we are pieces together made whole

Summary

Something is attacking New York City, and by extension the magical community that lives there. With the threat of a dark revolution overseas, MACUSA is desperate to find whoever or whatever is responsible for these attacks and put a stop to them.

As a man who lives solely for his work, Percival Graves will not rest until the case has been solved. But with a frustrating lack of evidence or leads, the investigation is forced to consult the help of an... unusual man. A wizard with a briefcase of highly questionable legality, who is somehow both completely different to everything Graves is, and more alike than he’d ever imagine.

(Uses the film's plot as a guide but is ultimately divergent, i.e. Graves isn't Grindelwald)

Notes

I have been absent from the fanfiction scene for about three years now, but like with most of the Harry Potter fandom, Fantastic Beasts has risen me from my eternal sleep, and now I thirst to create.

Research includes gratuitous Google searches of the 1920s and spell names.

Please let me know what you think.
Chapter 1

The papers in front of Porpentina Goldstein blur together, the words looking less and less like English the longer she forces herself to read them. Evidently it seems like the papers are getting just as fed up with her as one particularly rowdy sheet of parchment flips up and starts dancing with her inkwell. Unable to fumble the strength to break-up their waltz, Tina rubs her eyes tiredly and switches to a map of the city where red dots glow faintly to represent the most recent attacks in New York. Behind her she hears Donald McBurney taking notes, his quill scratching softly against paper, and on her left Ambrose Strenburg sets down his seventh cup of coffee.

The clock inside their workroom at MACUSA ticks the seconds away and Tina fights to keep her head up, despite the beat of the second-hand lulling her to shut her eyes, if only for a moment…

The clock chimes and Tina jolts at the sudden noise with a start.

“That’s it,” Don groans, chair legs scrapping against the polished hardwood floors as he stands up from his desk. “I can’t do this no more. I need a damn break.”

Tina’s inclined to agree. But then again, she’s been inclined to agree all week. She stretches her neck and shoulders and winces with every pop from aching bones and stiff muscles.

“You finished cross-referencing the No-Maj witness accounts?” Ambrose asks, wandlessly pouring creamer into an eighth cup. His pale blue eyes are bloodshot and his grey-blonde hair sticks up from constantly running his hands through it.

Don walks over to Ambrose’s desk and swipes the cup, throwing it back like water. Ambrose levels him with an annoyed look, but does nothing else. Tina figures he doesn’t want to waste the energy. “I’ve been cross-referencing No-Maj statements for two goddamn weeks, and guess what I found out? They all pretty much agree that they didn’t see nothin’!”

Ambrose puts his hands up. “I’m not trying to give you trouble Don, but you-know-who is going to ask you the same thing and your answer better be something break-worthy.”

Tina watches sympathetically as Don buries his face into his hands to muffle a scream – if there was ever a time a wizard was going to snap due to paperwork, it would be now, and Tina knows there isn’t a court in the world that would convict him.

The thoughts of workplace negligence have crossed her mind more than once the last few days when she has a moment to spare to something other than their case. She’s exhausted, they all are. If they aren’t sitting in this room going over evidence then their out in the field looking for it. Sleep is now some abstract thing in the day that serves no other purpose than to waste time better spent working – or at least that’s what the little voice in her head that sounds suspiciously like her boss says.

Don’s fingers are raw and ink-stained from all the writing he’s done and Tina spots the beginnings of silver due to stress sneaking into his hair, while the lines in Ambrose’s face are drawn deep in weariness as he twists the gold ring on his left hand and simply replaces the coffee Don stole. Tina looks back down at her papers and maps, unable to read a damn thing, and holds back the urge to pull her hair and cry in frustration.

Weeks upon days upon hours of case files and ticking clocks and pirouetting papers and not a single wink of sleep is enough to drive a person insane and Tina senses that everyone in the room has just about had it. That’s when the door to the office opens loudly and the entire room straightens up so
fast spines can be heard snapping. Don turns to the door, mouth working faster than his legs, his very understandable fear palpable. “Sorry sir we were just…! Oh, thank Christ it’s just you Queenie.”

Tina raises her head in utter relief as her sister bounds in, gold hair flouncing with every step and green eyes narrowed at the door at the end of the room where a certain someone’s personal office was, the stain-glass barn owl adorning the door’s window sleeping oblivious to the new arrival. “Is he here?”

“No,” Ambrose says with an uncharacteristic note of bliss, because they didn’t currently have a large, looming shadow breathing down their necks, “Left about a half hour ago for a meeting with Madame President.”

“Good.” Then Queenie walks over to Tina and yanks her out of her seat.

Tina yelps in surprise, “Queenie!”

Queenie settles her with a look that means no nonsense. “Don’t you try gettin’ of this one Tina. We’re goin’ out for a bit. Mr. Tall, Dark, and Brooding can have you back in an hour.”

“But,” Tina struggles, stuck between wanting desperately to leave and not daring to leave, looking to Don and Ambrose for help, but the two stare back at her with more envy than sympathy, “I’m still working!”

“Really?” Queenie clearly isn’t hearing any of it, “Tina can you tell me what day of the week it is?”

Tina doesn’t know when the individual days became a never-ending stretch of time but she should probably acknowledge, if only a little, Queenie’s wisdom if it’s this difficult to remember the date. Thinking hurts. “…Tuesday?”

“That’s what I thought.” Queenie links their arms together and marches them back to the door. Tina should fight harder. Should tell Queenie no. Should sit back down in her chair because prophecies only know the hell that will rain down if her desk is found empty. But damn if Tina doesn’t miss fresh air.

Queenie, perhaps intuiting Don and Ambrose’s own silent pleas for salvation, pauses just before she and Tina leave and turns back to them, “Can I get you fellas anything while we’re out?”

“A couple ham sandwiches wouldn’t go wrong Ms. Goldstein.” Ambrose looks to Don for confirmation. It’s not much but they look happy enough to be thought of and Don practically salivates at the mention of food. “Yeah that’d be great Queenie. You’re a lifesaver.”

Queenie flashes her smile that reminds Tina of sunshine. “You got it boys!” and throws the two a little wave as she handles Tina out of the office.

It’s a chilly day in New York City with the sky overcast and November air nipping at noses. No-Majs walk the streets bundled in thick coats as the late afternoon takes hold, busying themselves with street vendors and food stalls. Tina doesn’t know why her sister chose a rather lackluster café in a part of town where everything smells of fish, but quite frankly now that she isn’t surrounded by mountains of paperwork and the relentless ticking of clocks she’s just happy to be out of the office for what feels like the first time in weeks.

“I wouldn’t say he’s cold… exactly,” Tine lets her eyes flit about the small café she and Queenie
opted to sit at for lunch – though more of a late lunch considering the hour, trying her best to find the appropriate word to describe one Percival Graves. “He’s more…” She waves her hand about.

Queenie gets that knowing look in her eye and Tina can see her sister snatch the thoughts right out of the air before she gets the chance to think them. “Of a stick-in-the-mud? A pill? A wet blanket?”

Tina tucks a stray lock of brown hair behind her ear and shakes her head, “No, none of those.” She frowns almost comically over her coffee cup in thoughtfulness before taking a sip. Queenie’s pink lips open in a delighted smile.

“Oh! He’s a hardass!”

Tina spits out her coffee in a decidedly very unlady-like manner and smacks her sister on the arm, “Queenie!”

Queenie just laughs while Tina looks around the café, mortified. One or two patrons look in their direction at the outburst but pay them little more attention than that. It doesn’t really surprise her considering the café is relatively close to the docks with sailors coming in and out of port and factory workers going home for the day. Someone getting called a hardass is probably one of the nicer things the No-Majs hear around here.

“It’s true.” Queenie chirps, “Of all the thoughts millin’ around most of the time it’s either sex or swearing!”

“Queenie…” Tina hisses, burying her face in her hands.

Another bell of a laugh from her sister and a playful nudge. “Oh come on Teen, I’m just kiddin’! Mostly,” And she winks.

Despite herself Tina smiles.

“Besides,” Queenie continues, dropping sugar cubes into the last of her coffee, and Tina can tell from the shift in tone of her sister’s voice that this is a conversation not to be overheard and mutters a quick muffliato under her breath. “Even if you ain’t thinkin’ it exactly, you know I’m right. He’s been workin’ you to the bone for the last three weeks! You come home after I’ve gone to bed and leave before I wake up, and I’m guessin’ he locks you and the other Aurors in a dungeon somewhere when you’re on the clock since I can’t catch a glimpse of you at work even though we work in the same building.”

Tina sighs. It’s true. Painfully, woefully true, but still. “We’re all working hard, Queenie. It’s not just me. Ambrose’s gotten at least two Howlers from his wife and I don’t think Don remembers what daytime looks like. And Graves? Merlin, don’t get me started. I’d swear the man sleeps at MACUSA if I thought he ever slept!”

Queenie pouts and picks at the leftover crust from her sandwich. “That still don’t give him the right to keep everyone from their lives. If you could hear half of what the department thinks about him right now…”

Oh, Tina knows. It’s no secret around MACUSA how much of a stickler Graves is. The man is perhaps the greatest Auror Tina’s ever known – working his way up a long and tough career to become the Director of Magical Security through hundreds of cases and criminals, which says nothing of his immense skill in both wordless and wandless magic. Honestly, Tina can say she’s honored to be able to work with someone as proficient and distinguished as Graves.

However, Graves the Auror is also Graves the Man – with his sharp, forthright way of addressing
people, frosty attitude, and utter lack of being anything close to personable. Everyone at MACUSA respects Graves, not many people like him.

“It’s the case, Queenie. Someone out there is leveling parts of the city like it’s nothing and disappearing without a trace,” Even as an Auror the words form a pit in Tina’s gut and the flashes of buildings torn from the inside out turn it cold. There have been whispers around the office, of a dark wizard stirring up trouble overseas, that the Ministry of Magic doesn’t have the problem as under control as they claim, but so far there has been no word of him setting foot on American soil, and no connection to their current string of cases.

As relieved as Tina is about that, it’s still frightening to know something else out there is able to cause so much ruin in so little time. She does her best to keep those thoughts away from Queenie and continues, “The only thing left behind is destruction. Without any leads, everyone’s been working a bit harder, and if Graves works his team the hardest? That just means he cares that much more. He is head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement for a reason you know.”

Tina can almost feel Queenie searching her. Not so in an invasive way, but in concern. Eventually her sister gives a half-smile in begrudging acceptance, eyes shining with an intelligence most others write off when all they see is her beautiful blonde looks and fashionable clothes. “I’m just worried about you Teen.

Tina reaches over and squeezes Queenie’s hand reassuringly. “I’ll be fine Queenie. You don’t have to worry.” Queenie squeezes Tina’s hand back. “Well I’m your sister, it’s what I’ve gotta do.”

A bell rings out loud from a nearby factory signaling the end of another day at work. Tina laughs, some of the gloom of the last week lifting off her shoulders. “Thank you Queenie. I don’t know what I’d do without you.” It’s a bright spot in her heart to have Queenie care so much. “And I promise I’ll try to take a break a bit more often, maybe even take Ambrose and Don along… with…”

At some point Queenie’s eyes drifted somewhere past Tina’s left ear. Tina raises a dark eyebrow in suspicion and turns around to see whatever has Queenie’s attention. Milling out the gate of a canning factory are dozens of cover-all clad workers, every man lined in a film of grime and each with a near-identical tin lunchbox in hand. But Tina follows Queenie’s gaze into the midst of the crowd to a rather humble looking man. He’s shorter than the rest with portliness to his features and a kind face drawn down in lethargy, almost sad… Oh no. Oh, no, no, no. Tina immediately whips back around to Queenie’s miserable attempt at an innocent expression.

“Is that why we’re eating here?” This is not what Tina thinks this is.

Queenie just blinks, doe-eyed and voice void of anything incriminating. “What do you mean?”

This is exactly what Tina thinks it is. “No, Queenie,” Tina groans, stress crashing back over her like a wave, “You can’t do this.”

“I’m not doin’ nothin’,” Queenie protests feebly and Tina merely stares. She may not be the Legilimens of the family but she knows her sister.

It doesn’t take long for Queenie to give up the charade and get right down to pleading.

“Tina you don’t understand! He’s such a sweetheart!”

“He’s a No-Maj!”

“Sure but if you just heard him-”
Tina cuts her off. “Have you spoken to him?”

Queenie glances to the side. “Well, no, but…”

All Tina can think is thank goodness for that and Queenie glares at her for it, betrayed.

“Don’t give me that, Queenie. You’re a witch; he’s a No-Maj. It’s illegal.” And if anyone at MACUSA found out her sister was taking interest in a No-Maj… if Graves found out… they’d be lucky if they only got fired.

“It’s not like I meant to meet him!” Queenie smiles sheepishly. “We just, sorta, bumped into each other.” Tina can only cross her arms in disapproval – as if that’s ever stopped Queenie before, but then Queenie gets a faraway look in her eye, happy and dream-like, and Tina feels her resolve slowly start to crumble. Some Auror she is.

“It was down by that bakery on 7th, ya know? I wanted to get somethin’ sweet before work and there he was, standin’ outside the window.”

Queenie bites her lip in a vain attempt to stop from grinning and traces the porcelain edge of her coffee cup with her finger. “He was thinkin’ about cherry Danishes and banana-nut muffins and pecan pies and it was with all this love and he was going over the recipes his grandma taught him… it was so… passionate.” Queenie sighs the last word, “And do you know what he thought about when he looked up and saw me?”

“The same thing most guys think about when they see you?” Tina says to be coarse but it lacks any heat and Queenie sees right thought it anyway.

“He thought, ‘I’d like to have the kind of bakery a girl like her would walk in to.’” Queenie’s smile turns a bit somber. “He didn’t talk to me, the poor guy, he was too shy. But I wish he had. Not a lot of people think that brightly, ya know?”

The lit of sadness in Queenie’s voice tugs at Tina’s heart and compulsively she turns back to look at the No-Maj. He doesn’t seem all that special with his round features and battered leather briefcase, but Queenie’s always had a soft spot in her heart for people, for dreamers, something Tina always believed wasn’t only due to her being a Legilimens, and she supposed it was only a matter of time until one of them caught Queenie’s eye.

Still, Tina wishes that it would have been anyone other than a No-Maj.

“Like Mr. Graves maybe?” Despite the playful look Queenie sends her way, Tina knows it’s her sister’s way of asking for the conversation to drop, and while Tina can’t let Queenie follow a No-Maj around just because she thinks he’s sweet, it’s probably a good idea to let it go for now.

“Ugh, Merlin no,” Tina puts on a face like she’s just smelled a Troll.

Queenie’s smile returns, if a bit slower than before. “What, you don’t think he’s attractive or somethin’?”

“I think he’s my boss.”

Queenie smirks playfully. “Maybe he just needs a special someone in his life? A little bit of lovin’ might make him less of a hardass. He got a type? I could play matchmaker.”

The idea is so ridiculous Tina laughs and stands, grabbing the bag with Don and Ambrose’s food. “The only thing I know about Graves personally is that he loves his work, which is why I should get
back before he notices I’m not doing any.”

“Fine, but you let me know if you sniff anything out,” Queenie follows her and takes a final bite out of her sandwich. “I happen to know Nessa in Magical Items Confiscation thinks he’s real swell.” Tina rolls her eyes as they leave the café. “Then Nessa hasn’t tried to talk to him – it’s like having a Hippogriff stare you down.”

“Oh a Basilisk.”

The two dissolves into infectious giggles as they make their way to a nearby alleyway. Tina feels lighter, getting out of the office doing a world of good even if it results in what is sure to be a less-than-pleasant talk later on. Stepping between two buildings, Tina gives the area a quick glance around – nothing but brick and trash. With the coast clear she nods to Queenie and they apparate away.

Tina peaks around the door to the office. Ambrose and Don sit at their desks, diligently at work, but Graves’ door is still closed with the stain-glass window sound asleep which means she’s made it back before he has. Tina draws strength in the knowledge that she’ll live to sort forms another day.

“Holy moly I thought you weren’t comin’ back.” Don goes right to Tina the second she gets through the door, grabbing up the sandwich bag like it would disappear at any moment. Tina scoffs. “I was out for twenty minutes. Don’t overreact.”

Don waves her off, stuffing a sandwich into his mouth and tosses the second one to Ambrose.

“Gee, thanks Tina for the food,” Tina says as she shrugs off her coat and floats it over to the coatrack with a wave of her wand, “I appreciate you and everything you do. You’re such a pal.”

Don tries to smile around his sandwich. “Fhanks Fhina!”

Tina shares a look with Ambrose who shakes his head and has the maturity to not act like a man starved. “Thank you Tina, and thank Queenie for me too.”

Tina goes back to her desk where her paperwork has folded itself into vultures to circle her from above. She has barely enough time to sit down and sigh, wondering how she’s going to convince it to come down, does Graves walk in.

The paper vultures instantly float back down to her desk, cowed as they should be.

In the flesh, Percival Graves is a formidable figure. A tall, broad man with dark hair styled back and even darker eyes that lend him a stare so intense it gives President Picquery a run for her money. It’s that very intensity that has Tina frightfully paranoid that Graves somehow figured out she left the office for lunch and it takes more strength than she thinks she has not to duck under her desk. It’s Graves’ serious, stone-cold expression that makes people either feel guilty or want to admit to being guilty – Tina’s seen him wring confessions out of suspects by simply staring at them, no magic needed.

It’s silly considering she hasn’t done anything wrong.

But there’s no judgement or irritation in Graves’ face, only cool detachment, and that trickles the icy-numb feeling of dread down her spine, because there’s only one thing that makes him look like that nowadays, and the somberness in his voice confirms it.
Graves would like to think he’s worked his fair share of atrocious cases over the years. There was that month-long sting to track down a goblin dealing in Unicorn Blood, an unlicensed wandmaker selling cheaply crafted wands that resulted in the deaths of two children, and a Veela trafficking ring that was traced all the way out to Chicago.

All of them terrible in their own ways and better fit to stare at through the end of any empty bottle, but if Graves could say one thing it would be that at the very least each one got solved. Evidence was left behind, witnesses stepped forward, patterns eventually formed… something little always lead to something more and all Graves ever needed was a breadcrumb. Give him that, and the hard detective work and dedication would take it from there to get the job done.

But this case has given him nothing. It feels like he’s been treading water for miles with no land in sight.

Graves steps through the remains of a malformed warehouse. There’s a hole in the roof where flakes of rust and plaster fall like snow onto the splintered concrete floor. Graves starts at the end of an outermost crack in the floor and follows it inward, seeing the damage quickly get deeper and messier, reaching further down, past the foundation of a man-made building, pieces of glasses, brick, metal… all broken apart again and again until they resembled little more than dust.

At the epicenter of the destruction is a crater fifteen feet at its deepest. The support beams that once held the second floor are curved around the crater, bowed inward as if Graves has stepped into the steel ribcage of a great leviathan missing it’s heart.

Even with the severity of the destruction Graves figures the incident must have happened not too long before MACUSA was notified and they were able to contain the perimeter. It was unnerving that something so violent could happen so quickly and leave nothing of itself behind.

Pressure behind his eyes flares up and Graves pinches the bridge of his nose. That was the circumstance with all the attacks; violent and random, leaving destruction and fear in their wake, yet nothing linking them together.

It makes Graves itch.

“Damned lucky it happened in a mostly abandoned part of the city this time. Be thankful for small mercies, huh?” Graves nods in acknowledgement to Auror Huang Bai, the man he put in charge of No-Maj Obliviation when it became apparent that these attacks were attracting more attention than the handful of Aurors arriving first on-scene could effectively handle. Huang accompanies Graves when Obliviation requires an entirely separate team, and needless to say Huang has accompanied Graves to every incident attack after it first started last month.

Graves stares down at his Aurors as they move about the scene, nothing escaping his attention. Strenburg and McBurney work to keep the second floor from caving in; Fanbrick casts a quick *erecto* to search beneath a concrete slab; Howell tests the area for any signs of invisibility charms.

“Think we’ll find anything?” Huang asks though his tone suggests he doesn’t think they will.

Graves wants to be optimistic and believe that this will be the time they finally get the upper hand they so desperately need, but quite frankly he isn’t an optimistic man. It’s been this way week after week, an endless stream of questioning unhelpful No-Majs, scouring the wreckage for any trace of
what caused it, throwing around theories, calling in favors, following leads straight into dead ends… all for it to be for nothing when their unseen assailant strikes once more, and the headache starts all over again.

Despite the panicked murmurs of those higher-up, Graves has found no evidence to tie any of this to Gellert Grindelwald – and he has searched that particular possibility extensively. But with how dire things have been going over in England, the temperature could drop a few degrees past the average and the council would cry Grindelwald and drop behind their podiums. The destruction may be his style, but that’s where similarities end. No fanatics, no threats, no deliberate attempts on No-Maj life.

In a way, Graves almost wishes it were him, if only so he’d have a man to focus his efforts.

The corner of Huang’s mouth quirk up, “If you keep staring that hard you might actually set some poor soul on fire.”

Graves doesn’t comment. While he appreciates Huang’s attempt at levity, the last thing he wants to do is joke. Every time an attack like this happens, the boundary between the wizarding world and that of the No-Majs shrinks, and as that divide closes so does the feeling of safety, security, and anonymity their kind has needed to survive. It’s a serious matter, and he’s tired of their lack of traction.

“Sir!” Goldstein’s voice pierces the air, urgent. Graves apparates down to her where she holds her wand over a crisscross of rebar and steel panels. As he steps closer, glass crunching under his shoes, Graves swears he can hear… a voice.

All it takes is a look at Goldstein and she flicks her wand. “*Wingardium Leviosa.*”

The debris lifts cleanly and swiftly – a staple of Goldstein’s sturdy wandwork – and unveiled beneath the rubble is the broken body of a No-Maj.

He’s a man somewhere in his late forties and most likely homeless due to the worn, ratted clothing he wears and the long, scraggly beard on his face. Both of his legs and left arm are obviously crushed, blood pours from his nose and trickles out his mouth, and he looks up at Graves and Goldstein with bleary, unfocused eyes.

The pitiful sight strikes Graves right through the gut. So far death was something narrowly avoided with these attacks – a silver lining if he were so inclined to think of it that way. Now… now Graves grits his teeth behind the hard line of his mouth.

Damn.

The No-Maj rattles with each stolen breath. “P-please… help…”

Even if they had their best Healers there is nothing that can save this man, a trainee could see that. Graves kneels down in the dirt and dust and blood, “We’re going to get you some help,” The lie falls easily from his lips. “Can you tell me what happened here?”

The No-Maj shakes, coughs, broken fingers twitch in a useless attempt to move. “C-c-cold…”

Graves motions with a hand and settles a quick warming spell over the man. Graves doesn’t know how effective it is given the man’s state, but his shivers do quiet down. “Please,” Graves tries again, “Tell me what happened.”

The No-Maj blinks. “W-wa- was tryin’ t-to find a p-p-place… to sleep fer t-th-the night. S-so cold. W-woke up… when I-I heard s-somethin’…” He trails off in a weak cough, blood bubbling its way...
past his teeth. Next to Graves, Goldstein covers her mouth but refuses to turn away.

Graves gently places his hand on the No-Maj’s shoulder – pointless comfort in a hopeless situation. “What did you hear?”

“Her-heard a-a s-scream… but… but it w-weren’t l-like a p-person…. weren’t…. like… a person…” His words fade away. They were losing him.

Graves tries to keep the surge of desperation from his voice. A sliver of a chance for some kind of lead gnaws at his insides. “Did you see anything? Anything at all?”

“… O-only… d-d-dark,” The No-Maj looks somewhere far away, peace settling over his dirtied face. “…a… s-storm…?” The final note of confusion in his voice diminishes and his body stills.

Graves closes his eyes, takes a deep breath and exhales. The pressure in his head blooms into a pain, rich with something he refuses to call futility. Damn.

Damn, damn, damn.

He stands back up, knees stiff. The rest of the Aurors had stopped what they were doing, all eyes on Graves and the dead No-Maj at his feet.

“Alright everyone, back to work,” His voice carries far and powerfully and everyone busies themselves once again. They don’t have the time to waste, certainly not to feel guilt over the death of one nameless man.

A notion starts forming in Graves’ mind, the pieces of the case fitting less like a puzzle and more like a cobbled road, but a picture forms nonetheless. He looks down at the No-Maj, vacant eyes half-lidded, and mostly to himself he mutters, “We still have a long night ahead of us.”

Strenburg, McBunery, and Goldstein stand in front of Graves’ desk, hands clasped tightly behind their backs as they wait for him to finishing reading over their reports. As is expected, it is exemplary work from each of them, but with tonight’s attack, tonight’s death, there is still much more to be done. With this first, true witness, they have to go back thorough all previous No-Maj statements, set up surveillance teams for the warehouse and surrounding area, comb back over the earlier incident sites, try and find any correlation between the locations, retest anything and everything for spells, charms, jinxes, hexes…

Still so much to do when there simply weren’t enough hours in the day.

The headache he’s been staving off the better part of the week slowly spreads down his neck and shoulders. But it doesn’t matter. Discomfort is something Graves can ignore, and it will be ignored for however long it takes to see this damn case solved.

There’s a single, sharp knock outside his office and, as it is spelled to do, the door opens to allow Seraphina Picquery entrance.

“Madame President,” Graves stands as she steps into the room, her embroidered robes and bejeweled headdress sparkling gently by the light from the fireplace.

“Mr. Graves,” she smiles to him and nods to the others in greeting, each matching her with a respectful, “Madame President” as she meets their eyes.
“I heard there was another attack tonight. A death,” she says, hands folded neatly in front of her, “Any new insights?”

Is it Grindelwald, she asks silently.

Graves shakes his head. “No ma’am. However, we were just about to compile the reports. I can have it ready in a few hours if need be.” McBurney makes a strangled noise in the back of his throat to which Goldstein subtly smacks him on the back for and erupts into a brief coughing fit.

Graves ignores him. He knows his Aurors are tired, but this is the job. No one ever said it was going to be a cakewalk, and while he doesn’t expect perfection, he aims very close to it.

“Sorry Sir,” McBurney coughs, red with embarrassment, “Madame President.”

Seraphina raises one perfect eyebrow and turns back to Graves. “That won’t be necessary Mr. Graves. I’m sure your reports can wait until morning to be… compiled.” She punctuates the last word with something Graves is sure he’s supposed to catch onto but he doesn’t have the time or energy to spare for it.

“Of course,” he flicks his hand and his quill springs to life, copying the notes for his personal files, “In the meantime I need to speak to Rodgers about getting an owl out to the Ukraine. McBurney, Goldstein, I want you two to track down Gnarlack and see if he’s heard anything about tonight. Strenburg, I want you—“

“Ah,” Seraphina interrupts with a hand, “Mr. Graves, I think your investigation can resume in the morning, don’t you?”

She motions slyly with her eyes towards the three Aurors at his desk and Graves takes a moment to focus. None of them slouch, lean, or sway, but now that he really looks at them, Graves notices the large, dark rings under Goldstein’s eyes, the twitch that’s developed in Strenburg’s left hand due to all the coffee he’s been drinking, and the fact that McBurney’s been wearing the same suit for the last three days.

Being an Auror is built on long days and even longer nights, and Graves doesn’t excuse weakness of any kind, but he concedes this case might have gotten more under his skin that he’s been willing to admit, and maybe it would be… nice of him to give the three a break for tonight.

“Yes, Madame President.” He addresses the three before him, “You’ve done good work. Go home, get some rest, and report back to me in the morning.” They do a very poor job of hiding the relief that washes over them – McBurney looks like he might actually burst into tears.

Not to look a gift horse in the mouth, Goldstein, Strenburg, and McBurney say their goodnights hastily and scurry out the office, presumably before Graves can find a reason to rope them back. Still, Graves has an image to uphold.

“Ms. Goldstein.”

Goldstein freezes mid-step, Strenburg and McBurney already well out of the door.

“Yes, sir?” she turns to him like she anticipates a firing squad and Graves levels her with a look.

“Next time you leave for lunch, I would appreciate you clearing it with me first. Otherwise, you might find it more convenient to bring food from home, or visit the kitchens.” He probably shouldn’t take gratification in the flash of panic that crosses over her face.
“Yes, sir,” she stutters.

He nods once. “Goodnight then, Ms. Goldstein.”

Graves appreciates Goldstein not fleeing his office as the door shuts behind her. Seraphina, for her part, is far more amused then Graves thinks the situation warrants.

Almost like a taking off a coat, Seraphina shakes off her President of MACUSA regality and settles more into the friend Graves made his third year at Ilvermorny when they paired up for Potions and discovered through no small number of explosions and melted cauldrons that they were both equally terrible at the subject.

“Do you enjoy instilling fear in the hearts of all those you meet, or are your underlings special?” her voice is full of good-humor and Graves blames the answering quirk to his mouth on the lack of sleep and headache.

Graves sits back down into his leather chair with a sigh. “They’re good Aurors.”

Seraphina leans against his desk and smirks, “It might be nice for them to hear that from you every once in a while.”

“They know.” Graves isn’t entirely sure if that’s true or not, but he didn’t start his position as head of the department by giving flowery, emotional speeches of empowerment to his Aurors, and he isn’t going to start now. The quill at his elbow pauses for it’s work to be checked but as Graves looks over, Seraphina snaps her fingers and the file snaps shut, skimming the tip of his nose.

“When I suggested your team be allowed to go home for the night Percival, that wasn’t a suggestion for you to take as you please,” Graves glares up at her halfheartedly.

“I have work to do Seraphina.”

Seraphina waves him off, the bangles around her wrist clinking delicately. “You always have work Percival. You had it yesterday, you had it today, and you’ll have it tomorrow. You’ve been waist-deep in this case since it started and there’s no amount of note-reading or paper-pushing that’s going to give you any more clues in the next few hours than it will in the morning.”

Graves doesn’t like to admit when he’s exhausted, but he likes being called out on it even less. “I’m working on a new angle and I need to get started on it tonight.”

“You gave me the impression it wasn’t Grindelwald.” Her tone is immediately serious.

“It’s not,” he matches her tone beat for beat. There is nothing he takes more seriously than his work. “It’s a different kind of angle.”

“Oh really?” Seraphina crosses her arms, challenge in every line of her posture. “What angle?”

“I think a beast could be behind these attacks.”

Seraphina loses some of her sudden hostility and shifts attentively. “Why do you say that?”

Graves rubs a hand over his mouth. “There hasn’t been a single trace of magic to be found at the crime scenes, just damage. The No-Majs never see or hear anything. Not until tonight,” he taps the file. “This No-Maj said he heard something, something not human. And these attacks have just been so random – no pattern, nothing to gain.” Graves brings his hands together and rests his elbows on his desk. “If the attacks don’t fit typical criminal behavior, then maybe it’s because it’s not a criminal
doing them.”

Across from him, Seraphina doesn’t look so convinced. “That’s a lot of speculation.”

She hits the nail on the head and Graves scowls. He isn’t happy about it either. “I know. It’s irritating and I don’t like taking leaps this big without the evidence to back it up, but it’s all I have to work with.”

Seraphina leans back, understanding in her expression. “The one avenue you haven’t yet tried?”

“Preciously.”

“And that’s what makes you such a damn good Auror.” She smiles at him fondly, and he can’t help the small one he gives her in return. There aren’t many times when President Picquery his Boss and Seraphina Picquery his Friend overlap, but the few occasions they do make even Graves’ reserved temperament warm just a little. Not that he’ll admit it.

With a wave of her hand, Picquery summons Graves’ crystal decanter from the top of his filing cabinet and pours herself a drink. “So,” she swirls the brandy in her glass, “what’s the next step?”

“I’m going to owl Flintsworth from Beast Ordinances. He’s currently in the Ukraine with his wife celebrating their thirtieth anniversary and isn’t due back until Christmas.” Graves frowns into his hands, “I’d rather work with him directly, but I’m hoping he can suggest a peer to consult with us on this case.”

Seraphina hums in thought and sips her brandy absently. Graves thinks of the night ahead, how late it is, how much more needs to be done, how the muscles in his lower back twinge. It’s enough that the amber of the brandy shines attractively and why not? He could use a drink.

He picks up the decanter for his own pick-me-up but all that fills his glass is air.

“If you want a nightcap, you can have it at home. Take the night off Percival.” Seraphina flicks her wrist and Graves’ decanter, brandy and all, pop back onto his file cabinet. He squashes the rising irritation because he doesn’t need to help the subtle throbbing in his head.

“I still—“

“I can send an owl with the best of them,” Seraphina rises from her seat, “I haven’t forgotten since becoming President.”

Seraphina’s tone leaves no room for argument, but the thought of leaving work unfinished, and to someone else no less? No. He has to be the one to do it. His muscles will relax. The headache will go away. The exhaustion will be held off.

“Seraphina, with all due respect—” Graves stands, and is then promptly betrayed by his own body when a nerve in his neck spasms and he cuts himself off. Seraphina smells blood in the water and it’s all it takes for her to move in for the kill.

She pulls herself up to her full height. “With all due respect, Mr. Graves, you are my subordinate, and I am ordering you to go home.”

“Seraphina—“

“In fact, I think you should take tomorrow off as well.”
“Now look—”

“Would you like to make it a long weekend, Mr. Graves?” Seraphina asks, voice polite as ever but her eyes glint sharply, daring him to push her. Grave very nearly growls.

Seraphina smiles all pearly white teeth. “I thought not.” With one hand she motions to the fireplace and extinguishes the flames and with the other tosses Graves’ coat at him.

“I can take care of this before the night is out,” she says, summoning Graves’ files to her waiting arms – now she’s just showing off, being as pleased with herself as she clearly is, and Graves would roll his eyes if he didn’t know for a fact Seraphina would take it as another victory. “I’ll see you the day after tomorrow.”

Graves throws on his coat, trying to salvage some of his dignity despite the urge to fight her on this. That’s what he gets for a diligent work ethic. But he knows at the first sign of defiance, Seraphina will follow through on her threat.

Or worse, make him take a vacation.

Graves shudders at the thought.

“Goodnight Madame President,” he says civilly, if not icily, because being petty won’t get him anywhere.

“Goodnight… Percy.”

It takes a near unsurmountable level of Graves’ well-honed self-control to leave the room and not turn around to do something incredibly childish in response.

It’s well past midnight as Graves apparates behind his apartment building. The cold air hits him immediately, piercing and bitter, and he pulls his coat tighter, not bothering to charm it warmer since he’s so close to home. The street is quiet and empty, no one around to see him step out onto it as anyone with any sense already would have been home and in bed hours ago – Graves isn’t sure what that says about him.

Graves walks up the frosted steps to his door and lets himself in with two taps of his wand at the keyhole. The eldest son of his landlord, a young man of about twenty-one named Tanner Knobbs, is fast asleep at the front desk with gold and silver keys with wings flying lazily over his head and a spellbook on Apothecary nestled against his chest. Graves shuts the door loudly enough the boy snaps awake in a panic making the keys above him agitated.

Tanner is one of the few people Graves has ever known to look relieved to see him, but Coal Knobbs is notoriously strict in how his apartments are to be run, so Graves assumes he is the lesser of two evils.

“Evenin’ Mr. Graves,” Tanner yawns and bends over to pick up his book, only for his glasses to fall off his nose, “Another late night at the office?”

“Yes,” Because Graves isn’t one for small talk, and from the way he feels his legs drag, it seems the fatigue has caught up to him with a vengeance.

He shuffles past the lobby desk to the main stairway when Tanner continues to speak, “Don’t you
want to know if you have any mail?”

He’s a good tenant. He’s a good tenant and he shouldn’t hex his landlord’s son.

Graves bites back a sigh. “Do I have any mail?”

“No, sir,” Tanner replies far more cheerily than someone should be at this hour.

“Good.” And Graves stalks up the stairs before Tanner can bid him goodnight.

Graves opens the door to his apartment and is greeted with much needed solitude. Although he’s annoyed that Seraphina lorded her power to remove him from his office, Graves can admit that taking an hour or two for himself is something he’s missed in the last month over the case.

Graves has always lived with a minimalistic style. He’s never wanted nor needed a lot of material things, and the few extravagancies he does own are gifts he’s received from family and friends over the years, like the silver cauldron adorning the small kitchen table his father gave him when he started at Ilvermorny and the Persian rug in the hall gifted to him by his sister for making Auror.

His mother has accused it of being too impersonal, but Graves feels it reflects his tastes just fine; structured, clean, to the point. It may not be very homey, but it is his home.

Even with as weary as he truly feels now, Graves knows he’ll lay in bed awake for hours. The case is still on his mind, past, present, and future. He ducks into the kitchen and briefly contemplates food, but really anything left in his refrigerator has either gone off or gained sentience and that’s a problem he can tackle tomorrow.

Instead he goes to the cabinet above his sink and grabs a sleeping draught. Graves doesn’t like to rely on them to get him through the night, but sometimes sleep is more important.

He walks past a bookcase on the way to his room and picks up on the fine layer of dust that coats everything in the apartment. He grimaces and adds cleaning to tomorrow’s list.

Graves stumbles into his room and is overtaken by a yawn. He waves his coat, suit jacket, and waistcoat to the closet and doesn’t bother with changing out of the rest as he lies down, engulfed in a large bed with silk sheets – a luxury that would have to be pried from his cold, dead fingers.

The deco pattern and white paint of his ceiling stares down at him. The clock on his wall ticks softly. The mattress conforms beneath his weight. There is nothing to water, nothing to feed, no rousing plans for his time off tomorrow save to get his apartment back to pristine condition.

His mother has also mentioned how she’s afraid he’s lonely, but Graves disagrees. He likes his privacy, his solitude. He has his career, his position, his work. He can’t imagine being in anything other than Magical Law Enforcement – it fills his days with meaning and gives him something to do and will continue to do so for the rest of his life.

The blue vial of the sleeping draught catches a slice of moonlight peaking in through the blinds as Graves holds it over his face.

He enjoys his work, he does. Even on the nights he comes home to his quiet apartment, lies in his large bed, and faces the images of terrified eyes half-glazed with death and the sounds of horrible, wet, gasping breaths that play at the fringes of his mind alone.

Graves downs the potion and barely has enough time to lay his head back down before a dark, blissful sleep takes him.
Chapter Notes

I’d like to believe there’s a secret, underground magizoologist network where they all know each other and are able to send information to protect creatures when the magical government isn’t doing a very good job of it.

Anywhoist, please let me know what you think.

*Edits (12/14/16): I forgot to say thank you all for the wonderful reviews, feedback is always greatly appreciated!
And I corrected a couple word errors that were pointed out.

The usual litany of, “Good morning Madame President” and bowed heads greet Seraphina as she strides into work. Her billowing robes trail feather-light along the marble floor on her way to the elevators. The golden light shining in from Woolworth’s grand windows bathes the entrance in beautiful tawny yellows – an abnormally bright day so far into winter, but Seraphina isn’t going to complain about weather when it matches her good mood so exquisitely.

She steps into the elevator and smiles politely to the goblin manning the controls.

“Good morning, Nub.”

Nub’s upper lip curls to reveal pointed teeth in the closest thing to a smile Seraphina’s ever known a goblin to do.

“Mornin’ Ms. President. Usual floor?” Seraphina nods and Nub cranks the lever. There’s the tiniest of jolts, then the elevator zips off. They pass over witches and wizards in their business best going where they need to go and doing what they need to do – a flurry of activity from below that’s a meager flash of the inner-goings of MACUSA.

In no time at all, the elevator slows to a stop, and the ornate brass doors open to the main floor of the Magical Security Division. Aurors walk briskly by, their arms full of casefiles and parchment cats at their heels, while other paper creatures use the chutes high overhead.

“Thank you, Nub.” Seraphina departs the elevator as Nub gives her another well-meaning sneer in reply. Two wizards get into the elevator after her with an, “Excuse us, Madame President,” and “Potions Query, please” and the great glass box is off again.

Seraphina takes the long way to her office; mostly in part to ensure Percival didn’t sneak his way back in after she’d gone home. On one hand, she knows Percival would never disobey a direct order, no matter how undoubtedly sour he still is about it. Above all else, Percival is a man of principle and order, a firm believer in the chain of command. On the other hand, she knows better than most the man’s terrifying single-minded focus, and with how difficult his case has been he might’ve been tempted anyway.

Seraphina walks past the office for Percival’s team, the doors wide open. Inside, Goldstein, Strenburg, and McBurney are hard at work, and looking a fair mite better with a good night’s sleep if
she says so herself. Goldstein glances up just as Seraphina moves to the doorway,

“Oh, Madame President!” She goes to her feet quickly, followed by Strenburg and McBurney. Goldstein has a nervous sort of energy about her, and for a while Seraphina wasn’t sure what Percival saw in the girl that had him request her assignment to his division once she made full Auror. Surely not her worried demeanor or hesitancy to speak up, the way she wore her emotions on her face, her heart on her sleeve? Put someone like that in Percival’s way and he’ll eat them alive.

But a year later and Porpentina Goldstein was still here, slaving away under the heel of a man who’s made lesser Aurors weep.

Maybe that’s what Percival had seen? Goldstein’s strong will – her sheer determination in face of the odds? Seraphina smiles to herself. Adorable. And Percival says he has no heart.

“Is Mr. Graves here?” Seraphina asks. Best to get straight to the point if he has finagled his way back in.

Goldstein twists her hands together. She shares a glance with Strenburg and McBurney. They look worried and uncertain, and Goldstein is the one to speak, “I’m sorry ma’am, but, uh, Mr. Graves hasn’t come in yet.”

Seraphina doesn’t detect any hint of covering up in the name of loyalty, or in Percival’s case, fear, from his team. Chances are good that he’s bowed out with grace and accepted defeat with this battle. If he knows what’s good for him.

Goldstein continues on, “We were wondering if… um, everything’s alright? He isn’t…” and she pauses like she can’t believe the words she’s about to say, “… sick, is he?”

Seraphina can’t help the self-satisfied smile that pulls at her lips. Percival not showing up for work is akin to the first sign that the world is ending. In all their years of knowing one another, Percival is the most punctual person Seraphina has ever met, so much so that a great many clocks have been set to him. Not to mention his refusal to take any time off that isn’t necessitated by law. During his first week of making Junior Auror, Percival took a knife to the thigh breaking up a bar fight and hobbled right back to the office with his assailant in tow.

“Mr. Graves is fine,” Seraphina reassures, “I’ve just given him the day to catch up on his rest.”

“Ah.” Goldstein says eloquently, like the thought hadn’t occurred to any of them.

“That being said, Mr. Graves is due back in tomorrow. So for the time being, if you get anywhere on your case, you may report to Auror Huang.”

“Yes ma’am. Thank you ma’am.” Goldstein sits back down and the three exchange what Seraphina assumes are meant to be subtle glances, wordlessly questioning how to feel about their unanticipated day of freedom.

Seraphina leaves them to it and continues on to her office, passing the familiar faces of her employees as she goes.

At the desk outside her office doors sits Seraphina’s secretary Margaret Adler. Margaret glances up from her book the minute she hears the distinctive click-clack of Seraphina’s heels.

“Good morning Madame President!” Margaret’s voice is chipper and bell-clear as always though her bob haircut is an ocean-teal now instead of the red is was yesterday.
“Good morning Margaret. Anyone vying for my undivided attention at present?”

“Oh, yes!” Margaret’s long, matching ocean-teal nails flick through a stack of papers and she pulls out a postcard, “It’s from Mr. Flintsworth. He says he’s set up a Floo Network out of his hotel and will be available ten o’clock our time.”

Seraphina looks at the time. It’s nine forty-five now. “Excellent. I’ll take it in my office.”

The inside of her office is a tad grandiose, but Seraphina would be lying if she said she didn’t like it that way. The deep cherry wood of her floors, the intricate mosaic that decorates her high ceiling, and the twin granite Phoenix statues that preen atop their pillars – being President came with perks. Behind the gold mahogany of her desk is the fireplace, built strong by layers of flagstone and elegant by the organic forms interwoven into the design.

Seraphina pulls her wand from her robes and points to the wood resting atop the gold-gilded grate, “Incendio.”

Great flames spring forth and momentarily blind her as they engulf her fireplace. Apparently she’s in too much of a good mood and poured a little too much power behind the spell; she’ll have to remember that next time. After a few seconds the fire dies down to a more appropriate size, the logs crack and pop and the room fills with warmth.

When the clock chimes for ten on the dot, the fire starts to flicker shades of emerald green. Seraphina waves her wand to answer the firecall and from the green flames appears the face of Finis Flintsworth with his missing right eyebrow and handlebar mustache so impressive it’s said to have been the reason he got his first date with his now wife Agatha.

“Ah! Good t’be seenin’ ya Madame President.” Even through the fire Finis’ jolly tone couldn’t be dampened and Seraphina felt a genuine smile responding to it.

“Same to you, Finis. I’m sorry I had to cut into your anniversary, but the situation’s become rather… dire.”

Finis shrugs, or the equivalent someone can do when they’re just a head. “Don’t be worryin’ yerself Missy. Agy’s been wantin’ some rest from hiking Petros so as soon as I got yer owl I figured it was a sign. Got ourselves set up in a nice little inn that serves the finest potatoe dumblins’ this side of the mountain!”

The fire crackles with Finis’ belly-deep laughter. “Now, yer letter was none too specific. Yer thinkin’ ya got a beast runnin’ around New York?”

Seraphina nods. “It’s the theory Percival’s working with right now. And since there hasn’t been any evidence to the contrary, no one stepping forward to claim responsibility for the attacks, I’m prone to agree.”

Finis barks out a laugh. “I bet that’s rufflin’ the man’s feathers somethin’ fierce!”

“Finis,” Seraphina’s voice goes quiet, “a No-Maj died last night.” It’s been the first causality Percival has had to deal with for this case, and while the man is no stranger to death, Seraphina knows he takes the safety of every life as a personal responsibility – witch, wizard, or otherwise.

“Ah,” Finis says, admonished, “M’sorry to hear that, Seraphina. I ‘magine the kid’s glued to his desk?”

“If he had his way,” At Finis’ inquiring look, Seraphina adds, “I forced him to take the day off.”
“No doubt that’s put him in a worse mood. And fer a man who’s natural disposition is a bad mood, that’s sayin’ somethin’.” Finis says with good-natured teasing but Seraphina hears the sobriety in his voice now. “But, we’re gettin’ off track. How can I help ya with yer possible beastie?”

“I was hoping you knew an expert in magical creatures who’d be willing to work with us.” Seraphina says. “I’d rather go by your personal recommendation.”

Finis preens just a little. “Ah m’dear Madame President, flattery’ll get ya everywhere. But don’t let Agy hear ya or she’ll be gettin’ the wrong idea.”

Seraphina puts her hands up in mock-surrender. Agatha Flintsworth was a wonderful woman who could brandish a wooden spoon as well as any wand – Seraphina had the pleasure of being invited over to dinner once and it was a meal she could write poetry about. If Agatha heard the two of them now the worst she’d do would roll her eyes, cuff the back of Finis’ head, and tell him to stop spouting nonsense.

“Hm, now let me see,” Finis’ face scrunches up in thought. Seraphina waits patiently. The granite Phoenix statues look down in mild curiosity.

“Ah ha!” Finis exclaims suddenly. One of the Phoenixes leaps up in surprise and squawks in irritation. “I know just the man fer the job!” But almost as quickly does Finis’ face become… uncertain, “But…”

Oh, Seraphina does not have a good feeling about this. She raises an eyebrow – the universal sign to others that she means no games. “‘But’?” She tries to force Finis to meet her eyes but apparently he’s terribly interested in something just over her shoulder. That’s fine. She can wait him out.

“Erhm, ah, well,” Finis’ mustache twitches. “Ya see, he would be perfect. I hear down the ol’ magizoologist grapevine he’s been lookin’ to travel to America for some… business… and I know the boy personally! Had ‘im as a student when I substituted for a semester over at Hogwarts back in the day, could tell what dragon was in what egg blindfolded just by knockin’ on the shells!”

Seraphina crosses her arms and withholds the urge to tap her foot as she waits for Finis to get to his point. Finis seems to catch onto that and coughs awkwardly.

“Well, anyway, it’s just that… well, the boy, on occasion ya mind, has a tendency t’carry around creatures that ain’t always… legal.” Finis mumbles the last word like Seraphina wouldn’t hear it.

Of course. Seraphina rubs the spot between her eyebrows. Of course the first person Finis brings up keeps prohibited exotic creatures on him. She’s tempted to drop the conversation right there and look for someone not liable to end up on MACUSA’s bad side, but Finis wouldn’t suggest someone, especially someone he was clearly so fond of, if he didn’t think that someone was exactly what was needed for the job.

She sighs. “I trust he at least has permits?”

Even in the green flames of the fire Seraphina can tell that Finis turns pink. “Ah, ya know the boy takes such good care of his beasts, often times he saves ‘em from poachers ya see, it’s his life. So… when it comes to the others things, he tends t’be a tad forgetful. But really! In the grand scheme a’things is that so important?”

Oh this was going to be a headache, she can already tell. “…The best you say?”

Finis nods enthusiastically. “I’ve never met a better magizoologist, swear it on m’life. If you do have a beast in yer city, he’ll find it.”
Percival isn’t going to like this – which will undoubtedly be entertaining when he starts to kick up a fuss in his own composed Percival way – but the main point is that Finis swears by his man, and Seraphina trusts Finis’ word. Their case hasn’t gotten anywhere in the past month, and as loathe as she is to say it, it’s time to reach out and try less conventional means.

“I suppose,” she starts, and Finis does his best not to glance up in anticipation, “that for services rendered, MACUSA might be willing to overlook any… business your magizoologist brings with him, or otherwise looks into during his stay.”

Finis opens his mouth in a wide smile but Seraphina puts a finger up to halt him, “Pertaining that his business doesn’t disrupt our investigation nor cause any additional problems.”

“Of course m’dear, of course!” The fire seems to glow brighter with Finis’ infectious delight. “Ya won’t be disappointed!”

Seraphina sincerely wants to believe so. Even her granite Phoenixes don’t look so convinced. “May I have his name? I want to owl him as soon as possible.”

“His name’s Newton Scamander.” The name doesn’t ring any bells so Seraphina hopes that means Mr. Scamander’s illegal entanglements have only ever been in question and not lead to persecution. “As far as I know, he’s been in Cairo fer ’bout a month. Heard he’s plannin’ t’catch a boat on over in the next week or so.”

Seraphina can’t keep the judgement out of her tone, “No doubt wanting to avoid faster, magically convenient ways to evade being detained on his business.”

“Ah…” Finis glances behind himself abruptly, “What was that? Oh yes dear!” He turns back to her with a sheepish look on his face and Seraphina doesn’t buy it for a second, “So sorry but the Missus calls! Let m’know if yer needin’ anythin’ else!”

With that Finis’ face disappears from the fire and the flames fade from green to orange. Seraphina stares into the fire a few moments longer before allowing herself her daily long-suffering sigh. The one granite Phoenix that hasn’t fallen asleep looks down at her, head cocked in a decidedly unimpressed manner.

“Don’t give me that,” she mutters to it, and then walks to her desk and taps a tiny silver bell.

Immediately there’s a small knock at her door. Seraphina sits on the plush velvet of her chair and leans against the high back. She gets good and comfortable before she calls, “Come in.”

Margaret peaks inside, “You rang ma’am?”

“Yes Margaret. I need an owl ready for Egypt within the hour.”

“Yes ma’am.” Margaret closes the door and Seraphina picks up her quill – the gold and auburn feather shining from the flames of the fireplace. She twirls her finger and a piece of parchment unfurls in front of her while her inkwell shimmies closer.

Seraphina rolls her neck and dips her quill deftly into the ink. She pauses, quill tip poised at the ready, wondering how to word her request. Trusting she isn’t inviting further menace into her city, Seraphina figures it’s probably best to start at the beginning. Like ripping off a band-aid, better to just do it.

Dear Mr. Scamander…
Despite the hot Egyptian sun beating down upon Cairo, the chill of November refuses to break its hold. It makes for rather pleasant weather, not too hot during the day though the night brings a cutting, vicious cold.

Not that Newt notices. He’s spent the last couple months in his hotel room; furthermore he’s spent the last couple months in his briefcase.

Inside is a series of spells and charmwork interwoven into the tarps of the separate habitats that gives the necessary environment for each beast under his care. One minute he may be walking through the lush, green humidity of a jungle, sweat trickling down his back, only to wind up on a rocky, jagged cliff face with a soft breeze tousling his hair twenty feet later.

It is perhaps the most brilliant thing Newt has ever created, but it isn’t pride that motivates him.

Especially now, as Newt steps along sun-beaten boulders, hot sand slipping into his shoes with every step, he feels only an immense sense of joy. The background goes on for miles, nothing but sand and a blue, cloudless sky – the only thing that stops it are the red and orange mountains in the far distance. For a man-made piece of the wilds of Arizona, Newt likes to think it’s not too shabby.

He walks to the center of the exhibit, below a tall rock column, and waits. It’s a bit too hot for his liking, being born in England with its dreary and wet weather, but in only his vest with his shirt sleeves rolled up, it’s not unpleasant.

In one hand Newt holds a bucket of various dead snakes and vipers. He shakes it a bit for the scent to waif up and fill the enclosure, still in no hurry, but wanting his guest to know that food has arrived. From beneath the lapel of his vest, the small, beady eyes of a Bowtruckle peer out. Pickett is not particularly fond of their most recent lodger, mainly due to the lesion on his forearm Newt sustained from a wickedly sharp beak while trying to establish some trust.

Pickett chirps, apprehensive, and Newt pats his lapel comfortingly.

It takes a few minutes more, then, from atop the great column comes a cry, loud and resonating. Above him, six great wings expand from the top of the column, strong and powerful. Frank takes off from his perch and lands gracefully on a boulder next to Newt, his feathers shining more preciously than any gold or silver.

Newt smiles, warmth blooming in his chest. Only a month ago and the most noise Frank was capable of making was a frail rumble in the back of his throat. A month ago, his wings, plucked and mangled, couldn’t support his body. A month ago, he certainly wouldn’t have approached Newt so willingly.

The amber eyes of the Thunderbird stare at Newt, unblinking. Calm and open, Newt holds out his hand, palm up. Frank regards his gesture for a moment before he nuzzles his beak into Newt’s hand, giving him permission to touch.

Frank’s beak is hard and smooth and Newt’s fingers glide over it to scratch the gossamer feathers underneath his neck. He feels the bald patch where Frank’s skin is bumped and ragged, feathers no longer able to grow – rubbed raw by the heavy chains used to keep him tied to the ground.

Newt had been pursuing the traffickers for a week, eventually catching up to them in the Sinai Desert. For whatever reason, perhaps moving around with such a large animal had become too cumbersome, they had abandoned Frank. Newt found him chained to dense metal stakes in the
ground, covered with a dirty, flimsy sheet against the harsh desert wind.

It was heartbreaking. A creature so magnificent and beautiful, that had never harmed anyone in its life, left to die, emaciated and scared, without the energy to snap at Newt, much less defended himself from a real threat. It made Newt’s insides turn cold, a painful tug at his core. How awful the sight had been. How cruel. And for what? To keep Frank as a pet? To sell his feathers? The thrill of capturing an endangered animal?

He wasn’t sure he’d ever understand humans.

A nudge to his chest from Frank brings Newt out of his gloomy reflections. The Thunderbird watches the bucket with open interest, doing his best to maneuver around Newt’s arm to get to the treats within.

Newt chuckles softly, “Alright, alright. Here you go.” He puts the bucket down and Frank sets about his meal, picking at the snakes inside.

Newt runs his hand down the feathers along the back of Frank’s neck, straightening the wild ones Frank wasn’t able to reach with his last grooming. “Now don’t just eat all the coral snakes. I know they look pretty but you need more protein in your diet.” Frank ignores him of course, three coral snakes hanging out of his beak. Newt sighs fondly. He supposes as long as Frank eats them all, there isn’t any harm in letting him have his favorites first.

Frank continues to eat, and Newt has brushed his way to Frank’s second set of wings when a quick, sharp thump reverberates throughout the room. Someone is knocking on his case. Newt looks down to his lapel where Pickett comes out, curious enough about the sound to brave being closer to Frank.

“Were we expecting any company?” he addresses the Bowtruckle. Pickett shakes his little head, his leaves swaying with the motion.

The thump comes again. How curious.

Newt leaves Frank to finish his meal and makes his way back to his cabin where the ladder leading out of his briefcase is. He climbs the wooden rings up and opens the lid.

His briefcase is still on the bed of his hotel room where he left it. The walls still the same tan color with the same ornate tapestries hanging from the ceiling. What is different, however, is the large Horned owl perched on one of the overly fluffy pillows that encompasses the bed. It stares at Newt popping out his case like it’s about time he got up here.

“Hello there,” Newt says, spotting the letter beneath its talons. “Sorry to make you wait. I wasn’t anticipating receiving mail this far out. Give me just a moment.” Quickly, he dips back down the ladder and grabs a bag off his workbench. He comes back out of the case fully and closes the top, mindful of any creatures who may take the opportunity to go wandering.

Newt opens the bag and pulls out a dead mouse. “Here we are.” He offers it to the owl, which despite its obvious irritation at Newt’s tardiness deems the mouse a good enough peace offering and plucks it from his fingers.

It turns from him to eat its snack in peace and Newt takes the letter. It is definitely addressed to him, the lettering in bold, distinct swoops. The wax seal on the back is instantly recognizable with the stars and stripes patterned against the silhouette of a Phoenix. Newt bites his lower lip, wondering what business MACUSA could possibly have with him. Maybe someone high up was tipped off about his plans to smuggle Frank into America?
Newt turns the letter over in his hands. Oh well, not much sense in worrying if he hasn’t even opened it, is there?

He opens the envelope and unfolds the letter.

Dear Mr. Scamander,

I know we have not met in person, but you come highly recommended by one Finis Flintsworth, current head of Beast Ordinances of The Magical Congress of the United States of America. I am reaching out to you in the hopes that you can help us with a series of attacks that have been taking place within New York City – the cause of which might be a beast of unknown origin. I would like for you to consult with my team of Aurors heading the case. You would be given a stipend as well as room and board for your time and assistance. It is also my understanding that you were making plans to travel to North America for, shall we say, personal reasons. If you accept my offer, I see no reason why this situation cannot be mutually beneficial to us both. There is no obligation for you to accept, of course. However, if you do, please send your reply with this owl, and I will send back the necessary certifications that will allow you use of the nearest international Portkey.

Thank you and best regards,

Madame Seraphina Picquery

President of The Magical Congress of the United States of America

Oh. Newt blinks. That was quite… something.

As a general rule, Newt preferred to stay out of government, working with the Ministry of Magic taught him that world leaders tended to view magical creatures very low on the list of importance, and often turned a blind eye to poachers and hunters. At best they didn’t understand and at worst they just didn’t care, and Newt would regularly find himself opposite government officials when trying to protect creatures where laws and regulations had failed.

Still… he taps the letter to his chin in thought, if the Madame President was implying what he thinks she was implying with that bit about his personal reasons, then maybe he wouldn’t have to take the long way to Arizona after all.

Then again, saying and doing are completely different things, and Newt has come to not expect the best of people. Less chance of getting hurt that way.

The parchment wrinkles as he worries it. Anxiety builds in his gut. What to do? What to do?

As if answering his dilemma, a second owl swoops into his hotel room. Newt identifies it as a Southern White-Faced owl, probably too small a species for delivering, but it holds onto its letter with gusto. The poor thing descends in a less-than-dignified heap on his bed, a deal more haggard than the prim MACUSA owl. A fact that the MACUSA owl seems to recognize, as it looks at the newcomer with disdain, as if offended it has to share the same space.

Newt almost regrets giving such a vain owl a treat.

The smaller owl rights itself quickly enough, its large yellow eyes gazing up at Newt as it hops over to him and drops the letter in his lap with an encouraging chirp. Newt rubs a finger along the top of its head in thanks and the small owl leans into his touch, gratified. Newt pointedly ignores the air of jealousy coming off the MACUSA owl.

“Rather popular today, aren’t I, Pickett?” The Bowtruckle chirrups affirmatively but keeps to his
lapel. Owls have been known to mistake Bowtruckles as insects, and thus snacks. Newt takes the second letter, and much like the owl that delivered it, is considerably less official than his President-sent one.

This time though, Newt takes it with a smile and a growing sense of happy nostalgia. He knows that handwriting.

Hello Newton!

It’s me, Finis Flintsworth! I know it’s been an age since we last spoke, and even longer since I’ve seen you, boy. How are you? I hope this letter finds you well! I’m in the Ukraine right now with the wife doing my best to catch sight of a Zmey if I can track one down!

But enough of me. I’m sending you this letter to tell you that you’ll be receiving a formal request to consult on a case for MACUSA from its President, one Seraphina Picquery. I don’t think you’ll get mine first, knowing those MACUSA owls – things are damn fast! And while I’m sure she’s regaled you with her sanctioned way of speaking, I don’t want that to scare you off. I know her, and while she comes on strong, she’s a great leader and a good woman. I know you’ve had issues with government in the past. Hell, I don’t think there’s a magizoologist alive who hasn’t been threatened with arrest at least once! But I want you to know that the people working on that case are respectable and hardworking, if too serious for their own good – watch out for the head of the department, he’s a real ray of sunshine.

Anyway, if you choose to take the President up on her offer, know that she is a woman who keeps her promises, I can vouch for that personally. She asked my opinion on the best choice for specialist and I can think of no one better than you! If they need help with a creature, then you should be the one to do it my boy!

Best wishes,

Finis Flintsworth

P.S. Agy says hello!

Newt ducks his head and grins. Finis Flintsworth had taken over Care of Magical Creatures during Newt’s second year at Hogwarts when the previous professor had to take leave due to an extreme allergic reaction to Doxy hair. Newt remembers a jovial man with a large moustache and larger personality. A professor who was willing to put in the time and effort to nurture Newt’s growing passion on the subject when most other professors weren’t very keen to give him a chance.

They kept in contact throughout the years, after Mr. Flintsworth went back to America and more so after Newt’s expulsion from Hogwarts. “Us magizoologists have to stick together” he’d say.

If Mr. Flintsworth says Newt can trust Seraphina Picquery, then, Newt supposes he could… maybe… give the job a chance.

Because, surely Frank deserves it? A quicker, and safer, route to Arizona, to his home.

If Newt does go, then… perhaps he could show MACUSA how innocent magical beasts really are? Help dissuade all the fear and paranoia about them? He’s been trying, so very hard, writing down all he knows, all he discovers. The manuscript for his book lies on his cot down in his briefcase – a good start, but something that won’t be published for at least a year.

And... and if there is a creature running throughout New York, it’s probably not there by choice. Most likely brought in illegally, left to fend for itself in unfamiliar territory, surrounded by metal and
concrete and humans.

He could, at the very least, protect it.

Yes… yes he can do that.

Resolve as firm as it’s going to be, Newt summons up a quill and paper, jotting down a quick reply for MACUSA, and a more personal letter to Mr. Flintsworth.

He sends the little Southern White-Faced owl off with one last pet over its grey plumage and lets it pick a mouse out of his bag for the journey home. The MACUSA Horned owl looks so put out by the time the little owl leaves, Newt gives in and lets it have one more mouse before it takes off back to New York.

Alone, in a sense, Newt breathes deeply and lets his body relax. He can do this. It may not turn out perfectly, but he’ll get Frank home, and maybe even save another soul in need of help. Everything will be fine. After all, worrying means he’ll suffer twice, and what a waste of time that is.

Newt springs up from his bed, opens the lid to his briefcase, and climbs back in. He’s got travel arrangements in need of preparation.
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

So sorry for the delay, life got the better of me. I know this chapter is a bit too long, but I couldn't cut it in a place where I felt there was enough meat to justify two chapters. I'm also not too sure on the flow and if I got the character voices down (again, might just be because of the length and how long it took to get the chapter out).

Anyway, thank you so much for the previous comments and feedback, and please continue to let me know what you think. Comments and constructive criticism are always welcome.

Extra note: I like how there are different terms for Muggles depending on the place, i.e. No-Maj in America. I use Heka-Blind, where Heka is the Egyptian God of magic and also the word for magic, for the Egyptian Wizarding community to describe non-magic folk. I'm pretty sure there isn't an Egyptian word for Muggles. Mostly.

As it so happens, the nearest international Portkey is in a bar, right across the street from the hotel Newt’s staying at. President Picquery is swift and efficient in making the arrangements for his stay in New York, and the MACUSA owl is prompt in its return with the required documentation, arriving early the very next morning – with, Newt is pleased to note, less of an indignant guise of haughtiness this time around.

With how quickly everything progresses, Newt’s general anxiety doesn’t have the time to catch up with him until he’s checked out of his hotel and outside the entrance of the bar, briefcase clutched tightly with both hands. It’s not so cold out that he needs his coat, though he wears it anyway, but he can’t blame the sweat beading at his neck on the heat.

The bar is charmed to look rundown and long-abandoned with the letters of its name faded incomprehensibly, the windows boarded up, and a sign on the door that reads keep out in standard Egyptian Arabic. Aside from that, there are spells in place that keep Muggles uninterested in the building, thus why those who are out so early don’t even give Newt a passing glance as he stands alone outside a dilapidated bar.

And stand there he does. The confidence that spurred him through the night and out across the street dies rather quickly and regrettably now that Newt is so close to take on a position so intermingled with law after only being offered said position a few hours ago.

Newt stares down at his shoes. Should he do this? What if it isn’t a creature? Will President Picquery’s assurance that he’ll be able to continue his own business while in America still stand?

The scuffed, tan leather of his boots doesn’t provide any answers.

Newt sighs, twiddles his thumbs along the handle of his case, lets his eyes dart around the building, watches a fly zip around the air lazily, shifts from foot to foot, and sighs again. He screws up the courage to walk closer to the door, only to turn mid-step and walk right back to where he started in a
stroppy half-march.

His skin prickles in nervous energy, that feeling inside of him whispers *move, move, move*. It’s almost like a song, in his head and in his heart, drawing him from place to place with sweet promises of adventure and knowledge and lives saved. Newt wouldn’t call himself particularly daring, certainly nothing like that, but he’s gone most his life traveling from continent to continent and creature to creature to learn and so provide the world with what he’s learned, and he’s not about to ignore the call now.

Eventually, Newt musters up the nerve to take the last few steps he needs. He raises his fist to knock, only to hesitate. He stays like that a good minute, frozen awkwardly in his indecision, when the door unexpectedly swings open. A tall, dark-skinned woman swathed in gold jewelry with leaf-green eyes is on the other side, hand resting on a cocked hip.

“You have been standing out here so long even the Heka-Blind might begin to notice. Do you plan to come inside?” She seems neither annoyed nor necessarily interested, her tone plain and straightforward, addressing Newt like he’s a particularly bland handbag she’s been gifted.

In spite of her indifference, a blush creeps up his neck in embarrassment, “Ah. Yes. So sorry.”

She holds the door open for him and Newt focuses solely on not tripping over his own two feet. The inside, quiet obviously, is larger than the outside suggests, and further gives to the illusion of a simple bar, though far less run down and more so through design than magic. It is a lovely compilation of sandstone and woodwork with the vibrant color pallet of a rising sun.

It is rather empty, Newt notes, though that is to be expected with the earliness of the hour. There is only the woman Newt follows and a small group of five that sit at the main bar that looks as if it was carved from the very stone of the floor. Newt’s flittering gaze inadvertently catches the attention of the barkeeper – or at least the man Newt assumes is the barkeeper with the small gaggle of glasses and cleaning rags that float about him.

The barkeeper’s face splits into a large grin, “Ah, my friend! We were afraid you had been petrified, standing out there as long as you have been!” He bursts into laughter, soon followed by the rest of the group. Newt rubs the back of his neck to hide his further embarrassment and looks pointedly at an empty barstool. Even the newly-cleaned glassware shakes in its mirth.

The woman rolls her eyes with a huff, “Enough, all of you.” She turns her luminescent gaze upon Newt, who can only meet the golden ornament dangling off her ear with the stifled chortling still going on in the back. “What business do you have here?”

“Ah. Yes.” Right, he’d nearly forgotten. Newt pats his coat with a free hand, searching the numerous hidden pockets within, “Just – ah, a moment. Please.” He pulls out a pewter spyglass, a handful of stale Mooncalf feed, half a deck of Exploding Snap, the faux Phoenix-feather quill he’s been looking for since April, and the pocket-sized Sneakoscope Theseus gave him at their last family get-together.

“No… no, not quite… I know I had it just this morning – ah ha!” Newt finds the paper squirreled away up his coat sleeve and brandishes it with smile of triumph. “Here… we… are….!” Newt’s smile dims and he trails off into an awkward cough at the sheer amount of eyes on him – all studying him fairly openly with varying degrees of amusement.

Not bothering to hide his blushing, Newt stares directly at the floor and holds the paper out to the woman – the formal certification for Newt’s travel by International Portkey per President Picquery, and more importantly, the stipulation regarding his briefcase and the inhabitants within. She takes it with what Newt is sure is no small amount of impatience.
“I see,” says the woman simply, perhaps impressed by the legitimacy of it all or perhaps wanting to be rid of Newt as quickly as possible as most are wont to do. The bracelets around her wrists clink and clang as she hands the paper back to Newt. “Come then. This way.”

She turns promptly and makes her way to the back, Newt following on her heels. She stops at a door that might have mistakenly been believed to have led to the kitchen were it not for the bells in all manner of shapes and sizes that cover it. With a practiced motion, she pulls her wand from the bun of ebony hair on top of her head where it had been unseen amongst the dozen or so other hair adornments, and taps a few different bells in a quick, rhythmic succession.

The playful tune echoes throughout the air and the door opens.

On the other side of the door is not a kitchen or backroom or broom closet, but a large, open space more akin to a train station. The ceiling is impossibly high with glass and metal grated arches where artificial light pours down. Immediately Newt is assaulted with the sounds of hundreds of witches and wizards of all creeds and nationalities with luggage and children in hand as they walk to and from different platforms and instead of trains and tracks, the platforms have multiple podiums where different Portkeys rest.

The green-eyed woman – Newt wonders if it’s too late to ask her name… exactly how much time is considered too much time to properly introduce oneself? – easily moves about the crowd, gracefully maneuvering her way around the throng of people, and Newt trails after her, though with significantly less success. He tries to make himself as small as possible after he nearly trips over two small children running past, then is mere inches away from taking out an elderly woman with his briefcase to avoid them.

“Sorry! I… so sorry!” Newt holds his case in front of him as a shield. The elderly witch scowls at him from over her half-moon glasses and shakes her cane threateningly.

The woman interjects calmly with her hand on Newt’s elbow, “Excuse us ma’am.” She leads them away, not once removing her guiding hand. Which is probably for the best, as even just a pair can make up a herd and he’s less likely to be separated and cause unintentional trouble that way.

They stop at a platform, and instead of a number, the plaque that hangs over it reads **New York City**.

The clouds next to the name roll in, overcasting it in grey as light rain drizzles from the sign. Newt frowns a bit at the unfavorable weather. He has just spent several months with a bright sun overhead and feet planted firmly in warm sand.

The platform master sits at a table right beneath the sign. He looks up as Newt and the woman approach with large black eyes lined in kohl.

“Good morning Rashida,” he says, clearly bored. “Playing escort?”

The woman – Rashida, Newt remedies – does what Newt might consider a shrug if it wasn’t done with such seamless poise. “Just making sure this one doesn’t miss his Portkey.”

The platform master sighs, resting his chin on his hand. “Trouble maker, hmm?” He eyes Newt up and down in a dispassionate manner yet Newt can still physically feel his face go red. He refocuses his attention to the swirling weather in New York, fingers tapping against his case.

“If so, he’s not our problem,” Rashida hands Newt’s certification to the man. “He’s been requested specifically. Priority Portkey travel.”

He hums with all the investment of a man forcibly shown photographs of a stranger’s newborn baby.
for the fifth time. “That’s nice. Passport?”

Ah. Newt finds his passport with much less trouble than his certification and places it on the desk. The man waves his wand over the paper and passport to ensure the authenticity, the black-and-white photo of Newt looking anywhere but forward, refusing to make eye contact even as a picture. Newt watches as his passport glows and his certification turns an array of colors before settling back to normal. Satisfied, the man takes a stamp and punches an empty page in Newt’s passport, the black ink turning invisible as it dries.

He hands both back to Newt and stands, “Well then Mr. Scamander, right this way.” He gestures to a podium with a rusty cigarette lighter.

A lurching feeling churns in Newt’s stomach. One of the reasons he doesn’t like traveling via Portkey, aside from his particular difficulties getting through customs, was how awfully unpleasant it felt – like being pulled by a rope from one’s bellybutton.

He turns to Rashida to delay the inevitable and bid her goodbye. Even if she wasn’t very amiable beyond her duty, she was still kind enough to bring him to his destination. But by the time he opens his mouth to speak, she’s already made her way back into the crowd, a brilliant sparkle of gold in a sea of colors. “Ah,” Newt says to the air beside him.

The platform master snorts, “Don’t take it personally. She’s not one for pleasantries.”

Newt nods and shuffles to the podium, looking despairingly down at the cigarette lighter. It’s a good thing he forwent breakfast this morning.

The snap of a pocket watch closing sounds and the platform master tucks it back into his vest, “Alright then,” he recites with the nonexistent enthusiasm of a man who’s said this hundreds of times, “Please keep hold of all personal belongings and loved ones before touching the Portkey. In the unlikely event you lose luggage, children, or toes, you may owl the station and retrieve your item or items before the week is out.” Newt’s white-knuckle grip on his briefcase tightens.

“Do you understand everything as it has been said to you?” The man asks and must take Newt’s grimace as an answer because he continues, “Good. Deep breath and take hold of the Portkey, please.”

Newt thinks about Frank. About how happy Frank will be when Newt opens his case to the wide open ranges of Arizona. About the red mountains and tall rocks and clear skies – all the room in the world for Frank to spread his wings and soar, finally free.

And he thinks about the creature running rampant in New York. About how scared and confused it must be. About how the only person standing between it and dozens of Aurors most likely to shoot on sight is wasting precious time collecting the nerve to touch an old cigarette lighter.

Right then. Newt swallows and grabs the lighter without another thought. The immense tug hits him instantaneously, the sensation of being pulled in every direction possible all at once as his surroundings blur together. But it’s over in a second, Newt’s stomach scarcely having the time to rebel before his feet hit solid ground again.

Newt blinks the vertigo away as the sounds and smells of the city wash over him. The fuzziness of his vison clears to the International Portkey Station of New York, nearly identical in layout to the one in Cairo save for the swirling, structured metal designs of art deco reaching up the walls like golden vines and the geometric patterns of the tile beneath his feet.
“Good morning, sir.” A woman in a striped, pleated uniform, who Newt assumes to be the platform mistress, steps into his line of sight. “When the wooziness wears off can you confirm that you have all personal belongings and bodily extremities?”

Newt nods and takes stock of himself, flexing his fingers and toes, happy that no part of him seems to have been left behind in Cairo. His briefcase is still firmly in hand, and Newt wouldn’t have minded losing his tongue to ensure it traveled with him safely.

“I seemed to have arrived all in one piece.” Newt says, looking at her briefly before letting his gaze fall to the multiple pins displayed on her lapel.

“Excellent,” she says pleasantly, apparently unbothered with his lack of eye contact. “If you could step right over here sir,” she points to a table, “I’ll just need to check your passport and luggage.”

She sends a perfectly innocuous look towards his briefcase but Newt’s fingers tighten around the handle anyway. He has to swallow the quick flash of fear caught in his throat. “Ah, yes, here-” Newt pauses. In his hand is his passport, and only his passport.

Oh dear.

Ignoring the platform mistress entirely, Newt frantically pats down his coat and turns up only the baubles he’d rediscovered an hour earlier, the certification barring his suitcase from customs search nauseatingly absent. This was not good. This was very much not good.

Newt strips out of his coat and combs through the lining of his vest. “Terribly sorry,” he half-mumbles to the platform mistress, too frantic to spare her more than a cursory glance, “I – I seem to have, ah, misplaced my certification.” His vest has nothing. Definitely panicking, Newt dips down and unlaces his shoes, “If you would, um…, give me just a moment – drat! – I’m sure it’s, it’s somewhere.” He shakes a yellow-and-black stripped sock upside down and out pours the rose-gold sand of Cairo.

He can hear the murmurs and feel the eyes of the few witches and wizards not hurried enough to watch the spectacle Newt is surely making of himself. Not that it matters. Newt’s left sock is already half-way down his foot when the platform mistress coughs.

“Sir, ah, I do need to do a luggage check. You’re holding up the Portkey.” She’s pink with embarrassment and pointedly not looking at the crowd that’s gathered. Out of the corner of his eye, Newt catches a glimpse of a wizard in a security uniform looking their way and all Newt can do is pick up his coat and shoes and uneasily shuffle off the platform and over to the table.

The platform mistress, very much not looking at Newt, takes his passport and verifies its authenticity. She gracelessly shoves it back to him and holds out her hand, waiting for his case.

In response, Newt holds it protectively to his chest. “M-my case, you see, the nature of what it houses is very… delicate. I had a certification barring it from search from Madame Picquery-”

“And President Picquery told me I could spell myself pink and sing West End Blues in Times Square.” The security guard Newt spotted earlier rolls over Newt, sarcasm so strong in very note of his voice even Newt can’t miss it. He stops just short of Newt and the platform mistress looks utterly relieved at his arrival, “Please hand over the briefcase sir, we all got jobs to do and places to be.”

The security guard thrusts his hand out and somewhat unintentionally, Newt takes a step back.

It’s the wrong thing to do as an unmistakable tension settles in the air – a small bubble surrounded by the hustle and bustle of thousands of oblivious people. Newt has gone from uncooperative to a
possible threat; he can see it in the way the fingers of the security guard’s wand-hand twitch.

Oh, this would be so much easier if he were dealing with a Norwegian Ridgeback. Soothing the easily irritated scales of the gullet due to the heat from its fire-breathing was a marvelous way to diffuse a situation when perceived as a likely enemy.

Newt very much doubted this man has any such gullet. As it were, Newt couldn’t keep track of the number of times he’s fumbled into absolute clutters of situations because people had far too many variables.

As if to prove him correct, the security guard lashes quick as a serpent and grabs hold of his case, trying his best to pry it from Newt’s very arms. But there is nothing Newt holds dearer than those that reside within, and he keeps hold of his briefcase with all the ferocity of a Graphorn with a newborn Graphling. Sadly – or at least as his brother would say, because secretly Newt actually takes a bit of pride in it – this isn’t the first time Newt’s had to run from the law. He may not be the strongest wizard, but he is exceptionally nimble when the circumstance calls for it.

It’s all those years catching Billywigs. Does wonders for the hamstrings and calves.

Just as the situation is about to spiral hopelessly out of control with the security guard poised and looking ready to wrestle Newt’s briefcase from him and the platform mistress to tackle him to the ground should he try to run for it, a voice speaks up from the surrounding sea of people.

“Newton, uhhh… Sala – ah.. Salamander?”

Walking up to the scene is the one who spoke – a young haggard looking man stifling a yawn, swiftly being followed by a petite, brown-haired woman with soft features, who hisses something to him that sounds suspiciously like, “It’s Scalmander.”

Newt feels immediate relief at the interruption, the butchery of his name notwithstanding.

The two stop, placing themselves somewhat in the midst of the three-way standoff between Newt, the security guard, and the platform mistress. The woman looks to Newt, the security guard, and then to Newt’s briefcase caught unceremoniously between them, and pulls a leather wallet from the inside of her grey coat.

“Porpentina Goldstein, Auror for MACUSA,” she flips open the wallet to reveal her badge. “And this is my partner, Donald McBurney.” She looks over to her partner, but the poor man – Mr. McBurney, appears seconds from falling asleep right where he stands, staring unfocused at nothing and missing his introduction.

The woman, Ms. Goldstein, elbows him sharply in the side without looking away. Mr. McBurney jolts into awareness and scrambles for his badge, offering it upside down, his I.D. picture hiding behind a hand in mortification.

“We’re here to escort Mr. Scalmander per request of President Seraphina Picquery,” Ms. Goldstein says to the platform mistress, stressing request and president, then turns to Newt. “You are Newton Scalmander, yes?”

Newt clears his throat. “It’s, um, Scamander, actually.”

Miss Goldstein stumbles a bit, “Ah, yes, well, Mr. Scamander… what seems to be the problem?”

The platform mistress, her cheeks a bit pink now, steps up. “His passport does check out, ma’am, but, his briefcase,” she glances towards Newt and the security guard, the two of them still in the
midst of a frozen tug-of-war over his case, “He’s refusing a search.”

Ms. Goldstein’s brow quirks in confusion. “His certification from President Picquery should have all information regarding his personal effects.”

“He didn’t have one, ma’am.”

Before she has the chance to look at him, Newt lowers his gaze to Miss Goldstein’s rather sensible looking shoes. “Yes, I, ah… seem to have – accidentally, mind you – misplaced it between here and, um, Cairo.”

Though Newt doesn’t see it, but the snort of laughter that follows was certainly from Mr. McBurney.

“…Right,” Ms. Goldstein puts on a placating smile. “Well, since his passport’s been cleared and he’s got two Aurors here to escort him, I’d say it’s fine to release Mr. Scamander, and his briefcase, into our custody.”

“But,” The platform mistess starts, “the new regulations, what with the recent attack…”

Turning with heavy-lidded eyes, Mr. McBurney interrupts, “Look miss, we’re Aurors, we know the regulations.” He then walks up to the security guard. “Pal, I’m gonna need ya to let go of the case.”

The security guard frowns and his gaze flits between the heavy circles under Mr. McBurney’s eyes and the polite pacification of Ms. Goldstein’s face. Newt wonders if its pride that holds the man to draw a few extra moments out of the situation before he ultimately decides it’s not worth it and suddenly let’s go of his end of the case.

It is with some satisfaction that Newt only stumbles backwards a couple feet instead of falling square on his backside.

“Thank you both,” Ms. Goldstein addresses the guard and platform mistess, doing a much better job than Newt at handling the situation with a smile and gestures towards the entrance of the station. “Let’s get going.”

Newt doesn’t quiet meet her eyes as he maneuvers around the guard and platform mistess, but his mouth does quirk up in what he hopes translates to a grateful expression. Honestly he prefers to leave this experience behind as quickly as he can – another tally in his book on nearly causing international incidents. He can practically hear Theseus cackle in glee.

Because as mocking as the guard may have been, what he said was true. Newt does have a place to be and a job to do. He thrums his fingers against the top of his briefcase, the soft thumps drumming up a familiar energy.

As rocky as it was, Newt is in America now, he creatures safely by his side. Frank was closer to home, and Newt was closer to helping this mysterious beast lost in an unfamiliar city.

All in all, there is no reason not to embrace the warmth that spreads throughout his chest. He holds his head up a bit higher, catching brief glimpses of the witches and wizards leaving New York, and he keeps his strides long, matching the pace of Ms. Goldstein and Mr. McBurney, ready – and dare he say – confident to dive into MACUSA and this strange new world.

Naturally, Newt doesn’t notice one of the copper latches of his case has flipped up, no doubt occurring when the security guard released his case, the resulting force most likely jostling the already temperamental clasp.
And, naturally, as he, Ms. Goldstein, and Mr. McBurney leave the noisy Portkey Station out into the even nosier streets of New York City, Newt doesn’t hear the curious and excited chittering coming from within.

Tina has to hand it to Mr. Scamander; he’s definitely made an interesting impression. All she knows about the newest addition to the New York division of Magical Law Enforcement is that he is tall and lean with gangly limbs wrapped in a blue coat paired with a soft voice and an unusual gait.

And that he’s very good at starting fights with security in the middle of Portkey Stations.

Hopefully this doesn’t become a trend.

The moment they step outside, Mr. Scamander’s eyes, despite being obscured by the red fringe of his hair, take in the sights with child-like excitement. Tina can’t help but smile to herself. They aren’t so far from Woolworth – it wouldn’t do any harm to take the scenic route.

At the cusp of winter, Tina’s always felt the city looks a little like one of those moving pictures with the No-Majs in their dark, thick winter coats with the collars turned up and wool hats pulled low to protect against the frigid air paired with the gray clouds that hang overhead, threatening an early snowfall for about a week now.

It’s very impressive and everything, but Tina’s always secretly wondered what it is that No-Majs’ have against color.

“Is this your first time in New York, Mr. Scamander?” Tina calls back.

“Hmm?” Mr. Scamander drags his attention away from a hotsy-totsy looking automobile. “Oh, yes. Actually, it’s my first time in America.”

“First-timer, huh?” Don says somewhere between politely interested and dead tired, obviously sparing any energy he can in order to stay on two feet. Oh, does Tina feel sorry for him. Even the blessing of a day without Graves they experienced yesterday wasn’t enough to spring him back.

“Gotta say,” he continues, stifling a yawn, “If there’s ever a place you wanna get your feet wet, you can’t do no better than New York City.”

Mr. Scamander hums noncommittally, not necessarily disinterested or rude, as his attention is pulled away by one thing or another. Though it is difficult to tell, considering Tina doesn’t think he’s looked either one of them directly in the eye since they’ve met.

They turn onto Broadway and it’s the third time Don has looked back at Mr. Scamander’s case, trying to be as obvious as he can with Mr. Scamander either truly not noticing, or intentionally ignoring it. Eventually Don just finally asks.

“So… what is in the case?” It’s not any of their business, as Madame Picquery explicitly stated, but Tina would be a liar if she said she wasn’t the tinniest bit curious herself.

Maybe it’s a reflex but Mr. Scamander’s grip tightens around the handle ever so noticeably.

“My work,” he answers simply.

Tina and Don share a look. How purposefully vague. Beneath the dark smudges and bloodshot
whites, Don’s brown eyes light up as he sniffs out a mystery, to which he may be tempted to push his luck, and Tina may be tempted to let him, if only to quell her own nosiness, but one of them has to be the adult and it sure as hell isn’t going to be him.

But just as Don raises his head, probably ready to badger Mr. Scamander into singing, Tina hears the high-pitched voice of a newspaper boy across the street.

“Extra, extra! Read all about it! Abandoned scrap warehouse off the docks latest in recent string of building collapses! Get your newspaper here and read all about it!”

Don snorts. “Bet you a galleon the No-Maj police blamed it on structural integrity.”

Tina grimaces. That last attack hasn’t settled well with her. Not at all. Despite sleep being a rare and precious thing, the minute she closes her eyes all she can hear is a scream that isn’t quiet human and the groaning of metal twisting in on itself. Food is even less attractive than sleep, now that the smell of minestrone soup is tinged with stale dust and copper pennies.

Queenie had asked her about it last night. Tina just kept her thoughts locked down tight and didn’t answer.

“It’s a better answer than nothing.”

Don sighs, sounding as weary as Tina suddenly felt. “Yeah.” Then he nudges Mr. Scamander, startling the man. “But that’s why you’re here, ain’t it Mr. Scamander? You gonna help us figure out what’s been eating up the city?”

“I certainly intend to, Mr. McBurney,” Mr. Scamander answers, “If it is a beast, it perhaps has something to do with territory – animals are often extremely defensive when it comes to space. Or, since there have been multiple instances, there’s a good chance it may be trying to find a suitable place to nest. Quite a lot goes into nesting depending on the species and the season you know. Then again, there could be certain stimuli in those areas causing it to act aggressively –“

“Whoa, whoa, whoa.” Don stops Mr. Scamander mid-tirade, “First off, Mr. McBurney is my old man. You can call me Don ‘till I give you a reason not to. Second off, I didn’t catch half of that.”

“Oh.” Tina watches as Mr. Scamander turns pink – something that has nothing to do with the cold, and takes pity.

“Don’t you worry Mr. Scamander. Don’s lucky if he can catch a cold.” Don sticks his tongue out at her like the epitome of professionalism he is. “Besides, this is the kind of information you’ll want to go over with the entire team. The department head – our boss Mr. Graves, is, well… he’s a man who is…”

“Cruel and unusual?” Don offers.

“Proficient,” Tina throws Don a glare. It won’t do any good to run their Magizoologist off with the terrifying tales of Mr. Graves when he only just got here. Even if every single one of them is true. “It saves time and prevents details from getting lost second-hand.”

She finishes smoothly and flashes Mr. Scamander her biggest no-need-to-worry smile. Don snorts again and it’s a good thing they’re walking the steps of the Woolworth building or Tina isn’t sure how long she could distract herself from transfiguring Don into a pig.

Once they step inside Woolworth, the familiarity of the building’s charms drape over her like a blanket that’s almost too warm. The increase in security was deemed necessary after the warehouse
attack and implemented just this morning, but Tina’s always been extra sensitive to magic, and the additional spells layered over the existing ones makes everything feel humid.

Mr. Scamander doesn’t seem to notice though, taking in the imposing bronze metal work and stylized tile patterns that make up the inside of Woolworth’s lobby.

The three of them make it to the elevators when the four-faced clock resting between the multiple floors chimes that it’s just struck noon. A few witches and wizards run past, hurrying to pile into the elevator and get to wherever they need to be on time. One accidentally clips Mr. Scamander’s shoulder and sends his briefcase soaring through the air.

Tina sees it pop open once it hits the ground before it slides along the polished marble floor and disappears into the sea of hurried feet and trailing cloaks.

An expression of absolute horror flashes across Mr. Scamander’s face before he runs after it, sprinting across the floor with the elegance of a newborn fawn. Tina watches in disbelief as Mr. Scamander tries to move around a tight group of MACUSA employees, only to accidentally knock over a letter carrier. The letter carrier’s mail slips out of his hand and flies up into the air in a huff, while the man lets out a shout of surprise before he falls into a group of three witches who tumble over one another like dominoes.

Tina manages to snap herself out of it and takes off after him right as Mr. Scamander’s foot hooks the leg of a man from Wand Permits – Jennings, if Tina remembers correctly – and the two end up tripping one each other. Jennings manages to catch himself before his face smashes into the floor by falling on a large man with a bowler hat, while somehow – in a feat Tina can only describe as impressive – Mr. Scamander uses the downward momentum to skid along the rest of the way to the underside of a bench where his briefcase inevitably stopped.

Mr. Scamander pulls his case out from underneath the bench and slams it shut. Tina throws out quick apologies to the witches and wizards picking themselves up, mumbling either confused or angrily under their breath and keeping their distance from the man himself.

Tina manages a, “Mr. Scamander are you alright?” just as Don asks, “The hell was that?”

It takes a moment for Mr. Scamander to acknowledge them. He stays firmly planted on the floor as he twists to look around the area.

“Ah, yes, everything seems to be in order…” he says distractedly and then he oh so carefully unfastens his case the barest of an inch to peek inside. “… I hope.”

Tina narrows her eyes. She might have only met this man, but he reads as a terrible liar. A quick glance at Don tells her he smells something fishy too.

Still, Tina doesn’t have time to investigate, as the whispers and mutters of the Woolworth building settle around their group and she is suddenly, painfully aware of all her peers staring at them – though mostly at Mr. Scamander himself, who is on his hands and knees with his cheek pressed to the floor, no doubt getting a perfect view of everyone’s feet.

Tina isn’t sure if she feels more embarrassed for herself, or him.

“Mr. Scamander,” she asks as politely as she can, “please get off the floor.”

Mr. Scamander’s head quirks up, like he’s just noticed all the attention their getting. “Right. Yes. Sorry.” Almost cat-like, Mr. Scamander picks himself off the floor, still surveying the area like he’s searching it.
Tina admires the high brass arches above them because looking anywhere else would mean locking eyes with people she works with every day. If they can just make it onto the elevator and get to their floor, there is a very good chance Tina will make it out of this without a stern talking too courtesy of Graves.

With a composure that's a staple of any Auror, Tina grabs Mr. Scamander’s arm and drags him into the elevator. Funny how they have the entire lift to themselves. Don waves off the onlookers with his natural charm, smoothing over any ruffled feathers though the mail carrier is still trying to entice his letters down from where they’ve perched on a rafter, and steps in after them.

All Tina can say to the goblin manning the controls is, “Magical Security, please,” and is otherwise happy to spend the rest of the ride in silence with only the beady eyes of Slorg judging them.

They make it to the office without any additional bumps, bruises, or flying briefcases. Tina also keeps an iron grip on Mr. Scamander, so that may have something to do with it. Just a little. But Mr. Scamander’s gaze has been particularly shifty and he keeps craning his neck in a way that’s less about taking in the décor and more about trying to find something.

Tina didn’t make full Auror by ignoring evidence dangling in front of her face. “Mr. Scamander, are you looking for something?”

Ears red, Mr. Scamander admires the wall behind her. “Oh – uh, no. No, I don’t believe so.”

Really? Well, with that convincing performance Tina has no idea why she was so suspicious in the first place!

Before she can call Mr. Scamander out on not buying what he’s selling, Ambrose bursts through the door and into the hall, white-blonde hair even more frazzled than by the past month’s standards and face twitching.

“Where the hell did it go?” Ambrose circles the hall, eyes firmly planted to the floor, completely ignoring Tina, Don, and their guest.

Don is the first to ask the obvious. “You lose something, Rosey?”

Ambrose turns on Don in a whirlwind – it’s actually kind of alarming considering Ambrose is the most cool, calm and collected person Tina’s ever met. Even Graves has been known to raise his voice. Ambrose holds up his left hand, and even with his pale skin, there is a visible strip around the ring finger that hasn’t seen sun in some time.

“My wedding ring,” he points for emphasis, “It’s gone. Zayhara’s going to kill me.”

“Isn’t it charmed to stick to your skin?” Don asks, “What’d you take it off for?”

Ambrose looks at Don like he’s asked the dumbest question in all of the Wizarding World. “I didn’t take it off. I was shuffling reports, closed my eyes for a second, and when I opened them my ring wasn’t on my finger.”

Tina, afraid Ambrose is one more Don-question away from having a heart-attack, opens her mouth to suggest a locator spell, when…

“A RAT JUST STOLE MY NECKLACE!”

The shriek comes much further down the hall, loud enough to awake up a couple of portraits of past Aurors who grumble at being disturbed. Something stirs in Tina, maybe a feeling, maybe an idea,
maybe her gut that Graves tells her to or not to listen to depending on his mood – but it’s definitely something and it compels her to look right to Mr. Scamander.

Guilt. Every line of him reads guilt.

“Oh, yes… that, ah…” he clears his throat, his expression sheepish, “I think I should go take care of that,” and he runs off.

Of course he does. Tina has a sinking feeling this is going to be a continuing theme in their working relationship.

Percival Graves is not having what could be described in any way, in any language, by any person, a good morning.

Thanks to Seraphina and her meddling disguised as so-called wisdom, Graves’ drive pushing him through the last month was completely and utterly derailed with yesterday’s little respite.

He’d ended up doing little more than cleaning his apartment within an inch of its life and throwing out whatever had been growing unchecked in his pantry in order to restock it. Although, at the rate he’s been living at home, chances are he’ll just have to throw it all out again next month.

The only thing he’d even label recreational was fire-calling his sister in Massachusetts. It had been nice catching up, but he could have done without the laughter on her part at his expense when he explained where he’d gotten the time to call her in the first place.

The closest he’d gotten to actual work was the letter Seraphina sent, letting Graves know their consultative Magizoologist was due to arrive the next day, and also to take great pleasure in wishing him a relaxing rest of his day off. Even if Graves couldn’t see her face, the smugness was abhorrent; he could trace it in the ink of every overly-grand flick of her quill.

Unsurprisingly a slight headache cropped up after that diminutive tease and Graves opted to retire early for the night, both to curb the pain and try what he honestly thought was a pathetic attempt to make the day end faster, as if he were a child on Christmas Eve anxiously awaiting Christmas.

He ended up staring at his ceiling for hours and somewhere along the way the headache – which he was eventually going to have to admit were chronic – turned ruthlessly into a migraine. Around two in the morning, when the pain in his head wasn’t so much a knife as a swinging mace, he finally broke and against his better judgement took another sleeping draught. Only he didn’t adjust the dosage, so this morning Graves woke up bright-eyed and bushy-tailed and. Four. Hours. Late.

Which lead him to where he is now, jogging up the steps of Woolworth as hastily as his image will allow, well aware his shift started nearly five hours ago.

Graves pushes through the glass and gold rotating door and heads straight to the elevators. Not that Graves is a particularly welcoming person who people go out of their way to greet, but anyone who would normally be brave enough to stop him for a, “good morning” dare not do it now. With his heavy stride and dark expression, Graves is communicating to all not living under a rock that he is not to be stopped for anything less than another building turned inside-out.

He gets onto an elevator alone, the group of people originally waiting for it giving Graves a wide berth. One wizard, a skinny man with a bowtie and glasses three times too large Graves thinks works in Accounting, meekly offers, “D-don’t worry, sir. We’ll get the next one.”
Graves nods in the closest approximation to an answer he can. He turns to the Goblin at the level and has to bite back a sigh. It’s Nub.

He doesn’t like Nub.

And Nub knows this. There is a hint of razor-sharp teeth as the Goblin smirks at him. “Where ya headed, Sleepin’ Beauty?”

Graves’ hand curls into a fist in the pocket of his black wool overcoat. “Magical Security,” he grits out.

Nub chuckles dry as sandpaper. “Ya sure? We’s can always make a quick stop at the kitchens. Have those House-Elves fix you up a real good cup o’joe. After all, what’s your hurry?”

At this rate, Graves is going to chip a tooth. “Just take me to my floor.”

“O’course, o’course,” Nub pulls the level and the elevator couldn’t be going fast enough. “Don’t want to keep anybody waitin’ for six hours.”

In the twenty-eight years Graves has been an Auror, Director of Magical Security, and Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, not once has he missed a shift or shown up late. Graves holds high standards and as such holds himself the highest to them. He’s come in despite illness, regardless of weather, and incurred the wrath of his mother for working through holidays and being unable to attend family get-togethers.

And the one time he slips up, it’s Nub of all people to rub his face in it.

The elevator dings and Graves can breathe without danger to his blood pressure. He leaves, content on ignoring Nub until fate shines particularly cruel and forces them together again.

“Don’t feel too bad about it, Graves.” Naturally, Nub gets in one last sting before the doors close, a sharp jab right between the ribs. “There’s a first time for everythin’.”

Graves isn’t sure what he ever did to that stump of a Goblin, but he hopes it was appropriately awful.

Outside of the elevator is silence. Graves takes a moment to gather himself – running a hand to place back any disorderly hairs and pulling the front of his coat to smooth out the unseemly wrinkles caused by his haste in getting here.

There will be hell to pay for his tardiness, no doubt by Seraphina making fun of him for it until his final days. Not to mention he’ll have to reestablish his veneration less Goldstein, Strenburg, and McBurney take this one-off mistake to mean they can become negligent in their work-ethic.

Graves laments all the work he was planning on doing this morning – mostly so he could organize and present the case to their new Magizoologist, of which he has unquestionably made a terrible first-impression being as he was supposed to formally meet the man fifteen minutes ago.

Simply put, there are no excuses. Graves doesn’t tolerate them and he certainly won’t stoop to using one. So he readies an apology and hopes a strong introduction will save-

“GET IT! QUICKLY!”

The scream is followed by a loud series of bangs and similar shouts of surprise and Graves wastes no time in running towards the commotion, instincts on fire.
He draws his ebony wand from his coat’s inner wand-pocket. The number of spells he can use inside Woolworth are limited due to the security charms woven into the very stone, but Graves is nothing if not resourceful.

Graves finds the room where the yelling grows louder and with more frequency. The sounds of glass breaking and wood cracking follow on the heel of the tell-tale whizz and snap of magic. He clears his mind, muscles taunt, and wand poised and ready.

Whatever it is, criminal or curse, Graves is prepared for it.

Graves throws the door open…

…and is faced with the dilemma of intrinsically understanding what he sees but is unable to fathom how it came to be.

The room is a disaster with furniture overturned and parchment scattered everywhere – a few sheets even on fire. A desk Graves knows to date back to the 18th century with its silver baroque draw-pulls and ogee feet is in splinters and one of the high frosted-glass windows looks like a chair has been thrown through it.

But what’s even worse than the senseless government property damage is the inexcusable behavior of his Aurors.

In the very center of the room, standing atop a conference table, is Auror Delaney and a man Graves assumes is a suspect due to his handcuffs holding onto each other tightly while looking down at the floor in terror. In a corner between a bookshelf and painting is a middle-age woman clutching her neck and sobbing into the shoulder of Auror Fanbrick who tries to pat her comfortingly with one hand while holding out her wand in the other.

McBurney holds up a chair leg like a bat to defend a frightened clerk grasping her files to her chest, Goldstein searches for something behind a file cabinet, her wand between her teeth, and Strenburg pulls the cushions from a sofa like a madman.

None of them notice Graves.

A seventeen year-old Junior Auror-in-training, Sammuels, hears something and whips around to a pile of books. “Ah ha! Alarte Ascendare!” the boy yells and the books burst upwards.

But it’s not just books, as Graves notices some sort of… mole?... yes, he’ll call it a mole for now, flying amongst the pages. In its tiny paws are a gold brooch and a diamond earring, and a strand of pearls dangle from what seems to be a pouch on its belly.

Almost as if in slow-motion, the mole – which may actually be a hedgehog – turns its head as it nearly reaches the ceiling, and in that moment, spots Graves.

Or, more likely, it spots the silver scorpion lapel pins peeking out from under Graves’ heavier coat.

With an agility Graves would call impressive if he weren’t referring to a mole-hedgehog-platypus creature, the thing uses the remaining force from Sammuels’ spell and bounces itself off the ceiling, successfully changing its trajectory, and heads straight for Graves.

Despite being the second most ludicrous scene he has ever been witness to – maybe third considering the debacle that was the morning after Seraphina’s graduation party – Graves has had more than enough of jewelry-stealing catapulting rodents and his Aurors making complete fools of themselves.
Right as the furry thief is mere inches from its target, Graves utters a simple, “*Immobulus.*”

It stops in mid-air, not-quite frozen but unable to do little more than grab towards Graves’ pins like it doesn’t realize it’s been defeated. With one hand Graves diminishes the charm and scruffs the rodent by the back of its neck. Immediately it curls in on itself as if it’s nothing more than an innocent, harmless animal but Graves sees the way those beady black eyes linger on its polished targets.

Hopefully this isn’t the sign of an infestation. The last thing Graves needs is more of these things running around causing havoc. He’ll have to get in touch with an exterminator later, just to be sure.

Now that the immediate threat is over, the room is awash in uncomfortable silence, save for the woman blowing snot into Fanbrick’s beige trench coat.

Graves takes his eyes off the pest to look at his Aurors – as expected, none of them are daring enough to meet his gaze. He really isn’t sure where to start, from the utter lack of professionalism, to the avoidable destruction, to the inability to contain a single renegade animal.

A lecture the likes they’ve never heard is at the tip of Graves’ tongue. It’s going to be a month in Sanitation and then another month in Wand Permits. If his Aurors find that they have free time between their usual assignments and their new duties Graves is about to hand out with extreme prejudice, then Auror Huang will love to know that he now has half a dozen volunteers to rewrite and alphabetize his Obliviated No-Maj reports.

He hopes everyone, especially his personal team, enjoyed their break in routine yesterday, because they aren’t going to get another one until well after New Year’s.

Perhaps they sense the fury that is about to be unleased upon them because every person in the room employed by MACUSA takes a noticeable step back.

Except one man Graves hadn’t seen before whom pops up from behind a tattered lounge chair and looks his way with an expression of relief. “There you are!”

The man is younger than Graves with colorful red hair, a blue coat, and upon getting closer, remarkably expressive eyes. He moves around the ruined furniture in a way that is both clumsy and graceful to walk up to Graves and pluck the vermin right out of his hand.

“Now what have I told you about stealing, hmm?” He chastises the creature softly, and to Graves’ incredulity, it actually appears almost guilty. “You’re going to get yourself into a lot of trouble one of these days.”

If the situation wasn’t as chaotic as it was, if Graves wasn’t as annoyed as he was, he could almost laugh. What on Earth did this man consider “a lot of trouble” if the destruction surrounding him wasn’t it?

The man grabs the thing by its hind legs and gently shakes it upside down. Instantly all sorts of shiny bits and ends fall from the thing’s pouch. It’s a glittery cascade of jewelry, galleons, sickles, and… is that one of Seraphina’s gold-feathered quills?

After a good minute there is a small mountain of pilfered treasure at the base of Graves and the man’s feet. Strenburg, being the closest, dives into the pile and procures his wedding ring, bringing it to his heart and sighing in audible relief.

Switching to one hand, the man holds the creature and summons a briefcase with the other. He unfastens the latches and opens the lid. The creature has a second to look at its lost pillage longingly before being dropped into the case.
The man snaps the case closed and clears his throat, finally addressing the fact that Graves is in the room. “So sorry about that,” his eyes dart to Graves’ right scorpion pin and firmly stay there. “Nifflers, you see, are attracted to shiny objects… jewelry, in particular… and this one has a dreadful knack for getting out of my case, but… he’s harmless, really, just ah, just a bit of a trouble-maker.”

Graves stands there, silent.

Pink begins to paint the pale freckled cheeks of the man’s face. “Yes, right, well, I can promise it won’t happen again… unless, or course, it does… happen again…”

“Who,” finally Graves finds his voice again, lost somewhere between confusion and barely-concealed frustration, “are you?”

“Ah,” the man starts, trying to give a smile that conveys confidence but fails in every conceivable way. “I’m Newt Scamander. I’m, um, here to consult as a Magizoologist for the Magical Law Enforcement Department.”

There it is, bright like lightening, and not even twenty minutes into his day, a headache blooms near Graves’ right temple, because no.

Oh no.
"Good afternoon! How… are… uh, Director Graves?"

The voice is faint, not loud enough or empathized enough to warrant Seraphina’s attention. Most everything outside her office is white noise as a large stack of parchment towers over her desk, looming ominously. She truly has much to do and very little time in which to do it. It’s her fault, honestly, for putting it off longer than professionally reasonable.

Much like a sword in battle, her quill flies across the parchment in swift, precise slices, pausing only when the quill tip runs dry.

"Director Graves? She’s a bit busy at the moment, sir. Do you have a-”

This time, Seraphina pauses. Her gaze lifts from the office mandates splayed out amongst her desk to the deep, rich wood of her office doors.

"Mr. Graves! Mr. Graves, please stop!"

Seraphina sighs and gently sets her quill back into its stand. So much for a day of productivity. She gathers her papers and puts them off to the side, sparing them from being potential casualties in whatever war Percival has decided to bring.

Without so much as a how-do-you-do, the doors to her office fly open. Her granite Phoenixes squawk in indignation and their wings beat nervously as Percival strides in like a gathering storm – dark and deadly and not without a hint of God’s wrath.

Margaret runs in after him, hot on Percival’s heels. Despite being cheerfully bright magenta from the roots of her hair down to the soles of her shoes, Margaret’s body language screams frazzled as she tries everything in her power save hexing Percival out cold to keep him from advancing.

Eventually the poor girl latches onto one of Percival’s arms and digs her heels in, and if Seraphina were a lesser woman, she might be prone to giggling, because the sight of Margaret – at a slight five-foot-five and who can’t weigh more than one-hundred and fifteen pounds soaking wet – trying her damndest to hold Percival back by sheer strength and pluck is one of the funniest things Seraphina’s seen in the last two months.

Quiet unsurprisingly, Percival stomps right up to Seraphina’s desk, not giving any inclination towards Margaret as she hangs onto his sleeve like a determined house cat.

“Seraphina,” Percival’s voice is all ice and seething irritation, and Seraphina can honestly say she doesn’t have a damned clue as to what’s put him in such a mood, but she isn’t one to give up ground, especially in her own office.

“I’m so sorry, Madame President!” Margaret cuts in, overwhelmed. “I told Mr. Graves you were
busy and to make an appointment but he’s very determined to see you and I tried to stop him and was very polite and gave him several warnings and —“

Seraphina holds up a hand, cutting off Margaret’s apologies.

“Thank you, Margaret, for seeing Mr. Graves in.” Seraphina smiles like she wasn’t obscenely interrupted, though it’s mostly for Margaret’s benefit. After all, it isn’t her secretary that Seraphina’s unhappy with at the moment.

Unlike some wizards, Seraphina knows how to handle finicky things like emotions and how best to deal with them.

“I can take it from here.” Seraphina says kindly, ignoring Percival. Partially because she wants to wait until Margaret leaves and partially because stampeding in here like a thick-headed bull means he deserves it.

Margaret looks unsure, still clasped to Percival, as if waiting for Seraphina to give her the word and she’ll promptly remove him. Somehow.

Seraphina was going to have to remember Margaret’s fierce loyalty when the holidays came around, but for now, she settles on rising from her chair and tactfully maneuvering around Percival to gently take Margaret by the shoulders and guide her back to the doors.

The near-black eyes of Percival follow her like a snake ready to strike, but he is about to learn that Seraphina had much bigger fangs and a far worse bite.

“Madame President, I could…” Margaret turns her head to look back at Seraphina, her brow draws in worry as her eyes glance quickly to Percival to express what she leaves unsaid.

In spite of the irritation, Seraphina’s lips quirk in a smile. How good to have honest, loyal, and respectful employees. There was definitely going to be a large Christmas bonus in Margaret’s future.

“Don’t worry about it, Margaret. I’ll have this sorted out shortly. In the meantime, please dissuade any aspiring company while Mr. Graves and I chat.”

Margaret puffs up, her face serious. “I won’t let another soul in, Madame President! You have my word.”

“Excellent. Thank you.” With the politest of smiles, Seraphina nudges Margaret out the doors, which close as soon as she clears them.

What follows is a deafening sort of silence. For about three seconds.

In a flash, almost synchronized, Seraphina and Percival round on each other, meeting halfway, matching stride-to-stride and word-to-word.

“What the hell do you think –“

“How could you invite –“

“– coming into my office –“

“– letting an absolute menace –“

“– no respect in front of my secretary –“
This was getting them nowhere and Seraphina had things she wanted to get to today that didn’t involve Percival and his whining.

“Enough!” Her voice reverberates off the walls, power carrying every letter. Behind Percival, her fireplace roars to life, flames jumping high enough to cow her statues and the papers she took such care in keeping safe fly off her desk and flurry about them in a frenzied tornado.

Percival, of course, doesn’t even blink. But he does stop talking, so Seraphina will take what she can get.

She removes her wand from within her robes and gives it a little flourish to settle her papers and return them to her desk. She’s much too agitated to do so without it; she may accidentally blow up something.

“Now,” Seraphina starts carefully, “what, exactly, is the matter?”

“That… Magizoologist,” Percival says the word like it’s been poisoned, “you hired, is a criminal.”

Seraphina can only raise an eyebrow. “And you’ve come to this conclusion, how?”

“He has a multitude of illegal magical creatures kept inside a briefcase he carries on his person. Today, one of them escaped as Aurors Goldstein and McBurney were escorting him through Woolworth.”

Percival reaches into his coat and pulls out a familiar looking gold-gilded quill.

“It stole thousands worth in jewelry and tore apart a conference room in my department.” He holds the quill out to her and Seraphina absolutely doesn’t mention how she’d been looking for that very quill for nearly twenty minutes earlier. Instead, she sets her mouth firmly and betrays nothing as she takes her quill back.

Percival would never sink so low as to look smug, but that’s not the same as him not being smug.

She’s lost her footing in this battle, both she and Percival know it, but Seraphina will be damned before she gives in without a fight.

“So you’re saying this creature proved too difficult for your Aurors to subdue in a timely fashion?” Despite being relatively the same height, Seraphina looks down her nose at Percival. Her golden quill catches the light as she twirls between her thumb and forefinger.

Percival glowers at the low-blow but his voice remains even. “I’m saying we don’t need a man who’d otherwise be thrown in prison anywhere near this building, let alone my case.”

Under different circumstances, Seraphina would agree with him. Maybe not to Percival’s degree of absolution, but she doesn’t make it a habit of inviting troublemakers to work for her. Finis did warn her, in his own way of not really telling her anything, when recommending Mr. Scamander. Still, Seraphina had hoped that it would be at least a few days before Mr. Scamander’s personal business rubbed Percival’s iron sense of rectitude the wrong way.

Regardless, this was Seraphina’s decision. No matter the rocky start, she is sticking to it – Percival’s displeasure or no.

“Though I can’t say he hasn’t had brushes with the law back in England, Mr. Scamander has never
been convicted of any crime.” Slowly, Seraphina drifts back over to her desk.

The thin line Percival’s mouth was set in gets even thinner. “Not being convicted of criminal activities doesn’t excuse them of being criminal.”

“True enough,” Seraphina lays her quill gently on her desk, “But Mr. Scamander is a guest not only in our state, but our fine country, and the laws here do differ from the laws over there.”

Seraphina sees the exact moment Percival realizes he’s not going to win this argument. That she isn’t going to send Mr. Scamander packing.

“Furthermore,” she continues, because letting up for even a breath would give Percival more than enough time to go back on the offensive. “He is a guest not only of my invitation, but of Mr. Flintsworth’s recommendation, and your suggestion.”

And oh, if that last part doesn’t leave Percival looking utterly scandalized. Another bite striking true, and she hasn’t even finished.

“Perhaps Mr. Scamander isn’t what you had in mind for a consultant, but he’s what we have.” Finally, Seraphina sits back down behind her desk, a queen on her throne. “I’m allowing him certain… leniencies. He’s here because your case needs him, Percival, and if you’re as serious as you say about it, then you’ll learn to work with him.”

Instead of explosive anger, Seraphina watches as Percival’s fire turns inward, leaving only an icy exterior. It takes a few heavy seconds before he speaks.

“It,” Percival begins, his voice like serrated steel, and all it takes is that one word to admit that maybe she pushed a bit too hard. “Is because I take this case, my work, so seriously that I don’t want some harebrained idiot running around with a briefcase full of future problems waiting to be let out the next time he trips over his own damn feet.”

In a few long strides Percival is at her desk. He leans down right into her space, eyes dark. Seraphina doesn’t move an inch.

Percival doesn’t bare his teeth, but Seraphina knows it’s a near thing. “Never accuse me of not taking my work seriously again. We’ve already had one death as a result of this case persisting. I am trying to avoid any more.”

Low in her gut, Seraphina can feel the barest twinges of guilt bubble. She let her irritation carry venom into her words and struck to close to Percival’s heart. Many people, both strangers and colleagues, are under the impression Percival doesn’t feel, or that he doesn’t care.

A ridiculous notion if she’s ever heard one.

“Please show Mr. Scamander where he’ll be working, Mr. Graves.” It’s the most neutral dismissal she can say to end this before it spirals even further down.

Face like stone, Percival says nothing even though he obviously wants to; just nods rigidly like any actual movement make break his neck.

With nothing more to say between them, Percival leaves – a silent, pale shadow retreating from the amber glow of Seraphina’s office. The door shuts loudly behind him, though not slammed, because Percival would never react so childishly, no matter how angry he is.

When the sounds of Percival’s footsteps disappear, Seraphina bows her head and forces the tension
in her shoulders to melt away. She side-eyes her tower of parchment – now even less desirable than before, and catches her granite Phoenixes staring down at her in mild disapproval.

“I’ll apologize to him,” Seraphina sighs. Even her own décor thought she toed over the line. “But first he has to calm down so he’ll let me.”

Her statues, naturally, say nothing.

Newt has to say, considering the last time one of his creatures managed to find itself outside his briefcase – a disaster of a mess involving an Erumpent and a china shop, that the Niffler incident went surprisingly well.

That being said, he feels a touch dreadful about the whole thing. Having a renegade Niffler run about the place was certainly not the best way to make a good first impression. The director head, Mr. Graves, was positively livid – and Newt could tell, despite Mr. Graves’ deliberately blank expression and carefully controlled words. Newt’s been on the receiving end of ire so often that even he can’t miss it when directed his way.

Though, even if he had managed not to notice, the Auror team he’s surrounded by unquestionably did.

They were all seated in a small dining hall; having retreated there after Mr. Graves excused himself from the room shortly after Newt recovered his Niffler. It was generally agreed upon that their group was doomed.

“We’re deadmeat.” Mr. McBur-, ah, Don says next to Newt, pushing his carrots around his plate with his fork.

On Newt’s other side, Ms. Goldstein hums in agreement. She didn’t get anything to eat. She’s just stared at the table since they sat down.

“It won’t be that bad, will it?” Asks the young Auror from the room hopefully. Newt hasn’t managed to catch the boy’s name, and certainly doesn’t feel confident enough to ask and draw attention to himself.

Across from the young man, the Auror with white-blond hair who’d found his wedding ring snorts. “Oh, it will probably be worse.”

The remaining Aurors mutter in varying degrees of agreement. The young man pales and immediately deflates.

“Say, what’s with all the long faces?”

A woman with short blonde hair dressed in paisley pink approaches their table. She has a sun-bright smile and flounce to her step, though Newt catches a sign of worry at the corner of her mouth before looking back to watch Don’s carrots make another circuit around his plate.

“Hey Queenie,” Ms. Goldstein mumbles miserably.

There is a pause, the talking and sounds of eating from the other MACUSA employees in the hall filling the silence, and Newt takes the chance to glance back up at the newcomer in time to see her stare intently at Ms. Goldstein before she breaks out in a large smile.
“Really??” She laughs, drawing the attention of others in the hall.

“Aww, c’mon now Queens,” Don whines, “It ain’t funny.”

The woman covers her mouth to try and stifle her laughter. “Oh, no… it’s hilarious!” And she breaks out into fresh laughter, doubling over.

Newt looks from the woman, to Don, to Ms. Goldstein, then back to the woman. What was going on?

“Oh, oh… sorry, honey,” The woman’s laughter dies down as she tries to catch her breath. “I’m a Legilimens, and Tina’s sister.”

The blonde Ms. Goldstein holds her hand out to him, but Newt can only duck his head and offer her a small, polite smile. “Good to meet you.”

She doesn’t seem put-off by his behavior, which is nice. “Oh, none a’ that ‘Miss’ stuff, just call me Queenie.”

Newt blanches at her picking up on his thoughts so easily. While he can appreciate her natural talents, a knot forms in his stomach at his privacy being so easily invaded. “Please don’t read my mind.”

Queenie blushes. “Sorry, honey. Didn’t mean to look like I was diggin’ around. I really only get the stuff floatin’ on top. Especially with foreigners and your cute accents. I only recognized my name, promise.”

Newt nods at her and smiles, even if the notion still makes him uneasy. Underneath his lapel, Pickett pats gently at his chest in comfort. The knot in his stomach loosens some.

Queenie takes a seat next to Auror Fanbrick – whose name Newt knows only because the woman who had her pearls stolen by the Niffler couldn’t thank her enough.

“So,” Queenie rests her chin in her hand, “Mr. Graves was pretty upset, huh?”

“Sure,” Don scoffs through a mouthful of food, “If fou wanna be nife abouf it.”

Ms. Fanbrick’s nose wrinkles as bits of food fly out of Don’s mouth. The white-blond Auror throws a napkin at his face.

“We’re all going to be demoted to Wand Permits.” Ms. Goldstein bemoans and buries her face in her hands.

Newt bites his lip. He certainly doesn’t want anyone losing their job over his Niffler nicking a few trinkets. “I… well, this is my fault. I could… talk to him, I suppose?”

Don chokes on his food and clasps Newt on the shoulder. “Honestly pal, and don’t go takin’ this the wrong way, but you talkin’ to Mr. Graves would guarantee us pushin’ up daises.”

“The damage is already done,” Ms. Fanbrick says with a wave of her hand, “He’s mad at you about the rat-“

“Actually, it’s a-“

“The rat-，“ Ms. Fanbrick continues, “But he’s mad at us about how we handled it. He’s our boss, not yours. He can, and will, make life very difficult because of that.”
The white-blonde Auror nods, “I’m not going to see my wife for another month, assuming she
doesn’t divorce me,” he says simply and takes a drink. Newt worries because it’s his third cup of
coffee in less than forty-five minutes. Ms. Goldstein just slouches in her seat and lets her head rest on
the smooth wood surface of the table, “Wand Permits. Abernathy is never going to let me live this
down.”

Don keeps on eating.

“I am sorry,” Newt says, because he is, very much so. This was not how he wanted to start off
coming to New York.

Ms. Fanbrick waves him off. “Don’t worry about it. It’s about time he snapped, with how awful our
case has been dragging.”

“You call that snapping, Fanbrick?” The white-blonde Auror asks.

“Sure do. When was the last time you heard ‘Grave Graves’ raise his voice above mild mannered?”
Ms. Fanbrick points her fork. “I’m telling you, the stress is getting to him.”

“I don’t think Graves can feel stress,” Comes Ms. Goldstein’s muffled voice from the table.

“Seriously,” Ms. Fanbrick continues, “Scamander could have let in a mosquito and Graves would
have us refiling potion licenses.”

Newt wonders just how bad the situation over here is. What sort of creature could be causing so
much concern? He rubs his thumb along an edge of the briefcase on his lap.

Don swallows another mouthful of food. “Fanbrick, you and Howell got a bet goin’ on or
somethin’?”

“My lips are sealed,” she smiles Cheshire-like, “But if any of you see him throw something in the
next week – a paper ball, a vase, Sammuels,” she gestures to the young Auror whose eyes go wide,
“You tell me when.”

“Assuming we’re employed that along? Sure.”

They quiet down after that, the air about them says they’ve accepted Mr. Graves’ wrath as assured,
like the sun rising every morning. While Newt is glad they don’t seem to harbor any ill-will towards
him, he can’t help but feel that will change as soon as punishment is given out.

From her end of the table, Queenie huffs, “That Graves is a real bluenose.”

Ms. Goldstein’s head snaps up so fast Newt is momentarily afraid she’s hurt something.

“Queenie,” she whispers furiously, “you can’t say that here!”

“Why not?”

Ms. Goldstein’s eyes dart around as if the man in question might spontaneously appear. “He’s my
boss and I work here!”

“Well, he ain’t mine!” Queenie argues back, arms now folded across her chest. “I keep tellin’ you all
a guy like that ain’t good for moral, gettin’ all uppity over a harmless little Niffler. And he thinks he's
so great?”

Queenie winces and sends Newt an apologetic look. “Sorry sweetie. Last time, promise.”
Queenie reminds Newt of something of a Phoenix – bright and shining and utterly fearless.

With none of the others speaking up in agreement, Queenie pouts.

“Mercy Lewis above, has anyone checked the Graves family tree? With all the soul-sucking he does, there’s gotta be a quick fling with a Dementor in there somewhere.”

“Not to my knowledge, Ms. Goldstein.”

Behind Queenie is the dark, impending visage of Mr. Graves. It is a bit terrifying, Newt must admit, considering the hush that follows his sudden arrival, like air leaving a room. Because not only has their entire table been rendered speechless, but the rest of the dining hall has died down into an alarming state of stillness.

If a pin were to drop, everyone would hear it.

Mr. Graves is no less intimidating now than when Newt first met him an hour ago with his dark eyes, dark clothes, and dark demeanor… though, perhaps *met* is being a bit generous. No sooner had Newt introduced himself had Mr. Graves turned away and left without a word – a little disheartening, were it not for the fact that Newt’s gotten rather used to people reacting that way upon first encountering him.

Queenie, without a hint of fear or intimidation, turns in her seat and stands to face Mr. Graves.

“Mr. Graves,” Queenie greets politely enough, but with an expression that conveys nothing of the sort. “Good morning to you.”

Mr. Graves’ expression doesn’t change; his face could be made of marble – so life-like yet unmoving. “And a good morning to you, Ms. Goldstein.” His eyes flick past Queenie over to the table proper, and each and every Auror once seated around Newt stands, heads up and backs straight.

“You all are to report to Auror Huang after you clean up that conference room. I assured him you would meet up with him in no less than,” He turns over his wrist to reveal a beautifully ornate silver wrist watch with a mother-of-pearl face that shines like an Occamy scale. “Twenty minutes. I strongly suggest you don’t make a liar out of me.”

Without a second thought for food or good-byes, the group of Aurors push in their chairs and leave as quickly as they can with a hurried, “Yes, sir.”.

Before they leave the dining hall completely, Ms. Goldstein turns her head to give Newt an apologetic look and Don holds his hand in a fist above himself while his head lulls in an imitation of being hung. Then it’s just Newt, Mr. Graves, and Queenie in between them.

Oh, and the few dozen witches and wizards whose eyes devour the scene in a shameless way Newt is painfully, painfully aware of. He must look like he’s downed a bottle of Fire Whiskey. Instead of further embarrassing himself by turning a shade of red that only a Stomatopod can see, Newt opts to stare at Mr. Graves shoes.

They are sleek, stylish, and not the least bit comfortable looking – much like the man himself.

“Well, Ms. Goldstein,” Mr. Graves says, his voice carrying far too easy in the silence of the dining hall.

“Well what?” Queenie rebukes, arms crossed and hip cocked, standing rebelliously in front of the
“I can stand here on my lunch hour if I want, can’t I, Mr. Graves?”

“Certainly,” he says, not missing a beat, “But I need to show Mr. Scamander where he’ll be working during his stay.” Mr. Graves makes a show in looking over Queenie’s shoulder how she’s clearly in his way.

If Queenie does turn pink, it’s well hidden beneath her expertly applied blush. She brushes him off with a turn of her head and a sweep of her skirt and walks over to Newt.

She smiles at Newt, cheerful like Mr. Graves isn’t even there. “It was lovely to meet you, Mr. Scamander.”

“Th-thank you. You can call me Newt, if you like.” It seems only polite, after all.

Queenie smiles even bigger. Her face must have been made for smiling.

“Newt, then.” She leans down into his space, and Newt’s heart spikes and his hands go numb as he realizes she’s going to kiss his cheek.

Instead, she gets close enough to his ear and whispers, “Good luck, sweetie. And remember, honey badgers can eat snakes.”

“Don’t be a stranger.” Queenie says louder as she pulls back and waves her fingers at Newt.

What a strange woman. Kind, very kind. But strange.

Queenie then turns back to Mr. Graves, only this time with her back fully to Newt, he can’t tell what looks she gives the man, though considering their conversation so far, Newt doubts it’s anything pleasant. But Queenie walks past Mr. Graves without further incident, and slowly, so very slowly, the dining hall begins to fill with noise again.

Only, now with Queenie gone, there is no one between Newt and Mr. Graves save the table, and Newt doubts it has much stake in keeping the other man at bay.

They stay like that for a while; Mr. Graves clearly stares at Newt, while Newt obviously stares at one of the scorpion lapel pins the Niffler attempted to pinch. There are still eyes on them pretending to talk and pretending to eat, but Newt knows better. It’s distressing in ways people usually don’t understand, having so much attention focused on him. Sweat starts to build at the base of his collar, and Newt wonders how Mr. Graves can be so calm standing at the center of a scene – gossip to surely spread like wildfire throughout the building before the day is done.

“Mr. Scamander.”

Newt jerks and meets Mr. Graves’ eyes for a split second before drifting clumsily over to his earlobe.

“Sorry, I…” Goodness, Newt hopes Mr. Graves hasn’t been trying to get his attention for too long, the man seems to be running low on anything resembling patience. “… yes?”

Just below his ear, Newt watches as a curious twitch starts to develop along Mr. Graves’ strong jaw. “I need to show you to the office you’ll be using.”

“Oh.” Right. That makes sense. People in the government get offices, and since Newt is now working… well, consulting for the government, he gets an office. It’ll be different; he’s never had an office before. Hopefully it has a window.
“Mr. Scamander.”

Newt can trace the faintest hint of irritation in that steel voice as he’s pulled from his thoughts. “Yes?”

“Are you going to get up?”

Ah. Yes. Newt is still in his chair, isn’t he?

Embarrassed, Newt jolts up, smacking his knees against the underside of the table, knocking over a couple of half-full glasses and sending errant pieces of silverware clattering to the floor. Bugger.

In an attempt to salvage what he could of the situation, Newt pulls his briefcase close to him and withdraws his wand from inside his coat. “Sorry, I’ll fix that…”

Mr. Graves throws his hand out to stop Newt.

“Please don’t,” he sighs and snaps his fingers.

There is a loud *pop* and out of thin air materializes a House-Elf. She is a wizened little thing with floppy ears and a neatly-pressed uniform. She takes one look at the mess and sets Newt with a face so unamused it’s almost as if he’s being scolded by his own mother.

“This way, Mr. Scamander,” calls Mr. Graves, not bothering to look back to see if Newt is following him out of the hall.

Newt rubs the back of his neck guiltily and positively does his best to stay clear of the House-Elf as he moves to keep up with Mr. Graves. He can feel her large eyes burn holes into the back of his head as he leaves. He keeps his head down to avoid the continuous stares of the others in the hall and reaches the exit just as Mr. Graves coat tail whips around the corner.

This really isn’t turning out to be his day.

Never in all his working career has Graves wanted to leave work early, but this is proving to be the day that just might break him.

With Seraphina absolutely refusing to listen to sense, his Aurors turning precipitously brainless and possibly dissenting, and the last hope they have for some kind of foot-up on this case running around the heart of America’s Magical Government with Merlin knows how many creatures stuffed into one briefcase, Graves is having all sorts of insights about his level of self-discipline and tolerance.

Scamander manages to follow Graves successfully back to the Magical Security Department without unleashing a fire-breathing dragon or a swarm of venomous insects. Graves considers this progress.

They walk past Graves’ main office to the very end of the hall. The portraits of past Aurors not asleep eye Scamander warily. Victoria James, the Director of Magical Security some generations ago, visibly sneers at them, her canvas wrinkling up in distaste.

“Such nonsense would never have happened when I was Director.” She says haughtily, turning her beak-nose up at Graves as he passes her overelaborate frame. Graves ignores her. That disillusioned oil-painting has some strange one-sided gamesmanship going on with him that Graves refuses to feed into by acknowledging.
“Don’t listen to that Harpy,” says the portrait of Senior Auror Inola on the opposite wall, famous for having turned down the position of Department Head no less than five times. Her eyes move fluidly past Graves to the man trailing behind him. “It gets so boring around here, and Nifflers are such lively, mischievous creatures. I would have loved to have seen one in my time.”

Easy enough for her to say as she’s a painting and didn’t have to deal with the fallout from the thieving little cretin.

Out of the corner of his eye, Graves watches as Scamander’s mouth quirks up in a slight smile at Auror Inola’s words before quickly ducking his head back down. Only because Graves knows better that he doesn’t think the man has some sort of neck injury preventing him from keeping his head up longer than a couple seconds.

They make it to the old office that once belong to Auror Jerimiah Codswick – a tenacious man that had the office long before Graves started at MACUSA as a Junior Auror and refused to give it up to condense into the more team-oriented office rooms until it was pried from his hands when he retired six years ago at one-hundred and eight.

It’s been left to gather dust ever since, but it will serve as a temporary space for Scamander.

Because it will be a cold day in Hell when Graves allows him one of the “official” offices over in Beast Ordinances. Oh no, Scamander was very much going to remain close by, right under Graves’ watchful eye.

Graves taps the door with his wand and it opens with puff of dust. Despite being rightfully livid about Scamander’s blundering antics, Graves lets himself feel a small… very, very small… pang of embarrassment at not having the office properly prepared, no matter how last-minute he reassigned it.

“It hasn’t been used in a few years,” Graves clears his throat, “I’ll make sure to have a House-Elf come by and clean it.”

“Oh… you don’t have to worry about that,” says Scamander as he moves next to Graves and peaks around the door to see into the office more fully. “I don’t mind a little mess.”

In a moment of weakness, Graves looks Heavenward. Of course Scamander wouldn’t mind the mess, considering how often he probably finds himself in the middle of them.

Regardless, Graves shakes his head. “It’s the principle of the thing, Mr. Scamander,” They step inside the secretary’s room that leads to another door for the actual office. There is only a desk and a chair, anything personal having been removed when Auror Codswick’s secretary changed departments.

Naturally, everything’s gone gray and spotted with dust and dirt. Little specks of powder dance throughout the stale air and it smells like moth-eaten books. In the far corner it looks as if a family of spiders have decided to make it their home with long, lacy webs that waft delicately from the ceiling.

Okay, perhaps a team of House-Elves. At least five. Maybe seven. Depending on how the main office looks.

Yet, oddly enough, Scamander doesn’t seem to mind the filth layered on every surface of the room. He walks ahead of Graves, steps careful and quiet, looking around with an expression of open interest and thoughtfulness, bright eyes tracing the simple crown molding where wall meets ceiling.

He keeps quiet as he makes his way to the main door and opens it. Even in the poor light with
Scamander blocking the inside, Graves can tell it’s not in any better condition than the secretary’s room.

Scamander whispers a quick *lumos* and the tip of his wand lights up. Yes. Graves can clearly see more of the same: cobwebs and a general sense of lacking in proper upkeep.

Briefcase in one hand and wand in the other, Scamander does a little spin in the center of the main office, the tail of his blue coat fanning out around him.

It’s bizarre, definitely, but Graves is kind enough to keep his thoughts to himself.

Scamander does a few full rotations before he finally stops and faces Graves. His coat twirls against his body and briefcase knocks gently against his leg. A few loose strands of Scamander’s fringe fall into his eyes, but that does nothing to block the unusual glow caught within them – blue and green and…

It’s the *Lumos* spell. The light from Scamander’s wand is just reflecting in his eyes. Nothing unusual about that.

“It’s perfect,” Scamander says, and his voice carries the softest suggestion of breathlessness from his spinning. “Thank you, Mr. Graves.”

Graves doesn’t say anything. He isn’t sure why he doesn’t say anything. Probably because there isn’t anything to say to that, and he isn’t one to fill up silence with unnecessary talking.

Eventually, the silence wins over Scamander’s tentative smile and the man’s gaze drifts elsewhere. It’s the longest Scamander has looked him in the eye, or at least relatively close to it.

“I…” Scamander starts and fails. He coughs and tries again. “I’m sorry, Mr. Graves… about the Niffler. He really isn’t dangerous, and it honestly was an accident that he got out.”

Graves glances to the inconspicuous briefcase held in Scamander’s hand, then to the man holding it. Realistically, it would be best to put this morning behind them. Scamander seems genuinely remorseful over the incident, and if he can assure Graves that it was merely a one-off, then Graves would be doing their future working relationship a favor by letting it go - as against his moral fiber as doing such a thing might be.

And while he doesn’t approve of Scamander… carrying his work around, not even a little bit – it feels like he’s a cat getting pet backwards just thinking about what’s inside that briefcase – Graves doesn’t need to agree with the man one-hundred percent so long as he does his job.

Graves opens his mouth, ready to accept Scamander’s apology and put things back on the right foot, when a twig with beady eyes pops up out from behind Scamander’s coat lapel.

“What is that.”

Scamander looks at Graves in confusion before glancing down. “Oh! That’s Pickett, my Bowtruckle.”

A Bowtruckle. Another creature outside Scamander’s case, free to run around Woolworth whenever it fancies, being worn like a piece of decorative celery. Did the Niffler even escape his briefcase, or did it jump off Scamander’s head because he was wearing it as a hat?

“Mr. Scamander, I want you to understand clearly,” The irritation comes back easily, fizzling down his neck and along his fingers, hardening his voice. The Bowtruckle cowers and hides back behind
the lapel. “That in my line of work, an apology is made after the damage has been done, and once
the damage has been done,” The inevitable heat stabs between his eyes. “It’s too late for an apology
to mean much of anything.”

“I…,” Scamander trails off, casting his eyes downward as if he’s interested in the woodgrain of the
floor. Scamander refusing to look him in the eye, something Graves sees far too often in criminals
struggling to lie, is beginning to dig under his skin.

“Do you know why you’re here, Mr. Scamander?” Does this man understand the urgency? The
severity of the situation? “I don’t know how much Madame Picquery briefed you on, but I’ll tell you
now: you’re here because there may be a beast magical in nature causing havoc in New York City.
So far it has leveled five buildings in two months, and two days ago a No-Maj died because of it, and
we’re no closer to finding it now than we were when this all started. I’ve been doing this long
enough to know that when things aren’t taken care of, they escalate, and I don’t want this escalating
any further.”

Graves takes a breath, because this is the important part – the part that pertains to Scamander
specifically. “The last thing I need is you going off and aggravating the situation because you’ve
decided certain rules don’t apply to you.”

There is a new, tense silence now with Scamander on one side of the doorway in the office, and
Graves on the other side of the doorway, still in the secretary’s room.

“I do understand, Mr. Graves,” Scamander starts. His head is still bowed, and his voice almost too
soft, but there is something unmovable underneath it. “I want to help you, all of you, and the creature
too. I take my work as a Magizoologist just as seriously as I believe you take your work as Director.”
From what he’s seen, Graves seriously doubts that.

As if sensing what he’s thinking, Scamander raises his head, his face both serious and gentle. “You
may not believe me, but I hope that in working together, I can show you.”

Graves wishes he could believe him, if only for a guarantee that they’d finally go a step forward in
their case, not three steps back. But Graves isn’t prone to wishful thinking. It ends up wasting
valuable time.

“Well, Mr. Scamander,” and Graves is stuck firmly between anger and exhaustion, “We shall see.”

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