Five Times Newt Helped Graves, and One Time Graves Returned the Favour

by arrenkae

Summary

Newt just wants to help, but he doesn't always ask for it himself.
Chapter 1

1.

After the events of the New York subway collapse, one question remained: Where was the real Percival Graves?

A panic had flooded through the American wizarding community at the realization that a dark wizard had managed to fool experienced aurors and infiltrate the highest levels of MACUSA. Anyone could be a suspect.

Grindelwald was held in a high-security holding cell in the basement. It was bare concrete and iron and flooded with an intense white light that seemed to strip bare everything to its elements. He sat, bound to a chair, and smiled and smiled and said nothing.

Outside the shield-wall of charms and hexes, Newt and Tina were in conversation. She paced back and forth over the same stretch of floor.

"We have to find Graves," she said, "Or Grindelwald's already won! Look at him, he's loving this!"

The man had resisted hours of interrogation by MACUSA's best aurors. Even Tina had tried the strongest spells she knew but all for nothing. He'd just grinned at her and spat: "So you're MACUSA's guard dog. Not a lot of bite, dear."

Newt sat across from the holding cell and watched the dark wizard. For an instant, it seemed as if he looked up at Newt and held eye contact. As if all the concealment charms had failed. But then the moment passed.

An idea suddenly occurred to Newt and he stopped fidgeting and sat up straight. "Tina," he said. She stopped mid-stride and stared at him.

"What?"

"Do we - his boots - maybe we could..."

"You're babbling again."

"Do we have anything that belongs to Graves?"

"Just the stuff in his apartment."

"But what about his scent? His hair?"

She squinted.

"Do you mean the polyjuice potion that Grindelwald made?"

"That might do!"

Newt sprang to his feet and grabbed his suitcase. He began to open it.

"What is it you're suggesting?" Tina asked.

Newt reached an arm inside the case until he was buried down to the shoulder. "There you are... ah!"
He held aloft the Niffler by the scruff of its neck. It wriggled and protested.

"Now, hang on, you," he said, "I've got a job for you. If you can find someone for me, I'll give you three gold bars and some occamy eggs. Deal?"

Its beady eyes widened at the prospect. That was a deal. Once they had gone upstairs to the evidence rooms and got ahold of the potion, Newt uncorked the bottle and let the Niffler smell it.

At once it sprang to life and began roaming around, its pink whiskers brushing against the floor. Once it had found the scent it darted off and Newt and Tina had to run to catch up with it.

Stone-faced aurors in long leather coats watched them go past in surprise. Both Newt and Tina had expected the trail to lead outside MACUSA. But it didn't. They followed the Niffler up a flight of stairs. Up the elevator and all the way to the top of the building. Down a long hallway, a right turn, a left turn, and then...

The Niffler was scrabbling at the closed wooden door with a golden nameplate that read P. GRAVES.

Tina's shoulders slumped.

"Oh, this is useless," she said, "He's only lead us to the office..."

"Don't give up hope," said Newt, as he began to push the door open. The instant it was a tiny bit ajar the Niffler squeezed its round body through the impossibly small gap. Tia and Newt followed after.

Inside, Graves' office was spartan. The carpet was moss green and dark wood walls rose to a vaulted ceiling. The only furniture was a chair, desk, and a bookshelf filled with volumes on magical law. The desk contained a golden quill in its stand and a stack of paperwork. It was utterly impersonal. The only nod to the occupant's character was a small silver gilt box.

It was this that the Niffler was now crawling over and sniffing at. It held it up triumphantly.

"Really?" said Tina, "It just found the one shiny thing in the room."

"Really. I'm certain."

Tina gestured with her wand in the motion of a simple unlocking charm. It didn't work. Then she tried a more complicated unlock that was standard for aurors. This one bit back.

She ducked as a curse rebounded and hit the wall where it sizzled into the wood.

"You may be right... You know, now that I think about it, Graves didn't have this thing in here until a few months ago. He said it was his grandfather's or something, but..."

They spent the next few hours trying to unlock it. A whole team of specialists were called in to try and undo the curses and locks that had been placed on it without setting off any more of them. At least one auror was now sitting in the medical bay with a swollen face due to a rebounding spell.

Finally the last of the spells were lifted and the silver box opened with a click. Everyone stood back as the lid opened.

Inside the little silver box was another mahogany box. Behind another wall of spells, it contained a shabby walnut box, smaller than before, and within that was a tiny silver egg.
"He's in there," said Newt.

"How can you be certain?" asked Picquery, who was observing the procedure, "After all of our techniques have failed to find him?"

"Nifflers are excellent finders," he replied, "You should consider working with them instead of exterminating them, m'am."

Newt lifted the egg up. On one side of the elaborate surface was a tiny window. As he peered inside he could see a dark room with a huddled figure in the center.

"I've found him," he said.

"What do we do with it?"

"The same thing you'd do with any other egg, I suppose," said Newt, and cracked it open.

A dark smoke billowed out, obscuring the room for an instant, and then subsided. Lying on the floor was the body of Percival Graves, emaciated, naked, and covered in dirt. For a moment Newt thought he was dead. But then he staggered to his feet. As some of the aurors moved in towards him, he startled.

With a wordless gesture he snatched one of their wands out of the air and held it out like a weapon.

"Get away!" he shouted.

He was panting and shaking and the whites of his eyes gleamed out of the bloodied darkness of his face. His gaze darted about the room.

In an instant the other aurors in the room had brandished their wands ready to stun.

Newt stepped in front of them.

"Stop! Stop it!" he cried, "There's no need for this! Nobody is fighting anybody right now."

Then he turned to Graves and, with his hands raised, took a single step forward. The man tensed and his hand wavered as if to stun him.

He approached Graves as he would a frightened animal. They always appreciated a greeting on their terms.

Newt put his wand in his pocket, ever so slowly, and then withdrew his hand, and stretched it out, palm open in a gesture of greeting. He gave a polite smile.

"Good day, Mr Graves," he said, "Newt Scamander. It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance."

The reaction from Graves was immediate.

His face changed, his breathing softened and some of the fear faded. Something of the old professional returned to him.

Graves' face was a mask as he stepped forwards and shook Newt's hand. "Likewise," he said hoarsely.

A moment later the handshake turned into an awkward embrace as Graves stumbled forwards and collapsed against Newt's shoulder. He was sobbing.
Newt stood quite still as a crowd of aurors and nurses and doctors surrounded them. Perhaps it had been the unexpected simple greeting, a kind word that had diffused the situation, or perhaps just simple exhaustion. Newt was a bit worried that he'd broken him.
Chapter 2

2.

Soon after Graves was found, it became clear that not all was well. Grindelwald had ensured that once he was found there would be further punishment. He'd implanted a parasitic spell into the man, so that with every breath Graves took, Grindelwald grew stronger.

Eventually, it was Tina who managed to find the key to reversing it. On the second week of the illness his fever broke. He lay there bedbound and in limbo.

When Newt heard he was awake at last he decided to visit and brought with him a container of soup.

The hospital had pale, marble walls and a ceiling that was shifted into a soft blue sky. Graves occupied a private bed shuttered behind a curtain. The sheets were pulled up to his chin and he lay so still that he almost seemed dead.

Newt approached with soft steps and set the container to one side next to the bed.

"Hello," he murmured.

Graves turned his head on the pillow to look at him and even that motion seemed to take an enormous effort. His lips were pale and there were dark circles under his eyes.

"How are you feeling?" Newt asked.

"Sick. Tired. Doesn't matter how much I sleep..." He gave a weak shrug. "Thank you, all the same."

"Maybe I can help with that. I brought you some soup," Newt said. "It's actually my own recipe, one I invented when I was in Peru... I was stranded for a few days on an expedition and I was quite ill, so I had to improvise..."

Graves gave a hoarse laugh.

"You're rambling. How is soup going to help?"

"Sorry, I do that sometimes... here it is. I should warn you, it tastes vile, but it does wonders."

He handed the container over and removed the lid.

The instant the steam wafted out and hit his nose, Graves almost gagged at the smell.

"Told you. It's not pretty but it does help."

Graves looked deeply skeptical but he still raised the bowl and managed to take a hesitant sip. Then another, and another. Slowly but with each swallow gaining strength. Then he lifted it and drained the whole thing until only the dregs remained. They glinted silver at the bottom.

He sat back on the pillow and closed his eyes, and he mumbled something too soft for Newt to hear.

Newt leaned in closer.

"What is it?"
"Thank you. For when you - you spoke to me."

"That's quite all right."

A hand fumbled for his wrist.

"No. You don't know what that meant to me, it was like..." He struggled to form words and sank back onto the bed.

"Like hearing for the first time," said Newt, in a softer tone. "I have some idea."

"How do you..."

The question drifted off. A moment later his head sank back onto the pillow and his eyes closed. He was asleep - a true, deep and dreamless sleep. Already his brow was smoothing and the creases of worry were fading.

Newt took the empty bowl and left. When he returned some time later the nurses all demanded his recipe. Mr Graves, they said, was looking positively refreshed.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

this thing is basically my excuse to cram as many of my favourite fanfic tropes into one story

3.

Newt returned to England soon after. He roamed through Egypt and Morocco. He wrote a book and published it. And then, a year afterwards, he went back to New York, to visit Tina and Queenie.

How they had managed to find a flat directly opposite Jacob Kowalski's new bakery, he didn't ask, although he suspected Picquery was deliberately turning a blind eye to it. Queenie 'dropped by' every day in an attempt to woo poor Jacob, who remained flustered and oblivious. And Tina was doing much better after having got her old job back.

On his third day in New York, Tina took him through the city for a leisurely tour which he hadn't had the luxury of doing last time.

They moved through the bustle of Harlem, stopping off at various jazz bars and underground wizarding haunts. She showed him their version of the Floo network that ran parallel to the subway system. Already it seemed more skyscrapers had grown up since he'd been gone; like metal trees unearthed through the concrete. The crowds and the noise and the smoke of industry were almost too much for him.

However, the city also had Central Park, so he had to grudgingly admit it wasn't all bad. He was equally fascinated by the zoo but Tina dragged him along past it.

"Absolutely not," she said, "There's no time, Newt, I need to return to work or they'll think I've fallen in a manhole."

"Next time?" he said, looking at her hopefully.

She looked at his face and her hard expression melted.

"Oh, all right. Tomorrow, then."

Their path took them to MACUSA headquarters; the grey brick and marble building that towered over everything. As they were going up the steps towards the lobby, a man passed them. Newt, being Newt, was momentarily distracted by the sight of a No-Maj feeding a pigeon breadcrumbs, and he didn't look where he was going.

They collided. The man stumbled, his bad leg giving way. The pile of parchment he'd been carrying spilled all over the stairs.

"Oh my goodness! I'm so sorry!" Newt cried, and bent down to pick them up. Some more of them slipped from his grasp and it seemed like he was making everything worse. "Really, I'm sorry, I can help..." he babbled.
As he reached up to hand back the papers, he went still. So did the other man. It was Percival Graves.

Slowly, Newt rose to his feet and held out the parchment which was now in an untidy stack.

In a hesitant motion, Graves reached out and took them.

"Thank you," he said at last.

Graves looked different. Compared to Grindelwald's sleek impression, the real Graves was much more weatherbeaten at the edges, his shoes scuffed with use and there was wear at the edges of his coat. The experience seemed to have aged him several years and added more streaks of silver to his hair and lines to his face.

"It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance again, Mr Scamander," said Graves in a solemn tone.

His eyes held a distant expression that Newt had seen before in other faces - as if his ordeal had been days ago instead of years.

"Likewise," Newt replied, and not wanting to be unfriendly, he added: "Are - are you well?"

"Better," said Graves, "Thanks to you, of course. I never did get to thank you properly for your help."

"Oh, that was all the aurors, and Tina here, they figured out the locking mechanisms..."

Graves looked at her and Tina stood a little straighter to attention. "Sir."

"Miss Goldstein of course is a skilled witch and one of my best aurors," said Graves, nodding his thanks to her. She went pink. "But without your creatures, they wouldn't have found me. Miss Goldstein told me how it happened."

Newt let out a nervous little laugh. "Oh, well, she's exaggerated a bit..."

"Nonsense," said Graves, "I insist on thanking you both. This afternoon, perhaps, I can treat you to some food. Goldstein, do you know of anywhere decent?"

Tina smiled. "I think I know just the place, sir!"

So some hours later, Newt found himself having afternoon tea with Percival Graves. They went to Kowalski's Bakery, which was now a semi-acceptable haunt for the wizarding community.

Graves ordered a coffee, black and bitter, and Tina ordered one with plenty of frothy milk and one of the pastry specials. Newt ordered a pastry puffskein filled with thick cream and a cup of tea.

They sat and talked. Graves and Tina discussed auror business at first. But even as he was talking to Tina, Newt could feel the man studying him. The weight of his gaze was almost palpable.

At last his attention turned fully to Newt, who was all of a sudden aware of just how much mess he'd gotten everywhere and brushed some crumbs off his face.

"What brings you to New York again, Mr Scamander?"

"I published a book," he said, through a mouthful of pastry. "And I promised Tina and Queenie I'd give them a copy, so..."
"What's your book about?" Graves asked. And that was exactly the right question, because Newt loved nothing more than to talk about his book. He launched into an explanation of all the different classifications of magical creatures he had planned. It was halfway through that he realised that he was rambling again.

"...oh dear, I've bored you. Sorry."

"Don't be. I'd like to read it," said Graves.

Newt went pink. "Really?"

"You've managed to understand more about these beasts than most wizards ever have."

Newt flushed at the compliment.

"Well... it's just a matter of listening, I suppose... Other people could do it too..."

"But they don't try like you do. And for that I owe you my life."

"As I said before, I've been meaning to thank the both of you," said Graves, "You, Miss Goldstein - you were one of the few who even noticed something was wrong. I often think of how... so many people never realised that something was wrong. You were perceptive, and it almost cost you your career. I'm sorry."

Tina put down her coffee with a faint expression of horror. "... Sir, there's no need to apologize."

Graves made a dismissive gesture. "Please, Miss Goldstein, indulge me. And you, Mr Scamander."

Newt avoided that piercing gaze which now seemed intent on cataloging him.

"Without your intervention I would have been locked in there indefinitely. I've wanted to thank you ever since I left the hospital, but you'd already gone back to England. I don't blame you for not wanting to return."

"I like America more since I'm not being arrested," said Newt, "It's not all bad here. You have a zoo."

That actually made Graves smile. It was the briefest of expressions, like a flash of lightning in a dark sky.

"Perhaps I can give you an excuse to stay?"

Newt's gaze darted to the floor. "Oh, I don't intend to stay that long..."

Graves was silent and something in him seemed to grow distant all of a sudden. Newt wasn't sure what he'd said wrong. Sometimes the meaning behind other people's words fell through his hands like water.

Tina leaned in with a bright smile. "Oh, but Newt, you promised me you'd stay for at least a month! Isn't that right?"

"I - I did?"

She nodded and he felt her foot nudge his under the table. He glanced at her then at Graves, wide-eyed and bewildered.
"Er, I suppose..."

"Plenty of time for you to try some coffee, then! Perhaps you can persuade him, sir? You could even show him the zoo!"

There was another of Graves faint smiles. "Perhaps I can. Oh, and Mr Scamander?"

"Yes?"

"You, ah, missed a spot..." Graves gestured to his face.

Newt swiped a bit of cream away and grinned. "Sorry."
Chapter 4

4.

The next time Newt helped Graves, he was called over to New York by MACUSA. He was summoned all the way to the top of the building and into Madam Picquery's office.

Gold-trimmed windows overlooked a stunning view of the embryonic New York skyline. Thick swathes of golden sunlight poured into the room even through the smoky tinting on the glass. Picquery was silhouetted behind her desk, tall and regal in pinstripe grey.

Standing to one side of the room was Percival Graves. He was at attention, with his back straight and hands clasped in front, and carefully not making eye contact with Newt. He was tempted to say hello or ask him if he was well but suspected Picquery would disapprove.

"We need your expertise," Picquery said, "We've exhausted most deliberate spell-based methods, and now we're beginning to think that a creature could be behind these attacks."

"Why do you think it's a creature?" Newt asked.

"We have five No-Maj victims, drained of their essence, each within a seven-mile radius of each other. They all live along the east line of the subway. There's magical residue at the scenes, but according to my experts, it doesn't correspond to any known spell, and there are impressions of teeth on their arms. If it's a deliberate fake it's a very convincing one."

"Of course I'd be happy to help."

Picquery gestured to Graves. "Mr Graves here will be working alongside you, as my expert in magical law. He recommended you highly, Mr Scamander, and he assures me you are an accomplished wizard."

Newt blushed and looked away. "Possibly an exaggeration, m'am, but I'll do my best to live up to it."

They went first to examine the bodies, which had been kept in a state of magical preservation. Newt looked them over carefully. He wasn't squeamish when it came to blood or death. These were things common to the animal world and it was no different for people.

As he examined the teeth marks, he said: "I think your instincts were right. This isn't the work of a wizard."

"What's your best guess?" asked Graves.

"I believe it's a sort of - a Yolqui," said Newt excitedly, "They're from South America, and I've never seen one in the wild before. They usually live in jungles and prey on birds and monkeys... But if one went to this city, it would have the whole subway to roam and no natural predators! It could grow bigger than a person! They're incredible creatures, really..."

He trailed off because he realised Graves was staring at him with an inscrutable expression.

"Of course, that's just a theory," he added.

"It's the best guess we've got. Let's go exploring."

They tracked the creature to its sixth victim, and its nest in the New York subway system.
Down an abandoned construction tunnel they found faint spider-like webs of silver stuff. The further in they went it got thicker and thicker, like spun sugar. Touching it left a strange buzzing feeling on his fingers. The little light that Graves had conjured floated a few feet ahead of them.

The Yolqui was at the end of the tunnel. It was a great hulking shape perched in a corner. With its flat face and long arms it resembled a sloth. Its spindly fingers were constantly moving as it spun more webbing. Hanging from the ceiling was a human-sized cocoon that writhed and twitched. "Remarkable," said Newt stepping closer.

"Careful- " Graves started to warn him, but it came too late. The instant Newt's foot touched one of the big lines of webbing, the yolqui moved. For such an awkward looking creature it moved fast. It leaped down from its corner with a hiss and bowled him over. Its long hands shot out and grabbed him. Feelers protruded from its back.

For the first time in a very long career, Graves had no idea what to do.

Luckily, the instant the feelers touched Newt's skin in an attempt to drain him, they recoiled with a shriek as if burned. The creature backed away. That gave Graves enough time to stun it. Once it was still with a binding charm, Graves walked over to Newt and helped him to his feet.

"I don't know what you did to it," he said, "But be more careful next time. That 'incredible' creature could have killed you."

"You needn't worry about me," said Newt. His attention turned now to the captive yolqui and his eyes grew round. "I had no idea they could grow so big. Look at the silver patterning on his fur... It's like a thumbprint, you know..."

"It must be killed," said Graves, raising his wand, "That was Picquery's request."

"No!" Newt cried, and put a hand on his arm to stop him. Graves looked at it in surprise.

"Please," said Newt, "You don't need to kill it! It's such a waste..."

"It's already got a taste for humans, and it's already tried to hurt you-"

"Just consider! These things drain energy. With controlled exposure, you could use them to subdue things like excess Legilimency, or lycanthropy. It could help people! Or you could even use it to stop dark wizards..."

Graves frowned. "Dammit, Newt, stop making reasonable arguments."

"Please. I can rehabilitate it. It hasn't done anything wrong, it doesn't even know what it's doing. It's not... malicious or cruel! Not like people."

Newt looked at him with a pleading expression.

Graves sighed deeply, closed his eyes, and lowered his wand.

"Fine. But you'll have to do most of the explaining to Picquery."

Newt beamed at him and then clapped him around the shoulder in a hug. "Oh, thank you! Thank you!"

"Yes, yes, all right, don't get too enthusiastic, Mr Scamander. I can't guarantee she'll agree with you."
"Please, call me Newt!"

Graves looked up at the ceiling. "Newt, then. Aren't we forgetting something?"

He looked up at the cocoon. "Ah, right. Very unfortunate. We'd better cut the poor fellow down."
And so they returned to Picquery with a No-Maj and a live yolqui the size of a car in tow.
Newt revisited New York many times after that as Madam Picquery called on his expertise.

He was pleased to see that they had started adopting his methods; working with the creatures rather than destroying them.

He was also pleased to be working with Graves more often. Something about the man had softened over time - people now greeted him in the halls rather than scurrying out of his way, and there were flashes of humour that Grindelwald had never been able to replicate. He had the air of an old guard dog who was watchful but no longer inclined to bite.

In other ways he hadn't changed at all. For one thing, he was still pedantic about magical law. "That's technically illegal, Newt," was his favourite phrase.

And he still worked ridiculously long hours. By the time the rest of the department had left, Graves would still be out on patrol or in his office working. The only one who left later than he did was Picquery. Newt had caught him several times on his lunch break signing papers. He'd practically had to slap it out of his hand and force the man to sit down for a minute and eat.

Despite everything, Newt had grown to like him. He sensed a core of decency in the man. Perhaps it was the prospect of almost dying that had sparked this change, or the unfortunate realisation that so many of his coworkers had failed to notice that he had been replaced.

Even Tina commented on the change as they sat together one evening after dinner with Jacob and Queenie.

"I actually heard him humming the other day," she said, "Humming a tune! It's almost scarier than the old Graves!"

Queenie laughed. "What on earth have you done to him, Newt?"

Newt stared at her. "What have I done? Don't blame me!"

"He does have a soft spot for you," said Queenie, with that sly tilt of her head and little smile. Newt was positive that if she'd been at Hogwarts she would've been sorted straight into Slytherin.

He just shrugged and mumbled something vague as he passed Jacob the caramel pie, for there was no use in arguing with Queenie.

Newt banished the idea from his mind, until one late evening at the department. Almost everyone else had left the building. He was sneaking down the corridor towards Graves' office with a coffee in a ceramic container and a pastry shaped like a Niffler. He pushed the door open and peered in and stopped at the sight. Graves was at his desk, slumped over and dozing quietly. A stack of unfinished papers rested by his head.
Even the office had changed in a subtle way. It still belonged to Graves, but it felt a little more lived-in. His coat hung by the door. On the bookshelf rested a portrait of his long dead parents in the robes of aurors. On his desk, instead of the hideous box, there was a golden spyglass that Newt had given him as a souvenir from his travels.

Newt tiptoed into the room. He intended to just put the pastry and coffee on the desk and leave, but he felt pulled inside by some compulsion. With soft footfalls he crept closer and closer until he was standing next to him. He set the coffee down on the desk and stopped to observe.

It was a rare sight to see Graves at rest - he was always in motion and attacking a project. His face looked peaceful in sleep with the etched lines of tension smoothed away. Newt decided that the streaks of silver in his hair suited him. It made him look distinguished.

A rush of affection filled him that he hadn't expected.

He reached out a hand and brushed a stray wisp off his forehead, and that was his mistake. At the contact, Graves stirred, and his breathing became uneven.

Newt panicked and tried to move away but in his haste he knocked over the spyglass. It thudded to the floor and rolled across the carpet. He winced at the sound.

"Newt. I didn't hear you come in."

Graves sat up and was focused on him, the bleariness clearing from his expression and growing sharper by the second.

"You, ah, dozed off, I just thought I'd drop by and - and..." Newt gestured at the food.

Graves looked at it and a smile spread across his face when he saw the Niffler.

"Ah! This is exactly what I needed. Coffee and your company. You're a rare gem, Newt."

"You must be joking, I'm hardly adequate..." Newt said, a flush beginning to creep up his neck. He was horribly aware of how red he was turning. And oh no, now Graves was making direct eye contact and smiling at him, and Newt had to look away.

"I meant it," said Graves in a softer tone, "Do you always have such trouble accepting compliments? Or is it just me?"

His tone was light but all of a sudden Newt felt as though the conversation had turned on a knife edge.

"No, no, no," he said quickly, "I just - it's not that I don't enjoy your company, Mr Graves, I do - that is to say, I probably enjoy it too much - um -"

"Percival."

"What?" Newt blinked.

"Please, call me Percival. Allow me to thank you. A gift for a gift."

He was aware of a soft touch at his wrist and realised that Graves hand had enclosed around his in a loose grasp. It felt like the warmth was travelling between them. There was a part of him that hungered to lean into the contact. But another part of him panicked.

And the small, nasty voice in the back of his mind said: **Why would he ever want you? Stupid boy.**
Newt affected innocence as he said: "Oh, there's no need! But if you insist, don't forget Tina. Maybe we could make a meal of it, and invite the Goldsteins?"

He withdrew his wrist from the other man's grasp.

Something in Graves face was shuttered off to him now. But he wasn't angry or bitter, not how Newt had been expecting. Just a faint, cold sadness, which was somehow worse.

"Yes, that does sound like a fine plan," said Graves in a distant tone. "Thursday, perhaps?"

Newt blathered out something about dates and times that he was certain he'd forget and made an excuse to flee the room.

There was a part of him, too, that felt disappointed. Later it was hard not to forget details like the warmth of a hand on his wrist, and a scent that seemed to curl around him like a leather glove on a cold day.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

thanks everyone for reading! sorry i keep finding more things to nitpick i solemnly swear i will stop editing now.

+1

Newt was once again summoned to assist. They had managed to capture Credence - or what remained of him. He existed in an unstable state in the holding cells, at one point nothing but an amorphous roaring fog that pushed at the wards that held him, and at other times the thin shade of a boy who sat with his knees pulled to his chest.

It seemed to Graves that Newt was affected when it came to this particular case. He'd known him long enough now to tell when something was bothering him. He had grown jittery and more distracted than usual and wouldn't make eye contact with anyone. His face had taken on that drawn, pinched look from a lack of sleep.

Graves tried not to worry - he didn't want to push his concern onto Newt where it wasn't wanted - but one day Queenie stopped by his office.

He set down his paper in surprise and stood to greet her.

"Miss Goldstein. Is something the matter?"

"Oh, me, I'm fine," she said, with a cheerful smile, but the next instant it shifted to a worried expression. "I just came to give you some advice."

"Of course," he said, with a growing frown, and moved to shut the door. He sensed this was something confidential.

"What advice do you think I need?" he asked.

"You oughta keep an eye on Newt. That's all."

"Is there something I should know?"

She shifted uncomfortable from foot to foot. "Look, people don't like me meddling too much. So I try not to... but I want to help. So this is me helping. It can't come from me, it's gotta come from him. Just... look out for him, Mr Graves."

He nodded. "I'll keep it in mind. Thank you."

She flitted over to him and kissed him on the cheek. For a moment he was enveloped by a cloud of perfume, and then she moved back over to the door.

Later that day he approached Newt at lunch time and tried to take a direct approach.

"Are you all right?" Graves asked.
Newt blinked, wide-eyed and surprised.

"What do you mean?"

"Look, I..." Graves ran a hand through his hair. "I know you were involved in the case with the boy before. These things can be difficult, even for people who've worked as aurors for decades. There's no shame in working on something else..."

"No, no, no," said Newt with a strained smile, "I'm always happy to help. And I want to help Credence."

It was one of those rare moments where his selflessness became an irritation.

So Credence's case continued with Newt assisting. Newt had advised them to wait it out rather than trying to separate the obscurus straight away, and that he would ask for advice from someone in Britain - someone who he said knew more than him about the creatures. He said that it was possible for an obscurus to live and survive, if only the parasite could be severed and contained separately.

But debate still raged amongst the team of aurors.

Some of them insisted that it should be destroyed. With Grindelwald escaped and at large, its existence was a danger to the entire wizarding community. What if it got loose? What if Grindelwald tried to get it? Could it ever be controlled? Sometimes Graves felt like he was the only one defending Newt's position. It escalated to yelling matches and Picquery calling for order.

Graves had never see the department so on edge and at war with itself. And he had never seen Newt so tense before, either.

Then, of course, Newt went missing.

He didn't show up to lunch, wasn't there at Graves' office in the morning, and finally was absent at the meeting with Picquery.

Graves started the search himself. He couldn't rest while Newt was missing and it was impossible for him to concentrate on anything else.

He visited familiar haunts - the bakery, the museum, Central Park - to no avail. But it was finally, as he slipped into Jacob Kowalski's apartment unnoticed, that he found the suitcase. It looked innocuous resting on the table. He knew that it was the place that Newt would feel most safe.

He braced himself and stepped down inside.

The chaos within was exactly as Newt had left it. Piles and piles of books. Shelves crammed with vials and bottles. Plants hanging from the ceiling. On the desk there was a cup of half-empty tea that had gone cold. There were no clues in Newt's scattered papers and notes. Only more detailed zoological information. Graves wasn't sure if this was a normal level of disorganised for him.

As he got deeper into the space his unease grew. He got the feeling of being watched. With each footstep out the door and into the habitats, he could sense the observant eyes of the residents. One by one, they slunk into view, all of them sizing him up.
He felt a soft tug on his leg and, looking down, saw a green flash of something. He recognized the bowtruckle that rode around Newt's coat pockets.

"Where is he?" he said aloud, half to the creatures, half to himself. One of the mooncalves nuzzled at his palm. They were hungry, he realised, and that made him worried. Newt would never abandon his creatures.

He continued further into the space, and made his way through each of the habitats. For a while he was lost in amazement at what Newt had created. It was nothing short of incredible.

But the only inhabitants he found were the creatures.

A chill wind pricked at his skin. Graves turned, and saw a gap in the sky, as if a piece of reality itself had folded back. There was a strange buzzing in the back of his head that he recognised as an intense concentration of magic. Auror's instinct drew him onwards. It felt as if he was being pulled inside the doorway.

The frozen waste beyond was bare - save for one thing. His mouth fell open at the sight. An obscurus. A cloud of constantly shifting darkness. It looked wrong to his eyes. Like a tear in the world itself. The only thing that kept it from expanding and swallowing up the room and the suitcase and everything in it was the bubble that contained it. The obscurus pressed against the boundary as if it sensed his presence and was reaching out to him.

He felt drawn forward by an inexorable force. The same force that drew human beings to open flames and the edges of cliffs.

Step by step, closer and closer. And the obscurus moved, too, shifting forwards and pressing against the bubble. He could feel the buzzing under his skin and hear a strange whispering. It sounded like a crowded room in the distance.

Even without eyes or ears it was aware of him.

He swallowed and reached out a finger to touch the edge of the bubble. The obscurus surged forwards and enveloped him.

He was aware of the feel of it shifting over him like a cold mist, and the next instant, his own perception was gone. He was hit by a wall of images. A jumble of sights and sounds and feelings that rushed in at once.

A dark room with a single high window and birds that perched on the ledge.

A wooden chair.

The feel of a strap digging into his wrist.

The feel of water in his nose and mouth and burning as he choked. Resurfacing only to be shoved back down again.

The crack of his head against stone tiles.

A dead bird plucked clean of its feathers.

Running, running, running until his lungs burned. Incoherent screaming.

A forest.
The unstable reflection of a child staring back at him from a stagnant pool of water. A thin, pinched face dark with bruises.

Then the thing had passed over and through him. He staggered backwards and almost fell. The pressure of his skin was unbearable and his own heartbeat felt foreign. He drew in deep lungfuls of cold air.

The obscurus was now behind him, still shifting, still observing. It had been like a shark nudging a swimmer in the water, more out of curiosity than hunger. As if it had sensed his discomfort.

Graves realised they were more than impressions. They were memories. So vivid that they felt like his own, though he knew none of it had happened to him. He recognized nothing in them, save for the boy in the reflection.

"Newt..." he said aloud.

As if summoned, there were footsteps behind him.

"Step back." He had never heard that tone of command before.

Graves turned and raised his hands.

Newt stood in the doorway. He looked rain-damp and disheveled with mud on the edges of his coat and his hair dripping. There was no politeness left in his face. He just stared Graves down with his hands tucked deep in his pockets and shoulders hunched like some awkward vulture.

"Step back," he repeated.

Graves put more distance between himself and the obscurus which was still shifting.

"Did it hurt you?" Newt asked in a gentler tone.

Graves cleared his throat and spoke: "No. I don't think it wanted to hurt me. I was looking for you... I saw..." Graves tried to form words for what it was that he'd seen. He was still trying to process the feeling. "Where have you been? Why didn't you tell me you have an obscurus in your care? I was worried."

Newt looked at the floor.

"I was visiting an old friend who might be able to help Credence. I - I rather lost track of the time, I'm sorry. We should get back."

Newt was not good at deflection. Graves pointed to the sentient cloud of darkness hovering between them.

"And that?"

"Picquery knows," said Newt, "But I didn't tell her everything."

"You didn't tell me everything either. Did you?" said Graves.

"I told you that I knew it was possible for an obscurus to survive outside its host, but I never told you how."

He let out a shaking breath. The obscurus hovered closer to Newt, resting alongside him but never quite touching, and billowing softly against the edges of its prison. At certain angles it almost
appeared friendly, even beautiful, in the way a jellyfish was beautiful.

"Newt..." said Graves, "What are you saying?"

"It's mine," he said.

"You mean you were... Like Credence."

"Similar, yes. I can't stand to watch him - I know the measures are necessary, but it just - it reminds me."

"How do you...?" Graves asked.

"Do magic?" Newt supplied. "I have control over it now. I can do almost anything except a Patronus charm. But Dementors can't do much to me anyway."

There was only silence and the cold wind. Graves had many questions and none of them he wanted to know the answers to. He didn't want to think of the boy he had seen.

Newt's gaze darted towards the obscurus. His expression had grown cool and distant. He continued talking as if he wanted to fill the space.

"I suppose it's why I've always preferred animals to people. I owe a debt to Professor Dumbledore... he helped me. When I talked to him today he seemed optimistic. Maybe he could help Credence. He knows more than anyone about separating soul from body..."

Graves said nothing.

Newt turned away, back through the doorway, and Graves followed after like a dog on a leash. He moved through each of the habitats, stopping one by one to feed and greet the animals, who ran to him. His movements were a ritual. His mind was a thousand miles elsewhere and untouchable.

At last, he moved back inside, and Graves followed after. Newt tugged off his coat and hung it up. He pottered around, moving papers and pencils with an air of distraction.

He still had not looked back.

"I expect you'll want nothing to do with me," he said as if he'd rehearsed it a hundred times, "Don't worry. I'll help on the case, as much as I can, and then I won't bother you anymore. I'm planning to head to Australia, there's a creature called a bunyip that I want to find..."

He had already turned away and had stepped onto the first rung of the ladder.

Graves approached with soft steps. One, two, three, four. He stopped an arm's length away. If there was anything he had learned from Newt, it was that people - like creatures - liked to be greeted on their own terms.

"You don't have to go," said Graves, "You could stay."

He was itching to reach out and touch.

"Why?" said Newt, finally turning around.

Graves swallowed. "Because... because we need your help. You're a brilliant expert, Newt, you're one of the smartest and kindest people I know. The department needs you. I need you. We work well together, don't we?"
"Aren't you angry?" Newt's eyes darted to his face and then away again.

"A bit," he answered, "But mostly I'm worried about you. I'd miss you if you left."

A bitter smile crossed Newt's face. "You don't mean that." It occurred to Graves that Newt believed that. He was convinced that nobody cared.

"I do mean it," said Graves, placing a hand on Newt's shoulder. Just resting lightly. Even that felt like a risk and he saw Newt's eyes widen. "Please. I want to help."

Newt shut his eyes for a moment, as if he found the contact painful. He looked at Graves and it was the first time he'd made eye contact.

"This isn't something you nor I can fix," he said, "It's contained, not cured."

"No, I can't fix it," Graves murmured, "Perhaps I can cheer you up. You've done so much for me, at least let me return the favour."

He approached Newt slowly, carefully, as one would a skittish animal. Reached out a hand to tilt his chin up and look at him. Finally he could see that Newt was just as devastated at the prospect of leaving as he was. If only he had an excuse to stay.

"Just a favour," he said, "You can take it or leave it."

His fingers brushed Newt's jaw and travelled across his cheek. He was sure that at any moment the man would flee. But he didn't.

Graves crossed the distance between them and cradled Newt's face between his hands and kissed him. It was the barest, softest brush of lips. It was all that he dared. Then he drew away to give him space. Newt let out a sigh.

His eyes had closed and Graves took advantage of the moment just to drink in all the details of his face and commit them to memory. The shape of his brow and the soft line of his lashes against his cheek and the flush that had come to his lips.

A second later Newt surged forwards and kissed him back. It took him by surprise with the force of it. He stumbled backwards and flailed with one hand to grip at the ladder.

All of a sudden he had an armful of Newt Scamander. There was a warm body pressed against him and thin fingers moving through his hair and pulling him closer. Newt kissed him as if he was dying of thirst.

Graves touched his hair and urged him to slow down. For a moment his shoulders relaxed and he was lost in it.

At last he had to pull away and they separated just to get some air. Newt was flushed and gasping and even more dishevelled. It was a sight he could get used to.

"You're very persuasive," said Newt. "I think I'll stay for a while."

Graves couldn't help the smile that bloomed across his face. "I'd miss you." He brushed some of the droplets out of Newt's hair and felt him shiver.

"You need to warm up," said Graves, "Coffee or tea? I'm buying this time."

"You're good but not that good," said Newt, "The answer will always be tea." He took his hand with
a shy smile and they ascended together.

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