DMLE this – even you – because it's legally an open investigation. In this case, I believe I can count on your discretion."

Cornelius chuckled. "Since I'm opening myself to a lot of backlash, you will not have to worry."

Amelia smirked back. "I think you have a little cushion – the report of the goblins promising not to revolt since your bill was signed gives you a little leeway – and that happened just a few days ago. How did you wiggle that?"

"Amelia!" the Minister said in cheerful reproach. "I can honestly say it wasn't something that I asked for – although they were quite happy with the new business when I ensured they could do the work the new law required."

Amelia wasn't buying it but let it go. "Well, it was definitely a feather in your cap. Anyway … I contacted the head of the Black family, Arcturus Black. He agreed to provide a barrister to act as his grandson's advocate."

"I thought he had been disowned?"

Amelia snorted. "His mother tried – she was a pretty stone cold supremacist and her oldest was not following in her mould. But neither she, nor her husband, were head of the family. He disowned Andromeda Tonks because of pressure within the family but even that he didn't want to do. He's waiting for his cousin Pollux, her grandfather, to die before reversing that – especially because I could confirm her daughter is a metamorphmagus."

"Oh?" Cornelius was curious.

"Yes. It happened to come up when I mentioned I was working on recruiting her because of her special talents. There is a history of it in the family and Andromeda birthing a daughter with the ability goes quite a bit toward forgiving her less than politically optimum marriage. The Blacks are purebloods – but certain things can cause certain other things to be overlooked."

Cornelius sat back and said, "You want to get in better with the Black family? Even beyond clearing Sirius if he's guilty?"

Amelia was curious. "How?"
"The next time you talk to Arcturus Black, suggest that he order Andromeda to get her husband a lineage test at Gringotts. He might be squib-born and not muggleborn. That might make her marriage a little more palatable."

Amelia was confused. "Where did you get such an idea?"

Cornelius sighed. "I've had a few talks with Gringotts about old vaults and such – how money can get back into circulation that's been lying around. I want to stimulate the economy. According to them, the best place to find those who qualify are muggleborns and halfbloods who have unknown magical relatives."

Amelia was staggered. "I never heard of such a thing. That information could rock our world." She paused. "I'm a little surprised you're giving me this rather than using it yourself."

Cornelius considered the head of the DMLE for a moment. Finally he decided. "There are a few good reasons. I've introduced a fair bit of change already and too much, too fast will get me labeled a liberal – and politically, that wouldn't be convenient. I KNOW the information needs to get out, but I really need to solidify my credentials as a traditionalist before I can take steps. The sheer amount of information I've run across since I've become Minister has been astounding. Get Augusta Longbottom to tell you what we learned when we visited Gringotts with her son. And, when we have a little more breathing room, I'll tell you how I was given a gift by magic which gave me the impetus to take the actions I do now. I think you'll be surprised." He paused. "As a matter of fact, we can go together. Talk to her about when it would be convenient." With a small look he said, "And ask her to ensure her brother Algernon is present. I need to have a word with the man."

Amelia looked at her nominal boss. "I think I'll look forward to the conversation."

"You should. Now: The evidence?"

Amelia quickly reviewed what she had, what was proven, what was speculation, and what seemed wrong. The Minister would have been shocked at the massive mistakes – but he remembered how relieved he himself had been 9 years earlier and how accepting he was of the Ministry's quick action to put things behind them. This mistake was obvious in how it happened – the desire for revenge was powerful. Too bad it was illegal too.

When it was done, Cornelius had a few suggestions if – if – the man was found innocent. Amelia nodded at the Minister's foresight. It would reduce the trouble which came out of this.

"Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! The House of Lords and Ladies Wizengamot is hereby called to session! Let all who have business before this body stand forth and be heard! Wizengamot Clerk: What is the first item on the agenda?"

Amelia Bones, Director of the DMLE, stood up. "The Department of Magical Law Enforcement asked that Wizengamot stand in Judgment for Crimes Against Magical Society."

Albus Dumbledore nodded. "Who is it that is to be judged?"

"I cede the floor to the Minister of Magic to explain." She sat down.

There were murmurs and sounds of surprise at this variation to normal procedure.

With some hidden trepidation, the Chief Warlock recognized the Minister. Cornelius Fudge stood up.
"A few days after my claiming of the Office on Minister, the Director of the DMLE approached me to schedule the annual inspection of Azkaban prison. It is a duty that is unpleasant but necessary to ensure that criminals are being properly punished according to the law.

"In preparation for this inspection, I asked the Director to furnish me with a list of prisoners, what they had been convicted of, and when each was scheduled to be released. I wanted to ensure that there were no irregularities. I have a responsibility to the Magical public to ensure prisoners are properly punished – and a responsibility to the prisoners that they are not unduly punished, according to law.

"A few days later, the Director of the DMLE approached me because she found that there was a prisoner incarcerated in Azkaban who had never been legally convicted. Further, this wizard had never been formally charged! And to make this even worse as far as the law goes – this wizard had been incarcerated in High Security for 9 years."

There were shouts of outrage at this violation. Dumbledore now guessed who this was, but could do nothing yet. He got the chamber back into order.

"Yes. I was just as outraged. Now, this wizard is considered a stone cold murderer and a Death Eater. He was imprisoned during the whole emergency with You-Know-Who." There was suddenly less outrage. "Still, every witch and wizard – EVERY witch and wizard – deserves to be legally tried. And so I ordered the prisoner moved to minimum security to allow the DMLE to put together its case and to prepare the prisoner to stand before you."

Augusta Longbottom stood up. "Yes, Madame Longbottom?"

"What is the prisoner's name?"

"Sirius Black."

Suddenly there were shouts of outrage that this scum was being treated as any other – magicals were so fickle. The Minister's face took on a hardened look as they settled down. "Just minutes ago you shouted in outrage that the law wasn't being followed. Now many shout because such a man doesn't deserve a trial. Make up your mind! I've already made up mine: The Ministry for Magic, while I am Minister, will stand for Justice always but Revenge never. The laws will be followed or I will resign. I will not countenance the rights of our citizens to be abridged outside of legal action."

That shut many up – the new Minister had earned some respect. "Now – the incarceration of a criminal is not, in and of itself, illegal. Even without a trial or formal charges. But – according to law – the ONLY person who can order this, legally called a Bill of Attainder, is the reigning Muggle monarch. When we separated from the Muggles and gained autonomy, the Wizengamot was charged with ensuring that the King's laws were followed within our society. The Royal prerogatives were NOT, however, overturned. In a recognized State of Emergency, the Minister, with the backing of the DMLE and the Wizengamot, may order such an incarceration. But, when the Emergency ends, each person so incarcerated MUST be legally tried. Unless a Royal Order for a Bill of Attainder is provided. As such, by law, we MUST allow even those whom we despise legal recourse. It is the law."

There was less disagreement and more interest in the chamber. "I will be honest with you: I cannot hate those who are housed in Azkaban, even the worst of them. As necessary as it is to keep them away from us, it is always a waste when magical talent is lost due to the crimes they commit. My ensuring they pay for their crimes does not require that I hate them for it.

"But my lack of hatred does not mean I will allow criminals to roam free. At the same time, I will
also not allow witches and wizards to be labeled criminal unless legally convicted."

He turned to the Chief Warlock. "According to reports, the Chief Warlock has substantive
knowledge and involvement with the accused – even if he wasn't then aware of the activities for
which he was accused. The Director plans on calling him as a witness. I, therefore respectfully ask
that he recuse himself from this case and allow another respected member of his choice to run these
proceedings."

The Chief Warlock regarded the Minister with a small modicum of respect. As inconvenient as it
was, it was fair. "As requested and as is proper, I do recuse myself. I ask Lord Ogden as the next
more senior to take my place. He was not a party to either side during the conflict and so cannot be
accused of bias."

Lord Ogden agreed and moved to take the position of Chief Judge for the case.

"Madam Director. Please bring in the accused."

The Wizengamot watched as Sirius Black was led in to the chambers by two Aurors in their dress
uniforms. Along with the accused a man dressed as a well dressed man followed. Black was
surprisingly calm and coherent.

"Acting Chief Judge, before you is Sirius Orion Black, accused of Conspiracy to Overthrow the
Ministry, Murder of Peter Pettigrew, and the Murder of twelve Muggles, unnamed. The
Department of Magical Law Enforcement stands ready to prosecute."

"Does the accused have an advocate?"

"Barrister-at-Law Hiram Bastwick, hired by the Black paterfamilias for this trial, stands for the
accused," the well dressed man who accompanies the group answered.

"The accused and his advocate being present and the DMLE ready, let the case against Sirius
Orion Black begin. Madam Bones, you may take the floor."

The Director of the DMLE briefly explained the charges against Sirius Black. She described what
was known of his arrest and what followed. Finally she called the arresting Auror to the stand.

The Auror described what was found when they arrived. The evidence and statements, what little
of it there was, was presented.

The Defense's questions clarified that Peter Pettigrew's wand was not found on the scene – only his
finger.

The Auror who investigated the Potter's home was called. As the scene was described, many
noticed that the accused wept. The Defense had no questions for that Auror.

The Chief Warlock was called and the Director led him through what he knew and what actions he
had taken that night. He answered that he was not sitting as a judge during the trials at that time
cleared him of any accusations regarding the lack of a trial.

Finally the Defense was allowed to question Dumbledore. "Chief Warlock. You were a close
personal friend of the Potters before they were attacked?"

"I would say so, yes. They worked with me to do what we could to stop the madness."

"And you visited them after their home was placed under the Fidelius charm and before they were
"attacked?"

"Yes."

"To your knowledge, who cast the Fidelius Charm on the home of the Potters?"

"Lily Potter. She was gifted at charms."

"And who was the secret keeper?"

"To the best of my knowledge, Sirius Black."

"Were you told this by either of the Potters or Mr. Black?"

The Chief Warlock thought for a moment. "Not to my recollection. It was bandied about within the people we worked with, but I do not recall who actually said it."

"Who gave you the secret?"

"The accused did."

"Did he tell you verbally?"

"No. He gave me a slip of paper to read."

"To the best of your knowledge, was the slip you described which contained the secret written in Mr. Black's handwriting?"

Dumbledore was taken aback. "You know? I can't be certain. It was clearly written in block print but I cannot say I recognized the hand it was written by."

The Defense pulled out a piece of parchment. "I am handing you a copy of a report filed by the accused during that time period in the furtherance of his duties as an Auror. From your recollection, did the slip use the same handwriting?"

Dumbledore looked over the parchment. As was required procedure, it was in block print so that it could be easily read. But it wasn't quite the same. "I cannot say it did. This printing is much larger. The differences may be that the slip was written deliberately smaller or that someone else wrote it. I cannot honestly be certain."

"Thank you, Chief Warlock. I have no more questions."

Dumbledore was excused.

"The DMLE calls Rubeus Hagrid to the stand." The doors opened and the Hogwarts Gamekeeper entered the chamber. He looked somewhat nervous.

Suddenly a noise was heard. "Hm. Hm. Hmmm."

Everyone looked over to the source to find Dolores Umbridge, currenly proxying the Selwyn seat, trying to call attention to herself. The Minister recognized her only because her application to work for his office was on his desk - something that had been somewhat ignored with the various things the Minister was dealing with. He had also been warned by the Lone Traveler.

The Director reluctantly said, "Madam Umbridge? You have a question?"
Looking very inoffensive (or trying to) the woman said, "Can we really trust the testimony of this … man? He is known to have been expelled from Hogwarts and his wand snapped. Can his testimony be truly trusted?"

Cornelius almost cursed to himself. This was one matter he wasn't really prepared to deal with yet. He had learned of the situation from the Traveler but had wanted to wait for a more politically convenient time to deal with it. Wanting to curse the woman, he stood up.

Amelia's surprise was evident as she said, "Minister? You have something to add?"

"Yes. With all due respect to the Selwyn proxy, there is some information that I have become aware of that might be relevant."

Amelia nodded. "Please continue."

"I was asked, quite recently, by a wizard of good standing whom I am not naming, to review the status of Mr. Hagrid. Not wanting to raise this matter while other matters were taking everyone's attention, I was building the information necessary to see what the situation even was. I believe a few questions to Mr. Hagrid may clear up this matter. Does the Wizengamot give me leave to deal with this so as not to taint the case against Mr. Black?"

Ogden reviewed the Wizengamot and the Minister was given leave to do so.

"Mr. Hagrid. In 1943, you were implicated in the death of Myrtle Warren?"

"Yeah, that's righ'. They said it was me that opened the Chamber of Secrets and let out the beast and that it was my Aragog who killed her, even tho' he was innocent. The Headmaster at the time, Dippit, snapped me wand and expelled me. Nothin' came of it though, and Dumbledore asked to hire me as gamekeeper to let me stay at Hogwarts 'cause me dad had died and I had nowhere to go."

"I understand. Now, who is the one who brought your pet to the attention of Headmaster and accused it of killing Ms. Warren?"

"Twas' Tom. Tommy Riddle. He was the one who said it was Aragog. Got an award for special services to the school an' everythin'."

"I see. Now: You were never charged by the DMLE?"

"No."

"And what evidence was there that it was your pet that caused her death?"

"Well, none really. Aragog was jus' misunderstood. Cause' he was an Acromantula and people said they was dangerous, tha' was why they said it was him."

"Now, if I recall, Myrtle Warren's body contained no wound to account for her death? No mark which could explain it? Chief Warlock?"

Dumbledore nodded. "That is correct. That is why Rubeus was never charged."

The Minister nodded. "While expelling a student is under the purview of the Headmaster, it is normally occurs so that the wizard or witch in question can be turned over the DMLE. In this case, the DMLE determined that there wasn't enough evidence to charge him. So, instead of being found guilty or being cleared, Mr. Hagrid is left in limbo. I find that quite … unacceptable. I can't see
how this situation makes him unreliable."

At Umbridge's hem hem, she was allowed to speak again. Her voice was quite annoying to the members. "But, he was expelled."

Cornelius nodded. "If you must insist, I have two questions for Mr. Hagrid, a question or two for the Chief Warlock, and then the Wizengamot can decide if the expulsion of Mr. Hagrid was warranted. And then we can get back to the reason we are here."

There were murmurs of agreement and a number of negative looks at the woman who somewhat resembled a toad.

"Mr. Hagrid? Who, again, was it that accused you of opening Slytherin's Chamber of Secrets and releasing the beast against the students?"

"Tom Riddle."

"And your pet was an acromantula and not a snake?"

"Tha's right."

"Chief Warlock. Tom Riddle is not a name that most people are familiar with. Is there another name that most people know the man by?"

The Chief Warlock was quite put out that he had been painted into such a corner – but it was obvious that the Minister knew and that no dissembling would work. "He later took on the name of Lord Voldemort."

There were many sounds of shock and outrage. The chamber had come to the obvious conclusion. "Final question: Who was more likely the culprit who opened Slytherin's chamber: Rubeus Hagrid, who had a pet Acromantula – spiders being the normal enemies of large snakes – or Tom Riddle, who later claimed to BE the Heir of Slytherin when he was going by … well, that other name?"

"It was Tom Riddle who was the most likely culprit."

The Minister nodded. He addressed the chamber at large. "Now, with the testimony that we have heard, I ask the Wizengamot to clear Rubeus Hagrid for any part in the fiasco that caused the death of Myrtle Warren. I also ask that, because it was Hogwarts that expelled him and snapped his wand and NOT the Ministry, that Hogwarts be ordered to take on the burden of buying Mr. Hagrid a new wand and taking on the effort of ensuring his education is brought up to OWL and NEWT standards so that he can be certified as a proper wizard. Does anyone object to this?"

There were murmurings and comments among the members, but none objected, even Madam Umbridge, who had a very pinched look. "Good. It is so ordered. Mr. Hagrid, as soon as you complete whatever OWL and NEWT studies that you are able to, I would suggest that you take the necessary steps to become recognized as a Master of Magical Beasts. From what I know, there is no one in Magical Britain who is more knowledgeable in these things than yourself."

"Yes, Minister. Ah'll do tha'. Thank ye and thank to ye' all for givin' me another chance." All saw the tears that fell down the large man's face.

"Headmaster? Do you have any problems ensuring that Hogwarts do as we ordered?"

With a gentle smile for his friend he Headmaster replied, "No. I have no problem and will quite happily ensure the Wizengamot's decree is followed."
"Good. I think that if you ask, you can receive approval from the Board of Governors to take down the Special Services award for Tom Riddle – I believe that its presence in Hogwarts hallowed halls is an offense against good wizards and witches everywhere."

"It shall be as you say."

"Now, I hope the Selwyn proxy is satisfied that Mr. Hagrid can be trusted to do nothing to aid you-know-who and his Death Eaters and that his testimony can be trusted to bear this out?"

Madam Umbridge once again said nothing, just nodding her head. "Good. Madam Bones, if we can get back to the reason why we are here?" The Minister sat down.

Hagrid's testimony that he went to the Potter's cottage on Dumbledore's orders to ensure the safety of anyone who remained alive was easily accepted. Hagrid described finding Sirius with little Harry and the Sirius turned over Harry to Hagrid's care without disagreement.

The Defense had only a couple of questions. "Mr. Hagrid. First of all, congratulations on your being cleared to hold and use a wand again. Now, I have a question for you: When you found Sirius Black, did he in any way seem happy or satisfied by the deaths of the Potters?"

"No. He was cryin' fiercely and wantin' to get back at someone he called Wormtail."

"Mr. Black did not prevent you in any way from ensuring Harry Potter's safety?"

"No. Actually he gave over his motorbike so I could get little Harry back to Hogwarts faster. He was quite keen that Harry not be unprotected."

"So, you saw nothing which said that Sirius was responsible for the Potters deaths?"

"Nuthin I saw 'bout that."

"Thank you. If the prosecution agrees, you may step down." Amelia nodded and Hagrid went to the area where the other witnesses who had already testified sat.

"The Prosecution calls Garrick Ollivander."

From the doors at the back of the chamber, the highly recognized Wandmaker entered the chamber. When he got near the witness box he paused and looked at Hagrid. He then continued forward to take his seat to testify.

"You are Garrick Ollivander of Ollivander's Wand Shop?"

"Yes."

"It is said that you have never forgotten a wand that you have sold. Is this a correct statement?"

"It is true."

"It is also said that you can recognize any wand's components upon inspection of said wand."

"Yes. It is my craft."

"Do you recognize the accused' advocate?"

He peered at the man. "No."
Amelia turned to the barrister and said, "You didn't buy your want at Ollivander's?"

"No. I bought mine on the continent as that was where I lived and went to school."

"You might now be familiar with the witness then. Do you have your wand?"

The Barrister took his hand from a sleeve holster. "So that Mr. Ollivander can demonstrate his expertise for the Wizengamot, can he inspect your wand?"

The man shrugged and brought his wand forward. Mr. Ollivander took it carefully and looked it over. "10 and 7/8ths. Birch wood. It contains the hair of a unicorn, freely given rather than gathered. It is the wand of a wizard who champions the truth." He waved it and shot a few sparks from it. "It has been well cared for but needs more regular polishing." He looked at the Barrister. "It is a wand suited to an honorable wizard in your position but it is also quite suited to healing. It was made in Switzerland about 110 years ago and waited in the shop for you to claim for 77 years … 11 years times 7. You are then 44 years old?"

The Barrister chuckled. "I accept his expertise." The man retrieved his wand and put it away. A few Wizengamot members chuckled in amusement as well.

Amelia laid out five wands. "Do you recognize any of these wands?"

He looked them over. "I made four of them. One was made by my father."

"Can you say which belongs to the accused?"

Ollivander nodded and picked one up. "Blackthorn, Dragon Heartstring, 12 ¼ inches precisely. Sold in 1971 to Sirius Black."

"Can you tell me what spells this wand was last used for?"

Ollivander took his own wand and cast a few spells. "It hasn't been used in 9 years." He then picked up the wand and cast a spell. Various faded images came out of the wand. "It was used in a number of apparitions. Before this, it cast an infant-healing spell. Before that, there was a personal cleaning spell. And finally, before that, a contraceptive spell."

At his place, Sirius blushed a little. He guessed that everyone could guess what he had been doing before he had gotten worried and checked in at the Potters.

"So, if you were told that this wand blew up a street before it was confiscated and stored, would you agree?"

"No. It is impossible."

"No more questions." Amelia ceded to the Defense.

The Defense had no questions and Mr. Ollivander was released from giving more testimony.

He moved to walk out but stopped. "Rubeus Hagrid. Bring the pieces of your snapped wand when you come for a new one." He then walked out, back to his store.

The Wizengamot was a little spooked because he hadn't been present when the order to allow Hagrid a wand had been given. Most attributed it to the man's craft and its arcane knowledge.

Amelia sighed. "I have one more witness to call. I ask that Sirius Black testify as the occurrences of Halloween 1981. I also ask that he submit to Veritaserum to ensure that his testimony is truthful."
The Wizengamot watched as Amelia looked to Sirius's Advocate. The man stood up and replied, "My client is quite willing to testify and, in fact, demands the use of Veritaserum so that his words cannot be questioned."

The potion was administered and the Wizengamot listened in growing horror as the details of that night were laid out in full. More and more, they were coming to the certainty that an innocent man had been incarcerated for nine years. When it was all said and done, none were able to say that they had any doubts to the man's innocence.

When the counter-serum was finally administered, Lord Ogden asked the Director of the DMLE, "Director? Do you have any motions for us?"

Amelia nodded. "At this time, I move that all charges against Sirius Black be dismissed. I also ask that the posthumous award of the Order of Merlin to Peter Pettigrew be rescinded and that he be placed on the wanted list. I move that Mr. Black's status as an animagus form be moved from the confidential DMLE list to the public record. I will have other motions when this matter is disposed of."

Lord Ogden nodded. "Do any members of the Wizengamot object to the motions placed before us?"

No one wanted to go on record as opposing it, so the matter was dismissed. Lord Ogden returned control of the chambers to Dumbledore.

The Minister stood to be recognized and was. "I propose that Mr. Black be sent to Gringotts to receive the procedures they have available to cleanse any Dark magic taint he might have received during his stay at Azkaban, the cost to be paid for by the Ministry. After this, I propose he be moved to St. Mungos to receive treatment for long term Dementor exposure, also to be paid by the Ministry. I propose he have an Auror guard until the public can be informed that he has been cleared of all charges. I also propose he be awarded the pay of a Senior Auror for the time he spent incarcerated – the pay for the position he most likely would have achieved if he hadn't been falsely accused. And finally, I ask the DMLE to investigate for any charges that might be applicable against those who either were involved or did not prevent this injustice. This shall be separate from any recompense Mr. Black may seek once he has been fully healed."

The motions were quickly passed and the Wizengamot, many still in a state of shock, was dismissed for the day. The Minister motioned for the Chief Warlock to speak to him. When Dumbledore came over to where Amelia Bones and Cornelius were standing, the Minister spoke. "Albus? We are going to have a problem. Soon Black will be healed enough that he will want to see his godson. Now I am certain that you have him squirreled away from magical society in order to prevent any harm from those who were not happy with what occurred 9 years ago. And that's fine. But, you had better make certain that the boy is healthy and happy so that Black has no cause to make any more trouble for us. You can make sure the boy is safe and kept hidden – but you will not deny the boy's godfather his right to visit and spend time with him. Do you understand?"

The Headmaster reluctantly nodded. "I will begin to make arrangements."

"Please do. And I will want to meet the boy – after he has spent time with his godfather. I'll not interfere with family matters. And no, Albus, I will not use the boy for my gain – he's a child and not a resource. I think we all can agree with that?"

Amelia nodded and Albus chuckled. "Very wise. I am a bit surprised to be truthful."

Cornelius nodded. "I understand. We are all of us politicians. But common decency must be
Dumbledore walked away, knowing that he had better take steps to ensure that Harry Potter was quite well. He did not need the extra headaches if he wasn't. He was not looking forward to the next few months.

Cornelius looked at Amelia. "Make certain that you tell several people you trust about the conversation we just had. I do not want any of us 'forgetting' in the face of future distractions. Or suddenly deciding it isn't needed."

Amelia looked at the Minister carefully. "You suggest he might act to avoid this?"

Cornelius looked at the DMLE seriously. "I am only buying insurance, if you get my meaning. Personally, I'm going to mention it to my Accounts Manager at Gringotts – I've got a very good relationship with him and they have the ability to take steps if necessary."

Amelia nodded carefully. "I'll make certain to make my own assurances."
Cornelius Fudge was working on the final list of Undersecretary candidates. He had hopes that Augusta Longbottom would take the Undersecretary for the Ministry – helping her grandson had, he thought, paid dividends in making her an ally. Amelia Bones was looking quite prepared for Undersecretary for Magical Law.

And, surprisingly, Albus Dumbledore himself had help solidify his decision on Undersecretary for International Law and Cooperation: Tiberius Ogden. In looking over the man's voting record, he was a traditionalist as well, but no pureblood supremacist. He was almost the longest serving Wizengamot member. And, although Dumbledore had called upon the man to take his place for this trial, there were a number of times when he had voted at odds with the Chief Warlock.

Lord Ogden was well respected and would likely do a good job. Now, he just had to sound the man out.

A Senior Undersecretary to the Minister's Office was still a post that he felt was needed. He had almost shredded Umbridge's application after the trial of Sirius Black – the woman had annoyed him so much – but had left it with a note for his records that she was at odds with too many of his positions to be put in the post.

He did not want to open himself up to a charge that he didn't take the time to actually review the applications sent to him.

Some names he had reviewed and dismissed: Rufus Scrimgeour – too power hungry; Dirk Cresswell – too much of a promotion; Pius Thicknesse – too unknown to him; and a few others.

Suddenly, there was a knock on the door. He called out distractedly, "Yes?"

His secretary's head popped in. "Mr. Xenophilius Lovegood, publisher of the Quibbler, is here to see you."

Curious, the Minister asked, "Did he say what it was about?"

The secretary's head bobbed. "A message from a mutual friend?"

The Minister's curiosity was spiked enough to say, "Well, send him in."

"Yes, Minister."

Soon a man who's dress sense compared quite favorably to Albus Dumbledore was coming into his office. The Minister stood. "Mr. Lovegood. Welcome to the office of the Minister for Magic. I am Cornelius Fudge. How can I help you today?"

The man shook his hand and moved to the seat indicated by the Minister. "Recently a man arrived at my home in time to prevent my family from suffering a tragedy. When I had thanked him, he asked me to tell you that he was being moved on and that the main piece would have to be handled on 31 July, 1991."

Cornelius was surprised. "This man was dressed as a Muggle but was a powerful wizard?"
"Yes. You know who I speak of."

"Yes. I thank you for the message. I had wondered why he had been out of contact." The Minister paused. "And how is your family doing?"

The man smiled. "Wonderfully well, thank you. My wife is a spell creator. She made a mistake and caused an explosion. Only the man's intervention prevented her death and my daughter seeing it. We were quite thankful."

Cornelius nodded. "Well, I am glad to see you enjoying Magic's blessings. The man helped me quite effectively as well."

"I had been wondering why there seemed to be fewer wrackspurts hanging around the Ministry. Normally, you can't find a place that's clear of them anywhere in the building."

Cornelius was confused. Wrackspurts? "Yes. Well. My secretary mentioned you published the Quibbler? I am not familiar with it."

The man's face lit up. "We specialize in the stories that the Daily Prophet and the Wizarding Wireless ignore. Our coverage of little-known magical creatures is unparalleled."

"I see. Do you have a copy with you?"

Lovegood reached into his pocket and pulled out a copy of his magazine and handed it over.

The Minister unfolded it and looked at the cover. His curiosity roused, he took a minute to glance through its pages. One particular item caught his attention.

He was very amused.

The Potter traveler had told him that he had taken his position, his authority, and himself far too seriously in the universe he came from. Cornelius had taken the critique to heart.

"Well, I'm sorry to tell you, I am not working on new recipes for goblins – they look a bit too gamey if you ask me. Give me a good steak or a roast of pork any day." Cornelius could barely contain himself from laughing. "Just between you and I though," the Minister looked around his office as though inspecting it for spies, "there is a Wizengamot member who looks like the type who would be working on recipes for goblin meat pies. Dolores Umbridge, the Selwyn proxy – she's got that look about her. Just between you and I. Tell no one you heard it from me."

The man quite cheerfully took notes of what the Minister was saying. He could honestly not tell if the man was taking him seriously or was going along with the gag.

"How much do you charge for a subscription?"

Xenophilius looked up from his pad. "We publish monthly unless there's a new sighting of Snorkacks – but sometimes twice a month. It's 1 Galleon 8 Sickles for a year."

The Minister nodded and pulled out his money pouch. He placed three Galleons on the desk and pushed them across. "Sign me up for a year and send an extra copy for my waiting room. Give my visitors something new to read."

The man took the Galleons and pocketed them and noted the sale in his book. "Thank you, Minister. You won't regret it. It's always best to keep up with what's newsworthy. You keep that copy so you can read it all."
Cornelius smiled. "I certainly agree and thank you; and my thanks for the message. I look forward to receiving the magazines."

The two stood and shook hands. "The next one is in two weeks. I think you'll enjoy it."

"I definitely will."

The Minister waited until the man had left and was certainly out of earshot. He then sat down and laughed long and hard. It had been quite a while since something had amused him so much. His secretary looked in with a worried expression, but he waved her off with a smile to say he was okay.

He then got back to work, smiling cheerfully.

An hour later, one particular missive caught his attention: Amelia Bones had spoken to Augusta Longbottom. She was asking to have their talk on Saturday, 4 August, at the Longbottom estate. Augusta had agreed to have her brother Algernon at the meeting.

Cornelius reviewed his schedule. He would have to inform his wife that he would be away – she was seeing far less of him since his ascension to his position. He would have to do something nice for her – especially because she particularly despised getting involved with politics. He chuckled that most people he worked with had never met her – and she was quite happy with that. She would never be seen at a Ministry event.

Rather than send a reply, Cornelius made his way to the offices that contained the Wizengamot Administration. Where Wizengamot members might have a position within the Ministry and, therefore, an office, most members were people of older families or who were appointed by the Minister himself if an insufficient number of families deigned to hold active seats.

The Blacks were such a family. While venerable a family as any, they avoided holding a seat to avoid assassination. They tended to be a paranoid bunch.

Therefore the fastest way to reach a Wizengamot member if they didn't have an office was through Wizengamot Administration.

The Clerk saw the Minister and asked, "Minister Fudge! How can we help you today?"

"I need to reach Lord Ogden, paterfamilias Ogden. Do you know if he will be in the Ministry today?"

The Clerk reviewed the book in front of him. "No. The next Wizengamot meeting is on Monday and he doesn't tend to be at the Ministry outside of the meetings."

Curious, the Minister asked, "Is there a reason for that?"

The Clerk chuckled. "As far as he's concerned, his brewery is more important than everyday politics."

Cornelius cursed internally. If that was the case, the likelihood of the man accepting the position was very low. "Well, alight then." He paused. "Can he be reached?"

The Clerk thought for a moment. "I don't think he'd be too upset if I give you this." The Clerk made a note on a scrap of parchment. "This is the floo address for his private office. He can be found most days there if the Wizengamot isn't in session."
The Minister accepted the parchment. "Thank you. By the way, how do you like your job here? Everything going well?"

The Minister took a few minutes to talk to the man before he went along his way to Amelia's office – since it was nearby to where he was.

As he walked away, the Clerk murmured to himself, "A good man, the new Minister."

After being invited in to Amelia's office, the Minister said, "I got your message. I decided to answer directly as I was down the hall on another matter. 2:00 on Saturday should be fine."

"That's good. To let you know, Black is responding well to treatment. My Aurors reported that the goblins seemed impressed with our foresight to get the man cleansed of Dark Magic residue before trying to heal him up. It was a rather smooth operation."

"Good, good. I'm glad to hear that. Well, I'll see you on Saturday – if nothing else pops up in the meantime."

Amelia chuckled. "It's good that Friday tends to be a quiet day within the Ministry. Most of Law Enforcement are usually busy making sure there are no disturbances after people get paid or are celebrating the end of the week themselves."

Fudge nodded. "Nothing wrong with that – there are definitely times I could use a good glass of whiskey or a tankard."

After speaking to Amelia, he made his way back to his office. Getting in front of the floo, he threw some powder in and called out, "Ogden's Finest!" and then put his face in the floo. It was times like this that he was very interested in some of the Muggle things that the Traveler had described. He called out to the other side, "Hello? Is Lord Ogden available?" Through the floo he could see three figures. As was standard for a floo, they looked like fire shapes.

"Yes. Who is calling?"

"Cornelius Fudge."

"Minister! What a surprise! Do you need something?" the figure sitting down asked.

"Can I come through and consult with you?"

The figure at the desk waved off the other two who left. "Certainly. Come on through."

The Minister stood up and then threw more powder in and, after calling out the destination, stepped through. As most wizards and witches who were used to the floo did, he almost subconsciously cleaned the ash from his body with a silent spell and returned his wand to its resting place.

"Minister," the elder statesman and brewer said as he approached. "Welcome to my establishment. What can I do for you today?"

The Minister shook the man's hand. "Thank you for seeing me with no notice. I wanted to consult with you as to your opinion."

"Oh?" Lord Ogden indicated a comfortable seat in the office for the Minister to take.

"Yes. As you know, my Reorganization Bill is coming up. While it is not certain right now, if it DOES pass, I will need a few positions filled. This led me to you?"
"And what do these things have to do with me."

The Minister smiled. "To be truthful, I was going to ask you to take the Undersecretary for International Law position. However, it was suggested by those familiar with you that you'd much prefer your own pursuits than dealing with unruly foreign governments and others."

The man chuckled. "Quite true. The Wizengamot is a duty and honour; a political post would be a nightmare."

"Well, then, I wanted to ask if you had a name more suitable. I need a traditionalist in the post – someone who won't make revolutionary changes but who would be willing to ensure that the Ministry gets the best agreements regarding foreign trade. I think that Weasley as heading the Interior can deal with the Muggles sufficiently – I'm already having him spend some time learning from someone who understands muggles better. Even if the bill doesn't pass, it will help his current department run better. But, I need someone to make certain Crouch gets the best for Britain that can be achieved – someone with stature. Do you have any ideas?"

Ogden sat back in his chair. "I can see why you thought of me. My product makes my name well known far beyond Britain's borders." The two men chuckled together. "But I think that you need someone younger than I, someone who is familiar with the changing tides of International trade."

Ogden paused. "Where do you stand on Light vs. Dark?"

Cornelius waved his hands to dismiss this. "Being labeled 'Light' or 'Dark' is usually something done to make oneself or those you label to be looked at a certain way. I'm more interested in the law and prosperity for Wizarding Britain. I won't accept someone who's likely to upset other nations with some overblown idea of superiority or someone who will deal with International criminals. And the Supreme Mugwump, I am certain, pushes the 'Light' agenda quite enough as far as that goes. I also don't want someone who will treat it like a lark, something fun to do to pass the time – Ludo Bagman has that attitude sown up quite enough as well. I want someone who is business minded."

Ogden was nodding. "Good, good. I think you are on the right track with this. And so I think I have a name."

"What name?"

"Mathias Greengrass."

Cornelius thought about that. "He deals with … potion ingredients and magical items?"

"Yes. His family's fortune is based on international trade. And they have been traditionally neutral as well. I think he would find the position challenging."

Cornelius nodded. "A name I hadn't thought of. There's a reason I'm asking those who've been running things longer than I. Can you possible arrange an introduction?"

Lord Ogden laughed. "That will not be an issue." The man stood up and walked over to the fireplace and threw in some floo powder. He called out, "The Hothouse!" After a moment, Ogden put a foot in the floo to keep it open and called out, "Greengrass! Are you there?"

A voice came out, "Yes. I see a foot. Only one person calls the floo with a foot. What do you need, Tiberius?"

"Blame my bad knee. I will not get down on the ground just to speak to someone. Anyway, come to my place – I have someone who wants to talk to you."
Ogden withdrew his foot and the flames turned back to normal. After a moment, however, the flames turned green again and a man exited the floo.

Cornelius appraised the man. He looked to be in his forties – which could mean he was anywhere from forty to sixty, depending on how the man aged, and he was dressed in conservative robes. His face was pleasant but, unlike someone like – for example – Arthur Weasley, it wasn't open: In other words, what one would expect from a wealthy man in the normal course of business.

The man looked around and took on a small (very small) look of surprise. "Minister Cornelius Fudge. I expect that you are whom Tiberius wants me to meet. What can I do for you today?"

"Hello, Mr. Greengrass. I would like to sound you out on a proposal."

At Lord Ogden's invitation, everyone sat down. "What kind of proposal?"

"I assume you keep up with current legislation?"

The man chuckled. "Yes. Although I refuse to apply for the seat my family could assume, I do keep up. Necessary if one is to do business."

Curious, he asked, "Why not take your family's seat?"

Matthias grinned at Ogden, who looked almost resigned. "Well, first of all – I'm not that old. I'd feel out of place amongst those fossils." Ogden shook his head at his fellow business owner. "But mostly because things are fairly balanced and my input would not change much."

"I see. Why waste time when there isn't much reason to do so."

Greengrass chuckled. "Yes, exactly. Taking the title of 'Lord Greengrass' would be nice – but the headaches aren't worth it for so little gain."

"I understand that you deal in imports and exports?"

"Quite. My family has a long history of it."

"So, you are definitely interested in International Law and Cooperation?"

Feeling something coming, Greengrass looked at Minister carefully. "You could say so."

"How would you like more direct input in how Britain works with other countries? Be able to ensure the agreements we make will not damage your income base?"

Matthias Greengrass considered the Minister. "That sounds – theoretically – like a good idea. But what would I have to do?"

"My Ministry Reorganization Bill is coming up for a vote soon. If it passes – and signs indicate that there is more and more support daily – I will need someone to take the position of Senior Undersecretary for International Law. Lord Ogden suggested you, after verifying his own lack of desire for it."

Greengrass looked at the older man. "You just want to sit around and drink the product that your brewery makes and get out of all the hard work."

Ogden chuckled. "Someone has to be quality control – and who better than I?"

Greengrass laughed with him, as did the Minister. "Yes. I guessed it was something like that."
When the three settled down, he asked Fudge, "What exactly are you looking for in someone for that position?"

"I don't want a supremacist who will upset the foreign governments we deal with, and I don't want an idealist who believes in the innate fairness of people. I want someone who knows business and who can ferret out little loopholes and hidden clauses so that Magical Britain is not put at a disadvantage. I think you would do well in this."

The man considered it. "But I DO have my own interests to run."

"I understand that. But a few things to consider: You would not need to be in the Ministry full time. Most of the actual work will be done by the two who run the Interior and the Exterior. Your job will be mostly to ensure that they don't go off the deep end of the lake. A man in such a position could insure that agreements with other nations would not hamstring his own business. Now, I couldn't countenance you using the position to hamstring other British wizards who are doing business – the Ministry is supposed to work for ALL of Magical Britain after all – but at the same time, you could prevent insidious creeping of regulations and laws which might do damage to business."

Greengrass considered. "The offer is tempting."

Cornelius looked at the man and added, "Think of this as well – a little insurance for the future. The position will come with a seat on the Wizengamot. If, at some future time, I am no longer Minister for one reason or another and some political enemy tried to force you out so that you cannot use your Wizengamot seat against him, the fact that you can take a family seat will most likely be forgotten. So they force you out as Senior Undersecretary and suddenly you're back as Paterfamilias Greengrass. Imagine the consternation you could create in such a situation."

Matthias Greengrass looked at the Minister and asked, "What house were you in again?"

"Hufflepuff, actually."

Greengrass nodded and laughed. "You're the most Slytherin Hufflepuff I've met recently. Your vision of how to turn things on one's enemies years before such a possible scenario could occur would have brought a smile to the face of our House's founder, I think."

"Thank you. I think." The Minister said this with some humour.

Matthias thought about it for a moment and said, "I'll have to talk to my wife, but I think that I am interested."

"Good! Good. Now then, all you have to do is to get together an organizational plan for your section if the bill passes. Remember – your authority will be all relations with governments that fall outside of the direct control or authority of the Ministry of Magic. The Directors of the Interior and Exterior will answer to you, and then you to me. Arthur Weasley will deal with the Interior – Muggles, Goblins, Centaurs – and Barty Crouch will deal with the Exterior – other Magical Governments and International Liaisons for various Ministry Departments: Games and Sports, Magical Creatures, Law Enforcement, and for the Wizengamot Liaison, the ICW seats. Any questions?"

"And if I want to propose change to how we deal with a particular group?"

"Work it out with your Department heads, keep me informed, and propose it at the Wizengamot yourself. Remember, you'll have a seat with the same authority as any other."
"Well alright, then. I look forward to your bill passing."

The group of men broke up, the two visitors returning to their respective offices.

Cornelius Fudge was looking forward to the meeting he was going to be having. He would finally share the news of his visitor with those whom he felt he could trust, and would therefore solidify their support further, at least he believed so. He was also feeling refreshed - he had made the day before a short day and had taken his wife out for dinner and a show. She had quite enjoyed herself. The old axiom still held true: Happy wife, happy life.

He was welcomed in the floo area by the Dowager Longbottom herself, along with her grandson. "Minister Fudge. Welcome to Longbottom Hall. May you find peace and succor beneath its roof."

"Thank you, Lady Longbottom. I accept the hospitality of Longbottom Hall. And although the giving of gifts to one's host for every visit has fallen out of common fashion, I thought that these might be appreciated." He pulled out several small envelopes of parchment. "Each of these contains seeds of various magical plants. With young Neville's interest in Herbology and the suggestion of the goblin healer, I thought he might appreciate the chance to work with more unusual plants."

Madam Longbottom smiled and nodded to her grandson, who had looked at her for permission. He turned back to their visitor. "Thank you, Minister! The chance to work with new plants is something I always look forward to."

"You're welcome, lad," he replied, handing the packets over. "Practice your craft in good health."

Neville read the names of the seeds. "Wow! A couple of these I've never heard of!"

"I'm sure your gran would agree that you should research them first before planting them – always better to be safe and to have a plan. They are, after all, magical plant seeds."

"Yes, quite. Run along and put those away. We'll be having tea in the sitting room when all the guests have arrived. I expect to see you there."

Neville shot the Minister one more look of gratitude and ran to seal the seeds in his room – he was experienced enough to know you don't leave unknown seeds around without knowing exactly what they would do.

The hostess watched her grandson with a smile. "Since we visited Gringotts, he's seemed to grow up from a clumsy boy to a promising wizard overnight. It's been a joy."

The Minister nodded with an answering smile. "Nurturing our legacy should always bring us joy."

Augusta looked back to her visitor and nodded. "Please follow me. We have only to wait for my brother. I was curious as to why you asked for his presence."

The Minister chuckled. "Well, I think you'll understand. A few things I've heard I wanted to speak to him about – nothing of catastrophic consequences."

Soon, the Minister was sitting with Amelia Bones and Neville Longbottom. And, finally, Augusta led her brother to the table and the group had tea. It was a fairly cheerful setting. When it was done, and the plates and cups were taken away by the house elves, the meeting between the group began.

"Minister. I was a bit surprised when Augusta invited me to tea to meet you as apparently it was at
your instigation. Is there something that I can help you with or something you need from me?"
Algernon Harcourt asked the Minister.

The Minister smiled and said, "Yes. You could say that. Actually, I will need to speak privately
with Augusta and Amelia about Ministry matters, but things that I have learned prompted me to ask
your sister to ask you to come, and I had hoped that young Neville would be present as well, at
least for this first part. I won't take up much of your time, but I thought the matter fairly
important."

"Oh? And what can I help you with?" the man asked almost eagerly.

"Before I begin, I wish to say to our hostess that I hope that I am not intruding onto family matters
and that when I have finished that she will not be offended, but something occurred to me and I
find that there needs to be some … rectification."

"Rectification of what?"

"Well, you see … are you familiar with the family your sister married into? The respect that they
hold?"

Algernon was confused. "Of course. I've been here on and off for most of 45 years, since she was
originally married."

"Good, good. You see, I am familiar as well. Which is why I was surprised when Madam
Longbottom intimated to me that there had been concern that young Neville would not qualify for
Hogwarts. She expressed her happiness that these worries were unfounded. Knowing how
unfathomable the idea that a Longbottom would be unqualified was, I suggested we visit Gringotts
to check for Dark magic residue. He had been exposed, as you know, while very young.

"Gringotts, however, found that any residue was quite dissipated – but they also found two … not
one, but two … infant locks. They removed these for a fee. And what, Madam Longbottom, did the
goblin healer say about young Neville's magic?"

Augusta, who was solemn at the Minister's words, replied, "It was very strong. And because he had
grown with the locks, it would require a precisely matched focus for him to learn control –
otherwise his magic would be too strong to control it precisely."

"Yes. That's what I recall as well."

Algernon had not actually heard the details and his face was a study of shock and surprise. Amelia
Bones just watched. Neville's eyes were wide listening to the Minister talk.

"The Longbottom name is, of course, steeped within the history of Magical Britain. Its members
are usually very well known. And do you know why?"

It was a rhetorical question and the man didn't try to give an answer – he had some small sense that
the Minister wasn't looking for one.

"You see, certain families are … different. While many families have contributed much to our
society, certain families have always given … more. Names like Bones," he motioned toward
Amelia, "Potter, Longbottom – these names are a reverent litany of service and sacrifice; to their
families, and to their society; for over a thousand years. And the price they have paid is not just a
matter of the distant past either. Even young Neville here paid a price when was still in swaddling.

"While some families have one or two or even a few who distinguish themselves in service, these
families … the very ground that Magical Britain sits upon is sanctified by the blood that wizards and witches with these names have shed. So you see, it was rather curious to me that, after I visited Gringotts with the Lady Augusta and young Neville here, my inquiries ran into certain rumours seemed to tell a certain tale – which I knew to be false.

"So I roused out these rumours and, to my shock, found the rumour that young Neville was almost a squib! We know now that this is not true, but it got me to thinking: Where did these rumours come from?"

Algernon's face lost a bit of color at that. He didn't answer that one either.

"Also, the rumours of the actions that certain family members had taken to scare the magic out of him – to force him to have accidental magic: How his being dropped and bouncing verified that he wasn't a squib. How he almost drowned. Things like this. And that, finally, is what caused me to ask Augusta to invite you."

"First of all, I would point out a few things about certain actions that were taken during Neville's childhood: While – I am certain – these actions were born not of maliciousness but of concern, and even misguided notions of familial love, they are also quite properly classified as abuse. And if they had caused any permanent damage, they could have been reclassified as attempts to end an Ancient and Noble Line. As far as that goes, that is all I will say. I'll take no further action. If Augusta or young Neville decide to, now or in the future, I would – of course – have to support them.

"But the real reason I asked that you be invited is this: By the time young Neville begins Hogwarts next year, any rumour or hint that he is almost a squib or is less than the powerful wizard that he is had best be, to the best of your ability, squashed down flat. You started the rumours – you had best fix them. And, also, any description of the actions taken to cause Neville to have accidental magic had better not contain the notion that the results were successful. No, no. I want witches and wizards the length and breadth of Magical Britain to be certain that such activities are criminal and will be prosecuted thoroughly as such by any Ministry that I run. Do you understand?"

Looking almost green, Algernon Harcourt nodded in agreement. "Now, Augusta, Amelia and I have Ministry business to discuss and so, perhaps, you should ask to be excused so that you can begin to take the steps I've mentioned." He turned to Neville. "And you should ask to be excused so that you can begin your research. Or perhaps spend some time learning your family history – it is quite rich with tales of legend."

Augusta stood up. "Yes, Neville. We will discuss this further – later. Have fun looking up your new seeds. Algie: I will escort you to the floo so that we can have a private word or two."

Neville thanked the group for visiting and withdrew to his room. Augusta led her shocked brother out. And if it took longer than strictly necessary that the time to go to the floo and return, neither Cornelius nor Amelia said a word.

After the others had left Amelia commented, "I should perhaps spend some time with my niece explaining the importance of the Bones legacy."

Cornelius smiled at her and said, "Probably quite appropriate."

When Augusta returned and she had given the Minister her personal thanks for his words about her family, the three took a moment to drink some more tea delivered by house elf – and then the Minister came clean about the visit by the Lone Traveler. He explained what he had learned and what actions the Traveler had taken. He also explained what he had personally done to avoid that
future and why. He also included the things that he had learned that, perhaps, had not even been contemplsted by his visitor. He also included his general plans for the next year.

When the tail was done, the two women were both amazed and shocked. They also promised Cornelius their full support – the consequences of acting otherwise was too steep to be acceptable.

Augusta's final comment reflected what Cornelius knew to be true: "We truly have been blessed by Magic."
The Vote and What Comes After

It was the 13th of August, and the Wizengamot would finally be voting on the Ministry Reorganization Bill he had submitted two days after becoming Minister.

He had worked long and hard and talked to many Wizengamot members. Allies had been secured, more detailed organization plans had been added, a budget to institute the change had been worked out, the Undersecretaries had been included as well as their willingness to accept the positions as named, and a set date for the changes to be implemented had been set – if the bill passed, September 22, the day after the Autumnal Equinox, three months after his own election, was the day that the Ministry would shift and the new organization would be in place.

Cornelius Fudge crossed his fingers.

If the bill passed, the Wizengamot would only hold one more meeting for the summer sessions and the entirety of the Ministry would be focused on the change. His Model Prisoner Parole Bill would be voted on in that session. Already there had been a few comments, most positive.

The idea of requiring those paroled to pay for their own cleansing ritual (now to be standard for those being released after being in Medium or High Security areas of Azkaban and recommended for those who had been incarcerated in Low Security) or to perform one year to 18 months of community service on a farm, in a greenhouse, or otherwise working with the land had been revolutionary. The included information from the Gringotts healer, as well as many Wizard-written books from centuries previous – some that many had never seen or had been legend – had convinced a fair few. The magical oath to not re-offend during the years that the parole included was controversial, but most considered it an acceptable price if a prisoner wanted one to ten years removed from their sentence.

The more traditional members had, as he had expected, latched onto the sheer cost savings of no longer having to feed or house these prisoners in Azkaban. The Chief Warlock always agreed with the idea of forgiveness and redemption, so his faction wasn't a hard sell, and the darker elements only objected to the compulsory requirement of submitting to Veritaserum and the giving of a magical oath to be eligible for parole.

It helped that most prisoners, given a choice of Azkaban or magical oath and truth serum, preferred the second option; and their statements attesting to that fact was also included in the bill research submitted. It wasn't as if they were losing rights for time that they would normally have been free anyway.

Cornelius had spoken to Healer Breakfist when he had visited to ensure the Ministry 10 percent, his own 1 percent and his account manager's one percent as well. The agreement was firmly in place for this law as well.

Breakfist had been satisfied with how his report had found itself entered into the Wizengamot record. Most wizards had focused on the research given from old Wizarding books and almost ignored the report from the goblin healer. The almost- unnoticed precedent of accepting the word of a goblin as a recognized expert did endear him further to Slipnose – and Ragnok.

The goblins were amused that the law could mean that the Ministry might pay for the ritual and then receive 10 percent of its own payment back as a fee. Cornelius suggested that pointing this out to wizards, some of whom already had trouble telling their left shoe from their right, was perhaps more complicated than it needed to be: Best just to charge a standard rate and deliver a standard
percentage – less thought was needed. The Minister's comment did cause a few goblins to chuckle when they heard it.

The Minister sat back and watched as the Wizengamot was called to order. He then watched as each portion of the bill was quickly reviewed and it was closed to further modification – his own motion.

And then the voting began. As the numbers came in, the Minister was more and more relaxed. The final tally had shown how effectively he and the allies he gained had worked: 39 votes for, 9 votes against, 2 absent, 1 abstained (his own vote).

As the law was declared passed, Fudge raised in arms in triumph. A swell of applause followed around the chamber.

The hard work would now begin.

Fudge stood and spoke casually with three men and one woman he was with as he walked down Diagon Alley, his standard two guards following. Their destination: Gringotts Bank.

With him walked Matthias Greengrass, Senior Undersecretary for International Law; Arthur Weasley, Director of the Interior; Dirk Cresswell, Head of the Goblin Liaison Office; and, Ashlee Attaberry, Deputy Interior Director for Muggle Affairs.

The young lady, newly graduated from Hogwarts, had been Minerva McGonagall's suggestion for a reliable source for all things Muggle when Arthur had asked. Arthur had returned from his month-long training period a much calmer and more confident man when talking about Muggles.

He still had a battery collection but everybody had to have a hobby.

The decision to hire her permanently had been the Minister's. When several pureblood had protested a Muggleborn being hired for such a high position, he defended it by pointing out: A) The position paid more than an assistant but only just, B) The position almost exclusively dealt with Muggles and with the Director of the Interior only and therefore kept them away from the regular employees from dealing with; and, C) Arthur's ability to shut up about Muggles was a direct result of her position and intervention.

The Minister was, at times, very practical in dealing with politics. He never mentioned this tidbit to Arthur.

Arthur had made a few changes as well. His dress was much closer to Muggle normal when needed. He also now had a telephone line in his shed, somewhat separated from normal activity at this home. His entire family had learned about it: How to use it, how to speak into it; how to answer it; what NOT to do with it; and a host of other things. It had taken his third son and youngest son the longest, but Ms. Attaberry had been patient.

Arthur's decision to get it and the reason for it reflected the Minister's decision to appoint him in charge of Muggles: Weasley felt that if he was to be responsible, than he had to have a way that Muggles in the know about their world could reached him if matters of his authority came up.

Arthur had plans to have a list of contact which included the Muggle Prime Minister, the Chiefs of Muggle Law Enforcement in the largest cities, and Muggleborn parents so that they had a place to call if there were accidental magical incidents which needed resolved but didn't rise to the level which tripped the Ministry's alarms.
The cost of a phone line for his shed (with an alarm magically tied to his watch if it rang – a tricky piece of magic which he had enlisted the help of Filius Flitwick to achieve) and the few phone lines into the Ministry had been one of the costs he had insisted on ensuring was in his Department’s budget.

The group would be dealing with another matter that the Minister had insisted on being in the Department's budget.

Finally, the group approached Gringotts. Absently, the Minister said to his guards, "Ok, you two. Stay our here until we finish. It shouldn't be more than an hour – likely less."

He was about to enter the door that had been opened by the goblin guards when a voice spoke out in protest. "Minister!"

Surprised, the Minister stopped and turned. "What is it?"

"Ministry guidelines are that as the Minister for Magic you are protected at all times outside of your home and the Ministry."

Confused, the Minister asked, "What of it?"

"You can't go in there without protection. I mean, it's …." The man didn't want to speak further with the goblins in earshot.

The Minister's confusion abated but he took on a thoughtful look. "What's your name again?"

"Auror John Dawlish, newly assigned to Ministry Protective detail."

The Minister nodded and turned to the guards at the door. "Do you mind holding the door open for a few moments whilst I explain a thing or two to the man?" The senior guard on duty nodded shortly and adjusted his body's position to hold the door open while still having his weapons in comfortable reach. "Thank you."

The Minister turned back. "Auror Dawlish. What is my position and, in the simplest terms, what do I do? Describe it for me."

"Er. Minister for Magic. You run the Magical government."

The Minister nodded. "Good. Now watch this." The Minister walked across the threshold. "Once again: My position and my authority."

"Minister. In charge of the government."

"You see, there is your mistake. On this side," he walked back across the threshold, "I am the Minister for Magic. I oversee all government operations and ensure the safety and security of magical citizens everywhere. In simple terms, I AM the boss. Now on that side," he walked back over the threshold, "it's quite different. When I pass this point, I am no longer in charge of the government. I am known as, 'Customer.' Hopefully, 'Valued Customer.' Maybe, if I am lucky, 'Trusted Partner in Business.' And, if I am extremely lucky and don't cock it all up, I may eventually be known as 'Friend.' Not likely, but there it is. But one thing I am NOT is 'In Charge of the Government.' You see that position is held by a venerable goblin by the name of Ragnok. I believe he had to fight 22 challenges?" he looked over at the guard.

"24," the guard stoically said.
"Right. 24 challenges to reach his exalted position as well as demonstrate that he could, in all circumstances, turn a profit for the bank. Now, while I am not 'In charge' my security is a matter of treaty. And, should we wizards not violate such agreements, I am very certain of my continued security the moment I walk across this threshold: They have made solemn agreement. So, Ministry guidelines that I be protected at all times are being followed. Now, one other matter." The Minister walked across the threshold and up to the man.

"Auror Dawlish? I should tell you that, in the future, should you imply or outright state that the goblins of Gringotts in any way fall short in following the agreements that they have already made, and you do this within my earshot, without solid incontrovertible proof – and most especially do this on the very stoop of Gringotts – then I will ask that you be reassigned to Administrative Clerk for Prisoner Care at Azkaban Prison so that you can spend your time ensuring the prisoners are fed and clothed, such as they are. Do you understand me?"

Dawlish nodded. "Good. Now, we will be half an hour to an hour. Why don't you go and have a cuppa over at the Cauldron and contemplate this conversation and its implications while we complete our business. Alright?"

Without waiting for an answer, the Minister turned and walked back through the doors, the others with him following. The guards gave the tall Auror a hard look until he retreated nervously to follow the Minister's suggestion. The other member of the Minister's detail, one who had visited with the Minister before, said, "We'll be back in a bit. I think I'll go explain things to him – make certain he doesn't repeat the mistake. Have a good and quiet watch."

The two guards nodded at the other man as he waved and moved off to follow Dawlish.

The Minister, when the group was between the two sets of guards – inner and outer – quietly said, "That was political. I'll explain later," and then he moved quickly to enter the main lobby of the bank.

The people with the Minister glanced at each other and followed.

They finally arrived and followed as the Minister entered the queue that contained people waiting to be seen. Those with the Minister observed his casual stance, free of any tension, as he calmly waited like any other customer.

Soon, a well dressed goblin appeared and walked toward them. The Minister quietly said, "This is us," and moved to intercept the goblin. "Account Manager, Slipnose. Good business to you."

"Good Business to you as well; follow me." The goblin turned and led the group to his office.

Soon they were all within Slipnose's office.

"Account's Manager. These are the Ministry personnel that, according to our new organizational structure, are to be involved with relations between the Ministry and Gringotts. Let me introduce them to you."

The Minister named each wizard and each wizard greeted him courteously. The witch was also introduced and greetings were passed. Slipnose briefly interrupted to send a goblin off who returned with a few files.

"Now, is there any business Gringotts wishes to handle with these people before I get to the items I wanted to deal with?"

Slipnose nodded. "Mr. Greengrass. You current Accounts Manager is Rockcrusher?"
Matthias nodded. "Yes. For quite a number of years."

"You have no complaints with his management of your accounts?"

"None. He has always been efficient and effective."

"Good. We shall maintain that. Mr. Weasley, you have no current Accounts Manager."

Arthur blushed. "Never made enough to need one actually."

"True. But you are now paid as a Senior Department head, correct?"

"Yes. Quite a bump in my salary, actually."

"Yes. I will now be your Accounts Manager. Any service that you or your family needs from Gringotts, make an appointment and see me, or ask for me at the teller to find out if I am available."

"Er. Alright. Thank you."

The Manager looked at the Weasley's new file and said, "Do you wish me to ensure your children's tuition is paid from your accounts?"

Arthur was surprised. "You can do that?" He paused, embarrassed and said, "Of course you can. What I meant was, if you can, I would appreciate it. Just make certain that there's a hundred Galleons a month left over for current expenses. Otherwise, if the tuition is covered, manage the account however you decide is best."

Slipnose nodded. A wizard who let him do his job – this was good. "See me in three months to review the progress your accounts have made. There should be a quarterly meetings between us."

"Of course. I shall also inform my wife that you are the one to be seen about things. She has full access to the expense money." Slipnose noted that for his records. "Should I spend the money for another vault?" Slipnose looked at him curiously. Arthur explained, "If you put the expense money in our regular vault, the rest can be left for you to manage fully. As long as the tuition gets covered, I'll try to prevent any spending against the new vault. If the money isn't visible, we can avoid temptation."

Slipnose sat back and thought about it. "An investment vault." He nodded and rifled through his desk to retrieve a form. It took a moment to fill things out. When it was done Slipnose said, "I will place 100 Galleons a month from your salary, and an extra 100 Galleons on December 1st for expenses during your holiday period into your current vault. I shall vigorously manage the investment account, only ensuring there is enough to cover tuition when needed. Otherwise, you will let me have full authority and will not spend against the investment vault. We shall review expense levels every quarter to adjust them as needed. Is that correct?"

"Yes. That sounds right."

"If you follow this, I can build your accounts to a much more advantageous position within 6 months. Just ensure that you do not overspend."

The two shook hands in agreement.

Slipnose turned to Cresswell. "You normally deal with Blacktooth?"
"Yes. My account is with the same manager as the Ministry."

"We shall change this on a trial basis and I shall take over your account. If you avoid wasting my time, as many Ministry wizards have a tendency to do, this shall be made permanent. Blacktooth was specifically chosen to manage the Ministry's normal accounts as he is quite set in ensuring every detail of any level is rigorously dealt with. While such a modus operandi ultimately ensures complete and thorough record keeping, it is very time consuming. If you do not want to have your time unnecessarily wasted, you will ensure my time is not unnecessarily wasted. Do we have an agreement?"

Cresswell nodded. "That works for me." He had been quite unhappy with how long it normally took for every visit he made to Gringotts, both for his new position as well as for his accounts.

Slipnose finished his notes and set the files aside. "Now, Minister, what business do you have with Gringotts today?"

"First of all, thank you for your time. Now, the first item: The Ministry has budgeted an amount to ensure that those with me today and myself have proper attire to meet with Muggles as needed. Instead of going to a witch or wizard for these items, I want to have these things bought in a Muggle store to ensure it is truly Muggle friendly. These will be high end items, but definitely Muggle."

Slipnose nodded. "A worthy idea. Most Magicals have no sense of current Muggle fashion. Your idea matches how we accouter our agents who deal with Muggle banks as necessary."

Slipnose excused himself to get a few items.

Matthias looked at the Minister thoughtfully. "Every thing you do is political, isn't it? The way you've dealt with every matter today shows quite a bit of acumen with political image. Very Slytherin of you."

Cornelius chuckled. "Not Slytherin: Hufflepuff. I've worked hard to ensure my relationship with Gringotts is quite good, especially since I've become Minister. I wasn't all that upset with Dawlish – his attitude is not outside of the normal – but I wanted word to get back to Ragnok and Slipnose that I made certain their good name, and the reputation of Gringotts, is not impugned. It makes for much smoother relations."

The wizards chuckled while Ashlee watched in amazement – she was new to politics. "Still, I think Slytherin would approve," Matthias said.

Slipnose returned and sat down. He set a black card and the table. "This card has 2400 Galleons – 12,000 Pounds – available on it. It is accepted by most Muggle establishments. Who shall be entrusted with it?"

They each looked at each other. The Minister said, "Arthur, with Ms. Attaberry as a valid user. She will actually be helping us pick our Muggle wardrobe."

Slipnose nodded and keyed in the two named. He handed the card to Arthur. "Keep it safe. There is antitheft security on it, but if lost you must come here to get a new one and pay a fee for its replacement."

Arthur nodded. He handed it to his Deputy Director. "Hold onto that for today." She nodded and took the card.

He then put a wallet on the table. "This contains up to 100 Galleons – 500 Pounds – of Muggle
money. It also has antitheft charms and can be set to be magically returned to a particular person so that it cannot be lost. Only one person can be made to open it. Anyone else will find it empty. Who shall it be keyed to?"

Arthur said, "Me again."

Slipnose nodded. He keyed Arthur in and handed him the wallet. "If you place the card within the wallet as most Muggles do, it will not be lost."

Arthur nodded and put it in his pocket. "When I get it back from Ashlee when we are finished today, I will do that. I'm going to let her handle it today as she is more knowledgeable."

Slipnose nodded. He really didn't care.

"Very well then. Minister? Any other business?"

He nodded and turned to Arthur's girl. "Ms. Attaberry. You are Muggleborn?"

"Yes, Minister," she replied with a self-conscious smile. "My family is Muggle."

"I see. Have you ever gotten a heritage test?"

She was confused. "Heritage test?"

"Yes. Gringotts charges 10 Galleons to see if you have any magicals in your family history. Have you ever had the test?"

"No, Minister. I've never heard of it!"

"Alright then." He turned back to Slipnose, pulling out his pouch as he did so. He withdrew 10 Galleons and pushed it across. "Ms. Attaberry will need a lineage test."

Slipnose nodded. He barked out a command and a goblin entered. The two spoke and then the second goblin left. Slipnose said to the witch, "Sit directly across from me."

She stood up and moved to trade places with the Minister, who genially moved to allow room. He sat where she had been sitting.

The second goblin returned and set down what he had brought.

The item was a slim stone tablet. Carved from the same stone, an inkwell protruded. It held a fresh quill. The four corners of the tablet also had protrusions – each was a shallow bowl which contained a shiny grey stone.

There was also a small bottle on ink and a piece of parchment on the tablet.

Slipnose removed the quill from the inkwell and poured the ink into it. He pulled a dagger out and pushed it across, along with a small bloodstone. "Make a small incision on a finger. Drop three drops of blood into the ink and then one on each hematite stone at the four corners. And then sit back. Put your cut finger on the bloodstone after and it will heal your cut. You may return the stone and dagger when the parchment is being filled."

She did as asked and made the cut. Three drops fell into the ink and then she dropped a single drop on the stones at the corners. She sat back and watched as Slipnose put the quill in the inkwell. He then made a few sounds and motions and then tapped the tablet. The four stones lit up as did the ink. Suddenly, the quill had emptied the inkwell and then rose and moved to the parchment. It
began writing.

Ashlee, having finished with the bloodstone, pushed it and the dagger back, ensuring the tablet was not disturbed. Slipnose casually put these away as he watched the quill work. Soon, the quill stopped writing and dropped to the tablet. Slipnose picked it up and handed it to the waiting goblin. He moved to the fireplace and threw it in the fire.

Cornelius said to the woman with a smile, "Freely given blood is not something you want to leave around."

Slipnose almost chuckled as he nodded. "Quite right."

Slipnose carefully began reading the parchment and said, "Interesting." He looked up and said a few words to the other goblin, who then retreated from the room, carrying the tablet away but leaving the parchment.

"Ms. Attaberry. Your lineage is quite interesting. On your father's side, your name actually matches a name of a wizarding family that was thought to have died out three centuries ago but instead changed to squibs. While that is not strange in and of itself, what IS strange is that this parchment shows that your father and grandfather both were wizards who had their cores bound."

Cornelius considered that. "If their parents had refused their Hogwarts letter, they would have been obliviated and their magical core bound to prevent catastrophes."

Slipnose nodded. "This matches what I have found."

Ashlee had a surprised look. "My grandfather and his family are quite religious. They would never have accepted a family member with magic. My father broke away when I was found to be a witch so that I was not treated poorly. My younger brother is also a wizard attending Hogwarts. He's in his sixth year."

Slipnose nodded. "You are not, in fact muggleborn. You are at least a halfblood and possibly pureblood depending on how you look at it. Your mother's side is even more interesting, especially considering present company."

The magical looked at each other. Matthias asked, "What do you mean?"

Addressing Ashlee he said, "Your mother is a squib and there is a squib parent present at every step since they were magical – they never went completely Muggle. While you are related to a few magical families on your mother's side, your most direct relation is actually the Fudge family. You are 5th or 6th cousins with the Minister – it would take a small amount of time to verify the exact degree of relation."

The Minister turned to the young lady and said, "Well then. I certainly have no problem welcoming such a charming and intelligent young woman into my family. When we are away from the Ministry or not working on Ministry business, you should call me Uncle Cornelius. We shall have to make arrangements for me to meet the rest of the family."

Ashlee was a bit overcome and impulsively stood to embrace the Minister. Rather than being embarrassed, the Minister had a happy look. The watching Magicals also enjoyed the sight.

Slipnose just watched with a detached eye.

When Ashlee pulled away with some small embarrassment, the Minister turned to Arthur Weasley. "Arthur? Your Deputy is my family. When word gets out, she will be hounded by those looking for
a politically convenient spouse. You’ll keep an eye on her and make certain she is kept safe and no one takes advantage of her?"

Arthur nodded cheerfully. "That will be no problem, Minister. I will ensure she is treated with respect."

"Good, Good." He turned back. "Now, if anyone give you any trouble, you be certain to let me know so that I can take steps."

Quietly Ashlee replied, "Okay. Thank you … Uncle Cornelius."

The Minister beamed.

The second goblin returned with a file and the two standing sat back down.

"Ms. Attaberry. You qualify to inherit the vault that your family historically has kept at Gringotts. It contains a decent number of Galleons and a few heirlooms. If you like, I can take this account as well and help bring it to active status."

Ashlee was goggle-eyed. "Really? How much?"

"If you don't mind these knowing?" Slipnose asked.

She glanced around and then back. "I think they are trustworthy, especially my new Uncle."

"Quite. The vault contains approximately 77,000 Galleons." He pushed over the vault key. "When you have more time, you should inspect the vault and also make an appointment to meet with me as regards managing the account. With your father's core being bound at 11, your claim is the senior one. Do you wish to pay for your brother's final year at Hogwarts from the family vault?"

Ashlee was caught for a moment, not having thought of that. "Yes. Please do that. I will tell my parents later." She turned to the Minister and asked, "Can my father's core ever be unbound?"

Cornelius shrugged. "I'm not up enough on the law and I'm not a healer. When you aren't busy with work, you should consult with Arthur and perhaps Amelia Bones about the legality of it and St. Mungos or even a Gringotts healer as to the whether it is safe to be done. Not a decision to be made on the spur of the moment."

Ashlee nodded. "This is just so much different than how I expected my day to go."

The people in the room, except Slipnose, chuckled at that.

"Well," the minister said. "I have no more business today. Does anyone else?"

There were several sounds which all said basically, "No."

He stood up as did those with him. "Thank you, Slipnose, for your excellent service. Good Health and Wealth to you and your clan."

Slipnose stood and nodded back. "Good health and wealth to you and everyone here. I shall look forward to the increase in business in the future."

A/N: Not enough time for their adventures in shopping today. Maybe the next chapter.
The Minister of Magic waited cheerfully at the Ministry entrance for the others. Having completed their visit to Gringotts, the group had dispersed to take care of personal things and to 'Dress Muggle.' They were to take a Ministry car to a Muggle store that his new-found kinswoman had named: Harolds or Hadders or some such – like most wizards he often botched names that he was unfamiliar with for some reason.

It was something of a oddity amongst magicals: Names of unfamiliar or non-magical things were mangled as a matter of course and the oddest magical creatures or phenomenon were remembered far past the time when such information was useful: Something to ponder when he had time to just sit and think and was not so busy.

Cornelius spent the time waiting speaking with this visitor or that to the Ministry. The importance of the average citizen was something that the Traveler had wrung into his head. Originally, like most politicians and upper class, the average wizard and his troubles had been something that others worried about – something for minions to deal with.

His original foray into Diagon Alley after his election – at the Traveler's insistence – had been very educational. While some were truly only interested in 'being seen talking to the Minister' many were honestly happy to just stop and talk. Listening to the stories and concerns of the average citizen – and being seen doing it – had made him very popular.

Being seen doing it was less important than he had originally thought – but he was still a politician. Besides, people remembered and spoke to others and word got out even with no press around to relay the image he presented.

Soon, the others arrived. Cornelius almost militantly, after greeting them, continued talking to the average visitors. During a quiet moment, Mathias Greengrass asked him why he was doing it.

The Minister chuckled. "Politics is a harsh mistress, Greengrass. Although the average problem falls far below what I should be dealing with, the fact that they had a chance to tell me engenders a certain amount of trust and familiarity. And if I happen to enjoy being trusted by the voters by my actions … well, it's politics. Give it a try sometimes – find out what the average person thinks about international trade or dealing with muggles or goblins or centaurs. Not the politicians – the average wizard or witch."

Mathias considered it as he watched the Minister talk. After another ten minutes, the remainder of their party arrived and they made their way out.

Before they got in the car, the Minister asked Ashlee to ensure they didn't look silly.

She looked at each person. "Well, Minister, your coat might be considered a bit long – but it's traditional so it should be alright. Mr. Greengrass," she paused, took a breath and said, "are you good at color changing charms?" He nodded. "Change your pants and coat from the plum to black – your suit looks nicely cut but the colors are something that most Muggles see as … well, odd. It's not unheard of, so you don't have to, but a nice strong black would be more common."

Mathias shrugged and changed as requested. Ashlee smiled. "Now it just looks classic."
She turned and inspected her immediate boss. He was wearing black trousers, black shoes, and a royal blue jumper over a white collared shirt with no tie. "Mr. Weasley – you did well with what we've covered before. Seeing who you're with – you might want to look a bit more … well, upper crust if you will, but overall, no one should give you a second look." She looked down and sighed. "Except the socks. Black trousers and black shoes means black socks. Yours are Gryffindor gold and red and catch the eye. Color changing charm."

Arthur sheepishly did as asked.

"Dirk – you're good." Cresswell was dressed in what most Muggles called business casual. He had asked Ashlee to call him Dirk as technically she was at a level above him on the ladder.

She looked again at the four men and nodded. "Now, I am dressed in common clothes for a Muggle woman. My blouse is feminine but not overly formal or overly casual, basic black skirt – considered very normal for women both casual and professional – and these shoes are called pumps; black to match my skirt with socks to match my blouse. Women, I am sorry to tell you, can get away with far more unusual dress than men."

She took another deep breath. "Now, we're going to be going to a pretty upscale store – they will have pretty much anything you ask for. Please, PLEASE, let me give the helpers directions. It's part of Muggle culture to pretty much allow women to use any colors they like. As wizards, you are used to being allowed any color you like – but many colors most Muggle men wouldn't wear or will only wear on item."

"For example: Pink. A pink shirt might be considered alright – but if you wear a pink suit, people will think you are a man who likes men. Purples are the same: Avoid too much purple, yellow, bright or light blues, and bright reds. Darker colors are not uncommon for casual wear: Black, brown, green, maroon, royal or midnight blue, maybe even up to cobalt blue: Perfectly fine for casual. We, however, are going for professional or wealthy looking."

"This means, mostly, blacks, blues, greys, browns, and white. What differentiates power and wealth is not color, such as you often see as wizards, but cut and the type of material. Basic wool – to a muggle – looks cheap while higher quality wool looks traditional. Suits don't change much but what the Minister normally wears looks to be a robe version of a traditional suit: trousers, shoes, vest, long coat. Muggle have shortened their traditional suit coats. The one thing that gives the suit a bit of color might be a tie – a nice bright or patterned tie is considered as showing personality."

"Today, we will go mostly single color suits with vests, with complimentary tie colors. The sales assistants will look at your skin tone and try to match colors based on that. Just remember this: To Muggles, image is often everything. Many muggles can take one look and tell your social rank, wealth, family structure, health, and sexuality."

The wizards looked at each other and considered that. It was almost inconceivable that just the way one dressed communicated all of that. But none denied the certainty which Ms. Ashlee Attaberry spoke on the matter.

Ashlee chuckled. "On the first day of Hogwarts – when I was 11 – my conclusions based on my Muggle upbringing about Albus Dumbledore, for example, just from the way he dresses: He's very old fashioned, comes from common but not poor roots, has never made a lot of money but has made a comfortable living, very eccentric, very well respected despite his image and so likely very intelligent and likely also powerful, he prefers men to women, and he doesn't care what people think about him personally – but does work to manipulate people's opinion on social and political issues. Not the words I would have used at Eleven – but the basic idea I had of the man."
The wizards looked at the formerly-labeled Muggleborn with astonishment. Mathias Greengrass asked, "What do you think about working for an Undersecretary directly? Higher pay and more authority."

Arthur interrupted, "Now wait just a minute! I hired her – I'm keeping her. She's too important to my new job. Get your own Muggle-raised witch!"

Ashlee blushed a little. "Sorry, Mr. Greengrass. I happen to like my current job. Give it a couple of years and we'll see."

The wizards chuckled and everyone entered the car. On the way, "One more thing: Muggle etiquette. Everyone refers to the Minister as Mr. Fudge – it will tell everyone that he's the highest ranked person. Do we want formal or casual speaking? A trip to a shoppe is considered casual but the presence of high-ranked individual can make any casual situation formal. It depends on the opinion of the highest-ranked individual there. Mr. Fudge?"

The Minister chuckled. "We're co-workers. Let's be more casual. And you call me, Uncle Cornelius."

Ashlee gave the Minister a small smile. "Okay. Everyone used first names for those of equal rank or one rank higher. So Mr. Greengrass is Mr. Greengrass to Dirk and I and Mathias to Arthur and Mr. Fudge. I speak to Mr. Fudge using familial reference but I speak about him as Mr. Fudge. Arthur is Arthur to everyone and he calls everyone by their proper name, except Mr. Fudge. The on-duty guards speak to no one – and no one speaks of them. They just stand looking casual and dangerous keeping an eye out for Mr. Fudge and whoever is around him."

There were nods all around.

Harrods was a new experience for the wizards. They had never seen such a busy shopping facility. Even Diagon Alley, the day after the Hogwarts letters arrived, was not this busy normally. That this was considered a normal day was slightly unnerving.

Finally, the group found themselves in Menswear. Ashlee flagged down a sales assistant.

"Hello," she looked at the name tag, "Mary. I have these men who need to each get fitted for suits. Mr. Fudge, Mr Greengrass, and Mr. Weasley," she motioned to each man as named, "need one suit that says 'High Level British Government visiting 10 Downing' if you understand me." The saleslady nodded. "Now each, plus Mr. Cresswell here, also needs a suit which screams 'Old Money meeting Traditional Banker.' Got that so far?"

Mary looked them over. "British or imported?"

"British – most definitely. Mr. Weasley also needs two more less expensive suits more appropriate to, say, consulting at Scotland Yard or a Mayor's office. And one casual outfit which says 'Government officer trying to blend in to the background.' You get my meaning?"

Mary nodded. "We can do that. What is the budget?"

Ashlee pulled out the black card from Gringotts – Mary's eyes lit up. "9000 pounds should be more than enough. We don't need to spend all of that – it has to be justified to an accountant. But quality must not suffer for cost. And needed accessories must be included: Belts, wallets, shoes, socks, undershirts, underpants: All of it."

Mary looked at each man thoughtfully and nodded. "That should be possible. And you?"
"I will need to get one outfit suitable for Number 10, one suitable for Executive Assistant visiting the bankers with her boss, and two outfits for more low level meetings. I've earmarked 1200 pounds for that – separate from the 9000. Do I need to go to that department or can it come here so that I can help with fitting the bosses?"

"We can arrange a private fitting room for the group and I'm sure that they can measure you there and then bring outfits for you to try on."

"Good. They are all familiar with being fitted as necessary – no off the rack for them, but they are also used to service befitting their status, if you get my meaning. Dirk Cresswell and I are more mid-level compared to the Executive level these are."

Mary nodded.

The group was led to a private room. Soon, several tailors arrived to take measurements and to present choices for color and material. Once that was done, the staff retreated to begin bringing items to fit. Refreshments were provided.

"Uncle Cornelius? I deliberately left a few hundred Galleons in case there are sudden 'Extras' – much better than giving the full budget."

The Minister smiled. "We are in your hands. I admit – the store is impressive, but once you arrive at this level, it's not much different than Madam Malkins – at least so far."

When all was said and done, it took a couple of hours but the suits were bought. It would take a few days before they could be completed, but the wizards accepted this – Magicals were more efficient at a few things. Not many – but a few.

It was a week later when the suits were picked up by Arthur Weasley's Deputy Director for Muggle Affairs. She ensured each wizard got their suit or suits and that there were no issues. Madam Malkin or Twillfitts and Tatting's could make final adjustments as needed.

Mr. Greengrass had also paid for a suit himself that was Armani – he felt that meeting foreign Ministry's or Muggles as needed would be smoother if he didn't ruthlessly keep his dress British-made and Ashlee had agreed with him. Besides – he highly admired the material and cut of the suit.

Finally, the Minister was prepared to contact the other Minister.

Margaret Thatcher sat within her office at 10 Downing St., reviewing the reports on the continuing inability of the Government to enforce the poll-tax against opposition that seemed unending. Even her own party was becoming quite disaffected due to the response by so many groups and average citizens.

Suddenly, she heard a small cough. Looking around the room, she saw no one – but then heard the cough once more. She realized where the sound came from and had a feeling of dread – what in the hell did those people need? "Yes?" she asked the painting.

"To the Prime Minister. Minister for Magic Cornelius Fudge would like an appointment when it is convenient regarding a change in the Magical government and new procedures for contact between our two governments. When can such a meeting take place and should the party arrive via magical means or through the front door?"

Madam Thatcher was taken aback. In the nearly ten years that she had been Prime Minister, she
had never seen a witch or wizard walk through the front door. She didn't know if she wanted to now – they seemed incapable of not attracting attention to themselves.

"I am available tonight at 9 O'clock. They should use the other way to get here and not the front door."

"Very well. You will have two to four at 9:00. Your assistants shall remember other business and no one else should wish to meet you then." The wizard in the photo then stilled once more.

At least they got permission first – that was a step up.

At precisely 9:00 PM, the fire within the fireplace in her office lit up and then immediately turned green. Very soon, and to her surprise, a few people stepped through. First was the man she had met only a few weeks earlier – the new Minister. Unlike the last visit, his dress was actually normal enough to walk through the front door – actually, ALL of these visitors were dressed well enough that no one would have commented on that aspect if the had arrived during regular business hours.

"Good afternoon, Prime Minister! As you might remember, I am Cornelius Fudge, the Minister for Magic. I've brought those people from my government who you might need to know of or you might need to contact."

The Iron Lady of Britain nodded. "You are welcome here; please be seated." She motioned the chairs across from her desk.

The visitors did as asked and with minimum fuss.

"Now, what is this all about?"

Cornelius nodded. "Recently – well, as soon as I was elected Minister for Magic – I instituted a reorganization of the Ministry to provide more clear-cut lines of authority, to optimize its functions, and to reduce waste in terms of overlapping areas of responsibility."

Thatcher looked interested. "All of that in two months."

The Minister nodded. "We have a tendency to allow bureaucracy to overflow – I just wanted to rein it in a bit. As a result, there are now three clear-cut areas of authority: matters internal to the Ministry; matters dealing with our domestic responsibility to our citizens and Magical Issues specifically; and all matters dealing with our society's external relationships.

"The relationship with your government, for example, falls under this third area: We are, in practical matters, two separate governments, no matter how much our basic laws are built on those of your government before the separation. You could almost say that the Magical clauses of the Acts of Union finalized the matter after our Statute of Secrecy was passed. Which brings us to why we are here today."

He pointed to the people with him. "This is Mr. Mathias Greengrass, Undersecretary for International Law and Cooperation of the Ministry for Magic. His position is just below mine and his areas of interest include your government and our relationship."

The Prime Minister exchanged pleasantries with Mathias.

"This is Arthur Weasley, The Director of the Interior actually deals with all governments not our own within Great Britain and Ireland. As a result, he will be the new contact between our governments as required by treaty."
The Prime Minister nodded. "Secretary."

Arthur stood up and bowed. "Prime Minister." He handed over a newly-made card and sat down. It only gave his name and his Mugglefied title: 'Advisor to the British Prime Minister, Matters Special and Confidential'. "As our office shall now take over responsibilities for helping to keep our world and troubles away from you, it was the closest we could come up with which didn't sound … false and misleading. Should you need our help regarding our world, the phone listed is always available to you."

The Prime Minister nodded and said, "Well, Matters Special and Confidential certainly includes what you deal with." She paused and said, "I shall include your name and contact information within official directories as needed such that you are not listed as a paid employee but a consultant as needed. However, I shall have to contact the Queen about this."

The visiting Magicals were surprised. "Why is that, if I may ask?" the Minister queried.

"Your position should not be dependent upon the acceptance of each new Prime Minister. For example, if things can't be turned around soon about the Poll Tax – there may very well be a new Prime Minister in power before the end of the year. When a new Minister is named, very often all previous appointments have to be approved again or are replaced. The exceptions are those whose positions fall under the purview of Her Majesty. Your Ministry, from my understanding, is based on treaty with the Monarchy, correct?"

The Magicals all nodded. "Then you're really an Adviser to Her Majesty's Government regarding Matters Special and Secret. I am the head of Her Majesty's Government, so no change in whom you liaise with. It just makes it sound more … archaic and unchangeable. Such is the case when dealing with matters Royal." She paused. "You wouldn't happen to be a Baron or an Earl or some such, would you?"

The Magicals chuckled. Mathias explained. "There are no real patents of Nobility in our Government. Certainly some families had them historically but they gave them up when our societies separated. The only Lords and Ladies we have are the members of our Wizengamot whom are referred to as the Lords and Ladies Wizengamot as a whole and Lord or Lady as individuals. The Wizengamot is our body which passes laws and oversees trials."

"I see. Which of you are members?"

Fudge replied, "As Minister, I hold a seat. The new Undersecretaries all are Wizengamot positions – there are four of these total, which includes an Undersecretary for my office which I haven't named yet – haven't found a good candidate that I can work with so far. So that's five seats out of 50 – of which only I and Mathias here are present. Some Directors can be made Wizengamot members but it isn't automatic."

The Prime Minister thought about that. "Well, I can accept all of this. As a matter of fact, I feel a bit better about your government now. By the way, who is the last one here?" she asked looking at Ashlee.

Arthur replied, "This is Ashlee Attaberry, my Deputy Director for Muggle Affairs. She's a recent graduate from our educational system who grew up in the non-magical world. As a result, she has a better idea of dealing with things we aren't used to. She's the one who decided on our dress for today – as an example."

The Right Honorable Prime Minister nodded at the young lady with a smile. "Very good – and very wise of you. Young lady, just the difference in how my visitors look today compared to my
past experiences shows the wisdom of your position. I hope you do as good a job in all matters you
deal with."

Ashlee blushed a little. "Thank you. I hope to."

Thatcher nodded. "I will be sending the message regarding the change to Her Majesty as well as
your contact information as supplied. I am certain that you will be notified if any further contact is
needed." She stood up. "I will admit that your visit has been much more comfortable and
productive than I was expecting. Thank you for your time and your service."

The visitors all stood and returned the polite words and then made their way through to floo back
to the Ministry.

Mrs. Petunia Dursley

Greetings. I hope this letter finds you and your family well.

Due to a number of recent occurrences, the conditions of which I originally wrote to you when I
placed Harry Potter in your care as his blood relative of his sister have some need of modification.

Whereas the original letter stated that there would not be contact until Harry received his
invitation to Hogwarts, the situation now stands thusly:

Harry's godfather, as named by his parents Lily and James, has recently been exonerated of any
involvement in their death. He had originally been placed in Azkaban prison as it was suspected
that he was the source which allowed those who sought harm to the Potters to find them, creating
the situation which then obtained which required Harry's placement with you.

This suspicion, originally taken as fact, has, however, been disproven.

It was found that it was another acquaintance which, in fact, provided the information allowing
Harry's parents to be killed and Harry orphaned.

While Mr. Sirius Black has spent the previous month recovering from his stay within prison, he will
soon be released. And, upon his release, he will demand the opportunity to visit with young Harry
as is his legal right in our society.

I should warn you that this does not negate the need for the protections which your family enjoys
due to Harry's presence in your home. The individual who attacked your sister and her husband
has not, in fact, been definitively proven as deceased and, it is my contention, it is likely that he
will re-appear at some point in the future.

Harry's protection, given by his mother's sacrifice, means that currently Harry – and your family –
are protected against any magical attack against you. So while it may seem that the reappearance
of Mr. Black would result in Harry's removal, such is not the case.

So, I am writing this letter to inform you that soon Mr. Black will be calling upon your home and I
ask that you provide him such welcome as you can in the hopes that the protections afforded can
remain in place. Should Mr. Black force the issue and demand custody of his godson the
protections afforded to your family shall be negated.

Sincerely I am,

Albus Wulfric Percival Brian Dumbledore
Petunia considered the letter before her with a disagreeable look. While she had recently become less … angry (she wouldn't admit to jealousy) about the world her sister left her for, she was by no means sanguine about it. It had only been in the last two months that the sight of her nephew's eyes did not make her want to yell out in hatred (and hurt if she was being honest with herself) but it did not make her comfortable.

Finally she sighed and called out, "Vernon!"

Her husband's voice called out from the sitting room which contained the telly, "Pet?" Vernon sounded distracted.

A little irritated she repeated herself, "Vernon! Come here, please."

She heard Vernon's heavy steps before he appeared in the doorway to the kitchen. "What is it, Pet? Can it wait? It's only a few minutes of the match."

Withholding her worse ire, "Vernon, there are more important things than the replay of the match of the week."

Vernon sighed. "Okay, Pet. What do you need?" He walked over to the table and sat down.

She pushed the letter over. "Read this."

Vernon read through the letter. He had to consciously withhold his temper – his doctor was complaining about his blood pressure – but he completed the whole thing. Finally he sighed, "It isn't natural, what these people do."

"Natural or not, the boy's Godfather can apparently make trouble. And if we don't tell him a few things first, that's what will happen."

Vernon sighed again. Truthfully, he had been feeling guilty recently for his behaviour toward the boy. The boy had never asked to be placed with them and apparently nothing could be done about his unnaturalness.

Denying it made no difference.

During the summer, the Dursleys had suddenly lost that manic drive toward normality that had driven many of their choices towards the smallest resident of Number 4. That change allowed them to see a few things that they had been blind to in the past.

They had been so worried about being normal that they had become ABnormal – which wouldn't do at all. Who kept a 10 year in a cupboard – no matter how much they didn't appreciate his presence? Who dressed such a child in clothes that were many sizes too large when a few pounds allowed for decent used trousers and shirts?

They certainly didn't spend the amount on the boy that they spent on their Dudley, but they were not quite so tightfisted: It wouldn't have been considered 'normal'.

Vernon finally said, "We will sit him and Dudley down this Saturday. We'll tell him that we lied so as not to alert those murderers who killed the fre … er the Potters. We told him a story that no boy would want to repeat just so that he wouldn't try to brag up how brave his parents were."
Petunia considered that. "Why not tonight?"

Vernon replied, "I missed the first part of Match of the Week helping to put the boy's room in shape; I'll be damned if I miss the replay to talk to the boy about that unnaturalness. I have limits, Pet."

Petunia touched her husband's arm consolingly. "I understand. Go watch your match."

Vernon went to the door and called out, "Boy!"

Petunia heard her nephew's voice from the sitting room. "Yes, Uncle Vernon?"

"Get me a pint and Dudley a fizzy drink. After that, you can have a fizzy drink too – a SMALL one. Get moving!"

"Yes, Uncle Vernon!" Her nephew's voice didn't sound sullen at the sudden order at all. At least the way he was raised didn't lend itself to his being a Nancy-boy, crying over everything. He took the blows life gave him and moved on.

Petunia stood to retrieve the beer and the fizzy drinks from the icebox – the faster to get the boy from underfoot is what she told herself. She wasn't helping him – never that.

She heard her son's voice as the boy came in the kitchen. "I want crisps too!" He still wasn't used to the restrictions.

"Sorry, Dudikens. You heard the doctor – no snacks after supper and before bed. I'm allowing one fizzy drink because it just isn't proper to watch a match without a drink. But no crisps." Her husband hadn't liked the new restrictions but had agreed to them.

She watched the boy carefully pour the drinks even as she heard her Duddly-poo sound his disappointment. At least he no longer had tantrums about it.

As the boy picked up the tray with the drinks, she motioned for him to wait. She retrieved three bananas and put them on the tray. "Two for Dudley and the smallest for you. I expect you to ensure it's cleaned up after."

"Yes, Aunt Petunia." The boy didn't even frown at her tone.

"Get moving."

She heard the boy say to Dudley, "From Aunt Petunia."

Dudley called out, "Thanks, Mum!"

She was proud: Her son was so polite!

After an hour, during the commercial, Vernon yelled, "Clean this up, boy! And you've seen the rest on Saturday – so off to your room!"

"Yes, Uncle Vernon."

Dudley's voice could be heard, "Can I stay?"

"Of course you can! School doesn't start for another week or so."

Petunia watched the boy throw away the skins and put the cups in the sink. He started to reach for
the tap when she said, "Leave it. I'll do it. Go off and start reading those books we spent that money on. Even if they are used, they're the proper material for Level 6. I expect your grades to rise this year. I don't want to hear about poor effort from someone living in my home!"

The boy looked at her dubiously. "But Dudley …."

"Never you mind about Dudley! We're getting him a professional tutor because obviously those teachers can't take the effort to ensure he gets good grades. You'll have to do with the books. Now get a move on!"

The boy shrugged and retreated to his room. For some reason, he didn't seem so … disagreeable about orders anymore. Maybe they had finally taught him obedience?

A/N: I'd like to point out that in the first Harry Potter book, Harry pre-Hogwarts was NOT a broken, beat down boy – remember when he tried to force Vernon to give him his letter? The Dursleys were horrible – but it hadn't risen to the actions that started once Harry began Hogwarts. There was nothing in canon that indicated that the Dursley adults ever actually hit him – even the description of Petunia swinging the frying pan described it as half-hearted and easily dodged.

Getting rid of compulsions might account for the Dursleys becoming … a little less overbearing. They still don't like Harry – but they can finally see how strange their treatment of him looked. Every improvement in Harry's homelife is based off of that one overdriving fact: The Dursleys love being normal.

Chapter End Notes

A couple of particularly insulting reviews made me disinclined toward writing for a few days. If someone dislikes my stories, ideas, or style – please feel free to not read what I write. I write for my and other's amusement and to contemplate "What If's" that I think of. Many lone timg readers will note that, while I often use fanon cliché tropes, I also tend to think of things here and there which had never been really thought of before. I have actually created a few fanon clichés – the goblins despite of Horcruxes such that they won't even say the word (along with a viable reason for it) way back in Afterlife, Inc, for example – and so I do know that there are those that find some of what I write intriguing, logical, and/or useful. I also liberally use logical clichés that I find – some which are canon, some written by Rowlings but not part of the original books, and many that are pure fanon – I think Rowling commented somewhere about muggleborns coming from squibs, or it's fanon; but I find it eminently logical and regularly use it. Anyway, I could brood further over a few bad reviews, or I could expand my ideas forth for possible enjoyment of others. For now, I have decided. And so … I write.
Cornelius Fudge sat within his office, contemplating what he should next approach.

The problem he was having was actually of his own making: His appointees were too competent.

When he had reorganized the Ministry to be more efficient, his goal had been clear lines of command, operation, and responsibility. This was ostensibly to cut down on costs by removing redundancies, but the real purpose had been to minimize the ability of one person (Dumbledore) to exude unequaled control or persuasion on too many parts of the Ministry.

By delineating clear lines of command, people had one person – one – whom they answered to directly. No one person had more than five people that directly answered to them. Even the Aurors had been reorganized into squads based on Muggle military structure: 4 Aurors answered to a Supervising Auror, the supervising Aurors answered to a Senior Auror, the Senior Aurors answered to the Auror Watch Commander, the Watch Commanders answered to the Head of the Auror Department and they answered to the Senior Undersecretary.

The first time Cornelius had received a message "requiring" Ministerial involvement, he had gathered up every Ministry employee between the Minister's office and the low-level employee and explained the command line to the man and to each member of the command line. Yes, he needed to be informed if there were political implications, but that had to come through the proper channels – not directly to his office, except in cases where command structure had broken down, which had not been the case.

After this, his secretary often spent her time forwarding improperly routed missives to the appropriate supervisor or department.

Very efficient – but very boring.

This meant that he often had paperwork that needed reviewed in the morning and near the end of the day. The time in between – the Undersecretaries handled the day to day operations of their departments well: They had taken on the habit of enforcing the communication and command lines as their own, which meant that they often had time to observe their subordinate departments and to set up the command lines as needed, allowing the average Ministry employee to get his or her job done.

Cornelius finally reached down and, unlocking a particular drawer, pulled out a pile of parchment that he had written out when he had been visited by the Traveler.

He reviewed the various pages, noting where particular situations had already been resolved, reorganizing the remaining items into orders of importance, adding a few items from his talks with his Account Manager and his Undersecretaries.

He made a few more notes and then wrote an order for his secretary: Meeting of the Undersecretaries and Minister for the next day at 2:00 regarding review of current Ministry operations. After giving this to his secretary, he made a few more notes and then wrapped up for the day – maybe he's see if his wife wanted to do something together.

The secretary opened to door to find her boss looking at her expectantly. "The Senior Undersecretaries have arrived."
The Minister stood. "Good, good. Send them in. Thank you."

Very soon, Fudge was sitting with his three subordinates. "Good afternoon. I wanted to see you together to review what the Ministry is currently working on in each of your areas. But first: Would anyone like refreshment?"

The first person to speak was Mattias Greengrass. "Currently, there are no major concerns for International Law and Cooperation. Crouch has been dealing with the other Ministries as needed but nothing of major concern. Weasley has been doing very well with the Muggles – the Muggle Minister has spoken to him fairly regularly as regards any outstanding issues and things seem to be under control. Gringotts goes on as it normally does – no real complaints there."

The Minister nodded. "And immediate future plans?"

Greengrass shrugged slightly. "Currently I am more interested in ensuring that the normal operations remain just that before trying to introduce anything which may cause any upheaval."

"Good, good. Augusta. How goes the Ministry's inner workings?"

"Good for the most part. I've had to deal with a few more Wizengamot concerns than I would like – the Chief Warlock being normally found at Hogwarts, the daily concerns get sent to me. Currently, there is nothing earth-shattering but I am not looking forward to the next emergency."

The Minister nodded thoughtfully. "What concerns have you been fielding?"

Augusta considered that. "A few issues on the Judicial panels for the members who are trying cases in the DMLE – a few schedule problems and so forth. The Aurors and the normal enforcement officers have been picking up petty criminals a bit faster than they had in the past – both a good thing and a bad one. While the Aurors are more efficient, the judiciary wasn't prepared for the increase in the numbers."

Cornelius replied, "I see. Amelia? Any thoughts on how to resolve this?"

She nodded. "The problem has been that there are a number of laws that have been put in place over the centuries which label certain things crimes when really they are civil disputes between individual wizards. Sometimes, one wizard or another, seeing a possible threat to his business, has gotten one thing or another made illegal so that it wouldn't negatively affect their 'Merlin-given' right to a monopoly. This means that petty crime is really, in the opinion of some Aurors, really not criminal at all, but they are required to uphold the laws as passed."

Cornelius snorted. "As much as I am for tradition, I think it would be healthier for Wizarding Britain if we didn't involve the Ministry in trying to protect one British wizard over another. I am all for ensuring that the Ministry reasonably protects British interests over other, conflicting considerations, but locking up one British wizard to protect the pocket of another because the first one got a better idea? No. We need to review laws to ensure that no Ministry law favors one citizen over another. The pureblood supremacists won't like it – but a healthy economy depends on good competition: It makes things more affordable for people to purchase things and so increases the amount of money flowing through the society. So, how do we do this?"

The Undersecretaries looked at the Minister in surprise for a moment before discussing their options. Even Greengrass, the one most currently involved with his own business operations, could see the need for it – as much as he wanted to disagree. They finally reached tentative short-term, medium-term, and long-term plans to change things.
After checking that there were no immediate concerns for Magical Law and Regulation, the Minister went on. "Okay. Next item: Is there any Ministry employee who seems to be working hard 100 percent of their time or near enough?"

The three were confused. Amelia asked, "What do you mean?"

The Minister leaned back a bit. "While I am certain that we don't want employees wasting time, and therefore Ministry resources, I've come to believe that no one person should honestly have so much work on their plate that they must work day in and day out if there isn't a crisis to deal with. Think about it: If we have someone who's job is so vital that they have no time to do anything else, what would happen if that person all of a sudden died? How much confusion would that make?"

The three Undersecretaries considered that. "No one, and I include us in this, should be so busy that adjustments in an emergency would mean our downfall. What if we want a vacation? Who will do the job? So, in my mind, a person should be spending no more than 50 percent or so of their time on current work. Another percentage should be spent codifying their position so that they can be replaced or promoted as needed. If Mathias, for example, needed to take time to go to the continent, there should be some instructions for either his deputy or even I to review to ensure that normal business continue. Too often, when someone takes time off, the work just piles up, leaving needed things undone. Not efficient. The person coming back then has to spend months catching up.

"Instead, every employee should have a named alternate. Every person should be able to, if needed, do any job immediately below or above them as needed. If I was killed, Merlin forbid, one of you would likely need to take over to ensure the Ministry continues. But you will still need to ensure your job is done. If the Head of the Auror Department needs the day off, his job should be able to be covered either by his superior," he motioned toward Amelia, "or a set person such that that person can do both their job AND the temporary one. I need an Undersecretary for the Minister's Office who I can trust to do my job or any of yours as needed in a pinch.

"So, if anyone is working so hard they can't organize and inspect their areas of responsibility, file proper reports, brief their superior, teach their subordinates, and generally make sure things are running smoothly, than perhaps we need to look at getting more people for that area. And if anyone is spending most of their time organizing or inspecting, maybe we need to look at folding that position into another. Whatever the case, no person should be working on current concerns less than thirty percent of their time or more than sixty percent if there is no crisis. First we need to handle anyone working less than twenty or more than seventy five, and then we can move on from there. In my mind, if things are properly organized, no crisis should reasonably force us to start paying for time beyond what the employee is already scheduled. Thoughts?"

The Undersecretaries considered the Minister's words and discussed it. In the end, they decided to first take some time to inspect their areas and see if anyone was working too much or too little. The Minister asked that he be allowed to come along on occasion so that he could become more familiar with all areas of the Ministry. They agreed. The group also agreed to weekly meetings of no more less than one hour and nor more than two to review regular operations.

The Minister sat in his office, waiting for his next appointment. The door opened and his secretary announced her. "Madam Marchbanks! Welcome. Welcome. Please come and have a seat."

The elderly lady moved quite spryly for her age and accepted the seat provided. "Minister. You sent a request to see me?"

"Yes. But first: Would you like any refreshment? Tea? Juice?"
The elderly lady looked at the Minister and said, "No. Thank you. I prefer to complete whatever business is before us."

"Of course. I thank you for coming. You are the head of Wizarding Examinations? Making certain the OWLs and NEWTs are administered properly?"

The lady nodded. "Yes. It is my greatest responsibility. The magic I have seen during my time … it is a wonder. Why do you ask?"

Cornelius sat back and replied, "I was wondering if you, as well as the head of Magical Education, would like to accompany me to Hogwarts sometime soon."

"Oh? To what purpose?" Griselda asked suspiciously.

"Mostly to see the old place, but also to see how classes are delivered since my time there. Too much of the future of Magical Britain is directly involved with Hogwarts for me to ignore it entirely. But, at the same time, it is not the Minister's purview or even his area of expertise to competently judge what is 'Good Education' – and so I would like those who have more expertise to come with me and evaluate it for themselves."

The woman considered it. "And if you disagree with what you see?"

"I would speak to you and the head of Magical Education, and perhaps send a message to the board of Governors. As I said – control of Hogwarts does not fall under my office. I am interested only in that our future is placed within its walls."

Griselda considered it. "I might be interested. Is this to be a surprise?"

The Minister chuckled. "No, no. It would be properly scheduled. I would like for students to have an opportunity to ask questions of those visiting and giving their concerns, though, even anonymously if needed or desired."

The elder stood. "Make your plans. I am available with enough notice for any date."

The Minister stood. "Thank you." He politely farewelled his visitor and made ready for his next appointment.

In the end, the Minister for Magic, the head of the Department of Magical Education, and the Examiners visited Hogwarts on an early Friday in October. Cornelius brought with him Ashlee Attaberry, borrowed from Arthur Weasley's office for the day, so that he had available a more recent graduate's point of view.

They arrived at breakfast and watched as the students arrived. Ashlee took a few minutes to visit with her younger brother. The various examiners would be accompanied by prefects who did not have a class scheduled for that particular period.

The Headmaster had attempted to prevent the visit, citing possible disruption, but the Minister had been adamant. The Minister had also promised to only observe during the classes that would be observed.

The Professors were told to tell the students to ignore the visitors if they arrived during a class period unless otherwise directed.

During the morning, the Minister observed core courses mostly: Transfiguration, Charms, Defense Against the Dark Arts, and Herbology. As they were already outside, the Minister insisted on
saying hello to the Gamekeeper.

The Minister and Ashlee made their way to Hagrid's hut and knocked on the door. From inside they heard, "Back! Back, Fang!" Soon the door opened and they saw the large man. He seemed surprised at their presence. "Minister! I wasn't expecting y' to be comin' down. Do y' need some help 'r somethin'?"

The Minister smiled. "No, Rubeus. I hadn't seen you since that trial during the summer and I wanted to check in with you. You received your new wand?"

The Gamekeeper broke into a large smile. "Yeah!" He pulled it out from a crude holster he had apparently made himself. "Eighteen inches, Oak. Ollervander actually used th' core from me old wand to make this one." Hagrid paused. "I really wanted to thank y' again fer clearin' me name an' allowin' me to carry a wand again."

"It was no problem, really. You should never have lost your rights to a wand in the first place. Have you been making progress on your education?"

About to answer, Hagrid said, "Yeah. But where'r' me manners? Would y' like to come in for a cuppa?"

The Minister and Ashlee looked at each other and then the Minister replied. "Certainly. Why not?"

For a good twenty minutes, the three sat and spoke of current happenings around Hogwarts and Hagrid's work on reaching OWL levels. An idea formed in the Minister's mind. "Ashlee? Can you leave me to speak to Hagrid for a few minutes? It's a personal matter."

Ashlee nodded. "Certainly, Uncle Cornelius. I'll be outside." For this trip, Ashlee wasn't acting as Deputy Director but as a personal guide and this allowed a more personal exchange. She withdrew.

"Hagrid, I have a matter of concern I wanted to speak to you about."

"Oh? What d'ya wanna speak of?"

The Minister sighed. "Something which can cause both you and I much trouble if it isn't handled soon. During the trial, your ownership of a certain pet came up. Do you remember?"

"Yeah. Aragog. I raised 'em since he was a hatchling."

The Minister nodded. "And I have heard rumour that you later got him a mate so that he wouldn't be lonely?"

"Yeah. Mosag. I brough' er to 'im forty years ago."

"And that is the problem. He's had many children? He's got quite a full nest?"

"Well, yeah. But 'e's stayed away from 'ogwarts – I make certain o' that."

"And he's getting on in age? Showing signs he's not immortal. He is close to fifty years old now, if you count up the years. Is that right?"

"Yeah. 'e's bin losin' 'is sight."

"The problem is: What happens when he eventually dies of old age? Will his children act as your friend or will they no longer feel indebted to you?"
Hagrid paused for a moment. "I've always though' so. But, thinkin' 'bout it, tha's a problem I hadn't though' of." Hagrid started looking worried.

"Well, it's not an immediate problem. But I can see it becoming one. Also, the Forbidden Forest isn't a natural environment for such creatures. If it gets out, then you – and I, and Dumbledore, and others – would get in trouble for allowing them to stay."

Hagrid was really nervous now. "Wha' sh'ld I do?"

"Talk to Aragog. If we can make arrangements for a better hunting ground, where food is provided for them to hunt, would Aragog be willing to order his kin to accept it in exchange for allowing their old webbing to be collected in exchange for the food and the area?"

"Y' wanna send 'em all to a farm? Th' only farm I know about 's owned by Malfoy."

"Actually, I want to have you and I and the goblins work out a deal where you have an Acromatula farm. You provide the spiders, I provide the capital to start it, and Gringotts arranges the management of it, for a set fee. This way, they are away from Hogwarts, you can visit as you like, and everyone makes a profit. I actually don't need the profit, but as I am willing to provide the galleons to start this, it's to be expected."

The Minister paused. "If this doesn't happen, I would have to report what I know to the Department of Magical Creatures and the whole nest would be destroyed. So, you perhaps should warn Aragog that the choices are: A better hunting ground without worries about Wizards coming to kill them, or total death of the entire nest as a possible threat."

Cornelius had argued with the Traveler about this issue. The Traveler wanted to handle it himself, but the Minister pointed out that he was in a better position to make it happen. He had promised not to accept bribes in exchange for being allowed to arrange reasonable profits from his efforts.

"An' what about Malfoy? 'e won' like someone else getting' into providin' silk."

The Minister waved his hand. "Normal competition. I'll watch out that he doesn't push through any laws which unreasonably allow him to keep a monopoly. Whoever manages the farm will have to worry about ensuring a profit is maintained under current Ministry law. I won't use my position to help or hurt either business interest because that would be malfeasance on my part."

Hagrid considered what he had been offered. "I'll talk ter Aragog an' send a message when e' agrees."

The Minister stood. "Good, good. I look forward to receiving your message. Perhaps send it through my Accounts Manager at the bank, Slipnose. He's going to be who we negotiate terms with."

Hagrid shook the Minister's hand. "Thank y' for not jus' getting' 'em all killed."

"You're welcome. By the way, will you have a few hours available later today or tomorrow?"

Hagrid shrugged slightly. "Sh'd'n't be no problem."

"I want to try something, so no guarantee. But be available as needed."

The three made their way back to the Great Hall for lunch.

After a private meeting with the Examiners he had brought, the Minister continued observing
different classes and talking to different staff. It was quite enlightening. The Minister started making some plans.

Finally, around three o'clock, the examiners followed the Minister out to Hagrid's hut. The examiners spent a good amount of time quizzing Hagrid about the various things in his hut, including the various pieces and parts of animals that he collected. Hagrid described the various animals, their quirks, needs, and natural enemies. At around four, the Examiners followed Hagrid around as he cared for the various animals he had under his care.

Hagrid easily listed out the various uses for each creature and the best way to collect the samples. They watched as he fed the hippogryphs, thestrals, and a few other creatures Hogwarts had on hand. He also led them into the edge of the forest and pointed out the various creatures there.

They saw Hagrid patch up a unicorn that had been injured from just the items he carried with him. They stood at a distance because it was obvious that the unicorn cared nothing at all for meeting a large group of humans. It allowed Hagrid to tend to its wound – but only barely. As soon as it was patched up, the unicorn disappeared into the forest.

When they returned from the forest, they also observed Hagrid collect and freeze an Ashwinder egg from an untended fire kept at Hogwarts for specifically that reason. Hagrid said that they would be used by the Potions class.

On the way back to the castle for supper in the Great Hall, Hagrid explained other creatures he knew about, how to control them, feed them, kill them, and heal them. They were taken aback by the enthusiasm which he showed when speaking about dragons.

Everyone with the man saw exactly how much the man knew and how much he loved his craft.

At the end of dinner, the examiners and the Minister stayed in the Great Hall, allowing students to come and speak and ask questions. A few passed written comments to them, which Cornelius carefully stowed away, not allowing anyone to interfere. By 8:00, everyone there was ready for home.

Over the next week, Cornelius met with the Examination Authority as well as the current head of the Board of Governors for Hogwarts. On October 22nd, just over two weeks after his visit, the Minister found himself back at Hogwarts for a larger meeting.

This meeting had several people who were not present for the Minister's visit. They included Amelia Bones, Undersecretary for Magical Law and Regulation; the members of the Hogwarts Board of Governors; and Valerian Linacre, the Senior Mediwizard from St. Mungo's.

The group arrived during supper, bypassing the Great Hall, and met within a conference room found on the first floor – the level above the Ground Floor.

The Minister took Madam Marchbanks to the small room off of the Great Hall for the most pleasant part of the visit.

The Headmaster, having been told of this, had asked all students to be in attendance at Supper. At 6:30, the Deputy Headmistress stood and called for the students' attention.

The Headmaster stood. "Good evening. I asked that you all be here for a special presentation from the Ministry for Magic. At this time, I shall ask for our guests to come forth." He turned toward the door at the back of the stage area.
The students saw the Minister of Magic lead Madam Griselda Marchbanks out to the podium. The
Minister said, "Hello, all. I am please to be here and to give you all the opportunity to observe a
respected tradition of Magical Education. Now, I call Rubeus Hagrid forward for a presentation."

Looking confused, the great bear of a man stood and walked over to the Ministry guests. The
Minister stood back and allowed Madam Marchbanks to speak, only casting a subtle Sonorous so
that she could be heard better.

"Rubeus Hagrid. As the Head of the Wizarding Examinations Authority, it is my responsibility and
privilege to present the following: Subsequent to thorough examination by the Wizarding
Examination Authority on 5 October 1990, given at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry,
I, Griselda Marchbanks, certify that Rubeus Hagrid has demonstrated an Outstanding level of
competence on his Ordinary Wizarding Level for Care of Magical Creatures. I, Griselda
Marchbanks further certify that Rubeus Hagrid has demonstrated an Outstanding level of
competence on his Nastily Exausting Wizarding Level of Care of Magical Creatures. And I,
Griselda Marchbanks, Head of the Wizarding Examination Authority, certify that Rubeus Hagrid,
before a panel of examiners and experts on the subject, has demonstrated a Mastery of Care of
Magical Creatures. As of this date, 22 October, 1990, Rubeus Hagrid has been entered into the rolls
of Masters of this field and may henceforth claim the title of Master of Magical Beasts."

Hagrid was in tears as the small, ancient woman passed over the various certificates. The Great
Hall stood and cheered – more so the Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs and less so the Slytherins – all
in all rather enthusiastically for the gentle giant of a man.

Hagrid WOULD comment later when he saw the Minister that even the Slytherins treated him with
more respect for achieving a Mastery.

The Minister stood forward and shook Hagrid's hand, offering his own congratulations. He then
made way for the rest of the staff to congratulate the man. As the Deputy Headmistress passed by
him, he quietly passed her a small bag of gold and said, "For the celebration in Hogsmead when it
happens – the first round is on me. Please make certain he makes in back after though; we don't
need our newest Master to be sent to a Ministry cell for being drunk and disorderly." The humour
behind the Minister's comment caused the stoic Deputy Headmistress's lips to twitch – the most
amused that many students ever saw her.

The meeting in the conference room was not nearly as pleasant for those involved. The
Headmaster, Deputy Headmistress, and Potions Master were all present. Cornelius Fudge got the
meeting underway.

"Hello, all. Recently, I took the time to visit Hogwarts to see for myself the education of our
children. With me I brought the examiners from the Ministry as well as the head of Magical
Education. This meeting is to cover a few items that came up during that visit. First of all, does any
one have any questions or comments?"

There were murmurs but no one said anything. "Well, then. First of all, for the most part, the
instruction as observed was adequate to my eyes, with three exceptions: History of Magic, Muggle
Studies, and Potions. Before we review these subjects, do any of the other visitors have
comments?"

The Examiners and head of Magical Education voiced their agreement with what they had
observed as well. They also noted that they hadn't had opportunity to examine the teaching of
Astronomy. The Minister concurred. "Now, the first subject: History of Magic. My question is: Is
this a class or nap time? Because I couldn't tell."
Over the next twenty minutes the Board of Governors and the senior faculty discussed the problems and possible consequences of changing teachers. Cost was an issue – not having to pay for a teacher, the salary went back into the general Hogwarts fund.

The Minister almost started a riot by suggesting casually to Amelia that the finances of Hogwarts might need a review by her department. It almost convinced the Minister to order it done anyway. It was something to look at, especially considering the deplorable state of the school brooms.

The Hogwarts Board finally moved to put this matter off for a meeting later in the year.

The Muggle studies issue was brought up. When the Minister asked Ashlee to explain what the problem was, a few members of the Board sneered. The Minister put a restraining hand on Ashlee and stood. "Before any mistakes are made, know this: Ms. Attaberry is not for you to insult. She is a Ministry employee. And before you say any disparaging remarks about her family, her family's vaults go back to the founding of Gringotts in the 1400s. Her father and grandfather were both wizards and her mother is from a magical family: The Fudge family. So I would ask that you watch your tone when speaking of her or making comments."

Most in the room heard Ashlee mutter, "Thank you, Uncle Cornelius," and saw the Minister nod in acknowledgement. There were a few faces which showed some surprise at the revelation.

Ashlee pointed out how outdated the materials for the Muggle studies was. When a few questioned as to how outdated it could be, Ms. Attaberry pulled out a recent Muggle book in full color. "Automobiles covered by Hogwarts," she pointed to a sad looking picture in black and white, "automobiles of today." She pointed to a picture of a sports car. "This car can travel 200 miles an hour." She pointed to a picture of a modern plane. "A Muggle can travel in this with 500 other Muggles and be in China, for example, in twelve hours." She turned to another page. "A picture of the Earth taken by a Muggle standing on the moon. Taken twenty years ago."

The purebloods were shocked. She turned the page once more.

"A picture of a Muggle-caused explosion cause by one bomb. It killed 100,000 Muggles in less than one minute. It was dropped from seven miles in the air from an airplane which travelled 3500 miles without stopping, forty-five years ago."

The purebloods were looking in horror at Ashlee's grim face. The Minister looked a little grey as well – he hadn't known these facts. He had only asked Ashlee to show modern muggles compared to what Hogwarts taught students. Finally, he took back control. "Now, we might not want to emphasize these things – especially the last one – to students. But what we teach students cannot be useless. The teacher does her best – but she never lived as a Muggle."

This discussion was now more sedate. The Minister finally asked that they take time to get their minds set and to speak to Arthur Weasley about more recent textbooks before making any decisions.

"The final item on the list: Potions. And before our guests over there speak," he pointed to Amelia and Valerian, "as well as Madam Marchbanks, I have one question for the Hogwarts Potions Master."

Severus Snape looked at the Minister with a blank look.

"In reviewing the information about to be presented to you all I decided that a question needed to be asked: Are you a traitor to Magical Britain or are you just unbelievably incompetent?"
Snape's face took on a startled look – for those who knew him – while Dumbledore cried out, "Minister!"

Cornelius did not look away. Instead he said, "Madam Marchbanks. Please review the graduation rates for Potions for the last twenty years compared to the number of Hogwarts graduates and OWL level examinations."

Madam Marchbanks did as asked. The numbers were quite surprising when laid out in that order.

"And there is an extreme drop between OWL and NEWT level students because …." The Potions Master replied, "I only accept Outstanding Level students in NEWT level. My subject is not for those who refuse to do the work."

"I see. Madam Bones. What is the single most limiting factor in finding qualified Auror Candidates?"

"Lack of a Potions NEWT. We have had to start providing a remedial course during Auror training."

"Healer Linacre. What is the single most limiting factor in finding qualified candidates for Healer training?"

"Lack of Potion NEWTs. We have been having shortages in supplies and have had to start purchasing some potions from the Continent."

"Ms. Attaberry. What was your interest in Potions on the train ride to Hogwarts?"

"I was interested in seeing what could be done with them. They sounded so versatile."

"And what was your opinion on Potions when you graduated?"

She sighed. "I despised it because it was the source of five years of abuse."

"And what were your NEWT scores for every subject except Potions?"

"All Os or EEs."

"Thank you." He once again spoke to the Potions Master. "So. Magical Britain is starting to wither and die because of a lack of recent graduates who pass a Potions NEWT. We have started to send money to other countries because we can't get them here. And this lack of graduates coincides with the hiring of Severus Snape as Potions Master at Hogwarts. Mr. Snape. What would your conclusion be, given these facts?"

Severus Snape stoically refused to comment in the face of the evidence presented.

"Yes, I have heard how brilliant of a Potions Master you are. Your ability to brew potions that confound the average Potions Master. Your graduation rate once a student reaches NEWT level is simply astounding. But a good teacher that does not make." Finally he looked to the Board. "The Ministry employees are leaving you to work this out. By 3 January, 1991, I want a plan presented which will fix this abysmal situation. I would suggest not allowing Potions Master Snape anywhere near any student who is not at OWL level. I recommend forcing him to teach NEWT levels to any who achieve EE or better on a Potions OWL. I recommend finding another Potions teacher for the younger years. I recommend he spend the time NOT teaching or making potions for Hogwarts providing Potions to St. Mungo's until a suitable alternate DOMESTIC supply for needed potions is
The Minister stood up, as did the Examiners, Bones, Linacre, and Attaberry. "If I do not see a reasonable plan by that time, I will ask that the full weight of the Ministry and the Wizengamot come down on Severus Snape, Albus Dumbledore, the entirety of the Hogwarts Board of Governors, and anybody else who is contributing to this systematic destruction of the subject of Potions within Magical Britain. Have I made myself perfectly clear?"

There were murmurs from those still sitting. The Minister stormed out of the room, the rest of those standing following behind him.

Albus Dumbledore looked at the closed door where those who had left exited. "That was not a pleasant exchange," was his mild comment.

Minerva McGonagall nearly hexed her boss then and there.
It was 23 October, the day following his visit to Hogwarts, and Cornelius Fudge was reviewing his list.

Cornelius Fudge's list was getting smaller all of the time. Some of these items, if found out, would have spelled ruin for him. He was working within political realities but that excuse would not hold up if certain truths surfaced at an inopportune time.

For example: Barty Crouch Junior.

The Minister was quite aware that Barty Crouch had his son under the Imperius Curse and hidden at his home. Knowing that it would take until at least July 31st to contain the final portion of You-Know-Who meant that he didn't want to unsettle things on that score too much too fast.

He was looking for any excuse to resolve this – after 31 July, 1991.

Getting rid of the Dementors was a project which he was back and forth about. It was a pleasant thought, but it would be expensive. Perhaps once the economy was much stronger.

Solidifying the long-term support of Harry Potter was actually quite high on his list. Having met the Lone Traveler, he had a very good idea of exactly how much potential the boy had. But, if he read things correctly, he would receive no support if he attempted to use the boy before he reached his majority, or nearly so.

No. Harry Potter would have to be protected as a minor and treated as such by the Ministry if he had any hope in obtaining his long-term support. This meant that this project would be years in the making – but elections were held every seven years if there were no immediate reasons to hold them otherwise. By July 1997, Harry Potter would nearly be of age and might be amenable to supporting him to stay as Minister.

Meanwhile, getting Sirius Black freed and working on removing those ridiculous books (once the boy knew of them) would have to suffice. Otherwise, Harry Potter should be hands off.

The backdoor fees for Gringotts services he made required by law had provided, already, much capital. His plan on using that capital to take part ownership (silent) of an Acrornatula farm would ensure that his family would be receiving payments far beyond his tenure as Minister. After all, the likelihood of Rubeus having children was small. And even if he did, it was Galleons he wasn't planning on anyway.

Getting rid of Dolores Umbridge as an influence was lower on his list. She had not been put in a Senior position in his office and so her influence was limited. He should, he considered, ensure she wasn't creating problems with what influence she did have.

The werewolf problem couldn't be confronted until 1992 – when the potion which let them keep their mind would be released. Supporting the Ministry in subsidizing the continuing treatment (with appropriate commission if possible) would further earn Potter's support.

Getting Malfoy away from Dark magic was actually a high priority. He had been warned that accepting bribes would make Malfoy think that he owned the Minister's office and he couldn't let
that happen. As long as he wasn't supporting Death Eater activity, however, Cornelius had no problem with allowing the man to push his own views.

Everyone had a right to their opinion, after all. And, as long as it didn't take money out of the economy – Cornelius mostly didn't care.

The Minister was NOT a "muggle lover" or "Blood Traitor" just as he wasn't a "pureblood supremacist" or "Death Eater supporter." He was a pragmatist.

Teaching basic Wizarding values to those who were newly brought into their world was something he supported. Dumbledore's attempts to make Wizarding society more like Muggle society was personally offensive to Fudge's traditional ideals.

As far as Cornelius was concerned, as long as the laws didn't favor one wizard over another, and didn't cause tensions with foreign governments – he really didn't care what was happening outside of the Ministry's sphere of influence.

His whole effort to bring Britain's Magical society into the present was to allow Britain to once more lead in Wizarding politics internationally. Since the pureblood movement began, other countries listened to "backwards Britain" less and less – and that was unacceptable.

Forcing Dumbledore to actually handle the matters he SHOULD be handling was successful in ensuring that the man didn't spend too much time in the Ministry politicking.

Yes, he was truly appalled at how Hogwarts had regressed, especially as regards Potions. But it was, for him, purely a political push to get it cleaned up. And economic, of course.

For all of that, Fudge WAS quite enjoying being a good minister. He had support among all three major factions which ruled Magical Britain. The Light side saw him cleaning up Dark artifacts. The Neutral faction saw him saving money while increasing business and efficiency. And the Dark side saw him supporting traditional Wizard values.

There were Darker wizards that he knew he would have to take care of sooner rather than later. Walden McNair was at the top of that list.

Most Death Eaters who cried "Imperius" were opportunists at heart, not truly homicidal fanatics. Even Malfoy was such – as much as the man enjoyed the idea of destroying and killing the 'unworthy' he would not act if it wasn't politically convenient. And he liked money and power more than his ideals.

Cornelius was actually hoping that forcing the Dark items in the Malfoy home to be contained would eventually allow the man to get himself away from the pull of such magics.

That was something that, perhaps, Cornelius should check on.

Other names were considered less important: Nott, Crabbe, Goyle, Avery – these were also more than likely to behave if given no reason to act otherwise.

A second name which actually worried Cornelius was Yaxley. While the Traveler had been uncertain as to whether he was a true Death Eater believer or an opportunist, the man's position within MLE was a matter of concern. Too much would be open to the man if he turned out to be a fanatic. And he was NOT Imperiused, unlike others.

This brought him to his next item: Allowing Alastor Moody to ensure that all Aurors were inured against the Imperius Curse and throwing it off.
The Minister sent off two letters: One to Arthur Weasley and one to Sirius Black. He didn't know if Black was free from St. Mungo's yet, but he knew that the man would be wanting to visit his godson pretty damn soon. As Dumbledore hadn't come to try to prevent it yet, he figured that Black was still recovering.

But, Black would need to consult with Arthur to ensure he was "muggle friendly" when he visited the boy. Thus, having them meet. Black was certain to ask about Pettigrew and Arthur could hear the story during the meeting. The Minister watched the memos rush out of his office, hoping this worked.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter shows Fudge isn't really all that different from Canon in terms of what he
wants. It just shows how a nudge could make a much more effective Fudge – and make him almost likeable. He IS, still, a politician though.
Catching a Rat

Cornelius Fudge took a deep breath and then plastered on his most welcoming smile.

Some people had to be confronted with a cheerful mien – even when you privately felt that dealing
them was rather tedious.

His secretary announced one of the people coming, Sirius Black. The Minister relaxed – Black
wasn't that bad. As he walked in, the Minister gave a more real smile. "Welcome, Mr. Black. It is
good to see you looking so well."

"Thank you, Minister. Just call me Sirius, please. Formality makes me itch." Sirius had a
mischievous smile.

The Minister chuckled even as they both sat down. "Somehow, from what I've heard, that doesn't
surprise me."

Looking around, Sirius asked, "Where are the rest of them?"

"Arthur and his deputy are arriving soon. At first I thought the Chief Warlock would be here
before you, but apparently he is taking his own time."

Sirius gave a slight grimace before his face returned to a smirk. "Yeah, Dumbledore doesn't seem
to notice other people's schedules that much."

The Minister and his visitor gave each other commiserating looks.

The Secretary knocked on the door and the Minister called out, "Yes?"

Her head poked in and said, "Mr. Weasley and Ms. Attaberry have arrived."

"Good. Send them in."

know Sirius Black here?"

Arthur smiled and shook Sirius' hand. "Yes. Hello, Sirius. I was glad to hear that you were
innocent and released. I wasn't around during your trial, being on a training holiday, but it was a
surprise when I got back."

Sirius nodded. "Thank you, Arthur. It's good to be free. Now I hope to spend time with my godson,
which is apparently why you're here."

Arthur nodded. "My assistant is going to make certain we don't run against any Muggle problems."

Sirius turned and greeted Ashlee. "Hello! Aren't you a vision of loveliness? My name is Sirius
Black. I look forward to working closely with you." Sirius carefully kissed the knuckles of the hand
presented.

Ashlee blushed at the attention. "Hello, Mr. Black. It's nice to meet you."

Suddenly there was a small cough and everyone looked to the Minister. "Sirius? I'll say this once:
Ashlee here is a relation of mine. Not as close as it could be, but I insisted she call me Uncle when
we're not working. I know your reputation. While her life is her own, if I find you've been
continuing your purported antics from when you were younger, we might have to speak about showing the proper respect." The Minister had a predatory smile. "You understand, right?"

Sirius looked a little sheepish, "Er. Yes, Minister. I understand."

Ashlee had a small protest. "Uncle Cornelius! You can't be running off every man who might show an interest." She did have a small smile for her distant cousin.

The Minister gave her an apologetic smile. "I know, I know. But at the same time, I know the man's reputation – I'd prefer making my position known at the outset before he makes any mistakes. Both of you are rather young – I'm just heading off youthful impetuousness."

Arthur Weasley was grinning at the exchange. He was so happy that he had a few years before Ginny would be of an age where he had to deal with such things.

Sirius raised his hands as though to ward off an attack. "I'll be good!"

The room chuckled.

"Now, Sirius, if you're going to visit your godson in the Muggle world, I'm going to insist you consult with Arthur and Ashlee here to make certain you are muggle-friendly in your dress and actions. You're going to have to learn to dress Muggle, travel Muggle and talk Muggle. Any problems with this?"

Sirius replied, "No. I did a pretty good job before … well, back ten years ago."

"That's good. But have Muggle styles changed?" the Minister asked Ashlee.

She nodded. "I'll need to look at what you have."

Sirius sighed but agreed. "Now, can you tell me where he is?"

Cornelius replied, "That's why Dumbledore was invited. He's kept the boy away from those wanting to harm him or trying to idolize him. There isn't even a record in the Accidental Magic office – likely due to whatever wards he set up. We need his input."

Arthur asked, "Can you configure your robes into what you think is proper Muggle attire?"

Sirius shrugged and cast his spell.

Arthur looked at Sirius curiously. Cornelius was reminded of Dumbledore. Ashlee … well she was trying very hard to stifle her sniggers but was not doing a very good job. Finally, she couldn't stop and was laughing very loudly, barely able to keep standing.

Sirius was looking down at his clothes and back to her confused. Finally, she got herself under control. Sirius asked, "What?"

She was grinning as she said, "You could probably have gotten away with that ten years ago. The denim bellbottoms were popular then. The purple shirt with sparkly buttons – that's a bit weird. The red shoes? Muggles will think you sleep with other men. The yellow feather boa? Um. No. No. Not if you don't want to be considered a mental patient."

Just then there was a knock and, without further warning, the Chief Warlock swept into the room, the Fudge's secretary looking annoyed behind him.

Dumbledore looked at Sirius and said, "Very stylish, Sirius."
Cornelius, who was about to remind the Chief Warlock that coming in without being announced was rude, stared at the man in shock. Arthur, Ashlee, and Sirius all started sniggering.

Dumbledore looked at them, confused. It took a minute before things could be settled down.

Finally, everyone was paying attention. The Minister said, "This meeting is about Black here being able to visit his godson. Have you notified his guardians that he would be visiting?"

Dumbledore sighed and nodded. "I sent a letter shortly before September 1st. His Aunt is aware that Sirius, as Harry's godfather, has the right to visit the boy. She is also aware that Harry's continued residence in her home is the only thing that allows wards to be maintained on her home."

Cornelius nodded. "Reasonable." He paused. "Now, I do agree that the boy's address is best left a secret, even from Ministry files inasmuch as possible. But there is a need for his location among those present, if only to ensure that any undue interest in the area is deflected away."

Dumbledore nodded. "A written agreement should suffice."

Cornelius considered it and then shrugged. "Fine."

Sirius asked, "Where does he live?"

Dumbledore was about to talk and then Cornelius had a random thought. "Hold on."

Everyone looked at the Minister. Cornelius had just realized that one of the most guarded secrets of the Magical world was just about to be spoken about. He quickly wrote a note and passed it to the Headmaster. The Headmaster looked at it and his eyes rose. He then nodded.

Standing gracefully, the others in the room watched as the Headmaster silently performed a number of detection spells. The Minister's fears were realized when a particularly ugly decoration he hadn't noticed before, a bronze kitten, glowed. It contained a listening charm.

The Minister used his hands to regain the others' attention. "I was just thinking. If we're going to be successful, we should have one more person present. And that's Amelia Bones. She would be vital to this. Does everyone agree?"

Sirius, who had an interested look, replied, "Sounds good to me. Headmaster?"

Dumbledore said, "Yes. Yes. That might be advisable. Can she be retrieved?"

"Certainly. I'll write a note and perhaps Arthur can take it to her office?"

"Certainly. I'll write a note and perhaps Arthur can take it to her office?"

Arthur said, "Fine."

The wait was quiet other than the Minister offering refreshments and serving them. After a short time, Amelia Bones entered with Alastair Moody. The Minister pointed to the statue and Moody performed a few spells. Putting a parchment under it, he performed one last one and the charm was dispersed. The parchment, however, contained a record of the residue. "Whoever did this has horrible taste," was the first thing the gruff Auror said.

"Yes. Senior Auror Moody, thank you. Amelia? Can you perhaps see if Mr. Moody can perform an investigation into the other higher offices and find if other spying charms are in place? He's perhaps the most trustworthy Auror in the Ministry and I'd like to be certain whoever did this is caught."
Amelia nodded in agreement. "Okay, Mad Eye." Very few could get away with calling the man this to his face. "I want you to run through the Undersecretary and Directors' offices and see if there are any more of these. We'll then have to put together a reason to inspect every Ministry worker's wand if we can't find out who did this otherwise."

Moody gave a horrible smile. "Just let me loose. I'll figure it out."

Amelia gave a vicious smirk back. "The chains are off, Auror Moody. Have at it."

The glee with which the Senior Auror left was palpable.

The Minister was curious. "Will this be difficult for him?"

Amelia chuckled. "Moody is enthusiastic. Normally, I have to keep an eye out on his as his methods tend to be … enthusiastic. But he's also very sneaky. Giving him leave to act as he wishes will allow him to use every method available – even some I'd rather not know about. He'll find out who set that up."

Cornelius nodded. "Good, good. Well then. Why don't you stay as I DO think your knowledge of what we are discussing is important."

The discussion went on. Dumbledore was not happy, but he agreed that Sirius should be able to visit. Finally, a plan was in place. The Headmaster swept out of the room.

Everyone else suddenly relaxed. When each saw the others relax similarly, they all chuckled. The Minister asked, "Is it just me or is it always a chore to deal with that man?"

The others chuckled. Arthur said, "He can be. He's a great wizard – but sometimes he's a bit cut off from the day to day."

Sirius laughed a short, sharp laugh that almost sounded like a bark. "Yeah. Anyway. Thank you all for helping in this." He paused as he stood. "Hey, Amelia. Any word on Pettigrew?"

The Minister made very certain he wasn't overtly reacting.

The Undersecretary for Magical Law and Enforcement sighed. "I'm sorry, Sirius. The odds of finding the man after all this time … ."

Sirius nodded. "I'd just like to see the rat get his for what he did."

Arthur was curious. "What is this about Pettigrew?"

Sirius looked at Arthur. "Did you see my trial?"

"No. I was off training to deal with muggles and found out later."

Sirius nodded. "I was framed by Peter Pettigrew. The rat got one over on me and I've been hoping he'd be caught."

"How did it happen?" Arthur asked curiously.

Amelia explained what she knew. "… and Sirius was testifying under Veritaserum so he had to be telling the truth."

Sirius growled out, "The first time that rat got the best of me. And it will be the last."
Arthur had grown still. "You say he escaped by cutting off his finger and transforming into his animagus form?"

Sirius nodded.

"And that he's a rat?"

Sirius nodded again. Arthur, now very pale, sat down.

Cornelius asked, "Arthur? Are you all right?"

Arthur put his face in his hands for a moment and then dropped them. "I think I know where he is right now."

Everyone in the room was suddenly very much watching the red-headed wizard.

Sirius asked, "Where?"

With some heat, Arthur replied, "In the bedroom of my youngest son, Ron. With my increase in pay, I allowed Percy the pet of his choice and therefore he gave the rat he found 8 years ago over to my youngest children to take care of. I think I have a mass murderer under my roof."

Sirius had grown very agitated and looked like he wanted to bolt out immediately. Cornelius shook his head and stunned Sirius from behind. Everyone looked at him. "I don't think allowing a very upset Sirius Black to deal with this is the best choice. I'll apologize after – but we need a plan now."

Amelia nodded. "I can bring a whole Auror squad."


Arthur nodded. "Sometimes, when I visit my sons, I occasionally give over some cheese I've saved from dinner or some other tidbit."

"Good." He turned to Amelia. "Can we get some cheese season with a sleeping potion?"

Amelia's eyes brightened. "I'm sure we can. I'm sure the infirmary has some sleeping drought."

"Good." HE looked at Sirius, who was laid out on the floor. The Minister locked the door with a locking spell and said, "Take his wand. We need to calm him down before he goes off on a crusade again."

Amelia chuckled as she retrieved Sirius' wand. She then cast the Rennervate spell. Sirius came out of his stunning slightly groggy. "What happened?"

Cornelius replied, "I stunned you before you could go and do something stupid. Again. Are you calmed down now? Can you listen like a logical man and not a grief-stricken victim?"

Sirius took a deep breath and nodded. He felt around and asked, "Where's my wand?"

Amelia said, "I have it until you listen. You ready to listen?"

Sirius sighed and nodded again. "Yeah. I'll listen."

Amelia said, "Arthur is going to feed the rat some cheese with sleeping drought on it. If we go with
Sirius Black was sitting at a table in the Leaky Cauldron. He looked mulish for a moment and then finally resigned. "Alright, alright."

Cornelius Fudge looked at the man. "How about you and I go and have a bite to eat. You stay with me and I know you aren't doing anything … inadvisable." He looked at Amelia. "We'll be at the Leaky Cauldron, in a private eating area or possibly at the bar. When you've got him, you come and let us know."

Amelia grinned and nodded. "I'll be waiting here. Arthur will stun him after he's asleep and bring him back."

Sirius nodded. He looked at Arthur. "You get this guy, I'll buy your kids new pets – whatever they want. Hell, I'll buy them new brooms!"

Arthur looked annoyed. "I don't need any incentive to get a mass-murderer away from my family."

Sirius looked sheepish. "I know, I know. I'm sorry. But this … the rat cost me almost nine years in Azkaban – nine years of time with my godson Harry. The rat being caught is important to me."

Arthur nodded. "We can talk about it later."

Cornelius said, "Alright. Sirius, you stay here. Arthur, what time do you normally go home?"

Looking at his watch, Arthur said, "About an hour."

Amelia said, "That should give us time to get the cheese ready. Arthur can put it in his pocket."

Arthur and Asylee left with Amelia.

Sirius sat down. "What now?"

Cornelius leaned back. "Let's talk. How has it been since you've been released?"

Cornelius Fudge and Sirius Black were both sitting at a table in the Leaky Cauldron. They could have gone to Rosmerta's in Hogsmeade but the Leaky Cauldron was closer to the Ministry and farther away from Hogwarts – no one was particularly interested in having the Chief Warlock take too much interest, if only to avoid interference.

They all respected the man, but he did tend to butt in where he wasn't strictly needed.

With them sat Ashlee Attaberry, Deputy Director of the Interior for Muggle Affairs. She was just as interested in getting word as soon as possible as to her boss being successful or not in catching Peter Pettigrew.

Instead of a private room, the group was sitting out in the common room of the pub. Different people would come to say hello and the Minister would greet them personably. The normal guards for the Minister were standing back and observing, making certain no one took a chance at the Minister.

As the Minister kept getting distracted, Sirius and Ashlee would talk until Sirius said something too outrageous or forward – and then the Minister would clear his throat or enter a comment or otherwise remind Sirius that he was present.
Sirius would smile sheepishly and back off and Ashlee would roll her eyes at her erstwhile uncle.

Cornelius was actually having a lot of fun playing chaperone.

The tone around the tap room was fairly cheerful. The patrons were actually quite impressed that a Ministry big-wig would willingly sit among the common people and drink with them. They also had a lot of fun watching the playboy, Sirius Black, get knocked down a time or two in his predations on a member of the female persuasion.

Sirius didn't actually feel that put off by Fudge. Whenever a random bloke would make a comment toward his relation, the bloke would receive a rather chilly welcome by the Minister. That Sirius was being allowed to be friendly at all meant that Fudge wasn't truly offended.

The girl, in truth, was a year or two too young for him but that became less and less important as one got older. The rule was half the bloke's age plus seven – and Ms. Attaberry was three years too young for that, him being 30 and her being 19.

But when he was thirty-five, she would be 24 1/2 – he was just putting his charms into the pot for her future consideration.

Ashlee Attaberry actually found the older man amusing – thirty he might be but his mentality was closer to her own age. She looked at him as a project to amuse herself with – she wasn't looking for a serious relationship at the moment; she was just trying to get used to having such an important job in the Ministry for Magic. And yanking her newfound Uncle's chain was fun too. The Minister had been nothing but friendly with her and seemed to have a sense of humour one didn't normally associate with politicians.

At about 7:20, the group saw Kingsley Shacklebolt come in to the pub through the floo. He looked around and spied the Minister and walked over. Quietly he said, "We got him."

Sirius looked at the tall, black Auror. "No problems? He's in custody?"

Kingsley nodded. "Amelia sent me to inform you that Rufus Scrimgeour, the Senior Auror, would begin the interrogation soon under her supervision."

The three stood up. Sirius called out to Tom, "Tom!" The bartender looked over and saw the small bag that was coming toward him and caught it. "The next round or two or whatever that will cover for the house is on me!"

The pub's patrons cheered at the man's generosity even as the group quickly retreated through the floo.

The Minister and the rest arrived to the Interrogation area and were greeted by Amelia Bones. "Minister, Mr. Black, Ms. Attaberry; welcome back. Arthur got the rat to eat the cheese. We're about to supply the antidote and then force the reversal."

The Minister nodded at Amelia and Arthur, who was stoically watching through the charmed wall (much clearer than Muggle one-way glass).

The Aurors inside the room put a dropper of the potion in the rat's mouth. The rat stirred and suddenly got up. It was sitting in an area on the floor of the interrogation room which would be impossible for a rat to escape from – unless they could transform and step out of it.

"Peter Pettigrew. You've got two wands on you. Transform or we'll make you. You've got ten seconds." The Senior Auror's voice was harsh.
The rat scurried around for a moment and then stopped. Finally, just as the watching guards were about to cast, the rat transformed into a dirty, rat-faced man. "Thank Merlin! I've been scared for my life! Sirius Black is dangerous and tried to kill me. I've been hiding out so that he won't come back if he hears that I'm still alive!"

The second Auror cast a perfectus totalis and the rat-faced man dropped down onto the ground. Scrimgeour replied, "Likely story. Black testified under veritaserum. Search him!" the man said to his second.

The second Auror quickly searched the petrified prisoner. Besides his own wand and a second one (which would later be confirmed as the Dark Lord's) the rat-faced man had quite a bit of spare change that he had gathered over the years when he wasn't being actually watched by one Weasley or another – petty theft was obviously how the man had had ensured he had resources if he ever had to run.

As a final step, the man's forearm was checked – and there it was: Grayed out as though it had lost some of its definition was the Dark Mark.

"That pretty much puts paid on any idea that you're an innocent bystander. So let's not waste any more time." Rufus quickly countered the spell as the second Auror put handcuffs on that would suppress Pettigrew's ability to transform. The Auror then forced the man to stand and pushed him into a chair.

Pettigrew tried to transform but wasn't successful. His face took on a frightened look. "I was forced to! The Dark Lord was so strong!"

The interrogation proved what a pathetic man Peter Pettigrew had become. Amelia would push for use of Veritaserum – it was obvious that he was trying to put the blame on anyone other than himself.

In the end, Sirius Black just turned away at the complete waste that his former friend had become. With a quiet word to set an appointment to visit his godson, Sirius Black retreated to go and grieve what could have been.
The Malfoys

The Minister listened to his niece as she explained what she had found. It was three days until Halloween. There were several Muggle Samhain celebrations but most were private affairs. According to her research, the people who had these celebrations had private dinners as part of the Samhain observances, where they would feast and leave places for their loved ones who had passed over. They also had bonfires where they would attempt to sacrifice their bad habits for the year.

Some celebrated on Halloween, some celebrated on the nearest full moon, and some celebrated on November 6 as the Midpoint between the two equinoxes.

It happened to be that this year, the nearest full moon was on 2 November.

Traditionally, the celebrations were on All Hallow's Eve. But the Muggles tended to be fairly flexible. Different Muggle "sects" used different dates.

The Minister sat back and considered. He really had waited too long and let too many things distract him – there was no time to arrange a proper Samhain celebration for 1990, or at least not one large enough to make the impact that he wanted.

He also realized his other mistake: He was paying too much attention to Muggle celebrations. Perhaps he should consult with that Goblin healer again … or perhaps some of the more traditional families on the Wizengamot. They would most likely have records as to how celebrations were traditionally celebrated.

His main reason for researching the Muggles was to actually allow the Wizarding world to slide into things that were recognized by Muggles which would allow the Statute of Secrecy to be upheld that much better. He also wanted the credit for bringing back such an important part of Magical history while taking advantage of the information that he had been given by the goblin healer in Gringotts.

Finally, he decided: He would spend the next six months researching the various celebrations privately. He would consult the healer Breakfist so that the goblins knew that he was not ignoring their words – always good to maintain good and profitable relationships.

Suddenly, he had an idea. It didn't provide him with the acclaim that he had hoped for, but those in the know were aware who had helped rekindle Magical traditions throughout Britain.

Daily Prophet, Page 4

Muggles Celebrating Magic– Samhain in the Muggle World.

What followed was the product of Ashlee Attaberry's research – she was named as a contributing source – and comparisons between what the Muggles did and what Magicals had done centuries ago. Except for the removal of any blood or animal sacrifice, it was remarkably similar.

It also explained how Muggle Christians had attempted to subsume these festivals or do away with them so as to promote their own beliefs.

The Minister had commented about what he had learned regarding such traditions, citing the
Wizengamot record for the Regulation of Magical Artifacts and its accompanying reference materials as regards the cleansing properties of such rites.

It also expressed a hope that Magical families would see fit to start practicing, once again, their own heritage instead of leaving such things for only a scattered few Muggles to profit from.

The Prophet had a description of a Samhain ritual, including all steps, needed items, and the traditional spells and chants. It also included places where most items could be bought – both in the Magical world as well as the Muggle world.

The idea of Muggle shops to sell "magical" items was surprising to many readers, especially because they didn't violate the Statute of Secrecy. Such shops started seeing an increase in business which most attributed to curiosity. Gringotts made a few more fees on Galleon to Pound transactions – they were happy to get rid of the Pounds they received every year any way they could while still making a profit.

The Minister was so satisfied that he planned on repeating the theme for other Muggle observances for Magical holidays or rites. Some were not really celebrated or known in the Magical world as a whole, being more regional or more peculiar to Muggle pagan sects, but as human interest the Prophet agreed to include descriptions of each one as the year went forward.

Surprising to the Minister and his Undersecretaries who were in the know, Dumbledore did nothing to discourage such observances. His only recorded comment on the subject was to remark how enlightened the Muggles were to remove blood and animal sacrifices from such festivals, thus negating his true disdain for such celebrations in the past.

Perhaps, Cornelius considered, Dumbledore was truly not such a non-traditionalist as he and Augusta had supposed. The Chief Warlock had just done what the Wizarding world as whole had a tendency to do: Rather than change things so as to avoid the likelihood of Dark magic, wizards tended to be reactionary and just remove things which MIGHT be Dark.

The idea of actually changing the rituals as possible to reflect the changing mores of Magical society likely hadn't occurred to magicals in the past – thus the festivals falling by the wayside. The Muggle answer, it seemed, had been much more rational and reasoned.

Magicals were not good with change. Or logic. They also tended to be 'Purists.' A pity in this case.

So, Cornelius mused, with a little nudge perhaps the Wizarding world could return some of its traditional elements.

Little did Cornelius know at that moment that his efforts would be aided from a completely unexpected quarter.

-Malfoy Interlude

Narcissa Malfoy read the article in the Daily Prophet with some interest. Narcissa was a member of the Wizarding World elite – her birth family was as old or older than most others (even her husband's family could not claim such a long lineage) and she had married into another wealthy magical family.

For a woman of her intelligence and acumen, she at times felt her life wasted as a socialite, regardless of how playing such a part helped her husband maintain their social standing.

The rites and rituals that the Prophet reported sounded … right … to her.
It helped that recently Malfoy Manor had been equipped with a ward to hold all Dark objects that the Malfoy family owned. While they were displayed in a room set aside for such things, their effect on the rest of the home had been dissipated.

Since that time, her mind had become … less distracted. Her son, after having been subject to a cleansing ritual had suddenly lost much of his "Malfoyness" that he had been growing toward and he was much closer to the innocent boy she given birth to and raised.

The ritual had been so successful that she had availed herself of it as well. Her mental dexterity had received a huge boost. She felt cleaner than she ever had – even as a child, she had been surrounded by many Dark objects and it obviously had effects that she hadn't expected.

She had taken to trying to convince her husband to also take part in such a ritual. He was reluctant, but seemed less and less disagreeable about it the longer his surroundings were no longer affected by the magics that the ward contained.

She had even started taking care of a small garden of her own as a pastime, rather than having the elves maintain the Manor's grounds and surrounds. A small garden at the rear of the house now contained some flowers, herbs, and other plants that she enjoyed.

Her husband had been slightly disdainful but had allowed her her private pursuits. Her son had been confused but occasionally, when she prompted him, assisted her if there was nothing else to do for the moment.

Children hated being bored more than getting their hands dirty it seemed.

Reading the paper once more, Narcissa came to a decision. She got up and went to find her husband. He was in his study, making notes in a book.

"Lucius?" she said from the door.

He looked up. "Yes, 'Cissa?" His shortening of her name in private was one of the few informalities the man allowed himself, a small break from the image of a 'powerful Pureblood Wizard.'

She came in and sat down across from him. "Have you read the Prophet today?"

Lucius nodded. "Yes. Earlier. What of it?"

"Did you read the article on traditional rituals?"

Lucius got a slightly disagreeable look. "Yes. Muggles." He scoffed. "How Muggles expect to achieve the benefits of true magical rituals is beyond me. It seems silly."

Narcissa's face became less animated and Lucius almost instinctively knew he had blundered. "I find it quite fascinating that Muggles celebrate our traditional holidays and festivals and that we have largely abandoned them. I think that it's a tragedy that needs to be put to rights."

Lucius sat back. "Perhaps showing these Muggles their …" he didn't finish the sentence as his wife's face became more stormy. "No – it's not like it affects us. What do you thing we should do?"

"I think that we should investigate. And perhaps we should gather or purchase the items needed to perform our own Samhain ritual. I think our time of bowing the Muggles' Christian religion should come to an end. Halloween was celebrated by witches and wizards far before Muggles got their hands on it. And if the source of such things happen to be Muggles who have researched the past
and brought these back? So be it."

Lucius sighed. His wife had made up her mind. Regardless of the claimed superiority of the Wizard in most magical marriages, Lucius had learned long ago something that most Muggles had a saying for: Happy wife: Happy life.

Its obverse was also true: Unhappy wife: Unhappy life. Narcissa had grown up a Black, and Blacks were experts at making those that upset them truly regret it. He plastered on his best smile. "That would be fine, 'Cissa. Do you need Muggle money to visit one of these shops listed in the article?"

Narcissa took on a sweet smile. "No, you get the money and bring it. You and Draco are coming with me."

Lucius almost groaned – but he wasn't suicidal. "Yes, dear."

Lucius Malfoy followed his wife and son down the Muggle road which contained the shop they were planning on visiting. Each of them was dressed in Muggle clothes provided by Madam Malkin. Lucius was observant enough to notice that the Muggles around them weren't quite dressed the same, but it was close enough not to comment.

An observer would classify the family as dressing 'traditionally' – they looked about thirty years out of style but nothing that was unfamiliar to the average Londoner. The men's shirts had a few more flourishes than was strictly common. Narcissa actually wore a robe that appeared to be nearly a Muggle dress.

Lucius found it somewhat fetching, surprisingly.

Draco, his son, was trying to maintain his public demeanour but was obviously fascinated by the people and things seen in the shop windows.

The family had been dropped off by the Knight Bus – the area being unfamiliar. Lucius was on the lookout for an apparition location that was conveniently close. Luckily, London – especially this area – had many nooks and crannies that were commonly unobserved. He would ward one of them before they left with notice-me-not and muggle-repellant charms.

Finally, they arrived at the shop mentioned in the Prophet and they entered. Lucius looked around. To his surprise, it reminded him of some of the more common shops in Diagon Alley – it didn't have a Muggle feel to it. Even more surprising, several customers and the staff wore robes. They were Muggle in manufacture but he honestly found that most wouldn't be worth a second glance in a magical district.

The approach of an older woman was almost unnoticed until she spoke.

The Wiccan Priestess looked at the family who had entered the shop. Very few times had her Goddess spoken to her in her heart such that she could almost hear the words, but something about these had moved something within her: She was walking forward before she even stopped and considered.

She first addressed the woman. "Good afternoon. You come from a family long steeped in magick. Your countenance sings of your connection to the Earth Goddess. Indeed, you appear to be the very epitome of the Goddess in her Mother form. You do well to come here today."

She ignored the startled looks upon their faces as she turned to address the man. Her eyes became
harder. "You, however … you have been too steeped in magicks best avoided, although it seems … you have been distancing yourself from them. You must continue on this path."

She noticed the resigned look upon the man's face. She addressed the woman again. "You shall join my coven where I am High Priestess. Return tomorrow and I will make you my acolyte. For a year and a day you shall learn the rites and rituals of the Earth Goddess and her consort, the Horned God of the Earth. And at the end, you shall become High Priestess of your own coven. In a year and two days, you shall lead your own Sanhaim rites for your own people."

She addressed the couple together. "While fairly open about sex and sexuality as most Wiccans tend to be, the witches of my coven are fairly monogamous. So you will need your husband to help you as you learn."

She addressed the man. "You will go and today or tonight or tomorrow morning, you shall take the cleansing that your wife and son have so recently availed themselves of. Without this, you would not be a worthy vessel for the Earth God during rites. You shall then return with her tomorrow night. She will begin by learning how to perform the rites of Sanhaim, which she will assist me with two nights hence. You shall also be there."

She then turned to the young boy. "You are young yet. Yet your whole being sings of your connection to the snake." She noted absently the boy's look turn to one of satisfaction – surprising in such a young boy. She retreated and brought back a silver necklace. It was shaped in the traditional winged rod with two snakes intertwined. This one seemed more appropriate than the Rod of Asclepius – he seemed more a future merchant than future healer. Perhaps he would become a priest of Hermes?

She said to the father – because she knew he would be holding the purse – "This will be thirty pounds." Surprisingly, the entire family seemed to take her observations as a positive thing. The man withdrew a new looking wallet and pulled out three ten-pound notes and handed them over. She passed these to an assistant who rang the purchase up even as she gave the necklace to the woman to put on her son. As the woman did so, she addressed the boy. "The Winged Staff is called a caduceus. The god or divine force of magic, Mercury to the Romans and Hermes to the Greeks, carried such a staff. Besides being the god of magic and the messenger of the gods, he also was the god of herdsmen, thieves, oratory, poetry, sports, invention, trade, commerce, merchants, roads, boundaries, and travelers. He also was the intercessor between the mortals and the gods and was the conductor of souls to the afterlife. You would do well, young man, as you grow older, to cleave to the lessons of your mother and to pray to Magick for guidance throughout your life."

She looked at the boy. He appeared to be quite happy with what she was saying to him. His father also looked quite proudly at his son. The man's darkish nature made this surprising, but the man looked willing to eschew the shackles of the past.

She heard the man murmur, "Nos solus arcum ad Magia."

She gave the man a piercing look and nodded. In reply she murmured back, "We only bow to Magick."

The man gave a curt but respectful nod at her accurate translation even as the son stood taller with pride. The woman was giving her son a loving look, full of approval, as her assistant provided the receipt for the necklace the boy now wore.

The man nodded his head in farewell and said, "High Priestess." The man then led his family out.
Lucius Malfoy could not believe the encounter he had earlier.

When the Muggle woman started talking to them in that shop, he had restrained himself from cursing her only by reminding himself it was in a Muggle area – and there were witnesses.

However, the woman's uncanny perception as to her visitors had spooked him mightily. He decided to watch and wait. He was conflicted in his own mind between being happy and angry with himself for it.

It was obvious that the woman had some ability in divination or some other magic – there was no way a pure Muggle could see so much.

Her instant ability to see that his wife and son had been through cleansing rituals and that he had not had floored him.

And then for her to instantly see Draco's connection to Slytherin's totem? It was otherworldly. The purchase of the necklace with the icon for the caduceus and the meaning behind it were all traits that he wished for his son to achieve.

Even as they traveled home, he could see the almost reverent reaction that his son had to the small item.

Another shock had been his effort to retrieve the one enchanted item that had not been stored within the Gringotts ward in his home: The Dark Lord's diary.

Seeing the marked effects of the lack of Dark artifacts on his wife and child, the Malfoy Patriarch had opened the almost empty cachet which had formerly held the Dark items he owned. He had ordered his house elf, Dobby, to hide it away from the Manor when the goblins and Aurors had arrived to set up the wards and ensure all were contained. He had placed it in a small iron casket, often used to transport and store heavily enchanted items.

He decided that it was time to get this item destroyed.

When the box had been retrieved, he had opened it. Reaching in, he pulled out the book. But something felt … off. The expected attack against his mind had not materialized. The compulsions he had noted long ago were not present.

He carefully opened the cover to find a large hole through the inside pages of the book. Lucius felt dread. A parchment was pasted to the inside cover. He opened it carefully. Its content surprised him.

Mr. Lucius Malfoy

*Wisdom has deemed that this item should not exist and by my hand it has been destroyed. As to how this was achieved? In this, I am Magic's servant. That is all that you need to know.*

*Also know that I have taken steps to prevent the return of your former master. His return would spell doom for both the magical world and – more important to you – your family.*

*You are far better off without him – trust me.*

*Think kindly of me should you encounter me in the future.*

*Sincerely,*
Lucius trembled at the acknowledgement that everything the High Priestess had said to him just hours before had been vindicated. His family had been blessed by magic and his effort to distance himself from his former path was the correct path for him and his family.

And so, he found himself in the bowels of Gringotts, subject to a cleansing ritual that he had never expected to ask for. The attending goblins even had inspected his Dark mark – and they had a long term plan to take care of it. Due to the nature of the mark, a simple ritual would not do, but a step-by-step plan would. He had agreed to it and its enormous comparative cost: 2500 Galleons.

The loss of the link to that madman was worth the price many times over. Lucius hadn't even blinked when he agreed to pay the fees.

Lucius sat in stoic silence as the ritual began.
Cornelius Fudge reviewed the final files for the Senior Undersecretary position. The biggest reason he had been avoiding the subject had finally been taken care of: Dolores Umbridge.

Alastor Moody's investigation had found several more spying charms throughout executive offices and the magical signature had been the same. When the Wizengamot had been called, each member's wand had been recorded (for security reasons) and the results compared.

Moody had then, once the signature had been matched, investigated the woman. He had found that the Selwyn proxy had been blackmailing the actual head of the family to hold the seat. The woman herself had come from common stock and her family had no place in the Wizengamot.

The Selwyn head had been given immunity in what he had been blackmailed about in exchange for testimony against the woman. When she had been arrested, she had tried to raise a great stink.

The problem for her was: No one – no one – had any interest in protecting her or coming to her defense. A request for veritaserum had been approved (her claim as to Pureblood privilege had been summarily ignored as a Moody had already uncovered her mother was a Muggle and she had a squib brother).

The list of crimes she had committed to achieve her influence had been staggering. The trial had been quick and the woman had been shipped off to Azkaban – good riddance. Her views on Muggleborns and other magical creatures was extreme and what she had been willing to do to achieve her position … some people were better off cut away from magical society.

Dolores Umbridge had achieved what many had thought impossible: The toad-like woman was more disliked among magical families than Bellatrix Lestrange. And that was saying something. Her father had turned her into a bitter, twisted woman. She would be forgotten if anyone of any sense had any say in things.

Her vaults had been locked down in case any of her brother's descendants every achieved magical status – minus a few, large fees. There was one large payment which sat there in case her squib brother ever showed up – he would get paid even though he was a squib. Her and her father's free use of the Cruciatatus deserved some recompense - regardless of the man's squibdom.

Technically, her brother had been made a squib due to damage he had received in the womb. Her father had taught her the curse at the ripe age of thirteen. She had been very free with it when she could get away with it: Who cared about Muggles?

Even the Minister's account manager had drank a toast to her downfall on the Minister's next visit to Gringotts. Umbridge had upset more than just the wizards and witches in the Ministry.

Knowing that he no longer had to face her protests at someone else being picked for the position before her, he had started to look with more diligence.

Finally, he picked a non-Ministry employee: Berterem Gambol. He was a business man from a family with a record of being Muggle friendly. His Grandmother had actually instigated the Hogwarts Express. She had been well respected for it – after a while.

He was not a poor man, which meant that his susceptibility to bribes would be minimal. He was
Muggle friendly, business friendly Pureblood from a traditional family, and had no criminal record but often helped Aurors that he ran across while they were performing their duties. All in all – the perfect compromise.

He just hoped he could convince the man.

Suddenly, there was a knock on the door. "Yes?"

The secretary popped her head in and said, "Sirius Black to see you, Minister?"

The Minister smiled. "Send him in! Send him in!" He stood up to greet his guest.

The cheerful man walked in to the Minister's office. "Minister! How are you today?"

The Minister smiled as he shook the man's hand. "I am well! How are you doing? Have you met your godson yet?"

Sirius sat down where the Minister pointed, still smiling. "Yeah. He's a great kid! Doesn't really get along with his Muggle relatives, but they aren't truly unkind – mostly indifferent. At least now. There had been some unpleasantness, but apparently recently things have been much better."

The Minister nodded. "Well, that's good then. You are leaving him there?"

Sirius sighed. "Yeah. Better wards than pretty much anything I could arrange. After I explained to him about the Magical world, I explained about the wards and how they worked. He was okay with living with them, but he's also welcome to visit me as much as he likes. His Muggle Aunt pretty much gave me carte blanche."

"Well, I am happy for you. Why have you come today?"

Sirius gave a mischievous smile. "Well, I was informed that you wanted to meet him. As long as you don't try to use him politically, I thought I'd arrange that."

The Minister gave a genuine smile. "That would be excellent. And I promise you that I have firmly decided that using minor children for political benefit is off the table. When young Harry is old enough, I'd certainly like his support for re-election – but that's years off."

Sirius nodded. "As long as that's true, then I'm more than happy to set it up."

"When would be a good time?"

Sirius smiled again. "Are you busy Saturday?"

"I can free my schedule." He looked at Black's face and noticed he was looking a bit smug. "What is this really about?"

Black tried to look innocent, he really did, but he finally broke. "I actually really wanna tweak his relatives' noses. I figure a big government official will impress them. They've kind of ignored him, not wanting to get too involved, thinking he was less important and I want to disabuse them of the notion."

"They aren't abusive, are they?"

Sirius sighed. "No. Just bothersome."

The Minister nodded with a small smile. "I'll wear my 'Powerful Person' Muggle suit."
Sirius grinned. "Awesome!"

"We should take Arthur with us."

Sirius nodded. "It was pretty surprising that he knew the area. He had a call just a week before our first visit to a muggleborn boy of five who needed the Accidental Magic Reversal Squad out there. The funny thing is: The boy's last name is Evans."

Cornelius was curious. "Why is that funny?"

"Because Harry's mum's maiden name was Evans. They might be related!"

"Really?"

Sirius shrugged. "I wanted to check it out but Arthur stopped me."

"I see." The minister stood. "Well, I'll be ready to take a Ministry car out on Saturday at 1:00 to visit him. Will that work?"

Sirius stood as well. "That's great!" The two shook hands and Sirius left. The Minister contemplated the door for a moment and then made his way out. He told his secretary that he would return in twenty minutes. He made his way to Arthur's office.

"Minister!" the man he was looking for said. "What can I do for you today?"

"I wanted to speak to you. Do you have a few minutes?"

"Certainly! Come into the office!" Arthur led the Minister through his department and into his office. The two sat down.

"What can I do for you today, Minister?" Arthur asked.

"I just had Sirius by. I'm going to meet his godson to prepare him for the political crap he's going to have to deal with, being who he is. But Sirius mentioned another boy near him?"

Arthur smiled. "Yes. Little Mark Evans. Five year old Muggleborn. He accidentally turned his whole house blue during a children's game. We had to reverse it and obliviate."

Cornelius sighed. "Too bad. It would be interesting to find out if he IS related to Mrs. Potter. But they won't even remember the visit."

Cornelius noticed a peculiar blush on Arthur's face. "Weeeeell. That's not strictly completely true."

The Minister was curious. "What is this?"

Arthur gave a sheepish smile. "I've instructed my people to handle things a bit differently than what traditionally is done."

"How is that? They've not left Muggles into the Statute before they receive an invitation are they?"

"No. No. We've kept the Statute. We've just ... well, we've made it more smooth for future circumstances."

"How?"

Arthur pulled out a small case and opened it. He told the Minister to take a card. The Minister saw
that a pile of small Muggle looking business cards were in the case. He pushed one off to take it. "How does this work?"

Arthur gave a grin. "You know those spells to make certain that most Muggles are disinterested in Magical documents? The stuff that the DMLE uses for certain cases?"

The Minister nodded.

"I had these charmed with the same spell. It keys the person who takes the card in but makes it highly disinteresting to other Muggles."

The Minister read the card. It only said: "Special Branch" and then a bunch of numbers.

"How do you do it different than before?"

"Well, instead of obliviating everything, we only obliviate the obviously magical parts. We then tell the pre-Hogwarts muggleborn's parents that we're a special part of the government that deals with the supernatural and paranormal. Apparently, there are Muggle conspiracies about such things. Ashlee told me about this. Apparently, most muggles love conspiracies.

"We tell them the parents that if anything odd happens again, they can call the number so that it can be hushed up. We explain that if children are involved, the Queen has mandated that we protect children who might have been involved. If they seem agreeable, then we leave. Otherwise, we obliviate again and treat them traditionally.

"If they are okay with it and the kids do have further accidental magic, the parents call us about it. If no one outside the family saw anything, we tell them we're making a record but not to worry. Otherwise we send a 'cleaning crew' – the Muggle conspiracy believers buy it every time. The Muggles think they know something that other people don't know and the cards are charmed to be uninteresting to adults who aren't keyed in. It's saved us probably a trip out a week for the obliviation squads. Less overtime. They're not happy about that, but they ARE happy that the Muggles are helping them do their work and they have less of a chance of coming in and creating more problems with the Statute."

Cornelius sighed. "Arthur? I don't know whether to censure you or commend you. I'm leaning toward commendation. How much has this saved from the budget?"

Arthur smiled. "Oh, about 2200 Galleons a month."

Cornelius smiled and nodded. "We should get this written up as official law. I'm all about saving money where possible. Now then, can we arrange to meet the Evans boy's family on Saturday on the way to Harry Potter's home?"

Arthur nodded. "I'll call them – their contact information is part of the deal we make." Arthur grinned. "Makes them feel like British spies – like on the telly. They love it."

---

The Minister and Arthur Weasley stood on the doorstep of the home of Mark Evans. The Minister's guards and Sirius watched from the Ministry car. The door opened. The woman saw Arthur and said, "Agent Weasley! Welcome. We were surprised at your call for a meeting. Has something happened?"

Arthur glanced around and said, "Can we take this inside? Special secrets and all that."

The woman smiled. "Of course! Come in, come in." The two men entered the home. "And who is
Arthur replied, "This is the head of my section: Mr. Fudge."

The woman took on an enthusiastic look. "Wow. Your name sounds like special code. Are you a spy too?"

The Minister really had to stifle his chuckles. "Actually that is my real name: Cornelius Fudge. I asked to speak to you and have given special permission for your family to be told the real story. You understand that we have to keep this quiet, yes?"

The woman nodded enthusiastically. "I understand." She led them to where her husband and son were.

Needless to say, the explanation was NOT what they had been expecting. However, it did answer many concerns they had been having about their son.

Arthur, being a family man, explained things to the boy and explained how important keeping it secret was. He did tell him that when he turned eleven, he would be invited to a special school where he would have friends and classmates who were just like him.

The boy was disappointed that he had to wait, but all in all, he took it well.

Finally, Mrs. Evans asked, "If he's six years away from going to this school, why have you explained now?"

The Minster sighed. "Because of your name, actually."

The husband said, "Our name?"

"Are you familiar with a boy who lives a few streets over on Privet Drive named Harry Potter? Lives with his cousin – something Dursley?"

The two thought about it. "Oh wait! The Dudley boy – that's his name – used to be a troublemaker, but he hasn't been seen out and about this year for some reason. His group seems to have grown up a bit. I didn't know he lived with his cousin."

The Minister nodded. "Well, boys can be troublesome. But these two boys are children of two sisters, one of who was like your son and had magic. The boy Harry, her son, is actually also magical. The woman's family name, before they married, was Evans."

The man looked at the Minister with surprise. "So they might be related to us?"

The minister nodded. "I should explain that the boy is living with his Aunt so that he can be kept from a certain hubbub. His family is quite important and he himself is quite well known. Not wanting him to grow up bothered by those who might want to take advantage before he went to school, after his parents died when he was a toddler, Harry was placed out amongst his non-magical relations – we call them Muggles. It was much safer for him."

"I see." The man paused and said, "So the Magical world is dangerous?"

The minister chuckled. "Not really any more than your world. The boy is actually a celebrity for various reasons. You can see why we don't want him exposed, I hope. Imagine being a celebrity as a young boy without being old enough to understand why."
The couple laughed. The woman said, "Likely to make him conceited. Better to grow up away from that. But why does that bring you today?"

"If you're willing, I would like to invite you – and Harry, whom I am about to visit – to come to our bank. We have specialists who can verify relations quite easily and I would like to see if you are related. If would mean much to the boy to have more family, from what I understand."

The couple looked at each other and shrugged. "We've made our day free. Do you want to return and pick us up when you've spoken to him?"

The Minister replied, "Actually, I have a special car out front that can hold more than it seems. The visit to Harry should take fifteen minutes – twenty at the most. Would you mind coming now and waiting in the car?" He looked at the boy. "Mark? Would you like to see a magic car with your parents?"

The boy nodded eagerly. The Evans parents, once again, shrugged and followed the Minister out, locking the door on the way.

Harry Potter was sitting out on the front porch, waiting for his Uncle Sirius to visit. He was told that there would be an important guest but not to worry.

He saw an older, very official car pull up. He looked at it curiously. Out of the back stepped … Harry was off and running. "Padfoot!" he called out.

Sirius Black watched in joy as his godson ran up to him. He lowed himself a little and the ten-year old boy jumped into his arms. "You came!"

Sirius laughed. "I said I would. Of course I came!"

The boy looked at the man holding him and blushed. "Sorry. I'm still getting used to having a godfather."

"That's alright, pup. How have you been this week?"

Sirius smiled as his godson quickly explained what he had been doing that week. It added up to: Nothing unusual. But there was real joy in listening to the enthusiasm of a child explaining regular life.

When he was done, Harry looked at the other man who had gotten out the car. He was dressed in a very expensive suit – very much like some of Vernon's visitors from work sometimes. "Who is that?"

Sirius chuckled and set Harry down. "Harry? I would like you to meet the Minister for Magic, Cornelius Fudge."

Harry was a little surprised. "Minister for Magic? What's that?"

"He runs the whole magical government."

Harry was awed. "We have our own government?"

Sirius and the visitor laughed. The man said, "Such as it is. Hello. Hello, Mr. Potter. It is nice to meet you."

The boy was suddenly shyer. "It is nice to meet you too. Sirius told me that someone was visiting.
Is there a reason you came?"

"Can we go inside? I'd like to explain out of the earshot of any passing people."

Harry looked dubious as he looked back at the house. He saw Uncle Vernon peeking through the window, along with his Aunt Petunia. He shrugged. "Let me go ask my Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon."

The Minister and Sirius Black waited until the boy came back to the door and waved to them. He called out, "Come in!"

The Minister and Sirius entered the home. Standing there were the boy's Aunt and Uncle apparently. Not being familiar with Muggle animals, he never made the walrus and horse connection, but that's neither here nor there.

"Good afternoon! I'm Cornelius Fudge, Minister for Magic. Thank you for allowing me in your home. It's quite lovely."

The woman nodded stiffly and murmured a "welcome." The man, looking almost resigned, hesitantly put forward his hand. "You're welcome." After they dropped hands, the man added, "You're the head of his people's government? You have your own government?"

Cornelius chuckled. "Yes. We've been autonomous for about three hundred years. Legally, we still answer to the Queen if necessary, but we're pretty successful in not forcing her to get involved. In the end, we're all British."

The man hmmpphed as he considered that. "I wanted to meet you both, and Mrs. Dursley especially, because I … well, there's a conundrum."

The woman asked suspiciously, "What is it?"

"Do you have family in this area?" the Minister asked curiously.

The woman was taken aback. "Not that I am aware of. Why do you ask?"

"Perhaps if we can sit down, I can explain." He turned toward Sirius and Harry who were watching. "Why don't you take Harry out to meet Mark and his parents while I finish this conversation?"

Sirius nodded. "Okay. We'll be there." He looked at the Dursleys – he had promised himself that he'd stay polite for Harry's sake. "Thank you for your time. I'll bring Harry back before 9:00. Is that alright?"

The two nodded in agreement.

After Sirius took Harry out, the couple led him to a kitchen. The woman asked, "Tea?" She looked calmer but still unhappy.

"If you're having some, I'll certainly accept. But don't put yourself out on my account. We have tea in the car as needed." At this, the man looked mildly interested.

Vernon Dursley finally asked, "What is this all about?"

The Minister sighed. "First of all, I should say that recently we've been making some changes. When the boy's Godfather first visited, did a red-haired man come with him?"
The two looked at each other and nodded. "He didn't say anything much. He was also fairly polite. I'll admit, your lot has been far more normal and polite than we're used to in the past. When Pet's sister got married, we met her husband's friends – they didn't leave a good impression. Black has been much improved."

Cornelius nodded. "Since I took over, I've been trying to ensure that we encroach on the lives of non-magicals as little as possible. Part of that is ensuring that Wizards and Witches don't go out into your world looking like fools."

Vernon and Petunia nodded. Petunia said, "It has been much better."

The Minister looked at the couple. "Can I ask a question which might inadvertently give offense? I won't mean to – but sometimes in unavoidable."

Both of the Muggle's faces took on an almost pinched look. But Petunia nodded, giving permission.

"I notice there seems to be some … well, some resentment towards the Magical world. Is there a reason for it that you can explain?"

Petunia sat very still but then asked her own question. "What matter is it to you? We're just lowly 'Muggins' or whatever you call us." Vernon was patting his wife's hand.

"Honestly? I think it's a shame. If your sister was one of us and your nephew, I find it a tragedy that such resentment and dislike seems to be present in the family. And while I am not a miracle worker, I AM the Minister for Magic. Perhaps there is some policy or procedure that I could champion which would save future families from such heartache. The only voice I have access to, however, is yours. So, what happened?"

Vernon, wanting his son to know the truth, had called the boy in from watching the telly.

Over the next ten minutes, slowly, the story of Petunia and Lily Evans came out. While Petunia tried to be resentful of her sister, she had truly loved Lily and being forced to separate and not even being able to see where her sister went of to had caused a wide breech. As the Minister had stated, it was a true tragedy.

In the end the Minister nodded. "I don't know what I can do. But you have my promise that I will at least try. We wizards, it has been commented to me, don't seem to have much common sense and, unfortunately, since I've taken over I've found this to be rather true – it's truly embarrassing actually."

Vernon Dursley, surprisingly, was much more obviously agreeable to this than his wife. Dudley just watched wide-eyed.

"And one thing I will say: Between you, me, and the door over there, Albus Dumbledore is a rather condescending bastard – at least I have found him so. I am coming to think that allowing him free will in shaping the minds of the future might need some modification."

At this, even Petunia Dursley was somewhat won over by the politician in their kitchen – the man had pinpointed her true resentment from all those years ago.

"And Mr. Dursley? Your reasons?"

Vernon, at that, closed up. "I support my wife. My other reasons are my own. Maybe I'll tell her at some point, but right now – it's better left alone."
The Minister replied, "I can respect that." He sighed. "Are you willing for your son to come in to our bank and see if we can find out if this other Evans family are relations?"

Vernon and Petunia looked at each other even as the large boy looked dumbly curious (a Ravenclaw the boy was not). "We're coming with him. I'll be there to ensure nothing untoward goes on." Petunia nodded in agreement with her husband.

"Well, the car is out front. I will ensure you are returned safe and whole when we are finished." The Minister stood up. The Dursleys gathered their coats and things and followed the man out.

The Dursleys were quite surprised by the spacious interior of the car. While the adults mostly exchanged pleasantries and not much more, the three boys were fascinated by how the car seemed to jump between other cars on the road.

Finally, Robert Evans said, "I could go for a car like this – getting to work through London traffic is a nightmare."

Sirius, always willing to add his two cents, said, "I actually went another route. I have a motorcycle that can fly above the traffic. It even has an invisibility function so I'm not seen."

Vernon had a disagreeable look. "I'd rather stay on the ground, thank you very much. I might hate the traffic – but at least it makes sense."

Robert Evans chuckled. "There is that."

Bernice Evans and Petunia Dursley didn't add much to the conversation. The Minister and his guards also didn't say much.
The group that walked through Diagon Alley created quite a stir. The Minister of Magic with his Guards was not such an usual sight, but the fact that he was walking with Sirius Black and Arthur Weasley, and a few unknown adults and children and that none of them were dressed in robes was comment worthy.

The Minister took it in stride, nodding politely to those who greeted him.

The boys looked wide eyed. Each was sporting a muggle cap. This was to hide the fact that Harry Potter was among them – luckily, no one noticed.

The group finally entered the bank. Those who were unfamiliar were a bit intimidated by the goblins but they didn't react too badly having been warned.

The Minister did notice that the Dursley fellow seemed more relaxed inside of the bank than outside. The group waited in line until Slipknife retrieved them and led them to a much larger room than his office – there were too many for his office to easily hold.

The conference room held the adults and children easily. Slipnose looked at the Minister. "How can Gringotts help you today, Minister?"

"Well, Accounts Manager, it is about these three boys." The goblin peered down. "The youngest there is Mark Evans, a muggleborn wizard. He will need an inheritance test. The larger boy is Dudley Dursley, and his cousin there is Harry Potter."

At this, everyone noticed the goblin take special notice. "Mr. Potter. Welcome to Gringotts. We are happy to see one of our oldest accounts represented once more."

The boy looked at his godfather for a brief moment and then answered. "Er. Thank you. I'm happy to be here. Um. I hope our time together is profitable …?" He sounded a bit uncertain but his intentions were good. He looked to his godfather to see if he had gotten the greeting right. Sirius nodded at him.

The goblin nodded. "I shall send for the Manager for your accounts." The goblin called out and another came to the door. After a brief exchange, the second goblin retreated.

"And what does the presence of the Dursley boy and Heir Potter require to your mind, Minister?"

"Well, their mothers were sisters – and they also were named Evans. I would honestly want to get their lineage checked and see if they are related or if any have unknown accounts in stasis."

The goblin nodded. "We can do this."

Very soon the three boys had each received the Inheritance Ritual. The boys were quite fascinated by the way the quill worked without anyone touching it.

The Manager of the Potter Accounts, Barchoke, had also been brought in. Slipknife, however, managed the meeting.

He carefully reviewed each parchment. :"Minister? Your guess, it turn out, is correct." The
Minister looked interested, as did the families. "Mrs. Dursley, your father Samuel had a younger brother named William?"

Mrs. Dursley nodded thoughtfully. "I believe so. There was some confusion during the war and he got separated. He had lost touch due to his childhood home being destroyed when he was off fighting on the continent. He never knew where they went."

The goblin nodded. "You father was a warrior – we have much respect for that. His younger brother William was the father of Mr. Robert Evans."

The named man looked surprised. "My father always told me stories about Uncle Sammy. They thought he had died in the fighting!" He looked at Petunia. "I guess that makes us cousins."

Petunia nodded, a bit overwhelmed. She hadn't known about any remaining family.

"Yes," Slipknife continued. "I should mention that each of you is considered a squib – a non-magical member of a magical family. Your ancestor carried the name of Evanshire. Young Mr. Potter, as the eldest Magical of the eldest magical line actually has the right to inherit the vaults and any property or titles attached to it."

Harry was confused. "Is that all of the money I have?"

The Potter Account manager and the others chuckled. "No. Compared to the Potter Estate, the Evanshire holdings are minimal. The Evanshire account has approximately 200,000 Galleons as well as the title of a Noble house – at some point, they held a minor Muggle peerage before the Statute of Secrecy but gave it up."

Vernon was curious. "How much is that in Muggle pounds?"

The manager looked at Harry, who was nodding in agreement. "About 800,000 Pounds."

"And how much does the Potter account hold?" Harry asked curiously.

The manager looked to Sirius, who nodded. "Because your Magical guardian, Mr. Black, is present, I can tell you. The Potter holdings have a current worth of approximately 3,400,000 Galleons. About 1,270,000 of that is liquid – actual Galleons in your vaults – and the remainder is property and shares in businesses. It also has the status of being an Ancient and Most Noble house. Besides having a very long magical history, it held a more elevated Muggle peerage at one time."

Harry was overwhelmed. "Well, since I have my own money, can that money be used to pay for Mark and Dudley's schooling?"

The Evans and the Dursleys, more the Dursleys, were surprised at the casual generosity of the boy. Sirius and Arthur both had proud looks for him and the Minister was quite happy with his nature – innately fair people made them much easier to work with.

Slipnose simply replied, "You may discuss this with your Magical guardian, but other information might have an effect."

Harry shrugged. "You, young Mr. Dursley, are not actually a squib. Neither are you a Muggle or a full-level Wizard. You would technically be classified as a Hedge-wizard. Magical enough to hold a wand with proper education but not enough to be invited to Hogwarts."

Dudley was surprised. "I must get that from Mum's family."
"Not quite." Slipnose disagreed. He looked at Vernon, who was looking very unhappy. "Mr. Vernon Dursley. Were you aware that you are a wizard with a bound core?"

Everyone looked at the man, who looked to be trying to keep his temper. Finally he spoke. "I'm sorry if I am taking too much time, but this is not a subject I ever wanted to discuss. Yes. I am aware. My father's father and sister were both magical. But because he wasn't invited to that school, he was treated very poorly. Eventually my grandmother and he were kicked out. They were well shot of them." Vernon's face took on a more red look and his anger, which he was still trying to control, was rising. "His family were freaks. Just because he didn't have magic, the man tortured them. And when his sister," Vernon said this with quite a lot of venom, "was old enough, he taught her to torture my father as well. When I received a letter, knowing my own sister hadn't, and knowing what my father and grandma had endured, I refused to attend. They locked down any freakishness I had. My father died a young man because of what they did to him. I have never regretted the decision."

As Vernon Dursley spoke, the Minister was becoming more and more alarmed. Finally he blurted out, "Your father was Hawthorne Umbridge!"

Vernon shook his head violently. "NO! When they left, he took his mum's name: Cracknell. And when he married, he got permission to take my mother's family name: Dursley. When I got the letter for Vernon Umbridge, it was adding insult to injury. My name is Dursley and I am happy to carry the name. That Umbridge freakishness should just die."

Everyone in the room (except the goblins) was shocked. The Minister motioned for permission when the goblin was about to speak and he received it. "I would usually take offense at the work freak when talking about being magical, but in this case – I understand. Well, Mr. Dursley, I won't give you false platitudes about it, expressing remorse when I have none. Instead I'll tell the truth: I have the distinct pleasure to inform you that your freak Aunt, Dolores Umbridge, has recently been sentenced to a lifetime in prison, in part because of what she did to your father."

Vernon's face, which was a study in rage, suddenly took on a look of shock. "She's in prison?"

"Azkaban."

Petunia gasped. The Minister asked curiously, "You know about Azkaban?"

"My sister had a boy she knew who was a wizard. He told us about Azkaban. He said it was the worst place on earth and it is infested with demons who eat souls."

The Minister and Arthur Weasley nodded. Sirius looked slightly green – he had experience with Dementors.

"Yes. She is right now having the experience of being exposed daily to creatures called Dementors. Their presence will take away every happy memory a person has. And if they get a chance, they will eat a person's soul. We keep this punishment for only the worst of offenders. What she did to your father in law? She deserves it, quite a few times over."

The Evans looked disturbed – it would take some calm conversation for them to get over it. But the boys were wide-eyed. Petunia Dursley was looking at her husband with understanding. Vernon looked thoughtful. Finally he said, "Well, then. I guess not all of you people are freaks. My father said that nothing could ever be done – I guess he didn't know everything."

Cornelius sighed. "I will admit that in the past torturing Muggles wouldn't receive such a harsh penalty. But we're working on making the system more fair – no one deserves what your father
endured. You should ask the goblins about what they have for you."

Vernon looked curiosly over to the two goblins who had been passively observing. Slipnose said, "Yes. You have a sister, you said?" Vernon nodded. "And your father has passed." He nodded again. "Well, with the lack of further legal recourse, the 30,000 Galleon fine which was put aside for your father should he ever appear shall be split between you and your sister. The Wizengamot ordered the Galleons be converted to Pounds and paid to him in recompense for his suffering. If you can give me your sister's address, I will ensure a check is delivered to her. Each of you will receive 74,250 Pounds as a settlement for his payment. That is half each minus the conversion fee."

Vernon nodded. "I'll accept it just to spite her. And Marge, I'm certain, would never reject such a sum."

The goblins both smiled. "We do have an offer for you." Their smile was not pleasant, most of the watching audience noted.

Vernon was curious. "What offer?"

"The name Umbdrige has become … disagreeable to us. As it stands, the remainder of the Umbridge estate, some 33,000 Galleons after the fines and penalties have all been paid, is currently sitting in trust if your son ever has a magical descendant. If you are willing, for a 400 Galleon expenditure from the account, we can perform a cleansing ritual on each of your family and then unbind your core. You will never be a powerful wizard, but freeing your core would allow you to actually take control of the account. With a small magical ritual after the cleansing, we can permanently and irreversibly remove the name of Umbridge and permanently supplant it with Dursley.

"Once you take control, we will help you to disown the woman who sits in Azkaban forevermore. She would become Dolores No-Name. And the name of Umbridge could die in full and fall into complete historical oblivion. I'm sure that word to her of her changed status would make her punishment in Azkaban just that much more … appropriate. You could then put the remainder toward what it is meant for: the future of the Dursley family. Given leave and time, we can make the name an economic power."

Vernon's smile became larger and larger as the smiling goblin spoke. Vernon stood and put out his hand. "You have a deal; and an extra 100 of those Galleons to you from the account for you kindness. Let's erase the name from history. Let all of our enemies suffer the same fate."

The goblins shook hands. The watching audience was a little overcome with how vicious the man could be. The goblins recognized a kindred spirit.

The Potter account manager said to Sirius, "Mr. Black. We recommend your godson also receive a magical cleansing and to see a healer to ensure there any bindings are removed. The fee can be paid from the Potter account with your agreement."

"No. I'll pay – leave Harry's money for him. As his godfather, it is my right and privilege to provide."

Slipnose looked at the youngest Evans. "You have no bindings and no Dark magic, young one. We look forward to having you as a customer."

Barchoke added another comment. "Mr. and Mrs. Dursley. You haven't received a stipend for young Mr. Potter's care?"
Vernon looked sharply at the Accounts Manager. "No, we haven't."

The goblin nodded. "A mistake made by Mr. Dumbledore when he had taken Mr. Black's place whilst Mr. Black he was unavailable. Mr. Black. Do you have any problem with us dispersing the normal stipend for Mr. Potter as well as back amounts?"

Sirius shrugged. "Not really. Set it up and I'll sign."

Vernon and Petunia looked at each other. Finally Petunia nodded and Vernon sighed. "Accounts Manager?"

"Yes?"

"Reduce the arrears to a third. I admit we were upset with the extra mouth which wasn't planned, and as a result, perhaps we didn't spend the money on the boy's care that we should have. He's mostly worn things second hand. While I used to blame things on … well, I used to justify it to myself, it is more honest that we not take full payment for something not delivered. We'll ensure the proper amounts are spent for the proper stipend from now on."

Harry was amazed. His Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia were freaking him out a little. He had never had them acknowledge that they treated him other than he should have been. Because they were being so honest now, he interjected, "Can it be at least half? It's not all their fault from what you say. Don't punish them for this Dumbledore guy's mistake."

Vernon and Petunia looked at their nephew in surprise. "You're a good and decent boy. I guess you mother's kind nature that Petunia, in our better moments, had mentioned on occasion has come to you."

Harry had never received such a compliment from his Uncle and didn't know what to say. So he said nothing.

Sirius looked at the two and said, "Half. I agree with my pup. It's not entirely their fault."

Barchoke nodded. He did some calculations. "Eight years at 250 Galleons monthly is 24,000 Galleons. Divide this in half and that's 12,000. Add another 4,200 for his time before going to Hogwarts and that's 16,400. Converted to Pounds with the standard fee … Mr. Dursley, you will have a check for 81,180 Pounds for Mr. Potter's care through August 31, 1991 before you leave today. Future years will have to be paid annually. See me next August about the matter."

Vernon nodded, a bit surprised at the amount.

Harry got everyone's attention. "Now that everyone has been talked to: Sirius? How can we make if fair for Mark, Dudley, Aunt Petunia and me?"

"What do you mean?"

Harry shrugged. "Well, if Dudley's going to get the Dursley stuff when Uncle Vernon gives it to him later, and if I have the Potter stuff, can't Mark get the Evanshire stuff? We can split some money for what should have been paid, pay for Mark and Dudley to go to school, but leave the rest for the bank to invest. The manager said Evanshire has noble status. When Mark gets to be older, he can get the Evanshire name and stuff."

The people necessary to make such an agreement were all present. Petunia was happy that her father's name would not disappear, Harry was happy to do something nice for his newly-found cousin, and Robert Evans was happy to know his son's future was assured.
A casual comment brought Petunia Dursley nee Evans almost to tears. "Petunia? Would you like to meet your Uncle William? My father would be thrilled to find out his brother actually survived the war and had children."

Petunia replied, "Yes. Yes. I think I'd like that."

Dudley and Harry looked at each other and then to Robert. "Can we meet him?" Dudley asked. "He's our Uncle too."

Robert smiled at the boys. "I'm certain he'll want to meet you as well."

Little Mark put in his comments. "You'll love Grandpa – he has the best stories. And candy."

The people in the room laughed.

The Minister stood. "Well, I'll make arrangements for my car to take you all back when your business is concluded. I was quite happy to do my part in bringing a family back together and in getting that woman's name gotten rid of. If anyone needs me, just send a message through Arthur here and I'll do what I can to help."

He turned toward Harry. "Oh, Harry? You should get your Godfather to help you write a message to the Daily Prophet. You're well known, as your Godfather should have explained. But you've also been under a mail ward so that unknown packages and possible threats couldn't get to you. But a lot of letters are probably from other kids your age or younger and they might get upset from never having heard from you. I recommend a message saying that you recently became aware of your magical heritage and that you're looking forward to Hogwarts. And then for anyone who sent a letter, you're sorry but they never got to you because you've been being kept safe from possible negative sources. Thank them for thinking of you and express your hopes that you can meet many of them as you go to Hogwarts and grow up as a wizard."

Harry was a bit overwhelmed but Sirius understood. "Don't worry. I'll help get a letter written from him and take care of it. Should have thought of that myself."

Cornelius grinned. "I'm a politician – I have to think about these things."

The room laughed.

Arthur gave Petunia and Vernon two cards from his case. "I should have given these to you before. If anything happens and it needs fixing or being hidden, just call that number and we'll come take care of it. Better to help keep your life and image normal for the neighbours."

Vernon accepted it and thanked the man cheerfully. Vernon's entire demeanour had changed because of recent revelations and even the idea of accidental magic no longer upset him. He was getting revenge for his da' and gran and nothing could upset him now.

Petunia just accepted and nodded.

The two men exited, the Evans following. They would be taken home and the car would return after. They had exchanged contact information with the Dursleys and a tentative meeting for the next weekend was made.

OMAKE: A thought I had right before posting this.

Mark Evans was running down the road, a group of boys from the third form following. Suddenly,
he spied someone he knew. "Dudley!"

Dudley Dursley was with his friends. Since Dudley had calmed down, the group had ceased causing trouble for trouble's sake. "Hey, it's my cousin."

Piers Polkiss was confused. "I thought your cousin was Harry."

"No - my mother's cousin's son. We just found him a few months ago."

Mark ran up, catching his breath. "Why you running?"

"Third form boys. Trying to take my lunch money."

Dudley looked at his gang. They shrugged. Dudley kept Mark visible and hid the rest. The boys showed up. "Pipsqueak! Where's the money?"

Dudley appeared with his gang. There were much more intimidating. "Oh look, Piers. A bunch of wannabes. Hey, Morgon."

"Yes, Dudley?"

"These boys are trying to shake down my cousin. What should we do about it?"

The boys had heard of this group - no one wanted to mess with them. They had thought that they had gone away.

"What do you think?"

"Well, they are messing with my cousin. Maybe we can come out of retirement just this once and teach them a lesson?"

The older boys grinned at the younger ones. They started running. Mark watched as his cousin and his friends had their fun, relieved that he had someone around to help him.
Dursley Interlude:

Vernon Dursley looked at the house he had driven up to and sighed. He loved his sister – but dealing with her could be a chore and a half. At least what he brought would make her more agreeable. He had only told her, when he called, that he had to speak about an important matter.

He trudged his way to the door. Before he even got there, he heard his sister's dog, Ripper, barking. Her voice could also be heard, "Settle down, settle down. It's alright, Rippey-poo. Mummy's here." Vernon rolled his eyes even as the door opened. "Vernon! You made it."

"Yes, Marge. How are you?"

"Everything is doing well. The last litters have been sold and I'm nearly ready to breed the next batch." Marge motioned for Vernon to come in. He did so, ignoring the bulldog which tracked him as he came inside.

The dog was shockingly disagreeable for being a bulldog – most British Bulldogs were quite pleasant and non-aggressive.

"Well, I am happy to hear things are going well. I've come to take care of some family business." Vernon sat down at the table.

"Would you like a cuppa? Or perhaps a wee dram?" Marge asked pleasantly.

"No, thank you. I'll be driving once again soon and I best not." She sat down across from her brother. "Anyway, do you remember Da's stories about his father and sister?"

Marge's face became disagreeable. "I'd rather not think about it."

Vernon nodded. "Well, perhaps this will change your mind: While his father his dead, our disowned Aunt is not. I found out that she was recently put in prison for what she did to Da', among other things."

Marge's face took on a surprised look. "All these years later?"

Vernon nodded. "She was found to be subverting things in her government job. A background investigation brought it up."

"Will wonders ever cease?" Marge asked rhetorically.

Vernon grinned a little. "Not really." He reached into his pocket and pulled out the cheque. He put it on the table and pushed it over to her.

Marge's eyes got large as she read the amount. "What's this?"

"This is half what the court awarded to Da' for what she did to him. I got the other half. And any money she had left after paying this and a few penalties was put into trust for Dudley's future. Twasn't much after the fines – but it's being invested by a right canny investment banker. I just came to make sure you got your part, too." Vernon had no interest in making Marge interested in
how much money Dudley and his children would eventually get.

Marge contemplated the cheque and plans started filtering through her mind. Finally, she consciously put it aside. "Well, I think that calls for a brandy in celebration."

Vernon sighed – Marge liked her brandy a bit much. He was fond of a good whisky himself, but not when he needed to be driving. "We'll have to get together to celebrate when we both have the time."

Marge nodded. She'd just have her brandy after her brother left. "And how is the family? How's little Dudley-poo doing?"

"Fine, fine. His grades are improving. That school wasn't doing a good job so we got him a tutor. He's also been put on a food plan – the doctor found a few things. But he's been getting better."

Marge scoffed. "He's just a proper-sized boy. Not like that cousin of his. Has he still been making trouble?"

Vernon sighed. This was why he needed to visit his sister without the family. "Actually, a few things have changed with the boy."

Marge looked suspicious. "Like what?"

"You know how we said his parents were unemployed layabouts?"

Marge nodded.

"We found out that was because his mother's husband came from money. And instead of working, they were helping the government with some top secret stuff. We weren't told because it was so secret and we still don't know the details." Vernon had no interest in trying to explain that the freakishness their Aunt was guilty of had any good uses. He didn't have the time or energy.

Marge was surprised. "Then why was he left like a sack of potatoes on the porch? What about money to raise him?"

Vernon said, "Apparently, the man who did that was a dotty nutter. The boy's godfather, who had been falsely accused and put into prison, was recently free when the real culprit was found and interrogated. Very hush-hush. Like MI-6 hush-hush. He comes from money too. And so when he took the boy for his inheritance, the lack of a stipend was brought up by the bankers. They paid a lump sum for what we should have been getting."

Marge was astounded. "So the parents weren't worthless?"

Vernon shook his head. "Secret stuff. But they were trying to make Britain safe."

"Also, Petunia's family had a trust estate as well. Because of certain inheritance rules, the boy's mother was the first to qualify and he qualified too. With THAT inheritance, completely separate from his father's money, the boy paid for Dudley's tuition for Smeltings – in full.

"Pet has a cousin near us as well. Her father's brother survived the war and they happened to move to Little Whinging as well. Because they're from the same family, the boy paid for the cousin's tuition as well. All with his godfather's permission. The Godfather insisted on paying for the boy's things. His parents already paid for his tuition in full to for the private school they went to. Part of the rules for the boy's father's family that they have to go to that school to inherit.

"All in all, we're going to have a much better Yule season and New Year. With Dudley's tuition
paid, the money from the court, and the money from the boy's father's estate – we're close to 200,000 pounds in the black. And that's separate from the 75,000 for you."

Vernon pulled another card from his pocket and pushed it over. "This is the Barclay's Manager for Special Accounts." Vernon had no desire to put his sister in Diagon Alley – and so he had asked the Slipknife fellow for a regular banker for his sister to invest with. Gringotts had a relationship with Barclay's and this was the name they gave him. "I know you love breeding your dogs, but if you want to invest and perhaps enjoy a few of the finer things, this bloke will help take care of you. Make you future years a bit more leisurely in recompense for the years of work you've done."

Although Vernon actually loved working (this would surprise the people that he normally worked with if they knew), he knew his sister preferred an easier life. Done right, this might make his need to worry about her future a thing of the past.

"Well. Christmas will be much more pleasant. Perhaps I should come to your house for the holiday."

Vernon's face took on a brief pinched look before he relaxed. "Let me coordinate with the boy's godfather. We all know you and the boy don't get along. If he's going to take the boy, then there should be no problem."

Marge nodded. She, perhaps, hadn't treated the boy well in the past, hating to see her brother's good nature taken advantage of, but it seems it wasn't the boy's fault at all. She could ensure that she didn't see the boy again for her brother's sake. She might never like him, but she could respect that his parents weren't the bad sort that they had thought.

The Greatest Minister for Magic in History Part 12

It was November 30, 1990.

John Major had just completed his second day in the big chair, or nearly so.

He had replaced the Iron Lady as Prime Minister. Luckily, her loss of the position had not ousted their Party from leadership. He was looking forward to a quieter weekend before the next major item crossed his desk.

His phone sounded. "Yes?"

His secretary's voice came through. "Your 8:00 appointment just called to confirm that he would be here."

He was confused. "My 8:00? Did I have an 8:00?"

"If you look at your schedule, sir?"

Major did so and right there, in his own handwriting, was the notation on it. An A. Weasley, Advisor to Her Majesty's Government on Matters Special and Secret. He shrugged. "Thank you, Mary. I'm certain I can handle this one. Why don't you go home?"

"Yes, Sir. Thank you. I will be here tomorrow for the half-day."

"Good. See you then."

The Prime Minister looked through his notes and could not find any information on his 8:00. At
7:59, the guard announced a Mr. Arthur Weasley and a Mr. Cornelius Fudge.

He stood to welcome the two well-dressed men. "Welcome, Welcome. Mr. Weasley and Mr. Fudge. What can I do for you today?"

John Major was not emotionally prepared for what his visitors told him. That the man, Fudge, led a completely separate British government for a completely insulated people was a shock. He was greatly relieved to find the contact man, Weasley, quite sensible and proper. He was also informed of the purpose of the odd picture on his wall.

His visitors explained that this was the method used in the past to contact his office, but the phone was decided as a more viable option for the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister was quite happy about the change.

Major had remembered an odd comment from the outgoing Thatcher and realized that this was the meeting she had referred to.

All in all, as uncomfortable as it made the man, he would have been relived to know how much easier he had it than previous Prime Ministers.

He hoped he would not need to meet with these people again, or at least that there would be no emergencies in that sector. He had enough to deal with as regards the economy.

Cornelius Fudge made his way to the meeting room.

Truthfully, he was almost cursing at the need to interrupt his Yule holiday, but he had set the deadline for a plan to take care of Potions at Hogwarts and he would be Merlin-damned if he didn't see it through.

The Minister entered the conference room at the Ministry with fifteen minutes to spare. He said hello briefly to those who were already present. The Potions Master in question had already arrived as well – he was sitting along. His face was a stoic mask.

Glancing around, the Minister saw that Dumbledore had not arrived.

Deciding he needed to get a few things clear, the Minister casually made his way over.

"Potions Master Snape." The Minister's voice was neutral.

"Minister Fudge."

"I would like a private word with you."

The man looked at the Minister and nodded. With an efficient flick of his wand, the man set up a charm. "Those listening will only hear a buzz. Why did you wish to speak to me?"

The Minister sat down. "I think that you are curious about something. And you have something to ask me."

Severus Snape peered a bit at the Minister and said, "If you found my record so disagreeable, why did you not force me to be summarily dismissed?"

The Minister gave a small, victorious smile. "Yes. I knew this question would come to you. And I have an answer: Someone who's word I trusted spoke to me of mitigating factors."
Snape looked at the Minister. "And what were these … mitigations?"

The Minister nodded. "Perhaps you can keep this to yourself?" Severus nodded in reply. "Even from Dumbledore?" Startled, Snape nodded again.

"My source described you as perhaps the most ill-used wizard in the history of Magical Britain. Born of a pureblooded witch and abusive Muggle, your teenage years were a trial of endurance from being bullied by a certain group of fellow students who were perhaps treated with too much leeway by the Hogwarts staff. While I am certain that you gave as good as you got, four against one are not favorable odds. The instigator of this bullying found it offensive that you were friends with a girl that he fancied and this instigator was rather immature and pampered.

"This boy's friends included another pureblood whose family never taught him proper decorum, only their innate superiority. And although he rejected those values, he certainly took advantage of the unspoken influence his name generated. Another one of these boys, due to an illness he had no control over, was easily led by these others such that he didn't want to risk standing up against behaviour he knew to be wrong. And the fourth – the fourth was a rather pathetic wizard who also used the notoriety of being friends with these others to see other made to look as pathetic as he felt."

The Minister could almost see the man trying to maintain his calm.

"And then, an extremely humiliating attack caused you to lash out at this friend and the one bright spot in your life was lost. And, seeing this former friend eventually become close to and marry one of your tormentors certainly pushed you into the camp of one powerful wizard who used every opportunity to manipulate people into following him. Perhaps his people helped to take care of that abusive Muggle who sired you."

The Potion Master's face was frozen as the Minister explained.

"And then, service to this powerful wizard, you accidentally caused his eyes to move toward your former friend – whose friendship you still regretted the loss of. Trying to prevent her death, you went to this wizard's sworn enemy to try to prevent her death. And HE used to for HIS own ends; and forced you into vows which constrain you to this day. How am I doing?"

The Potion Master looked at the Minister with a fear which was barely hidden. "You are remarkably … well informed." The Potion Master desperately tried to conceive of where the man got his information but was coming up blank.

The Minister nodded. "Well, here's what I know: 1) The man who tormented you grew up. He then died protecting your former friend. He's been dead for ten years – get over it, man. 2) The secondary tormentor spent 9 years in Azkaban for a crime he didn't commit. Take comfort in that he at least received some punishment – even though he skated on almost getting you killed as a teenager. 3) The third tormentor still suffers from an affliction which marginalizes him. And unless something changes, he will never be able to harm you. Indeed, he was the most innocent of the four boys. 4) The fourth tormenter, the most wretched of them, is in Azkaban. You are not.

"So it's time to grow up. Forget about maintaining your position as a spy. You do no one any service from the appearance of supporting your former master's viewpoint. While he is not fully dead – steps are being taken. Between me and you, by the time your nemesis's son arrives to Hogwarts, the matter will be dealt with. Do not tell Dumbledore – I don't need the man's interference. You'll see the sign things are taken care of on September 1 of next year. This will free you of the vows you were forced to take."
"I was told that you have the capacity to be the bravest man in Great Britain. Your intelligence far outstrips the majority of the people around you. You have never set one foot in Azkaban – although that certainly could have happened. You were tortured for ten years by various people. Well, you’ve tortured others for ten years yourself. The scales are balanced, in their own way. So," the Minister leaned down and looked directly into the man's eyes, "grow ... the ... fuck ... up."

Snape paused and then gave a curt nod.

"If you continue the way you were, I'll use my office to bury you. I sympathize with you – but don't think that won't stop me from crucifying you if I think it necessary."

The Minister stood and turned away. Just as he did, the man asked, "Who? Who told you of these things?"

The Minister turned his head and thought a moment. "I won't say his name. Yet. But he is known by the moniker of: The Lone Traveler."

Snape's face took on a startled look even as he dropped to Muffliato charm.

Amelia Bones, Augusta Longbottom, and Albus Dumbledore all watched the Minister and Severus Snape converse. Dumbledore attempted to use a supersensory charm to listen in, but a mild buzzing was all that came through. He did see the discomfort that Severus felt at the conversation.

He would have to speak to Severus later about what the man spoke of.

The Minister made his way to the seat that was set aside for him, even as the Board of Governors got the meeting underway.

The Head of the Board got the meeting started and ensured all were present. "Before we get to the matter at hand, does anyone have anything to say?"

Surprisingly Severus Snape stood and waited to be recognized.

The Head of the Board said, "Potions Master. You have something to say?"

The man nodded. "Yes. Thank you for the opportunity. I would like to take this moment to acknowledge my shortcomings as the Hogwarts Potions Professor. While I may be quite knowledgeable, I was a poor choice to teach those new to the subject as I have no patience for those who do not already have a base in the subject. As a result, my teaching habits were not the best way to ensure that the subject was properly taught. I would also like to point out that my personal history does not lend itself to a professional view of the different houses. As a result, besides limiting myself to Years Five and above for Potions Tuition, I am also hereby resigning as the Head of House for House Slytherin. I shall accept the reduction of pay which this will necessitate. I recommend Professor Aurora Sinastra, as the other former Slytherin on Hogwarts Staff, to be the Slytherin Head of House. The stipend for that position should be redirected to her, once she accepts and is approved. I shall, until the end of the 1992-1993 academic year, ensure all penalties and awards of points from my position are put through the different Heads of House to ensure there is no bias on my part, should I maintain my position." He then sat down.

There was a hubbub among those in the room. Professor McGonagall was looking at her colleague with surprise, almost shock. The Headmaster was speechless. The Potions Master sat stoically.

The Board Members were discussing this unexpected statement quietly. Finally the Head got the room back into order. "Potions Master Snape. Your acceptance of responsibility and recognition of your personal limitations are admirable. We shall take your resignation under advisement. You and
the rest of the staff shall have our final decision on this matter before the return feast on January 3, 1991. Now, to the matter at hand."

Not wanting to lose the services of the Potions Master, regardless of his prickly personality, the Board had taken the Minister's suggestions. It was noted that the man did teach the upper levels extremely well. His shortcomings came during the earlier years.

A Potions Mistress had been hired for years one through four. The new Potions Mistress had reviewed the texts that were used and suggested an additional primer that should have been included for new students to Potions. It would explain proper safety procedures as well as basic ingredient preparation techniques. She proposed a month for each class to bring the current students up to speed.

After reviewing the proposed text, Severus Snape – once again surprising those present – volunteered to pay the 600 Galleons that providing the current students the next text would cost. It would be included on the First Year lists from that point on.

Severus Snape had done much during that particular meeting of the Board of Governors to dispel the idea that he wished to destroy to future of Potions in Magical Britain.

The only one who seemed discombobulated by the man's actions was, in fact, the Headmaster.

Later, when the Headmaster quizzed him on his change of heart, Severus Snape would only say that he was no longer the immature wizard he had been when hired at Hogwarts. He would not volunteer any more information. He even refused to explain the conversation he had had with the Minister for Magic.

The Minister reviewed the proposed bills that he had painstakingly put together over the past five months.

He had taken the research that he had done, the conversations that he had had, and the various tests that he had witnessed, and put together a bill which would, if it passed, ensure a large amount of money would be put back into the economy.

The title of the bill really indicated its central thrust: The Magical Britain Economic Resurgence Bill. The secondary bill, a much harder sell to be certain, was the Marriage Health Act.

The entire purpose of the bill was to find those vaults that were currently sitting in statis below the surface of Gringotts Bank and to get as many as possible into circulation.

It required that any Muggleborn invited to Hogwarts be given the recommendation for a Magical Inheritance test. It acknowledged that many considered Muggleborn were, in fact, Squib-born and that vaults that might be dormant could be available again.

To satisfy those who would not want to accept squib-born wizards into their family, the bill stated that any wizard or witch who was found to be related to a currently active family could NOT be told of their relatives without the permission of the currently recognized Magical head of the family. Gringotts would automatically inform any living magical relatives of the existence of a newly found relative and ask for permission to inform the newly found wizard or witch. If permission was not received, they would only be told that they were, in fact, descended from squibs but that there was no inheritance to be achieved at that time.

Gringotts, however, keep a record and, if the current family died out, the newly recognized family member would be notified.
To prevent inadvertent interbreeding due to a squibborn not knowing exactly who they were related to, any magical couple who wished to marry was required to test through Gringotts for consanguinity. This was the Marriage Health Act.

No marriage could take place between those who were second cousins or closer by blood without the approval of a head of family. NO marriage could take place between first cousins or siblings.

Even purebloods had their limits, as hard as that was to find. (Sirius Black had pushed for a ban on second cousins – it would have made his parents' marriage legally impossible and he felt the Black family already too inbred.)

If the couple already each had Inheritance tests completed, these records could be used as an alternate to a consanguinity test.

The third bill that the Minister wanted to get approved was the Magical Education Preparation Bill.

With so many Muggleborns being found as descended from squibs, the idea was to allow the squib parents and siblings or squib guardians to visit the school one time, at least, so that they could relate to what their magical relative would experience. The sibling must be at least old enough to start Hogwarts the next year. The squibs could not be forced to see the castle.

The trip would occur, at the earliest, the May before the Squib-born wizard or witch was to begin attending. The Hogwarts express would take one trip each year to bring the relatives to Hogwarts and then return them to London.

The Minister knew how much damage the refusal to even allow them to see the place could do. Petunia Dursley, in his mind, deserved AT LEAST the chance to see Hogwarts one time.

Also included in this bill was the mandate that Hogwarts educate any Muggle-raised wizard or witch for one year on Magical traditions and etiquette. The Muggle Studies elective, as required by ICW mandate under the Statute of Secrecy, was also ordered to be updated to reflect changing Muggle values, society, and technology.

The Muggle Studies professor was to undergo the same educational summer that Arthur Weasley had experienced to ensure that they were knowledgeable about current Muggle things.

The Department of the Interior was to provide the personnel to ensure that the Muggle Studies professor was knowledgeable about current Muggle affairs and history.

Ashlee, his niece, was looking forward to being that tutor.

The Minister had, by himself of course, negotiated the cut for the Ministry (and his own account as well as the Accounts Manager) for the mandated Inheritance Tests and consanguinity tests. The Inheritance test would remain 10 Galleons. The Consanguinity tests would be 15.

The Director of Gringotts had agreed as they were looking forward to getting quiet vaults active again. The increase in business was worth the two Galleons they would lose per Inheritance test and the three they would lose on the Consanguinity tests.

The Minister was just as happy to open another income stream into his accounts without taking the steps of "accepting donations" (taking bribes). The Traveler had warned him about the inadvisability of such.

The liberties he took in achieving commissions would have been considered corruption in the Muggle world. This was not, however, the Muggle world. The Magical world had a different ethos.
Using your position to achieve financial success was almost expected.

Magicals were not particularly altruistic and no one really expected them to be. As long as you paid taxes on your income, the Magical government didn't really care where you made money. And Cornelius was very scrupulous about declaring income.

If he had accepted bribes, this would have been much, much harder to do.

Chapter End Notes

For those who have commented about the unreality of giving child abusers money – I think I mentioned that even in the first Harry Potter book, very little of what happened PRE Hogwarts was actionable by the laws of that time.

Not that the way that the Dursleys treated Harry was good. But Harry was not a shy, withdrawn, abused boy in canon. Even in Chapter 2 of the first book Harry had far too much of a sense of humor and ability to give his cousin a few verbal knocks without being punished for the environment to be seen as emotionally stifling. He was mostly ignored. Being required to wear second hand clothes. Now we recognize it as abuse -- then it wasn't considered such.

A lot of the "abuse" that Harry suffered before Hogwarts is described in fanfiction of various types. Nothing wrong with those tropes – but I'm not using them in this fic at least. Harry has never been whipped, he does not get punished for better grades, he hasn't been systematically starved – these are all things which are fairly reasonable inferences as a possibility but never specifically stated by Rowling.

The obviously horrible treatment by the Dursleys started AFTER he went to Hogwarts.

The one exception is how Vernon allowed Marge to treat Harry – her not calling Ripper back after Harry accidentally stepped on the dog's paw until after midnight. But that seemed to be a very rare occurrence for her to visit. And I would note that Petunia rather disliked Marge in canon – even though she tried to hide it. Mostly, it was Vernon allowing his sister to get away with anything. Marge Dursley is, perhaps, the second most despicable person outside of Voldemort and his followers (Umbridge being the first) in the whole set of Harry Potter books. It takes little imagination to consider her the Muggle version of Dolores Umbridge. Making her Umbridge's niece seems … not an unreasonable path. Marge will pretty much disappear from Harry's life … the Interlude below explains.

How we understand psychology and our definitions of abuse are different even a few years later. Up until the seventies or eighties, men in Great Britain could still "chastise" their wives physically. Enlightenment didn't happen all at once.
It was May 24th, 1991. Cornelius Fudge was on the Platform for the Hogwarts Express. The parents before him were all quite nervous.

It had taken quite a bit of maneuvering. Many traditionalists had been opposed to the Magical Education Preparation Act. That almost every single Muggleborn tested were found to have one or both parents as a squib had been quite a shock.

And although a few only knew that they had a magical family but that the current head had no desire for contact, most either came from lines thought defunct or from families that were at least interested in knowing they had another family member. Gringotts was well satisfied with the number of defunct vaults brought back into current use.

The biggest surprise was that a few Muggleborns were found to be the children of rape. Fudge thought it poetic justice that these had inherited the personal vaults of their incarcerated for life or dead parents. That bill had actually been easily passed when the matter came up.

Privately, in his own mind and locked away was the disappointment that some of the worst offenders in Azkaban never had illegitimate children, from all appearances, to take over their estates. He in no way advocated rape, but if a Lestrange had been found, it would have made the suffering for those worse to find out that they lost their estates to a "Mudblood."

Too bad the Lestrange men seemed to be more interested in each other than women, even Bellatrix. The Lestrange parent's attempt to get an heir from that contract had failed utterly – and he was just as happy that the bitch had never spawned.

But, the Preparation Act HAD passed, and he was seeing the largest fruit of it now: Every squib parent who had a child already attending or who was going to attend the next year had been invited to come and see Hogwarts. A few older siblings who were squibs had also been included.

Petunia Dursley and Vernon were present. Both for the fact their ward, Harry Potter, would be attending and to make up for never having seen it when Lily Potter went to school. Their son had no interest in seeing the place – and the Act specifically forbade forcing the visit. This clause had easily passed – there were already many who were unhappy in allowing squibs to see Hogwarts.

Fudge had used the example of the Evans/Dursley/Umbridge families as his main argument. The sheer harm that had come from the breaking apart of families due to some being squibs and some not justified this bill in his own mind. And it justified the bill in many who had been questioning the need for it. This bill had passed by only two votes.

The Economic Resurgence Act had passed with 65 percent agreeing and the Marriage Health Act had passed with 80% approving – these had been far less controversial.

Increasing the money in the economy and ensuring healthy children was far easier to sell than the acknowledgement of squibs as worthy of some consideration. He could have seen that one failing if Umbridge hadn't been removed from the equation.

The parents and squib siblings would experience a ride on the Hogwarts express (two hours earlier than the normal 11:00 leaving time) and would then see Hogwarts. They would experience a Hogwarts feast and then have the chance to speak to the various staff. They would then be taken to Hogsmeade and, with the assistance of a few Aurors and Ministry staff, would then be floo'ed back
to Kings Cross to retrieve their cars.

Dumbledore had been a voice against this, but the Minister had anticipated that. He had lobbied from support for the Board of Governors as well as the Neutral, business-minded members of the Wizengamot. The "Light" members had been split between his position and listening to Dumbledore. The "Dark" families were fairly consistently against.

You couldn't make all people happy all the time.

The Minister sat within a compartment, even as he had so many years earlier, making himself accessible for any parent who wanted to visit him. The biggest complaint that the parents had, especially one couple who had a daughter who would be attending her first year in September, was that the trolley only sold sweets.

Fudge told them that it was traditional and unlikely to change. He also explained how sweets were actually healthier for magical children – the extra calories helped to recharge their cores faster, and the effects of chocolate as a Magical health aid was surprising to many. He did suggest that maybe they wanted to send their children with healthier snacks if they wanted a more balanced meal before the children reached Hogwarts. He also suggested still giving permission for some sweets – it would help with the benefits needed.

Most of the parents realized that there were differences between Magical and non-Magical people and their needs. Some resolved to quiz the Magical Healer when they reached Hogwarts about the matter (another suggestion by the Minister).

All in all, the parents were happy when the train ride was over. It was 1:00. They would be served a light lunch (the students were in class) and then taken by prefects and other older students who had no current class to see the various classrooms and dorms.

The single exception was Slytherin – it was explained that virtually no squib-born child ever was placed in Slytherin.

Some parents were more interested in the Library – Cornelius noted the couple who had most objected to the sweets were two of these. He happened to see them after their visit and they were mightily impressed with the number and age of the volumes within.

Their family loved old books.

The most unimpressive part had been the pitch – mostly because a few shrewd questions uncovered that the brooms used by new students were quite old. They did see a few older students with their own brooms playing a pickup game, which was nice.

The feast was quite impressive to the parents. The sheer variety of food and how it was delivered was quite outside of their expectations. They knew that their children would always be well fed.

The Healer had given advice as to what inoculations to ensure were taken care of at St. Mungo’s. She had also demonstrated magical healing – one student in the pickup game had broken their arm. The cheerfulness of the student and how quickly it was fixed was most impressive.

A few parents had a quite word with the Healer about personal, persistent concerns and most found that there were potions that Squibs could take to help with various conditions. The Healer had listed a few potions that they could take as Squibs if they wanted to buy them at the apothecary in Diagon Alley: Contraceptive potions, fertility potions, strengthening solutions, Pepper up for a common cold, and a few others were the most surprising.
They were warned that most potions did NOT work on pure Muggles and those parents who had a Muggle partner were admonished against experimenting with such.

There was no need for accidents.

All in all, the visit went well. The most surprising for the Minister was at the end. Vernon Dursley, leading a few other parents, volunteered a donation to the school for new beginner brooms.

The parents were the Flinch-Fletchleys, Dursleys, and Clearwater (the last one had a daughter who was completing Year 4). The only stipulation was that the students were informed of the donation and the names of the families who donated for the brooms. Twenty four beginner brooms would cost 2400 Galleons – 12,000 pounds. Each of these families could afford to contribute.

Vernon was quite keen on making his name well known and popular in as many places as possible. He would then send a letter to his bitch of a former Aunt to let her know how her former money was being used to help squib-borns.

Vernon was NOT being charitable – Vernon was being a bit vindictive. Fudge, privately, didn't think it was healthy, but he would get press when he presented the donation at the beginning of the new school year.

As a result, his final decision was: Eh – let the man have his fun. There was nothing illegal about it.

Overhearing this, the Grangers mentioned that their daughter had inherited quite a few historical volumes on potions from her Great-Great-Grandfather's estate. They would look into getting copies made for those which might prove valuable to the Hogwarts Library. Cornelius was surprised – many wizards donated money for exactly what Dursley was after (name recognition), but few donated knowledge from their family library. As such, this was more impressive to the man.

The Minister didn't know until later, but when Vernon returned home, he explained what he was doing to Sirius Black and Remus Lupin (who had agreed to watch the boys to allow their trip) and Sirius took it farther.

With his Grandfather's permission, Sirius worked with a few other families to donate high-quality brooms to the four quidditch teams. The names Black, Longbottom, Bones, and Greengrass would achieve much future recognition for a 5000 Galleon layout each.

Sirius had been surprised when he got out of Azkaban that Arcturus Black, the head of the family, while being someone of a snob to be certain, was NOT a pureblood supremacist nutter like his son and daughter in law. To Arcturus, such narrow-minded views shut one off to opportunities. He may not want Muggles related to him, but business was business.

The old man was actually enjoying having a healthy and free Heir who would do something with the Black family name beyond support an idiot Dark wizard. Upon finding out that Andromeda Tonks' husband was a pureblooded squib (squib parents for three generations back) and not Muggleborn, he had reinstated the woman and accepted the daughter into the family.

Rare magical talents like being a Metamorphmagus were quite acceptable to be claimed, even if her father was squib-born.

The only disagreement that Sirius had with his Grandfather was which team the Black name would be attached to. Sirius disliked Slytherin and Arcturus was not fond of Gryffindor – they finally compromised with Ravenclaw. It worked out with Greengrass for Slytherin, Bones for Hufflepuff,
and Longbottom for Gryffindor.

He would never tell his Grandfather (he eventually told Harry) that he accepted Ravenclaw because a few of his most pleasant conquests at Hogwarts had been Ravenclaw beauties. (Harry had asked for a spell to bleach his brain when he heard this.)

It was July 31, 1991. Cornelius Fudge had left his Undersecretary, Bert Gambol, in charge of the Ministry for the day. He told those that were curious that he had a personal matter to take care of.

As soon as Gringotts opened, Cornelius Fudge had flooed (with prior approval) into the bank.

If the goblins and the Minister had their way, today would be the last day for the soul of Tom Marvolo Riddle upon the earth.

The Minister had confirmed that Quirinus Quirrell had returned from his year-long sabbatical and would take up the Defense Against the Dark Arts position. He had confirmed that the man was now wearing a turban. He had also confirmed that he was now a stuttering mess. (A few nights in the Three Broomsticks and a talkative Rubeus Hagrid helped.)

Hagrid would be acting as Bodyguard for Harry Potter and his Godfather when the boy picked up his supplies – something that Dumbledore had arranged. Too much in his cups, Hagrid had mentioned a small additional job the Headmaster had given him.

The board was set. The players were in place. The MOMENT that Rubeus Hagrid left Vault 713, a team of Goblins would enter and set up a containment ritual. They had practiced setting it up in another vault and found that there were limitations.

As a result, the rune circle was already in place – just masked to the eye. Quirrell would find a stone in the vault – but it would be Amber instead of the Philosopher's Stone. That Amber would house the last part of the Dark Lord that was not under control.

As soon as the Amber held the spirit, the Horcrux transferred from the Cup would be destroyed.

Minister Fudge would then be led by Croaker of the Unspeakables to the Death Chamber in the Department of Mysteries and the Amber would be passed through the veil.

Fudge had agreed to a Goblin witness as they had done much to achieve what was necessary.

The Goblins would then provide the Minister with the Founder's Relics that had been collected and cleansed so that September 1st, 1991, would see the Minister giving much to Hogwarts.

He would also be giving, without fanfare, two memories to Dumbledore: The capture of Voldemort and the Amber entering the Veil and its destruction confirmed.

This was predicated upon one more thing: The prophecy sphere that held the prophecy about Voldemort would be checked. If it went dark, this too would be given to Dumbledore – with the message to but out of the boy's life. It was hoped that Fudge, acting as the hand of "Harry Potter" (the Lone Traveler) could finish this.

If it didn't, the Unspeakables would take over and try to find out what was left to be taken care of. Fudge would contact Black at that point and warn him. There was nothing else to do.

Fudge would wait with his Account Manager and the Director of Gringotts for word. Business was up and this venture was very important to Gringotts – almost as important as it was to the Minister.
It was quite a long wait. At various times, different Gringotts employees would bring word. Hagrid's arrival and removal of the stone brought the waiting group to high alert. The message that the preparations to catch the thief were in place relaxed them a bit. The message that the man had entered the bank brought them back to the edge.

And finally, the message they had been waiting for: The piece of Amber containing the final part of Tom Marvolo Riddles soul was delivered by the lead Cursebreaker. The items that they had acquired which had held the pieces of the soul were presented as well – the Minister had agreed to pay the fee and that these items would be donated to Hogwarts. The part that Gringotts had played in cleansing them would also be announced.

Croaker was summoned and he took control of the piece of Amber and the two flooed to a secure floo in the Ministry, along with Slipnose. From there, they made their way to the Department of Mysteries and to the Veil of Death.

The Minister and his Accounts Manager stood witness as the Amber was retrieved from the container. Slipnose performed one more spell to ensure the soul remained. And they watched as it was pitched through the Veil of Death.

The first indication that it had worked was that the Amber disappeared into the Veil. Most things that were "dead" just passed through the arch and showed up on the other side. That there was life enough to activate the arch signaled that it had been successful.

The final indication was the orb which had been on display to the side, retrieved from the Hall of Prophecies. The moment that the amber had disappeared, the orb flashed – and went Dark.

Tom Marvolo Riddle, the Dark Lord Voldemort, was dead and passed beyond the world.

Slipnose had a pleased grin (very scary on a goblin) as he got permission to use his portkey to return to Gringotts to report to the Director. The Minister and Croaker gave permission after polite (for a goblin) farewells.

At that point, all of the stress that Cornelius Fudge had been holding for hours, days, and months was suddenly released. He heavily sat down on a bench on the side of the Death Chamber and took several long steady breaths.

The greatest threat the Magical Britain in the last hundred years was finally defeated. He knew that he could prove it and get an Order of Merlin out of it – but he was just as satisfied for the issue to die a quiet and unlamented death.

Algernon Croaker watched the Minister for Magic compose himself. To be honest, he was shockingly impressed with the man. Instead of the shallow toady that many had expected – a placeholder because no one better could be found – they had somehow gotten a Minister who got the job done.

The finding of many historical families from the Muggleborns, the final and lasting resolution on dark and cursed items, the tempering of goblin/wizard relations, the correction of Ministry/Muggle relations, the reorganization of the Ministry, and the final defeat of the Darkest wizard of the last few centuries: Cornelius Fudge had done more for Magic than any minister in living memory.

The Unspeakables would support the man – in their own, quiet, hidden way. They were not a political institution after all.

It was September 1st, 1991 and Cornelius Fudge was sitting happily as a guest at the Hogwarts
opening feast.

Despite a few protestations from Dumbledore, the Minister had gotten everything he wanted. A number of things today were going to cause quite a stir, but Cornelius didn't need to be so careful anymore about keeping things quiet.

With him was Alastor Moody. Moody was about to retire, only training a last few recruits. One of his students would be Nymphadora Tonks starting the next year. The Minister had gotten him to agree to one year off of Auror duties to take the Defense Against the Dark Arts post.

The Minister's final choice for the post was going to be Remus Lupin. By September 1st, 1992, the Wolfsbane Potion would be available and he planned on using Lupin to change the debate on werewolves. But because it was a year away – he needed a GOOD teacher for one year. Alastor Moody had agreed. Dumbledore had only been told that Quirrell had been found dead from some Dark magic that he had run into. Further inquiries were rebuffed.

Moody had also been charged with helping to teach the top-level Ministry employees to reject the Imperius Curse over the weekends of this year: A minor bill which cost little to no money.

Fudge had asked the chamber which right-minded wizard or witch would want their government susceptible to the Imperius Curse? That swayed enough votes (scared them away from objecting) from the Dark families that it had passed easily. The greatest cost would be required examination and possible cleansing for every participant at the end to ensure there was no Dark magic residue from the needed procedure.

Also present was the Hogwarts Board of Governors. Most had absolutely no idea. The families who had donated had agreed to be represented by the students who were in Hogwarts when the donations were announced.

With about fifteen minutes before the end of the feast, the Minister had quietly gotten Dumbledore, Snape, and McGonagall to go to the small room off of the dais. The Headmaster had agreed to bring his pensieve for a "quiet necessary viewing."

Flitwick had agreed to keep an eye out to ensure nothing happened for the ten minutes that the three would be distracted.

Dumbledore moved before his pensive. "Okay, Minister, where are the memories you wish me to see?"

The Minister pulled out two vials. "First this one, then the other."

The Headmaster put the first memory in and waited for the three to view it, a small smile plastered on his face. When they returned, all three were staring at the Minister in shock.

"Okay, bottle that up and you can see the next." The Headmaster did as asked and exchanged vials.

Once again, the three dropped into the pensieve.

When they exited, all three sat heavily. "Bottle that one. They are copies that the Department of Mysteries created so I will allow you to keep those. I am not losing my original memories. One more thing: Are you familiar with the Hall of Prophecies?"

Dumbledore nodded. Snape was frozen. McGonagall was curious.

The Minister pulled out the darkened orb. "You might want to watch the memory again later as it was present during that memory, but this was retrieved from Row 97: A prophecy about the Dark
Lord and Harry Potter? It's been completed. More I will not say at this time." The Minister put the orb on the table and stood. "I'll say this once. He's gone. No comebacks. At some point, maybe I'll explain. But any plans you might have for Harry Potter? No. Not happening. No need to sacrifice the boy as the job is done. Let him be a boy. I had better not hear of wild adventures that the boy has to endure to test him. Get rid of that third floor trap – it's no longer needed. I will allow you, at Halloween when we return, to announce that while the Dark Lord had in fact survived ten years earlier as you had warned people of, tireless work by the Ministry and Gringotts has completed what Harry Potter's mother started on that dark Halloween when she died for her son. You will give final confirmation that the Dark Lord Voldemort has been destroyed, and he will never trouble Magical Britain again. And then we'll have a traditional Samhain observance, led by the newest High Priestess of Magic, Narcissa Malfoy. Any questions?" He didn't allow them time. "Good. I will return to my dinner in preparation for my announcements." He then quickly left.

The three took a moment to compose themselves. They would be talking together about this later. That was guaranteed.

The three quietly returned to the feast.

At the proper time, the Deputy Headmistress stood and got everyone's attention. She nodded to the Headmaster.

The Headmaster nodded in return. "Good evening! And Welcome to a new year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardy. I hope that you have all emptied your heads sufficiently over the summer for we shall endeavour to once again fill them up!"

There was moderate applause from around the room. "Yes, quite. Now, while I do have some traditional announcements to make, first I wish you to help me in welcoming the Hogwarts Board of Governors and the Minister for Magic, Cornelius Fudge."

There was a swell of applause. No one wanted to appear impolite as these were very influential people.

"Now, the Minister of Magic has asked leave to address you. He has a few items to cover and, while I am uncertain as to their contents, he assures me that it will have a direct effect upon many students. Minister Fudge." Dumbledore retreated and the Minister approached the podium. The applause was good.

"Students of Hogwarts. A few items have come up that I believe will help to enhance your time at Hogwarts. Last spring, I had the opportunity to help a few parents from magical families who had not attended Hogwarts to see the place their children would attend. Hogwarts was very welcoming and it was a success. And I thank you for that." Applause.

"There was one item of concern, however, which was brought up. For those of you who have attended Hogwarts, one lack has been a problem for a while. After the tour, a few of these families approached me to help rectify this lack. Now, before we go any further, I will mention that the families I will speak about shall be represented by the students who are a part of those families. And I want to apologize right now to Harry Potter. Mr. Potter has expressed a wish that he be treated like any other student. Unfortunately, I will be putting a small spotlight on him, mostly because he happens to be related to a few remarkable people. So – Sorry, Harry. I won't do this to you again."

The hall laughed at the image of Harry Potter trying to hide his head. He had been told part of what would be happening but it was still embarrassing. Finally he said (muffled by his arms), "That's alright Minister. But just today, please."
There was laughter all around.

"Now, the first item. Will Madame Hooch come up to front of the hall."

The Flying instructor looked around curiously. None of the other staff appeared to know what was going on and so she did as asked. "Madam Hooch. Perhaps you have heard complaints that your brooms have been ... well, they are old. Is this correct?"

Madam Hooch nodded. "I've heard it a time or two."

Cornelius smiled. "Remarkable ability to underplay there. Well, the families in question decided to do something. Will Harry Potter, Justin Flinch-Fletchley, and Penelope Clearwater go and help bring in the first item?"

The two young boys from Hufflepuff and Gryffindor met up with the Ravenclaw prefect and went out the doors. Very soon, the three were pushing a cart back into the hall on which sat a large box.

"Mr. Potter's uncle, Mr. Dursley, as well as Mr. Flitch-Fletchley, and Mr. Clearwater all contributed over 800 Galleons each for this first gift to Hogwarts. Madam Hooch, please open the crate."

She did so and was agog at what she saw. She pulled one out. "In this case are 25 beginning level brooms. This will allow you to teach the students flying in safety."

There was a large round of applause and Madam Hooch shook the hand of each student. The students returned to their seats – except Harry who tried to look as inconspicuous as possible. "No, Madam Hooch. Stay there. Now, will the Quiddich Captains of each house come up?"

The four students in question did so, wondering what was going to happen. "Okay: Harry Potter, Neville Longbottom, Daphne Greengrass, and Susan Bones. Please go help retrieve the next set of items."

The four first years quickly moved to exit the room. "When Harry Potter's godfather, Mr. Black, learned of his Uncle's donation, he decided to take it further. Also, he perhaps felt that three families newly returned to magic should not get all the credit. I don't know." The four students returned, each pushing a separate cart which contained a large box – not as large as the first.

"The Black family, represented by Mr. Potter, the Bones Family, the Longbottom family, and the Greengrass family are also making a gift to Hogwarts. In each crate there are seven brooms, each new, each specifically picked for a Quiddich position. There are also a pair of keeper's gloves and a few other standard Quiddich items. The Longbottom family provided for Gryffindor, Bones for Hufflepuff, Greengrass for Slytherin, and Black for Ravenclaw."

There was a huge surge of applause now as the student saw the Quiddich Captains open the chests and they could see each lift a couple of high-quality brooms. After it died down, the Minister spoke again.

"I highly recommend that each Head of House and each Captain write a letter of thanks to their patron and that the Board and the Senior Staff write a letter to each family who contributed."

There was a large amount of applause as the boxes were pushed out.

"Now, when Mr. Dursley offered a donation of brooms, another family offered another item. Will Madam Pince and the Potions Professors, Potions Master Snape and Professor Beltley come forward? And will Ms. Hermione Granger go and retrieve the next items?"
The first year from Gryffindor with the wild hair jumped up and rushed out of the hall even as the staff moved to the front of the dias. "Ms. Granger found, during an inheritance test at Gringotts, that her family was not all Muggle. In fact her Great-Great-Grandfather was a wizard of some repute and she is descended from squibs." At this, Hermione Granger came back, pushing another card with two boxes on it – rather large.

"Hector Dagworth-Granger was the founder of the Most Extraordinary Society of Potioneers. While it was thought that his family died out, it was not true. Ms. Granger is the new head of the family. And, loving books and learning as she does, she agreed to allow several Potions books from her inheritance to be copied and donated to Hogwarts. One box, the larger, contains two copies of each book for the Hogwarts Library. The smaller box contains a copy of each book she is donating for the Potions Professors to enhance their ability to teach the subject."

The staff members each took time to thank the first year, who was blushing greatly. As soon as she could, she scampered back to her table while the staff inspected their gifts. Each looked quite happy.

"This might not be the most popular stance, but I would be happy to see others follow the sterling example of Ms. Granger. Upon receiving her inheritance, in accordance with the laws about such things, she had every right to keep every book and tome and scrap of knowledge she received to herself. It is almost expected. Instead, she did what she felt was right. At the suggestion of her parents, and without complaint, she took her inherited books and consulted a person in the field, the owner of the Apothecary in Diagon Alley, and asked him: What books would help the subject be taught better? And, upon receiving an answer from the drooling man as he looked over her library, she paid to have copies made and to give these to Hogwarts for her fellow students to succeed. Now, imagine how many books have been lost to history which would help teach our future generations. How many could be found in family libraries? She didn't give the originals – she owns those. But she DID give verified copies. Why can't other families do the same?" There were many sounds around the room, some approving, some disapproving, but most startled. "As I said – not the most politic suggestion. But don't our children deserve the best? And are you willing to sacrifice that small prestige of owning the only copy so that magical education can be furthered?"

The murmurs were more thoughtful. "Anyway, I wanted to acknowledge the extraordinary gift. Please give Ms. Granger a round of applause."

A number of Purebloods would be writing to parents, noting how a squib-born was receiving more acclaim and why. Hogwarts would enjoy the fruits of the attempts at one-up-man-ship far into the future.

The small girl tried to disappear into the table, her face a bright red, as the collected applause moved through the room and became louder and more enthusiastic. Finally, it died down.

"Now, to another matter. In just under three months time, Narcissa Malfoy shall receive her final rites to ascend the be first High Priestess of Magic recognized by the Ministry for Magic." There was a startled moment and then a large round of applause. Draco Malfoy, at the Slytherin table, looked quite proud. "And, on the night of Halloween, she shall perform the first Samhain rites that have been observed in Magical Britain in hundreds of years. In the past, Muggle Churches have made every attempt to stamp out our traditional observances. Recently, it has been brought to my attention, that these observances did much to cleanse our magic. The increase in Dark wizards can be seen as a direct result of our losing this most valuable tradition. Well, this ends now. So, I will tell you that, in preparation, please ensure that you retrieve some token of those who have passed before that you might want to remember. These items will be used during the rites. And we shall celebrate what has been traditionally the beginning of the Magical year – Samhain. This shall be done right here, at Hogwarts. Now, Priestess Malfoy will need a few items which she will bring or
that will be provided. One item I can immediately help with."

At the back, four Gringotts goblins came bearing a case. The room had several noises as the
walked forward. When they were close, the lead guard handed the case to the Minister, who
thanked him. The guards stood watching as the Minister opened the case.

"An important item for a magical ritual is a chalice. And while many times this is just a fancy cup,
perhaps for our re-introduced rites, this chalice is more appropriate: The Cup of Helga Hufflepuff!"

There was much applause from the room, but loudest of all was Hufflepuff House which had stood
to a man. Many of the older students had tears in their eyes as they saw a relic of their founder.

The Minister gently returned the cup to the case. "Also, the Priestess often wears a crown of one
type or another. Usually a crown of flowers. I will have to ask her to make a decision, but perhaps
this crown might be appropriate: The Diadem of Rowena Ravenclaw!"

Even as the Ravenclaws went wild and the room exploded, the Ghost of Ravenclaw moved
forward, trailed by the Ghost of Slytherin. The room became quiet as the Minister spoke. "Yes,
Madam Ravenclaw. Your mother's diadem has been cleansed of the taint that Tom Riddle placed
on it and it is being returned to Hogwarts. Your perceived shame is over – you are forgiven."

Everyone saw as the Ghost of Ravenclaw looked at the Diadem with longing, tears in her eyes,
until she turned and disappeared through the wall. The Bloody Baron stood watch at the point of
her retreat, daring any other ghosts to follow.

The Minister sighed. "I will tell you all that each item I am showing today was cursed by Tom
Marvolo Riddle, also known as You-Know-Who. The Gringotts Goblins have cleansed each item
in preparation for their return. I believe our thanks should be given to these fine people." The
guards in front of the Minister stood taller as the applause started slow but built up to a loud
crescendo.

They would never have to buy their own grog again as they often told the story of the time that
Goblins were honored in the Great Hall at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and the
Wizards and Witches applauded, all of them.

Finally the Minister got the students' attention again. "I mentioned that one should bring
remembrances to a Samhain rite. One vessel for such a remembrance might be a locket. I have one
here that may be appropriate: The Locket of Salazar Slytherin!"

The applause was loud again. The Minister called to speak again. "The only problem is: I cannot
open it. It was owned by Slytherin. And thus, only parseltongue can open it. A shame. Although
many attribute such an ability to Dark wizards only, it is not true. Merlin was a parselmouth. He
could speak to snakes. Those with this ability, in many parts of the world, are revered. The Rod
Asclepius, the symbol of a healer, has a snake because parseltongue healers have always been
revered. Such an ability can be used for great good. Are there any among you who can speak this
noble tongue?"

Harry Potter knew it was coming – the Minister had explained. Somehow, the Minister had known.
But he was still embarrassed. Finally, when everyone had looked and no one else had raised their
hand, Harry tentatively put his arm up.

The room was shocked as the Minister smiled and called him up. They watched in fascination as
the boy spoke a hissing sound and the Locket popped open.
The applause was quite muted. The Minister made Harry stay.

"Yes. These items shall be in a locked display at the entrance of this hall. Only the Headmaster and the Heads of House acting in concert will be able to open the display for the items to be retrieved. It is almost a shame that Riddle never found an item of Gryffindor so that it could be displayed as well."

The Sorting Hat had spoken to the Minister earlier and Hogwarts had approved of what was asked. With a smile, it spoke. "Cornelius Fudge! I can help with that."

The room was astounded as the Sorting Hat spoke from its position to the side. Minerva McGonagall brought the hat out and presented it to the Minister. The Minister shook his head even as the hat said. "No. Cornelius was a Hufflepuff. I need a true Gryffindor. HARRY POTTER!"

The room watched in astonishment as McGonagall brought back out the stool and Harry Potter sat on it. The Sorting Hat was placed on his head.

For a moment, nothing happened. Then, the Hat spoke. The room listened with held breath.

*The Cunning of the Snake have you*
and the Raven's Wit you could claim
The Badger's Loyalty is here for all to see
The Lion's Bravery brings you fame

*And though the words I said are true*
When I was first thrust upon your head
Slytherin would help to make you great
Gryffindor is where you belong instead

*A Gryffindor you are and*
A Gryffindor you shall always be
New to Magic even as you are
Ready to bleed you are for them and me

*Though some might protest and cry*
that it wasn't done before
A True Champion you are named
Your Weapon: The Sword of Gryffindor!

The room was shocked as Harry Potter winced and ripped the hat from his head. Reaching in, his face lit up and all watched as the young boy pulled out a bright sword, longer than the hat, upon its pommel a great ruby. The boy raised it up and the word "Gryffindor" could be seen on its blade.

The room's applause was no longer muted. The Gryffindors all stood and cheered their newly named Champion. Harry tried to look invisible, but it wasn't working. "The sword should be seen … well, unless I need it to act like a champion, I guess. Anyway, here you go." Harry Potter put the sword on the table next to the case, dropped the Hat on the table as well, and quickly retreated to the Gryffindor table.

The Weasley twins took the chance to make a show of it, which caused Harry to laugh – which was what they were going for anyway.

Cornelius nodded. "You can see why I apologized to the boy at the beginning – he really doesn't like the fame. Sorry, Mr. Potter. You're just going to have to live with it."
There were some chuckles mixed in with the undercurrent of people whispering to each other.

"Anyway, I guess that the display will be keyed so that if Hogwarts’ Champion needs it, he can retrieve the sword. Anyway – I hope that you all enjoy seeing the items of the Founders of Hogwarts. Let them remind you that different people can come together and build something great. Thank you."

The applause was loud and long. Very soon, the students were dismissed and led out of the Hall.
Samhain Rites

Chapter Notes

The ritual was mostly taken from JOANN KEESEY who has been a witch for ten years. She belongs to a small working coven that specializes in British and Celtic folklore. I modified it a bit. It can be found in Obsidian magazine .com if one googles samhain rites. I added the bit about the slips containing the imperfections one wants to overcome from another site (I don't remember which – but it fit). If I screwed up anyone's beliefs… sorry, it was not my intention.

Filius Flitwick was looking forward to what was coming.

The first year Gryffindor/Ravenclaw class was coming to an end. Looking at the clock he said, "Alright, children. It's time to start cleaning up. Mr. Potter, please stay after class for a moment."

The period ended and most students rushed out. Harry Potter stood nervously waiting. "You asked to see me, Professor?"

Flitwick nodded. "After your … unusual introduction during the opening feast, your Head of House and I had a discussion. While there is no record of a Hogwarts' Champion being named, it is obvious that a few things will be needed. And I volunteered."

Harry was curious. "What will be needed?"

"You've been given the right to use a sword. And not just any sword, but a goblin-made blade. As the resident Duel master, and as someone who has some goblin blood, it falls to me to ensure that you do not dishonor the position you've been given – or the blade you've been allowed to use."

Flitwick's grin suddenly reminded him of one of the Accounts Managers he had dealt with earlier in the year.

"I hope that you are not overly fond of sleeping in. Because until I deem you proficient – your mornings before class belong to me. I expect you at 7:00 in the Entry outside the Great Hall – and wearing comfortable clothing. Also, I will be monitoring your food choices to ensure maximum growth. You will eat what you are given, without complaint. Any questions?"

Harry really wanted to groan – especially facing such cheerful, slightly manic enthusiasm, but he knew somehow it would be pointless. "No, Professor. I will see you tomorrow morning."

He quickly retreated after he was dismissed.

It was seen by many throughout the year that Harry Potter's naming as Champion was not something to be envious of. Cheerful little Professor Flitwick took great delight in "training" (torturing) his student regardless of whom watched.

Harry grew to hold a little resentment for those who would casually lounge about and snack on whatever they liked while watching him work.
He did have the last laugh – by fifth year every girl who had found hormones (virtually all of them) were quite appreciative of the growing Potter's stature and he had no lack of those willing to help him with his own growing hormones. That he was also polite and considerate due to his upbringing was considered a bonus.

Needless to say, his godfather was very proud. He neglected to mention it to his Aunt and Uncle – no need to rock the boat.

Cornelius Fudge looked at the parchment before him. Four names: Four names that he had been told about and he didn't know what to do about them.

Finally, he bit the bullet and asked Amelia Bones to visit his office.

After she was announced and was sitting down, Amelia asked, "Minister. What can I do for you?"

Fudge sighed. "Do you remember when I told you about the visit of the Lone Traveler?"

Amelia nodded. "I do remember. And with the changes you've made since becoming Minister, I believe you've done a good job of taking the man's advice."

"I've tried. First I'm going to let you in on a little secret: Tom Riddle, You-Know-Who, was finally taken care of permanently this summer."

Amelia looked at the Minister in shock. "When … how …" She got herself under control. "Why am I just hearing about this?"

"Need to know. The Traveler had much experience from his own world and gave me the benefit of it. According to him, he always appears closest to the person or situation his knowledge are most needed for. And in this case, it was my office right after I was elected. Many of the things I've done were to head off problems that he told me about."

Amelia was in awe. "Wow."

The Minister chuckled. "Actually, Dumbledore is going to announce his final defeat before the Samhain ritual at Hogwarts. We're not giving too much information, but as Dumbledore kept telling people that he wasn't totally gone and now he is, it needs to be him that says it. Those who listen to the man will only accept it if it comes from him."

Amelia nodded, considering that. "That's an excellent point. So what's the problem?"

Cornelius pushed the small parchment over. "These four are names the Traveler gave me, needing to be handled. I had to get Riddle gone first, but now he is. This final cleanup became less urgent but possible."

Amelia read the names. "Three are Ministry employees."

Cornelius nodded. "I probably should tell you something I've told no one, even those I've told about the Traveler: The Traveler's name was Harry Potter."

Amelia was startled. "Merlin! That means that …."

Cornelius nodded. "The unnamed Dark wizard from the story was the resurrected Voldemort (even now he flinched at the name). Because of his knowledge, he knew how to take care of the man before he became a problem and he charged me with doing it. These are the loose ends."
"Crouch?"

With a blank face, Cornelius said, "In his world, Barty Crouch helped his son escape Azkaban when his dying wife used polyjuice to switch places. He was kept for years under the Imperius to control him. In the Traveler's world, he escaped in 1994. There is also a highly devoted house elf to deal with. We need to find out if Crouch did this in our world and get it taken care of – without telling anyone how we found out."

Amelia sighed. "That won't be easy. What about McNair?"

"An 'Imperius Victim' who is actually a real Death Eater. The Traveler told me that most Death Eaters were opportunists. Without a leader, there's no reason to rock the boat. But McNair used his position to torture and kill on the sly. I don't know if it's true here – but I can't afford to ignore the possibility. We need another quiet investigation. Possibly have someone check the Muggle Law Enforcement files for missing persons or if his face has ever been seen near a disappearance."

Amelia groaned. "This is a mess."

"I know. Luckily – this is three years before the resurrection in that other world and the Dark Lord is taken care of. We have time and opportunity to do it right with much less possible loss. But it will be a mess if the Traveler was right."

Amelia nodded. "Yaxley?"

"Closet Death Eater. Starting in 1995: Responsible for your death, my loss of the Minister's position, the death of the next Minister, the Imperius control of the one after, all for You-Know-Who. I don't know if the man's a real threat – but I can't see leaving an Auror in place I can't trust. We'll have to be VERY careful with that one."

Amelia nodded. "At least I can keep an eye on him while we look into it." She looked at the last name curiously. "Lockhart? The Author?"

Cornelius nodded. "In the Traveler's world, he wrote his books by finding those who actually did these deeds, obliterating them, and taking credit. The man's books were chock full of inconsistencies with dates and he would have had to be in three places at once. The man is a genius with the Memory Charm – and that's about it. That one, in my opinion, will the 'Fun' one to take care of. Minimal threat, good press for the Ministry when the truth gets out, and at least the man's not a murdering psychopath – just a greedy one. I thought I'd throw you a bone."

Amelia rolled her eyes as she said, "Thanks. Very generous."

The Minister chuckled. "I've taken care of most of the big things. I have a few more things for the future I have to handle. I think it's time to let those more qualified deal with the rest. Whatever you need that I can provide, just ask. I want this all taken care of by next summer if at all possible."

Amelia nodded. "Well, we've needed something to sink our teeth into with the better budget you've helped us get. We should at least pull our weight with it. Helping the Muggles clear old cases by helping review their files – that's not something I've thought of. Might give us better cooperation for the next time we have to consult the Muggles."

"I look forward to hearing about the results."

Lucius Malfoy sat within the chambers of his friend and the godfather of his son at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.
"Draco tells me that you are rarely seen. He was unhappy that you were not his Professor."

Severus nodded. "I will be. All he has to do is to excel – I will teach his OWL year and his NEWTS – I will ensure he knows of my expectations."

"How has the new arrangement been working for you?" Lucius asked curiously.

Severus had a neutral face – which for him denoted extreme happiness. "It has been working well. I no longer have to deal with snot-nosed dunderheads who don't know which side of the potions knife to use. Proper preparation of equipment is also a lesson they come to me knowing – the random accidents due to contamination are much reduced. I have yet to make a Hufflepuff cry recently – but the year is young."

Lucius chuckled. "Do you regret your loss of Slytherin House?"

"Truthfully?" Lucius nodded. "No. Looking at it honestly, Slytherin dunderheads bothered me just as much or more than other types. Now that it no longer my job to shield them, I can treat them the same as any other student. To my shame, this has reduced tension in my classes and the school, meaning that my former approach was a failure. So I have decided it is better this way."

Severus's visitor nodded in agreement. "I can see that now. My eyes have been open recently."

Lucius paused and asked, "Have you had any issue with your Mark?"

Severus smirked. Now it was coming to the meat of the matter. "Not really." He pulled his sleeve up and Lucius was astonished at how the mark was very nearly gone. "I assumed you were aware, having your own Mark."

Lucius shook his head and gave a smirk of his own. Pulling back his sleeve, what Snape saw astonished him: The Dark Mark of Voldemort was completely gone. "How?"

Lucius dropped his sleeve. "A very expensive procedure taking a month of visits to Gringotts. But it was worth the 2500 Galleons. How was yours reduced so much?"

"I am certain that you shall find out on the first night of Samhain when it is announced by Dumbledore. But our former master has been … permanently dealt with."

Now it was Lucius' turn to be shocked. "How?"

"The Ministry and Gringotts working in concert. The Minister showed the memory to the Headmaster, the Deputy Headmistress, and I on September 1st. I cannot say that I am disappointed. The man was … irrational at the end."

Lucius nodded in agreement. "Well, we are at least now free. Truth be told, the Malfoy vaults are much healthier since I have eschewed my former leanings. Since my wife has become involved with these Muggle Witches, I have been dealing with magic on a much purer level. The one teaching her almost earned a hexing or a visit with my former robes in use, but caution stayed my hand. And the results have spoken for themselves. I find it ironic – and disconcerting – that Muggles have done more to help bring back ancient Magical tradition than the Purebloods factions."

Severus asked, "Are you happy?"

"To my surprise I am. I have recently found that the 'proper bedding of a spouse' that we have been following for hundreds of years was the product of Muggle religious celibates who found sex to be disagreeable. I can no longer boast that I have never seen my wife naked – and truthfully I am quite
happy about it. I might not be as satisfied if my wife looked like many matrons – but my wife is quite attractive. So I have no complaints. You ought to look into finding a wife now – and ensuring she learns from Narcissa. You wouldn't be disappointed."

Snape gave his grinning visitor a withering look. "I will look after my needs myself – no need for your interference."

Lucius grinned as he replied, "I am only pointing out that you are still a young man. A bed is much warmer and more inviting when you can share pleasant company."

"You will cease this discussion! I need not hear this!" Severus was using anger to hide embarrassment. Lucius had expected this.

"I will say no more personally. I might warn you that Narcissa has taken an interest in the matter though – and I have no control, really, over what she does. As long as she's happy I'll say nothing to stop it, and you're on your own." Lucius made his way quickly out.

Draco Malfoy was confused the next day when Severus Snape, stalking by, stopped and glared. "20 points from Slytherin for having interfering, busybodies as parents!"

The points were returned later by the Deputy Headmistress, who was almost smirking about something. Draco just shrugged and let it go – it didn't look to be something he wanted to have any part of.

Draco Malfoy, a few days later, listened to an argument at the Gryffindor table. Finally, he had to go over. As soon as he walked up, the redhead boy on one side looked at him. "Malfoy. What do you want?"

The two boys did not get along, but Draco was a bit less snobbish than he used to be and Weasley was a bit less jealous than other circumstances would have created, and so their usual mutual attitude was of quiet dislike. "I, like many others, wonder what you people are talking so loudly about."

Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley looked around and saw that, yes, many people were looking at them. Hermione huffed. "Ron was being an idiot. He seems to thing that his experience with Alton Towers and Thorpe Park makes him an expert on theme parks. I was trying to disabuse him of his idiocy."

"I just think the idea of a park with a mouse as its mascot is quite silly. This Disnin fellow can't have put together a better park than Thorpe which is run by Merlin Entertainment. Besides, those places are in the colonies – too far away for a few days of fun. The roller coasters here are awesome!" Ron Weasley had a pinched face.

"I told you they're opening one in France next year. I've already started working on my parents to take me. And until you've seen Disney Land, you've got nothing to talk about!"

Harry Potter quietly got Draco's attention. Curious, the boy walked over. "Don't get in between them. I think they just like arguing. Today it's Muggle Theme Parks. Tomorrow it will be something else. I've learned to just let it go." The two boys looked over to see that Draco had already been forgotten about.

"What the hell is a theme park? Or a rolley-coaster?" Draco was very outside of his experience.

Harry shrugged. "I haven't been to one. I think I'll ask my Godfather to take me next summer – it
sounds fun. And the roller-coaster – imagine a big thing built with tracks like at Gringotts. Imagine a mile or two of going up and down and all around. Muggles build these things for fun. I'd rather just visit Gringotts. But the other stuff sounds good."

Draco was very confused now. Then again Muggles, while not as stupid as he had thought before he had met any, were quite confusing in a number of things that they did.

The students were being paired. At one point, Harry raised his hand. "Mr. Potter?"

"Why don't I work with Ron and Neville works with Hermione? They tend to argue more than work when they try to study together – they tend to argue in any case. I'd like to actually see them succeed than just fight."

The listening Gryffindors and Ravenclaws snickered. The fights between the two were legendary.

Flitwick looked at the two, who were eyeing each other with annoyance. "Just today. In the future, they will just have to learn to get along."

With everyone having matched wands and Harry being a bit more patient than Hermione would have been, all the students eventually got the hovering charm. Ron's snide comments after class were met with a sniffle full of disdain rather than pain.

While the two considered each other somewhat "friends," they were quite aware that they tended to rub each other the wrong way. Truthfully, they quite enjoyed the arguing – it was somehow stimulating to each of the pre-teens.

It was nearly 5:00 on Halloween, 1991. The Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry looked about the hall and contemplated the changed circumstances of the last year.

It had all, surprisingly, started with the election of a new Minister for Magic in 1990. Cornelius Fudge had been a Ministry employee of little note, his name put forward as a compromise amongst various factions.

The presiding wisdom was that he would be unlikely to make too many changed, unlikely to upset too many people, and that the Ministry under his charge would be quiet.

Such was not to be the case.

Almost immediately, the man had started where most Pureblood politicians ignored: The average wizard and witch.

The man had also used his apparent management experience to help reorganize the Ministry to be more efficient. Dumbledore had been of two minds about that.

On the one hand, a more efficient Ministry meant less would be lost between the cracks. It also meant, however, that non-official influences were less effective than previously. Instead of a number of people consulting him for advice, the new structure gave clear lines of command and assistance, ensuring no outside advice was in immediate need.

The Minister had casually defeated a few measures backed by the Pureblood supremacists but also veered away from the "Light" by allowing legal means to hold items that most Light wizards and witches would see summarily destroyed.
That he had done it in such a way that harm would be minimized was laudatory (random visits to St. Mungo's due to cursed items had significantly decreased) but Dumbledore had misgivings about any such item being under the control of anyone he didn't approve of (mostly himself he would have realized if he had sufficient self-awareness).

And then the Minister had started meddling with Hogwarts – and that was not something he could approve of.

The Headmaster had built a system which would see him in control for decades but it had almost been completely destroyed by the actions which came from the interference. No longer could he control the amount that Muggleborns knew, no more could he use the staff to manipulate the relationships of the different houses.

To the Headmaster's shock, the "Dark" elements seemed to be moving toward the "Light" without much of his prompting at all.

The re-introduction of traditional festivals without the blood and animal sacrifices was a shock. When he had first studied these things, the casual violence involved had been abhorrent. Never would he have accepted the idea of allowing these Dark influences to come back. But the rituals had been modified over the years, quietly, in the Muggle world, and the objectionable elements had all been taken out.

He was actually quite looking forward to the ritual that was scheduled this evening.

The whole situation with Tom … that had been a shock and a half. The proof that he was gone and the prophesy showing as complete, certified by the Department of Mysteries – how it had been done was a mystery he needed to solve.

The boy training as a Champion of Hogwarts was all to the good. He was happy to see that, outside of the time with Filius, Harry seemed a boy like any other. He wasn't remarkably charismatic or withdrawn. Dumbledore supposed that it was the best that could be hoped for.

Suddenly, the Headmaster's ruminations were interrupted by the sound of the tapping of a crystal glass. Minerva was calling the room to attention.

Narcissa Malfoy, externally a picture of serene calm, was nervous as a girl waiting for her first date. Tonight, she would take charge and be the High Priestess for the first Samhain rites at Hogwarts in hundreds of years.

She watched calmly as the Headmaster moved to the lectern. The man may be dotty, but his innate grace was apparent for all to see.

"Halloween. The Autumn Harvest. Samhain. The Day of the Dead. All Soul's Day. Tonight's Feast marks a celebration of the year and has traditionally been important in many circles and societies.

"While in the past we would begin the Feasting in good cheer and with full cups, it is important to remember that we are beholden to the past and to those that came before. It is also imperative that we recognize our magical roots.

"The recently- elevated High Priestess of Magic, Narcissa Malfoy, shall lead us in traditional Samhain rites. Samhain was, traditionally, the start of the new year for the Celts who lived upon these lands these many centuries past. Mixed with the traditions of other cultures, it also included a celebration and invitation for those who have passed beyond the veil to revisit their living family. It is said that on this night, the eve of November, the veil between worlds is at its weakest.
"Before I turn this over to Lady Malfoy, I have an announcement containing a remembrance of past fears and the presence of future hope.

"Ten years ago the magical world was living in great peril and great fear. Brother against brother, friend against friend, none knew exactly whom could be trusted or whom was being controlled by Dark forces to harm their neighbours and community. Ten years ago tonight, that changed. Two remarkable individuals took steps to protect their young son and due to their magical prowess and ingenuity, the man who threatened all of Magical Britain was laid low.

"We do not know exactly what happened nor were there any witnesses to proclaim what was done. What we do know is that whatever was done bought a reprieve for us all. While the young boy was celebrated as a hero, we forgot or ignored that the true heroes were those parents that sacrificed their lives and magic to ensure that their son was safe. We forgot that this family was not the sum of all heroes.

"Many more were lost and many more sacrificed. Names like Prewitt, Bones, McKinnon, Dearborn, Longbottom – the litany of the names and deeds could fill a great tome and our tears could overflow a great river.

"Such was our joy and relief, we put it all in the past. We ignored what happened, hoping that such times would not come again."

Dumbledore sighed. "Many have called me senile in that I quietly warned people various and sundry that I worried the Dark wizard was not permanently destroyed.

"Well, tonight I have news. News both bad … and good. First, not to shock you, proof has been provided that the Dark wizard who called himself Voldemort did not, in fact, completely fall on that Halloween night. Due to dark rituals, his 'death' was only temporary and he could have returned."

There were noises of both fear and incredulity. Many looked to the Minister, who saw watching with a serene smile, as though none of this was news. It confused them.

"At the same time, I can report that … due to the tireless work of the Ministry, as well as aid from Gringotts Bank, the final destruction of Voldemort has finally been accomplished. I have seen the proofs … and I can hereby declare it to be so. Voldemort is gone forever."

The room was shocked. It started at the Gryffindor table, but soon encompassed the room. It took a good long while for the hubbub to die down.

"Yes. And with this announcement, this celebration of Samhain should, perhaps, mean a bit more than it might have. And so, I now turn our festivities over to High Priestess Malfoy."

The stately Malfoy Matron took her place at the lectern. She looked out to the waiting students and said, "To you I say: Blessed be. Blessed be you and blessed be us all. While there are many traditions for Samhain, tonight's will be a mixture of a few that I found most appropriate. I will be assisted by several of your Professors. For tonight, it is proper to refer to them as Priest or Priestess and not Professor. I shall introduce them. First, please acknowledge her with her title, I give you Witch and Priestess, Pamona Sprout."

The Herbology Professor stood and the student body said, "Priestess." She nodded in reply.

And so it went. Many staff were assisting with a few exceptions (Snape, Hagrid, Kettleburn). Some were a surprise, especially the last: A remarkably sober Sybil Trelwany.
"And now, the coven members shall be passing out slips of parchment. Please take one and pass the pile on until each one present has one. Also, a small sharpened pencil should be taken by each person as well."

It took a good five minutes, but every student now had a slip and a pencil. "Now, I want you each to meditate a moment and find, in yourself, one thing, one imperfection, that you would like to see gone from yourself for the New Year. Meditate with reverence and calm and honesty. Perhaps it is pride, or venality, or shyness, or fear. Whatever it is, meditate to find it and then write it down on the slip. We shall use these slips during the rituals."

Narcissa watched as the students did as asked. After two minutes, it appeared that most all had written something on their slip. "Quickly now." The final few finished.

"Put this slips away for the moment. Now, to the left, you see the large board placed? Anyone who wishes to shall now be allowed to add a token of a lost relative or loved one whom they would welcome once again into your home. Think of them as you line up to place your tokens. This is not required but is recommended. The coven members will assist as needed with tacks and other means to attach things to the board. When finished, return to your seat."

It took a good twenty minutes, but the board on the side of the hall had been transformed. Where it was once an empty expanse, it now contained hundreds of small items: Pictures, scraps of cloth, wisps of hair, even small pieces of jewelry. It was almost beautiful in its aspect now.

"Now, although we shall not be eating yet – please restrain yourself – the Headmaster shall call for the feast to be placed. We shall then exit the hall to the hill nearest the front doors while stasis charms shall maintain the meals. However, this presentation of the feast shall allow those who went before to come among us once again to enjoy and experience the joys of home and hearth."

The Headmaster stood and, as asked, called forth the feast. At the end of each table was a place set aside for those that had passed on. "Now, please follow the coven members out. For those who have religious objections to participating, please feel free to quietly peel off between the doors of the Hall and the doors of Hogwarts and wait quietly until the rest return."

Remarkably, no one took the High Priestess up on her offer. All participated, some to make certain they experienced this at least once.

The students found the large field set up with a very large pile of wood. "Coven members, please come up and help light the great fire. Any student who knows the spell may help as well – but mildly: We don't want the fire to burn out too quickly."

Quickly the large bonfire was lit and the students watched as it lit up the dusk. Some noticed a portion which came out of the side into a smaller leg of fire. This allowed a safer access for someone to approach.

Ten feet from this leg offshoot, a table could be seen. Upon the table were several items. Many recognized the Cup of Hufflepuff.

Narcissa cast a sonorous on her voice, as well as one on Sybil Trelwany. "I shall lead the rites and Priestess Trelwany shall instruct you as we go."

She turned. Sybil Trelwany called out, "Form a large circle about the meadow!" Her voice had no hint of sherry.

As the large circle was being made, Narcissa's voice belted out, "East, South, West, North! Let
the people gather forth! Air, Fire, Water, Earth! Sacred circle now sees birth!" Soon, the circle was complete.

Narcissa pulled her wand and lit one of the candles. "Let there be a light kindled in the spirit. Blessed be the Eastern Gate and blessed be the element of Air."

Another candle, the one on the southern side. "Let there be a light increasing and illuminating the South. Blessed be this Southern Gate and blessed be the element of Fire."

The Western candle lit. "Let there be a light radiating in the West. Blessed be this Western Gate and blessed be the Element of Water."

The final candle was lit. "Let there be a light reflecting in the North. Blessed be this Northern Gate and blessed be the Element of Earth."

All of the Priests and Priestesses chanted: "Let these powers be as one."

Sybil Trelwany's voice spoke, "So mote it be."

In response the gathering repeated, "So mote it be."

Though none noticed, the side of the forest saw the Centaurs come, curious as to what the humans were doing. Many were surprised to recognize some of the rites.

"Stand quietly and relax with your hands resting at your sides. Clear your mind and concentrate on your breathing. Breathe in and out slowly and follow along with this meditation." The gathering did as Trelwany's voice directed.

"Take three breaths. On the fourth, bring your hands from the sides to your heart."

As the majority raised their hands, "We are at the center of the world."

"Exhale and put a knee on the ground, and your palms on the ground before you."

"We stand firmly upon the land."

"Inhale and rise to your feet. Cup your hands behind you and then arc them forward in an arc until your cupped hands meet in front." There was less certainty in this, but soon it was done.

"The sea always surrounds us."

"Inhale and move your hands to the sides, spread the fingers wide, palms forward. Exhale and raise your arms, bringing the hands together above the head, thumb and forefinger meeting to create a triangle." A number of children giggled at those who erred and had to correct themselves.

"The sky spreads itself above us."

"Inhale and lower hands to heart again."

"We are at the center of the Three Realms."

"Exhale and return your hands to your sides."

Narcissa Malfoy took a stone from the table and raised it above her head and then touched it to the
ground. "May Talamh support us."

She then took a water jug and poured some into Hufflepuff's cup. Tipping some salt in with the water, she swirled it three times widdershins.

She then started walking deosil around the large circle of people. It took her a good few minutes to complete walking around the large circle of people three times. Finally she returned to the alter.

"May Farraighe Siorai surround us."

She put the cup back and took up a feather. Waving it in an arc over the people gathered, she called out, "May Speir Eigriochta watch over us."

She then put the feather back and said, "The coven shall now help to distribute the libations. Those who are of age may take wine. Otherwise, take cider. Drink it and be fortified. Banish the cups when done, or return them to a coven member who shall banish them."

It was a bit disorganized, but soon the entire group each had drunk from a cup (conjured for this particular use) and then gotten rid of them.

"Let us make offerings to the ancestors and land spirits. Meditate upon our debt to them, for without them we would not exist."

"Repeat after me: " The students chanted each line in response. "Here I stand on sacred land. The sky is over my head. All around me the endless sea. We honor the Mighty Dead."

Narcissa looked out and said, "Beginning with Albus Dumbledore," Dumbledore was nearest to her in the circle, "the circle shall move widdershins. Each person deosil shall first go to the sacred fire and, taking the slip with your named imperfection, cast it into the fire. As you do, imagine that imperfect part of yourself being released into the air and sky. Once this is done, now cleansed and purified, go to the Apple Woman, Priestess Sprout, and take up an Apple, or a nut if apples make you ill. Hold it until all have a fruit of immortality. Contemplate on those who have come before whom you now miss."

Everyone saw that there was a very big bag next to the Herbology professor, along with a smaller one.

Dumbledore took the small slip from his pocket and contemplated the word he had written: "Arrogance." He stood in front of the fire and did as he was directed. He imagined his arrogance flying off into the ether. It was, unexpectedly, quite cleansing to do. He went to take an apple.

It was a very calm procession. Finally, however, it was done. "Now, as you contemplate upon your deceased loved ones, eat of the fruit of life until only the core remains."

For a few minutes, the gathered witches and wizards ate the apples (or nuts) and thought about their lost loved ones. Finally, this done, Narcissa spoke again. "As we have eaten of the fruit of life, so our ancestors live in our fruitful memories of them."

Sybil's voice rang out, "Return the core to Priest Flitwick, who shall return the cores to the forest floor."

Professor Flitwick cheerfully watched as the gathered people brought their cores to the large bag he had next to him. When all had been returned, he levitated it to the edge of the forest and dumped
the bag onto the floor of the forest. Flitwick nodded pleasantly to the centaurs who watched.

The small animals would eat the remains and the seeds until there was nothing left.

"Once again, come forth and take cider or wine and a small cake in celebration of those who have gone before."

Once again, libations were distributed. The students were allowed to chat and talk as they drank and ate the small snack. After another ten minutes, High Priestess Malfoy called them together once more.

"And now we shall dismiss the quarters. For the North: By the power of the stone at Midnight, I transform, send forth and remain at Peace. For the West: By the power of the setting sun and rising moon at Twilight, I transform, send forth and remain at Peace. For the South: By the power of the radiant Sun at Noon, I transform, send forth, and remain at Peace. And, for the East: By the power of the rising sun and morning star at Dawn, I transform, send forth and remain at Peace."

The staff chanted together, "Let these powers be as none."

Sybil's voice called out, "So mote it be."

The entire gathering echoed her. "So mote it be."

Narcissa Malfoy's voice rang out one last time. "North, West, South, and East! All have eaten of the Feast of Life! Earth, Water, Fire, and Air! Circle is open with joy and care! The circle is open... let us return to our own feast in joy and health. The rites are now complete."

She quieted her voice, as well as Sybil's, and turned to the Headmaster. The Headmaster clapped his hands and said, "To the Great Hall!"

A/N: Epilogue is coming.
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Greatest Minister for Magic Epilogue

Though it created much noise and furor, the Minister's initiative regarding werewolves, with the help of the Wolfsbane potion released in 1992, was rather a success.

The money that had previously gone into tracking them down was reallocated to registering them and ensuring they were kept apart during the full moon. Anyone willing to follow the program was allowed a certain increase in freedom and a reduction in hiring discrimination – as long as they followed the rules.

Harry Potter's support – one of very few times he used his name recognition personally before he reached his majority – was a very decisive boon for the initiative.

Remus Lupin was hired by Hogwarts and was a visible test cast for "redeemed" werewolves.

Fenrir Greyback was hunted down and destroyed because he was determined to turn or kill as many as possible.

By 1995, a couple more students who were werewolves were allowed to attend Hogwarts. With a faculty member on hand who knew their problems and could anticipate troubles, no hint of any difficulties ever came of it.

Though the Minister found it difficult to swallow at times, his niece (cousin) Ashlee in Muggle Relations did eventually start dating and marry Sirius Black. She turned over the Attaberry Head of House position to her younger brother.

Very little happened to Harry Potter during his time at Hogwarts. He did, as Hogwarts' Champion, help subdue a Mountain troll who had come out of the Forbidden Forest in 1996 – he would later remark that he didn't do much as the wards and the staff did most of the work. He was there because he felt he had to do something.

The Ministry did work to reconstitute the Triwizard Tournament in 1994. The improvements to Hogwarts had impressed the visiting schools. The choosing of the Champions went out without irregularities and Fleur Delacour from Beauxbatons narrowly beat out Cedric Diggory and Victor Krum from the rival schools.

A good time was had by all.

Harry Potter dated a few girls during Hogwarts, but didn't settle down until after he had spent a few years playing Quiddich. After retiring, he had followed in his father's footsteps and had become an Auror. He married Luna Lovegood, daughter of the editor of the Quibbler. Standing with him were his friends Neville Longbottom, Ron Weasley, and Draco Malfoy. Standing with Luna were Hermione Weasley-Granger (Ron and she still enjoyed fighting – but mostly for the makeup sex afterword), Ginny Longbottom-Weasley (Harry had been deemed too flighty by Ginny during his fifth year – solid Neville balanced her own wild nature better), and Daphne Greengrass-Weasley (somehow, she had ended up marrying Percy Weasley – it was a shock to all around, except for their fathers who worked together). Cornelius Fudge and his wife were invited to be guests on the groom's side.
Albus Dumbledore had retired from his non-Hogwarts' positions at the end of 1993, citing the success of the Ministry in its current form and the continued good works it was doing without needing his input. That this was just after Walden McNair had been caught, tried, obliviated, and handed over to the Muggles to help clear a number of old cases emphasized Dumbledore's approval of how it was handled.

When the Minister of Magic was up for re-election in 1997, Harry Potter had no hesitation in endorsing the man's re-election. The Minister had freed his godfather, helped his uncle Remus, increased Goblin relations, and done a number of other things that Harry found he could support.

The Minister was quietly happy that his long-term methods of dealing with the boy had borne such fruit.

Cornelius was still Minister when Vernon Dursley's grandson received his invitation to Hogwarts. The Dursleys had been regularly checked up on by the man because he wanted to make certain that none of the problems of the past remained. The couple quite liked the Minister and his no-nonsense attitudes.

By Cornelius Fudge's fourth term, he was seriously considering retirement. His wife was getting on and he decided that 28 years as Minister was enough. He was going to devote his later years to making his wife happy. His chosen successor was Daphne Weasley-Greengrass, who at nearly forty would be one of the youngest Ministers in history. She would be the youngest woman ever to take the post.

To be truthful, the reason he picked Daphne rather than Percy was that Percy was a bit too straight-laced whereas Daphne had the mental flexibility to not be offended by some of the things that she learned when the former Minister brought her to Gringotts to ensure the smooth relations he had would continue.

She never told her husband of the deals that the former Minister had made out of sight. With his rather fat back account, Cornelius Fudge deemed that he no longer needed to receive the stipends from those agreements and formally assigned them to Daphne, with the understanding that they were maintained because no goblin-wizard agreement had ever been successful when the goblins weren't forced to give something up. Culturally, they despised those who were too agreeable.

As a result, Daphne Greengrass-Weasley maintained the tough negotiating that her predecessor did when dealing with Gringotts.

The Minister's retirement party was very large and the guest list contained quite a number of famous witches and wizards who got there based on the programs and management of Cornelius Fudge.

Even Albus Dumbledore, retired oh-those-many years ago as Headmaster, appeared at the man's party. Cornelius remembered back in 1998 when Dumbledore had decided to give up his last position of authority.

With Harry Potter graduating and the distinct lack of Dark activity, the Headmaster had decided he no longer needed to shepherd Hogwarts. Only one thing nagged him, and so he had requested the visit by the re-elected Cornelius Fudge.

"Minister. Welcome to Hogwarts. Thank you for taking your time to see me."

The Minister waved it off. "It was no trouble. What can I do for you?"
Dumbledore sighed. "I am contemplating retirement. After forty two years, I think it is time for there to be a change."

The Minister was surprised. "I'm truly sorry to hear this. Hogwarts has been much improved recently. I don't know that such a drastic step is needed."

The Headmaster chuckled. "I won't be disappearing. I still plan to do a term here and there on the Philosophy of Magic that I started after retiring from the Wizengamot, but other than that, I think that Minerva could do a wonderful job as Headmistress."

"Well, you will be missed." The Minister was being sincere. Since removing himself from the Ministry, Dumbledore had been doing a wonderful job at Hogwarts. The test scores bore that out.

"Thank you. There is one item that I need your help on though."

"Oh?"

"For the life of me, one item has nagged me for almost seven years: Voldemort." It was a sign of the changed times that Fudge didn't even flinch at the name. "How was he finally defeated? I KNOW there was a prophecy – I originally heard it. I know that Harry Potter was the subject of that prophecy. And I know that Harry Potter had nothing to do with the man's defeat. This was, from what I could ferret out, almost entirely your doing. At first, I thought it was the Department of Mysteries that had done the job. But this didn't, in the end, calculate out. Instead, it was you. So I have to ask: How in Merlin's name did you finish a prophecy for Harry Potter?"

That Dumbledore's face showed such honest irritation and confusion was so amusing that Cornelius Fudge couldn't help himself. He laughed. He laughed long and hard.

Dumbledore's irritation stayed. When the Minister had gotten himself under control, all the Headmaster said was, "Well?"

Looking at Dumbledore, Fudge sighed even as he smiled. "Okay. Considering your long service and knowing you can keep a secret, I'll tell you. You have to bind these portraits to silence on the matter though – I don't want word getting out."

Dumbledore nodded. He ordered the portraits of the past Headmasters and Headmistresses to silence. Once they agreed (they were just as curious), he turned back to Cornelius Fudge.

"Are you familiar with the tale of the Lone Traveler?"

The Headmaster thought about that. "Gertrude Yolanda's Legends and Myths of the Wizarding World."

Fudge nodded.

"I do remember the tale. I have never heard that it was verified as true."

"Well, I am able to report that the tale is true. And I know because on the eve of my election to the post of Minister for Magic, the man appeared before me. His appearance was a surprise. I was just sitting there wondering what my next step should be when this handsome younger man appeared before me using such an unusual method. It wasn't a portkey, or apparition, or floo. He appeared in a blue light, just as the legend said. And, wonder of wonders, he had advice for me.

"There I was, wondering what I should do next, when I was handed a whole heap of things to do and take care of, with no need to bribe, investigate, or read mounds of records. And the first thing
that he told me was about Riddle. He did the first few steps, but allowed me to take care of the man's final horcrux and the shade he had become."

"Horcrux? FINAL horcrux? How many did he make?" Albus' face took on a look of horror.

"Six – his original goal. Six plus one main piece. The problem was, the last one was entirely accidental: Harry Potter's scar. The Traveler took care of that one, as well as most of the others. He was the one who told me of Hagrid and Riddle. He also told me of what would happen if the man was allowed resurrection – it wouldn't have been pretty. And so I did what I had to in order to make certain it never, ever happened. You saw the result."

The Headmaster was astonished. "And you believed him?"

Cornelius chuckled. "He was very persuasive. He told me about Riddle, about McNair, Lockhart, Yaxley, and a few others. He told me about Sirius Black and Peter Pettigrew. He warned me against taking bribes and of the remaining Death Eater threat. And finally, he gave me advice on how to deal with it all. There was one, overriding piece of advice which informed the first two years of my term. Do you want to know what it was?"

Dumbledore was looking at the Minister in shock. He recognized each of the names that he had been given and tied them to a number of victories that the Ministry had against corruption and Dark influences. Finally he answered, "Yes."

"Keep Albus Dumbledore as far away from my plans as possible."

Albus was taken aback. "But why?"

The Minister sighed. "Because you, at best, were a very old man who was extremely manipulative. Your plans tended to be overly convoluted and you have the extremely bad habit of keeping all the important information to yourself. He explained that while you were probably the most intelligent and powerful wizard in the world, your inherent arrogance in 'knowing what was right' despite others' disagreement tended to ensure the most painful lives for those whom you had plans for. Ask Harry Potter about his life pre-1990. Ask Sirius Black about his life pre-1990. Ask Severus Snape or Lucius Malfoy or Remus Lupin. Be honest with yourself. Were any of these leading good and happy lives?"

Albus sat back and considered the Minister's words. While he was a 'know-best' he was also, when prodded, remarkably able to view things objectively. And when he did so in this case, his only conclusion had to be …

Albus sighed. "You are right. As much as I dislike what you have said, there is nothing in any of what you said that I can disagree with." He gave a sad chuckle. "Do you remember the first Samhain rites in 1991? The imperfection that we were to write down and cast away?" The Minister nodded. "Mine was 'Arrogance'."

The Minister considered this. Finally, unable to control himself, he let out a small chuckle. The Headmaster's responding chuckle increased it to a laugh. In the end, the two men sat within the Headmaster's office, tears of mirth running down their cheeks.

It was, to be certain, a release for both of them. Albus didn't remember the last time he laughed so long and loudly. Finally, he got control of himself. "Well, I think you did the right thing. Only the path that you have guided the Wizarding government in leads me to the conclusion that I can leave the world in the hands of those currently present. But it still doesn't answer my question."
"Which was?"

"How did you complete a prophecy for Harry Potter?"

Cornelius gave a sheepish smile. "I honestly thought you'd catch on. The name of the Lone Traveler is Harry Potter, from a world where things went to pot. I was, while dealing with Riddle, acting as his hand in this world. Thank Merlin this world is no longer anything like the world he described as his home universe. We have much to be thankful for."

Albus thought about what he had been told and then, finally, sighed. "Yes. I can see now how it was done. Well, for my part, thank you. You've obviously prevented me from making a great many mistakes. I think I have some of Madam Rosmerta's mead. Would you join me in a drink?"

Cornelius chuckled. "I don't think I'll mind. Get out the bottle and cups."

The Headmaster retrieved the bottle and two cups. Opening the bottle, he carefully poured a good amount into each and then restoppered the bottle. Albus raised his glass. "To what do we drink?"

Cornelius considered. He raised his own glass and said, "To Harry Potter, the Lone Traveler." He looked to see Dumbledore's response.

Albus nodded and added, "May he find his own eventual, permanent peace." The two men clicked glasses and drank in the name of the soul described as lost in legend.

Chapter End Notes

Apologies for the Hermione-Ron ending. It was just funny enough to leave this canon-pairing.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!