Crimson Petals

by Annjushka

Summary

A flash of copper. Golden eyes. A gentle tilt of the head.

The crowd ceases to exist as all the air is pressed from her lungs. Could it be? Here of all places? Tina nearly loses her footing, stumbling forward as her mouth falls open. Her heart beats against the confines of her ribs, moving upwards to lodge deep in her throat. She shivers and her insides turn to ice when the pieces fall into place. The woman next to him is Leta Lestrange, the beautiful girl in the picture.
Tina is hot on Grindelwald's heels on the European continent, deep undercover, when Newt is recruited by his former teacher.

Notes

This story has been in the works for two years and is now finally ready. It just wouldn't leave me alone until it was all written out. These ideas came to mind before we got any news of the new movie, and almost every bit of information so far has fed into the idea.

Please be mindful of the tags! Tina's role is loosely based on female French resistance operatives during WW2, who used every means available to them to gather intelligence (and fight the bad guys).

For Katie Havok, without whom this story would still be a collection of bullet-points collecting dust on my drive.

See the end of the work for more notes.
The hallway is dark, its blackness broken only by the cones of flimsy lamplight from the lanterns adorning the walls. No natural light penetrates these walls, stoic in their solidness, and he loathes it.

He always has.

It’s not the darkness he despises, it’s the forced codependency he seeks to end. Darkness is daylight’s intriguing cousin, mysterious and full of secrets, shrouding everything from view. It’s his cover, his ally, his secret keeper. Still, there are bigger, larger things he no longer wishes to conceal. He wants to break free, to no longer be chained to the darkness.

Soon, he thinks, it will be time to reclaim the daylight. No more hiding in the shadows. It’ll all come to light.

The hushed whisper of voices floats through the opening and into the hallway, growing exponentially the closer they get. His footsteps follow behind, slow and steady, echoing off the stone floor and ceiling. There’s no need to rush; he wants to savour the moment, draw it out as long as he’s able. He waits in the door, staying just within the shadows as he watches the hall. Rows upon rows of seats reach almost all the way to the ceiling, filled to the brim with expectant faces.

The corners of his lips quirk into a satisfied smile at the sight and he runs his fingers through the blonde hair atop his head. It’s short again, nothing like the long mane and beard he had acquired in New York, and his smile grows wider. He’s himself again, about to reclaim his rightful place. They’re all here, waiting for him.

“Look at them, waiting like vultures for the lions to deliver the kill,” he says, inclining his head to the man on his left.

“Revolting,” his companion agrees, icy blue eyes trained on the crowd of waiting people, “but they will be of use to you, Gellert. They’re flocking to the cause like starved men to water since your spectacular escape from MACUSA.”

He chuckles darkly. “Yes, I imagine they enjoyed seeing the great Seraphina Picquery made to look like a fool just as much as I did.” He sneers. “I told you, Rosier. It’s just the prelude we needed. They’ll be putty in our hands after tonight.”

They share a look and turn as one to the woman to Grindelwald’s right. Her eyes are lowered to the coarse rope binding her hands, chin nearly touching her chest, barely daring to breathe as she waits for their direction.

He leans close to whisper in her ear, delighting in the way she shivers and recoils from him, naked terror in her eyes. “Are you ready, my dear?”

She doesn’t answer and he gives a crooked grin, tugging at the loose end of the rope to pull her along like a dog. The voices quiet immediately as they step out of the shadow and into the pool of sunlight streaming through the rotund skylight above, broken only by the shallow water that covers it, painting silver ripples of light across their faces.

Grindelwald comes to stand at the centre of the hall as his two-toned gaze sweeps the room, arms drawing wide. “Welcome, friends. Glad you could join us; I am planning to make this meeting
worth your while.” He pulls on the string and the woman yelps before stepping closer. “We have an esteemed guest with us today, let us welcome her properly, shall we?” He turns to her. “Tell us your name, dearest.” She mumbles quietly and he tugs at the rope. “Louder!”

She jumps at the sharpness of his tone as it cuts through her like a knife before raising her head, standing proud as she challenges them. “Alexandrine Tremblay.”

A gasp goes through the black-feathered crowd.

One elderly man stands on wobbly legs, straightening his garments, and his beard trembles in agitation as he points a wrinkled, gnarly finger at Grindelwald’s chest. “You go too far, Mr Grindelwald! She’s from one of France’s most important wizarding families — old blood — this will not be easily forgiven. You’re parading her around like a show horse! What is the meaning of this?”

Grindelwald holds up both hands in a placating gesture. “Dear Alexandrine is in good hands, fear not. No harm will come to her, I will attest to it. I don’t like having to keep her here, but it’s the only way.” He smiles. “She’ll be helpful, won’t you, my dear?” His tone imitates near perfect warmth. Grindelwald holds out his left hand, and Rosier places a large glass sphere in his palm. The crowd watches with bated breath as he holds it high, his voice ringing out strong and clear as it slices through the expectant silence. “The prophecy has fulfilled itself. I have found the child. He is magnificent.”

“That prophecy got you captured. And where is the child?” The old man withers, shrinking in on himself as Grindelwald disconcerting gaze hones in on him, unblinking, and swallows before retaking his seat.

Grindelwald turns, pacing the room with both hands folded behind his back. “The boy will come. He’ll be instrumental to the cause. His power alongside mine will make us invincible. They will all bend to our will, mark my words! We shall be free.” He turns in a whirl of black fabric, a sure smile gracing his lips. “He’s been slighted, sure to harbour the same hate towards them. All he’s looking for is a family, a place to belong — Alexandrine will lure him here,” he spreads his arms wide, “but we will be his family. Nobody will stop us.”
Chapter 1

He is alone and has been for days — or has it been weeks? Months? Credence can’t be sure anymore. It’s morning outside, judging by the single beam of brilliant white light that slithers through the narrow crack in the ceiling above. He is still wrapped in darkness, both inside and out, and shivering in the cold. Everything is dark, even the clothes that hang off him in tatters, almost as if he means to slowly blend into the walls that surround him, solid and unrelenting, yet he doesn’t dare touch them. It’s as if the stones bear eyes and ears like living, breathing things. Who knows what they can hear?

There’s an eerie creepiness about this place.

Nothing is breathing here, quiet except for his own rattling intakes of air, almost unbearably loud against the deafening silence that surrounds him. Then there’s the constant drip of water, a rhythmic tap, tap; like a pocket watch, both soothing and disconcerting all at once. A small patch of moss grows by a crack in the masonry, craning its limbs towards the light, the deep green of its leaves a stark contrast to the monochromatic backdrop of the stone. Something else struggling for survival in this godforsaken hellhole.

Credence feels just as hollow and alone on the inside. Sometimes he wishes he truly could melt into the walls. Now and then he feels the need to pinch his own skin, blindly groping for his forearm, just to see if it isn’t slowly disintegrating. He relishes in the small twinge of pain, even if it does make it real, a living nightmare, and he’s unable to wake.

His greasy hair hangs well past his prominent cheekbones, now surely sharp as razors, almost all the way to his pointy chin. Occasionally he catches a filthy strand with his fingers, rubbing it between his thumb and forefinger simply to have something to do. Taking stock is his only way of passing time.

A new activity, a project is what he needs. He has tried to move his muscles, push his tired body up from the filthy ground, but he doesn’t have the strength, so the idea is abandoned soon after.

Fortunately for Credence he has inherited the gift of imagination from his sordid parents, so he sits there in the darkness, eyes unseeing, and yet he’s no longer alone. He often sees him, Graves, the man that had betrayed him. Used him. The way Graves always stood there, a wicked glint in his eye; surrounded by his army of leather-clad cronies, wands blazing high above their heads. And then there’s her, the woman. Tina, that redheaded man had called her the night in the subway. The night he had died.

He’d never known her name before that day, remembering her only as the woman who’d shown him kindness, warmth and security the likes he’d never experienced before. It all seems hollow now. She’s betrayed him, just like the rest of them. Left out on the doorstep in the cold; left to fend for himself.

They’d tried to destroy him and failed. He’s alive — wounded perhaps — but still in one piece. His mind is left unscathed, and his will never wavered. For a while he’d harboured hope; a small, feeble thing that didn’t survive for long. He’d crossed the ocean to get away from it all, only to walk straight back into the darkness.

This cell and its abysmal stench is all he can remember since stepping off the boat at Amsterdam. Food gets passed through a small slit to one side, but he’s neither seen or heard from his captors. If
they’re trying to break his will, they’ll be in for a long wait. Credence has been in confinement all his life; arms shackled to his body, what difference does this make?

The mechanical click of the lock and the screech of iron scraping over iron shakes him from his reverie and he shields his eyes against the sudden brightness assaulting him. There’s the silhouette of a person – a man perhaps? Credence cannot be sure – standing out against the blinding light of the open doorway.

“It’s your lucky day, lad. Boss wants to see ya,” says the silhouette man, jostling his keys and wrapping fleshy fingers around Credence’s bony forearm. They walk down a narrow, dimly-lit corridor, yet his eyes still burn from weeks spent in utter darkness. It’s just as cold and lifeless as his cell; only the cleanliness sets it apart. Their walk couldn’t have been far, but to Credence’s unused muscles it feels like an eternity. On and on they walk, deep into the building’s underbelly. There’s a distant rumbling above, strong and steady as a heartbeat, and he’s convinced now more than ever that the building is positively alive.

They pass through a doorway at the end of the corridor and the chamber behind is cleaner, brighter and colder than anything he has ever experienced before. The windowless room is devoid of any furniture except for a small table and two chairs in the centre, the same phosphorescent white as the four walls surrounding it.

A tall man he’s never seen before occupies one of the chairs. His silvery white hair is long at the crown and neatly slicked back over his skull in a way that’s strikingly familiar, yet his merciless, unsettling stare isn’t. One eye is large, nearly black, and Credence shivers as it draws him in as if to suck him into the depth of the stranger’s soul. Its small, grey counterpart is no less disconcerting, piercing him with a fierce and knowing stare that seems to see right through him. Credence thinks that if his own appearance so fittingly reflects the interior of his cell, this man could camouflage himself like a chameleon against the backdrop of these walls.

The stranger’s face bears the ghost of a smile, the moustache covering his upper lip doing nothing to soften the jagged angles of his face. His razor-sharp gaze clings to him as Credence is frog-marched towards the table without putting up any resistance. Credence can tell the man is trying to look casual, almost nonchalant, but his eyes betray him. They are frozen steel, ice cold and terribly dangerous.

He motions Credence to sit while another man appears with a tray bearing two crystal glasses and a carafe of ruby liquid. The light reflects off the angled crystal rim of the glass, dappling the walls in myriads of glinting rainbow shards and he fights the urge to cover his eyes again. Credence dips his head, letting his hair fall into his face to partially shield his view, yet never takes his eyes off the mysterious stranger.

“Drink, boy. It won’t harm you,” the man says and raises his glass without breaking eye contact. His voice is smooth like velvet, kind with an underlying callousness that makes Credence’s skin crawl.

He fingers the hard crystal before lifting the glass to his mouth, parting his lips to let the liquid wet his desperately parched throat, swallowing dutifully. The taste isn’t at all as he’s imagined, the richness of its colour feigning something sweet, not the spicy, almost savoury flavour now coating his tongue. It’s not at all unpleasant. There’s a familiar pressure in his head and he looks up sharply. He hasn’t felt it in weeks, not since the subway incident, and it shakes him to his foundations.

Who is this man?
“You might not know me, Credence, but I know everything about you. I know what you are and what you represent. What they’ve been trying to take from you,” the stranger says, answering his unspoken question, and Credence shivers with comprehension.

“Who are you?” Credence growls against his better judgement.

“I’m Gellert Grindelwald.” The man smirks and Credence regards him through narrowed eyes as the pieces finally fall into place.

“You’re the one they’re after. In the papers,” he says, sudden realisation colouring his words and Grindelwald’s face splits into a sly, close-lipped grin that doesn’t reach his eyes.

“Now, now. You mustn’t believe everything they write in their polished little articles. Truth is always in the eye of the beholder, don’t you think?” Grindelwald takes another sip of his drink and Credence knows better than to make any sudden movements, feeling much like predator and prey.

“What do you want from me?” Credence asks instead, not wanting to prolong this meeting. Surely there’s a motive behind it all and he’s sick of the incandescent white blinding his eyes, though whether it’s the walls or the man in front of him he cannot say.

“Well, I see there’s no point in small-talk with you, my boy. I have, shall we say, a proposition for you. And I’m sure you’ll find it to your liking.” The rest of his face doesn’t move when he speaks and his eyes, unblinking, take on a near-manic glint. Credence thinks this is the first time he’s showing his true self.

“I’m not joining your circus of fanatic clowns,” Credence utters grimly, face set.

Grindelwald seems to delight in the obvious slight and grins before leaning forward like the cat that knows it’s about to make a kill. His eyes glint with cunning delight when he delivers his last blow. “There’re others like you. Scared, defenceless, hurt. I want to help them, Credence.”

Credence perks up at this, imagining another helpless child in desperate place, hurting just as much as he was, and it does things to him. Blood boils under his skin and there’s an insistent ringing in his ears, threatening to overtake his mind. He’s too weak to give in to it, instead, he works to calm his thoughts.

“I’ve heard this once before,” he says. “How do I know you’re any different?”

“They need your help Credence; yours more than anyone else’s. I can help you. Do you think a sin should go unpunished? Look what they’ve done to you — are you willing to let them get away with it?” The grin is gone from Grindelwald’s face, instead, there’s the glow of triumph on his skin; the look of someone who knows they’re about to get what they want. “That man was useless. Empty promises. He was one of them! Me, however — I’m the one they fear.”

“I know how wizards like you look at people like us,” Credence says, meeting his gaze. “Why do you want to help scum like me? What’s in it for you?”

Grindelwald smirks, nodding approvingly. “I think we can help each other. All we want is to be free of the shackles we’ve been forced to wear for centuries. These chains are the reason people like you exist, my boy. They’re the root of your suffering. Without them, you could all be free. No more pain.”

Credence doesn’t stop to think, following the longing of his heart and the blood rushing through his veins. There’s no question about his intention when he lifts his head to brush the hair from his eyes, mind made up. “What do you need me to do?”
The smirk is back, larger than before as Grindelwald leans towards him, extending a pale-fleshed palm. Credence blinks before lifting his own bony fingers to clasp the proffered hand. They shake over the gleaming white table in the white-walled chamber, and for the first time in weeks, Credence feels like the world has started spinning again.

Whether it’s moving in his direction or away from him, he’s yet unable to say.

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Two months earlier, late December 1926, MACUSA, New York

The clock reads ten minutes to midnight, but there’s still a sliver of light peeking from under the threshold of the President’s office. He scrubs a tired hand over his face, briefly wondering whether he’s going to be seeing his bed at all tonight. Director of Magical Security is a prestigious title, yet it comes with a heavy burden and even greater expectations. His predecessor left a large pair of shoes to fill and nobody knows this better than he, Arnold Guzman.

He’s been in charge for barely a week and he’s close to breaking. Of course, his predecessor didn’t have the world’s most dangerous wizard stewing in the basement.

*It’s because the guy was running the damn show*, he thinks bitterly before shaking his head to clear his thoughts.

His knock is confident yet politely muted, appropriate for the time of day, and he must strain his ears to hear the quiet “Enter!” before pulling open the door.

“Madame President,” he greets her and clears his throat as she inclines her head in a graceful little bow. “I was wondering if you’ve been able to look through the folders I gave you. The ICW is pressing for an answer.”

“I have,” she says and reaches into her drawer. She produces a stack of brown folders and hands them across her desk. “I’ve made a few minute changes.”

“Very good,” he murmurs as he thumbs through the files. He comes across one particular name that makes him frown. “Tina Goldstein? Madame President, she’s just been reinstated, and with all due respect, we do have far more talented aurors on hand.”

Picquery sighs as if she expected his objection. “Arnold, I am sure you have read the report and seen the photographs. If it’s true and the Barebone boy survived and made it to Europe, Grindelwald might well be trying to use him.” He begins to protest and she sends him a pointed look. The words die on his tongue, mouth opening and closing like a fish gasping for air. “If that’s the case, you will need Goldstein; she’s the only one he will reason with. And while I agree she might not be the most skilled, she has shown good instincts and the will to learn. There’s passion and dedication. Goldstein’s part of the team at my request, end of discussion.”

He snaps his mouth shut, pressing his lips into a thin line but refrains from any further objections. Seraphina Picquery is a headstrong woman, used to getting what she wants, seldom straying off course once she’s picked a path. There’s no use in arguing.

“Good, I’ll get this underway,” he says and fingers the papers in his hand, unable to stop the words before they slip. “If this backfires we’ll lose some of our best guys.”

“**It’s an uncertain time, Arnold. Europe is a fuse waiting to blow. This is our best chance to ensure continued peace across the continent before it spills over and on to our own shores, so we’ve got to do our part,” she says and her eyes gleam like black onyx in the low light of the candle on her
desk.

“I understand,” he says.

“I want regular reports on their progress. We’ve got to get this right,” she murmurs and he thinks she looks more strained these days, the deep line on her forehead a constant companion. “Good night, Arnold,” she says, dismissing him.

_He’s got us all on edge_, he thinks and gives a brief nod as he backs towards the door. “Good night, Madame.”

The files weigh heavy on his arm as he makes his way towards the lift. “Passion and dedication.” He chuckles darkly, and the elf operating the lift nearly jumps out of his skin. “Let’s see what you’re made of, Goldstein.”

“Sir?” the elf asks.

“What? Oh, major investigations department,” he barks with more force than strictly necessary. The creature glowers at him and he imagines the elf muttering, _Damn wizards these days_, under his breath, but Arnold doesn’t care. He’s got a big pair of shoes to fill, and something tells him this is just the tip of the iceberg.

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**Mid-January 1927, MACUSA, New York**

The rhythmic clink of Queenie’s heels on granite triumphs over the amorphous hum of MACUSA’s inner workings. It’s a familiar sound that precedes her through the halls and follows everywhere she goes, comforting her much like her mother’s singing used to do. Sometimes it’s all she can focus on to drown out the noise and calm her mind, to keep the headaches at bay. Especially now.

The winding staircase takes her down far below the lift’s lowest stop, on and on like she’s descending into MACUSA’s foundations. That’s where they keep him, a level below the canal rats that inhabit the sewers, locked away where no natural light can ever reach, and Queenie tries hard not to think of the time Tina nearly lost her life in this place. She’s seen it in her sister’s thoughts, tasted her fear, and she shudders every time she remembers it.

Now the man who tried to extinguish her sister’s light is slowly rotting away on the same cold, slimy granite floors. Some would say it’s justice, barely enough for the offences he committed, yet the more time she spends with him the less she finds him anything but ordinary, if not a little pathetic.

It’s her duty to bring him his meals. Simple Queenie Goldstein from the Wand Permits Office, simple Queenie Goldstein who’s never spent much time with Director Graves, simple Queenie Goldstein who will never succumb to Grindelwald’s wicked ways.

Simple Queenie Goldstein who feels entirely hollow inside.

On the outside, she’s still the same as she’s always been, yet there’s something missing she’s never going to gain back. Sometimes, in her darkest hours alone at home, she wishes she could have stood in the rain alongside him and forget anything ever happened. Then she chides herself,
knowing she would do it all again in a heartbeat and makes a point to cherish every second they had together. The short time she’d been able to spend in his presence is priceless, and she holds it dear, guarding it close to her heart like the precious jewel it is.

It happens on one of her dimmer afternoons when she reaches the bottom of the stairs and finds the holding area surprisingly empty; devoid of the usual guards holding their silent vigil. The cell door stands wide open, yet their prisoner is still in his chair. His eyes are the only thing that moves as she approaches him, and his stare makes the hairs on the back of her neck stand on end. There’s a low prickling sensation in the back of her mind, like a gentle tickle, a presence she’s come to associate with him.

They never speak, protocol forbids it, yet she knows he’s aware of her ability. It’s how they communicate. He’s never unkind, never forces himself on her and retreats if she shuts him out. This time, however, it’s different. She sets the tray before him with shaking fingers and his hand shoots out to wrap around her wrist, holding her in place. He leans towards her without ever breaking eye contact.

“It’s not too late for you and your non-magical friend, you know,” is the only thing he says, lips pulling into a sympathetic half-smile as he sits back and releases her skin to pick up his fork.

Queenie stares, rocked to her foundations and waits for him to elaborate, but he turns away, and she knows their conversation is over. She climbs the stairs back to reality, mind deeply troubled, and it follows her around for the rest of the day, muting even the comforting click-clack of her heels. When she arrives home that night she’s met with a familiar deafening emptiness; the apartment feels cold without Tina’s comforting presence and she’s alone once again with only her troubles and her grief for company.

Tina is absent most days, busy with retraining on top of her usual workload and rotating night shifts, and even when she’s home the only thing they seem to do is argue; about Jacob, about the Statue of Secrecy, about the injustice of the burden they’re living under. She knows Tina isn’t yet entirely whole, still fragile in her confidence. Newt’s cryptic and irregular correspondence weighs heavy on her sister’s mind, yet Queenie can’t help the sting of jealousy taking a hold of her heart when she thinks at least there’s a correspondence to speak of.

She feels utterly alone in a crowd of people.

It’s under these circumstances that Grindelwald finds her, advancing slowly, and it takes all the willpower she possesses not to scream aloud the first time it happens. She’s sitting on her desk when she feels his familiar intrusion, a gentle probing at the back of her mind, and her fingers grip the edge of her desk until her knuckles turn white.

Don’t be alarmed, he says. I mean you no harm. I’d like to help you.

Queenie closes her eyes, shivering. Why do you want to help me?

Because, I think you could use a friend.

It unnerves her at first, the strength of his abilities and how far he can reach, yet it should not have come as a surprise. With time it becomes a comfort, the knowledge that she isn’t entirely alone after all.

It gradually morphs into a routine as the days go by. Their exchanges become longer as sentences grow into paragraphs and soon she spends most of her lunch breaks glued to her desk, eyes closed and listening. She learns him just as much as he’s learning her, and she finds her fear of him slowly fading, yet she isn’t fooled. There’s quiet strength there, and intelligence, and a cunning,
calculating side of him he’s unable to hide in its entirety. What surprises her most is the humanity and the reason in his eyes, qualities she was sure he couldn’t possibly possess.

They talk about the past and the future, his visions and her desires, and she finds they don’t fall so far apart. She doesn’t have to hide from him, doesn’t have to pretend, and it soothes an aching wound, fills a gaping void she’s otherwise forced to ignore.

He teaches her to use her gift, rather than to fight it, and for the first time in her life she feels useful and appreciated, like there’s something beyond the boundaries she’s drawn for herself. Her sister’s continued absences no longer weigh her down as much and when he extends a helping hand she only hesitates for the briefest moment before reaching for it.

Close your eyes. Now, concentrate on the image you want to project. Shield it from me then consciously plant it into my mind, he instructs and she gasps, eyebrows nearly touching her hairline.

Both at once? She opens her eyes, unable to hide the uncertainty of her thoughts.

Yes. You have the strength, I’ve seen it. Close your mind! She feels his familiar presence gently filter through her thoughts. Ah, yes. Emotions. There's tremendous hurt in you. A sense of loss. You feel abandoned. It holds you back and weakens your defences.

Queenie’s heart lurches, knowing his words to be true. People are easiest to read when they’re hurting. His probing presence delves deeper into her mind, yet it’s almost like the gentle caress of a compassionate friend as he looks into her soul.

There's a way to reverse the memory loss, and for you and your muggle friend to live together in peace, he says after a time.

Not here there ain’t, she counters miserably, wrestling with the familiar longing deep in her chest.

Not yet, perhaps, but it can be done. His presence feels strong and sure, comforting and supporting all at once until she truly believes his words. I can help.

There’s no way to get out of MACUSA unnoticed, she muses, thinking of the nightly patrols stationed around the Woolworth Building. ‘Specially for you.

He laughs at that, the cold and calculating cackle she doesn’t like, the one that makes her skin crawl and has her fidget in her seat. Think about it; you’ve done it before, and I have skilled and loyal friends in many places, Miss Goldstein. How do you think I managed to get here, right under MACUSA’s noses? Americans — your self-importance makes you imprudent — and blind.

Her face hardens at the slight when she finds there might be some truth to his words the longer she ponders them. President Picquery appears more focused on her own image than international security these days, fighting for jurisdiction over Grindelwald’s interrogation not out of national interest, but as a demonstration of political prowess; almost as if she’s trying her hardest to ignore and deny the facts that stare her right in the face.

Queenie ponders it for a time, battling her inner demons and conflicting emotions, trying to stifle the guilt that threatens to bury her until she makes a decision. It’s her turn to bring him his food that day and he looks at her expectantly as she turns the corner. The guards are nowhere in sight.

His smile broadens when he senses the change in her and a plan slowly starts to solidify in her mind. Yes! Take the hurt and all the pain they’ve caused you. Don't let it weigh you down — use it!
“That might just work,” she breathes aloud and he smiles wider still.

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Tina is exhausted, bone tired no longer sufficient to describe the all-encompassing fatigue weighing down her body. She’s dragging her feet up the stairs at the tail end of an entire month of intelligence operation training. Days are filled dusk to dawn with theoretical lectures, sandwiched by brutal practical training units at either end, and she’s looking forward to collapsing on her own bed. It’s late and Mrs Esposito has already left her watch for the night, and Tina is more than grateful to skip the usual Spanish Inquisition halfway up the stairs. It’s hard enough to keep herself upright as it is.

The apartment is dark when she shuts the door behind herself and tiptoes through the living room, careful to skip the two loose floorboards that screech like a banshee, shedding her heavy outer layers as she goes. She’s down to her knickers and camisole when the bedroom door slides open.

“Teenie? You’re back!” Queenie’s voice is missing the sleepy scratchiness Tina expected, proof she’s been waiting up, and she frowns at her watch.

“Queenie, it’s past midnight,” she admonishes gently and Queenie scoffs.

“I could say the same. Only I ain’t white as a sheet,” Queenie shoots back before softening her gaze. “You look exhausted, Tina. I’m worried about you.”

Don’t be, Tina wants to say, you’re the one I should be worried about, but she knows Queenie is only telling the truth. “It’s alright,” Tina says instead. “I’ll be okay.”

The standard answer. Queenie’s eyes fall to the crusty scratch along her sister’s cheekbone and a healing, yellow bruise along her wrist where Tina’s neglected to mend her tattered sleeve.

“Teenie, what happened?” Queenie asks and reaches for her, but Tina snatches her arm away.

“Nothing,” she murmurs, closing off and Queenie wants to scream at the deafening silence that greets her.

“You know I can’t tell you,” she says.

Queenie knows there’s no point in arguing, so she Summons the letter she found sitting on their kitchen table when she arrived home that afternoon, stoically swallowing her hurt. “Something came for you today, I thought you’d be happy to know.”

Tina’s face brightens at the familiar sight of her name and address scrawled across the front, haphazardly penned in bright silver ink, the hurried letters so different from his usual loopy script. She traces it thoughtfully, wondering what might have caused his obvious agitation before slipping a finger under the flap to break the seal. The paper is heavy and expensive-looking, a teal-coloured parchment with his gold-lettered monogram at the head.

She still remembers the first missive he sent, a heartfelt telegram from aboard his ship before he even reached the English shores. They’d managed an irregular string of letters ever since, always polite and always addressed to the pair of them, but this one is different. It’s addressed solely to herself.

“So? Any news?” Queenie asks after a few moments of silence and Tina sends her a half-hearted glare, too happy to put any real feeling behind it. “Is he saying when he’ll be in New York next?”
It’s a question she asks every time they receive a letter from across the Atlantic, yet there’s finally an answer to it amidst all the tales of fantastic creatures and mundane everyday happenings, and Tina’s heart sinks as her eyes scan the words. “He’s not,” she says, voice quiet with disappointment. “They denied his travel permit.”

“Oh, Tina,” Queenie says with sympathy, desperately wishing to read the colour of her sister’s thoughts, now more than ever. “Who did? MACUSA?”

“The British Ministry. I never expected this to be easy, not after everything that’s happened in December, but I didn’t think they’d go that far.” Tina folds up the letter and tugs it back into its envelope, simultaneously locking away her feelings before squeezing past Queenie to disappear into the bedroom. Queenie looks after her, heart heavy at her sister’s distress and the hollow ache in her chest, and gives Tina a moment before following.

Tina doesn’t speak as she readies herself for bed and slips under the covers, turning to face the wall and away from her sister. Queenie sighs, her own heartache now supplemented by her sister’s pain. Despite it all she pushes on and reaches out a hand across the narrow space between their beds, delighting in the small spark of triumph when Tina leans into the comfort of her touch.

“Tina?” Queenie asks into the stillness of the bedroom and receives a noncommittal grunt in return. She licks her lips, hesitating briefly before voicing the question she’s been practising in her head for days. “Is there any news on what they’re planning to do with Grindelwald?”

This catches Tina’s attention and she rolls to face her sister, propping herself up on her elbow to better meet her eyes. Her voice is laced with mild surprise and a healthy amount of suspicion when she answers. “Why do you want to know?”

“Nothin’, just curious,” Queenie murmurs and shudders before she adds for good measure: “He gives me the creeps, is all.”

Tina nods in understanding. “They’re going to move him next week. That’s why they send us home. A delegation from Switzerland is coming to bring him back to Europe, so you won’t have to put up with him for much longer,” she says and reaches for her sister’s hand to give it a gentle squeeze.

Queenie’s heart gives a painful lurch, both at the sympathy in her sister’s eyes and the knowledge of what she’s about to do, the hurt she’s going to inflict on the only family member she’s got left in this world.

***

The Swiss delegation arrives on a cloudless morning in early February. The sidewalks still glisten with the remainders of last week’s icy flurry, the city firmly within winter’s unrelenting grip.

Heinrich Eberstadt is among the group, his dark green uniform as impeccable as his poise when he stands, awaiting his address as the sun reflects off the silver medal on his front.

The white strands in his beard and hair seem to have increased since his last visit as has the fine network of worry lines marring his forehead. His jaw is set tight and he looks just as thrilled to be here as his American counterparts when they face the crowds at the foot of MACUSA’s marble staircase, stiffly posing for the mandatory photograph.

The atrium is crowded, bursting at the seams with office workers and journalists alike, and the camera shutters go off at a near-constant rate, the remnants of burned flash powder lingering in the air, shrouding everything in a fine, silvery mist.
Tina stands in the shadows close by the doors, far from the group of aurors lingering close to the President, not yet allowed back into the Inner Circle. She doesn’t mind, welcoming the opportunity to watch from the sidelines, observing the delegates and onlookers in turn. They kept her well away from Grindelwald’s quarters and what little questioning they subjected him to, deemed unfit to witness his interrogation given their proximity and his obvious interest in her during his time at MACUSA.

While Mr Graves had seen and nourished her potential, Grindelwald had sensed her connection to Credence and had used it in his favour. He’d formed and manipulated her without her knowledge. It still pains her, her blindness and apparent inability to see through his disguise while Credence’s loss still weighs heavily on her mind.

The hall quiets when Seraphina Picquery steps forward, equally dressed for the occasion, her deep red silk gown glowing like a precious stone in the sunlight slanting in through the windows as tendrils of her light hair frame her face, piled high atop her head like the symbol of power it is. She lifts her chin and her regal gaze sweeps the room before she addresses the crowd: “Today, Gellert Grindelwald is to be dispatched back into the waiting hands of his motherland. He will no longer be our responsibility —”

Tina senses movement from the corner of her eye and her gaze falls onto a tall woman standing in the middle of the crowd. She’s elegantly dressed, her silky black robe flowing around her ankles like black smoke, dark hair tied in a neat knot at the nape of her neck where it pokes out from beneath an unusually pointy hat. The ensemble makes her stand out from the crowd and Tina inches closer as a familiar suspicious tingle takes the back of her neck, making her hair stand on end.

The woman turns and her intelligent, brilliant blue eyes find Tina’s with unerring accuracy, fixing her with a calculating stare as if in challenge, making her blood run cold. Her scarlet mouth pulls into a smile — or is it a sneer? — before she slips away and disappears in the crowd.

“— We have kept him under lock and key as promised, but it's time for him to face the charges brought against him. Justice will be done! —”

Tina tries to follow, using her elbow for leverage as she pummels her way through the crowd. She loses sight of the woman when another black-robed figure catches her eye. And then another. Tina’s heart begins to pound in her chest as she turns to fight her way through to her fellow aurors.

“We’ve got to clear this space,” she gasps, holding her stinging side once she’s found two of her colleagues loitering behind a column. “Now!”

“Are you crazy, Goldstein? The president is in the middle of her address! On what grounds?” one of them answers sharply, eyebrows raised in clear disbelief.

“Get everyone out of here,” she hisses vehemently as naked fear seeps into her voice.

“— Let it be a lesson all those who seek to do us harm. We are not a nation to be trifled with, and this shall serve as an example. Our political ties remain unperturbed and international cooperation is stronger than ever. That I — ” There’s a small commotion at the centre of the room and the president’s voice falters in the middle of her speech.

A scuffle. A blood-curdling scream. A flash of light before an earth-shattering blast sweeps the room, the magnitude of its shockwave catching Tina by surprise as the ground is swept from under her feet and she’s thrown violently against the wall. The last thing she sees is her fellow aurors crowding around the President before it all goes black.
A low rumble reverberates through the halls, announcing its arrival as the walls begin to rock and the floor quivers below their feet. Small pieces of plaster and stone rain from the ceiling when a second thunderous groan takes the building. Queenie stops in her tracks as one of her female colleagues screams in terror and rises to her feet along with the other three employees still seated around their desks. Their floor is almost deserted, with most of MACUSA upstairs watching the President’s address, but Queenie had chosen to remain.

*Be prepared at any moment*, was all he’d told her. Is this it? Is this the sign?

They jump into action simultaneously, hurrying towards the lifts to make their way up to the surface. Queenie hesitates only a moment, knowing they will overlook her in their haste and slips around the corner towards the familiar staircase, pulling off her heels to silently descend to the basement instead.

***

The air is rife with the pungent smell of smoke and heavy with dust when Tina wakes. She blinks as her vision slips in and out of focus until she’s vaguely able to make out the shapes of people moving, climbing over chunks of crumbled ceiling and bent metal as chips of plaster and ash fall like silent snow. An eerie ringing noise fills her ears, muffling every sound as she lifts her hand to her forehead in confusion, fingering the sticky warm substance at her hairline, and her fingers come away with blood.

Tina springs upright in a sudden rush of adrenaline, oblivious to her own injuries as she scans the room, driven by an incomprehensible sense of urgency. There’s someone she needs to find, but she doesn’t know who. She grabs onto the wall for support as the world spins around her and she stands on wobbly legs, willing her feet to move. The fog in her mind slowly begins to clear while the dust around her settles.

The extent of the damage unfolds in front of her eyes as it does, and her hand clamps over her mouth to muffle the cry of terror clawing at her throat as she her gaze sweeps across the bodies half-buried beneath the rubble and dust, some moving and some unnaturally still, limbs bent all wrong, and her mind struggles to keep up with her eyes.

Natural light floods the hall through an opening where there wasn’t one before. She doesn’t know how long she’s been unconscious and her head begins to swim anew as she struggles to remember, struggles to comprehend what happened. Weren’t they at a press conference mere moments ago?

A face appears in front of her eyes, familiar features she’s unable to place immediately, and a gentle hand steadies her by the arm to help her sit on a piece of fallen stone. “Goldstein, can you hear me? Do you know who I am?”
“Ruby,” she murmurs after a time and receives a tight smile in return.

“That’s right. Do you know where we are?” Ruby asks, trying and failing to mask her own trembling hands with another encouraging smile.

“The atrium, I think,” Tina says, licking her lips and tasting dust before suddenly shooting out a hand to wrap around the woman’s arm. “What’s happened? Where’s Queenie, where’s my sister?”

“I don’t know, honey. I haven’t seen her — “ she starts, but Tina cuts her off, trying to pull herself upright on unsteady feet.

“I’ve got to find her!” she exclaims, brushing off Ruby’s well-meaning hands as the urge to find her sister becomes overwhelming.

Tina stumbles on through the chaos, trying not to think of what she’s stepping over as she blindly searches for a glimpse of her sister’s golden head. Deep down Tina knows Queenie is alright — she must be — convinced she would have felt it if something had happened to her little sister. Tears sting her eyes along with the dust still clinging to her skin and clothes, and she reaches up to press a hand to her aching head. “Queenie, where in the name of Deliverance Dane are you?”

Queenie runs along the corridor on silent feet, pressing herself flush against the wall as she reaches her destination. There’s light in the room around the corner, where she can barely make out the twin shadows of the two guards moving about, nervously whispering among themselves.

“It’s an explosion, I’m telling you!” one man says, his voice trembling with barely suppressed fear and agitation.

The second man scoffs in clear defiance. “That’s impossible. There are more aurors than people up there.”

Queenie recognises one of the men by the familiar colour of his thoughts and her face falls. There’s no helping it. Frankie, she thinks at him, I’m so sorry. Forgive me.

She clutches her throat as a wave of all-consuming guilt threatens to bury her, and it’s Jacob’s smiling face she thinks of as she reaches out with her mind, gently breaching his and planting the thought neatly between his own. The effect is immediate, and she forces herself to turn away when ice cold fear overtakes his senses.

“We gotta go, John. My wife’s up there!” Frankie cries and Queenie cringes, feeling no pride in her success.

“But, we can’t. The prisoner — ” John interjects.

“What’s he going to do? He just sits there all day drooling and staring at the wall. He’s perfectly harmless. Let’s go, they won’t know a thing!” Frankie says and Queenie quickly presses herself into a dark corner, barely daring to breathe as they run past.

She wastes a moment on consoling herself that his wife is nowhere near the Woolworth Building before she rushes forward and into the light. Grindelwald is already waiting for her, looking up expectantly as she slides her open powder box through the iron bars of his cell. “Get in,” she breathes and his face pulls into a grin.

***
The powder box hits her thigh with every step she takes, burning a hole into her pocket as she rushes upstairs, knowing she only has moments before someone is bound to notice his absence. The scene that greets her nearly pulls the floor from under her feet. She reaches for the wall to steady herself, one hand clamping over her mouth to stifle a shocked outcry as her eyes survey the chaos and devastation. The hollow feeling inside expands until she feels like an empty shell, with no strength to give, no strength to fight.

*Morgana, I didn’t want for any of this. What have I done?*

Shock gives way to naked fear when her head catches up with her eyes, and she reaches out with her mind, near frantic as she searches for the familiar mental presence of her sister.

“Queenie!” Tina’s voice slashes through the clamour and chaos like the clean cut of a razor blade, and Queenie turns towards the sound like a flower straining towards the sun. They collide amidst the crumbling ruins of MACUSA, clutching each other tightly, their own, individual demons temporarily forgotten. Tina reaches to cradle her sister’s skull as Queenie sobs in the crook of her neck, soaking through her shirt.

“It’ll be alright,” Tina murmurs into her hair as she feels the fine tremors shaking her sister’s frame. “You’re alright.” Queenie wants to tell her that nothing will be alright, that it’s all her doing, but she can’t bring herself to utter a word aloud, throat clogged with tears and emotions. She looks into her sister’s honest eyes, tasting her relief, and suppresses the urge to howl.

Tina. Brave, loving Tina, who’s done nothing but help and support Queenie in any way she possibly could. Tina, who loves so unconditionally, who won’t think twice about throwing herself into harm’s way if it’s to protect another. Tina, who doesn’t know how her world is about to be turned on its head at the hands of her own sister. They stand before the ruin of their life as they’ve known it, the explosion like the starting sound of a gun in a war that’s sure to come.

This is just the beginning, Queenie’s sure of it.

She pushes away to brush a hand over her eyes once she’s in full control of her limbs, banishing the bitter tears of guilt coating her cheeks. Her eyes roam her sister’s face, lingering on the nasty cut along her brow. *I put that there*, she thinks, and suppresses a fresh wave of tears. “It’s not me I’m worried about. Look at your head!”

Tina smiles, a smile that’s gentle and bright, and speaks of relief as she reaches up to gingerly brush her fingers along the wound. “I’ve had worse. You know I have.”

Of course, Queenie knows, no longer keeping track of the cuts and bruises she's had to mend and heal since her sister had joined the force. This one is different, and she swallows at the black ball of dread that forms in the pit of her stomach. The scar is but a small reminder of the shift about to come, of the lives irrevocably altered, and the paths forever changed.

Her hand moves automatically to cover the pocket holding the powder box. It’s heavy, heavier than usual with the knowledge of her actions, the knowledge that she’s helped bring about this hurt and suffering, and she closes her eyes against the sting as fresh tears slip down her face.

Tina makes a soothing sound and gentle fingers rise to stroke Queenie’s cheek. There’s a small commotion behind them and Queenie recognises one of the guards from Grindelwald’s cell. His eyes are frantic as his face contorted in fear and she knows what’s about to happen. *And so it begins*, she thinks.

“He’s gone!” his panicked voice triumphs above the pandemonium of sounds and everyone stops in their tracks as silence descends. “Grindelwald is gone!”
“Mercy Lewis,” Tina breaths and her hand closes around her sister’s arm, squeezing painfully as their gazes meet. Queenie isn’t prepared for this, neither of them is, but they spring into action simultaneously as MACUSA dissolves into chaos for the second time that day.

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The same day, Hertfordshire, England

Newt rushes along the gravel-covered drive, conscious of the high-pitched shrieking from his waistcoat pocket where he’d stashed his watch. He doesn’t need to consult it to know what the clock face says — *You’re late! You’re later than late!* It reads in angry, red letters.

Indeed, he does find himself running behind schedule on an obligatory family dinner yet again, as is his fashion of late. If one is caring for a suitcase full of magical creatures, time becomes a rather nebulous concept of little to no importance. Sometimes he manages to weasel his way out of these dinners, yet his mother insisted on his company on this occasion, sending two owls, three department missives and his own *brother* to wrangle him in. His mother has always been a force to be reckoned with and she knows she usually gets her way.

Mrs Scamander is standing in the doorway when he arrives, kind blue eyes focused on her youngest son as he hurries towards the house. Her beautiful, long auburn hair has long since turned silver, now artfully draped around her head, accenting her joy as she beams up at Newt. His mother reaches for him to pull him down to her level, pressing a warm kiss to his forehead in welcome.

“My Newt,” she breathes as she holds his face between both hands. “It’s been too long.”

“It’s been two weeks. But it’s good to see you, too, mother,” he says, lips pulling into a fond half smile as she pats his cheek before releasing him.

“Good lad. Now come inside, let me get some food into you. Merlin knows you need it. Look at you — you’re just skin and bones! Theseus, too,” she huffs and reaches for his coat as soon as he’s crossed the threshold.

“Yes, mother,” Newt murmurs, grinning to himself as he obediently sheds his outer layers, knowing better than to argue as he hands her his coat.

His mother heaves a weighty sigh of disapproval, and he steels himself for the inevitable lecture. “Newt, this just won’t do. You’re a published author now, and you’re going to have to start looking the part!” He smiles sheepishly as she holds up his battered blue coat accusingly. “This thing has more holes and tears than you have freckles, darling. Did something *chew* on this?”

He sighs and refrains from telling her that’s precisely what happened, slipping on his protective coat of nonchalance instead. “Oh, you know how I don’t bother much with appearances. The creatures certainly don’t mind,” he says and smiles toothily, leaning down to deposit a kiss on her weather-roughened cheek.

“I’m sure, Newton, but you’re no longer crawling through the underbrush of the South American rainforest. I agree, humans can be foolish, simple-minded creatures and should be treated thus. But they won’t be impressed if this brilliant new author they’ve come to see looks positively *feral,*” she continues, picking a piece of straw off the jacket sleeve and pinning him with a pointed stare.

Newt gulps, throat bobbing, as he catalogues the characteristic twinkle in her eye and the firm set of her jaw, eyebrows raised in challenge as if daring him to disagree. He knows that look, has known it ever since he was a small boy; it’s pointless to try and argue with her. His mother had
always got her way and that isn’t going to change anytime soon, whether he is five years old or
nearing thirty.

“I’m going to write to Delphine immediately. She’ll have to come and take your measurements.
We’ll get you some proper new clothes and one of these beautiful new overcoats,” she rattles on
as they continue down the hall. “Something a little more neutral, perhaps? You’d look dashing in
grey, dear.”

(If he is being honest with himself, there's someone he would like to impress, but surely she
wouldn’t be bothered about the colour of his coat or the length of his slacks.)

“As you wish, mother,” he says to appease her, stifling another grin as they reach the family
dining room at the end of the corridor. It’s a generous and impressive affair with high floor-to-
ceiling windows and heavy satin drapery, and a fireplace large enough for Newt to walk into
without bending his head.

There’s a figure standing in front of the windows in the corner, dark hair piled high, exposing the
elegant curve of her neck as she looks out over the gardens. Newt swallows heavily, barely
noticing his mother’s presence as he drinks in her figure. He’d forgotten how short she is, and
how lovely. A memory flashes across his inner eye, there and gone again, transporting him back
into the past, a happier, carefree time before everything changed. His mother touches his arm and
excuses herself to the kitchen, but he hardly hears her.

The woman turns as if on cue, hesitantly meeting his eyes from across the room as her lips pull
into an uncharacteristic, hesitant smile. “Newt,” she breathes and he wants to close his eyes
against the sound of her voice, and the memories it inspires. It’s been years, yet it might as well
have been yesterday.

“Hello, Leta,” he says to her shoulder, avoiding her eyes. Her large, beautiful dark eyes that
captured his soul and followed him into his dreams. They still haunt him sometimes.

She sashays closer and he tries to focus on the soft *swish* of her fine silk gown, undoubtedly of her
own creation, cursing his mother’s ill timing as he clears his throat to stall for time. “Where’s
father and Theseus?”

“Having a drink in the library,” she answers easily. “It’s good to see you, truly. I didn’t think
you’d come.”

“Yes, well. I’m not here on my own free will, if you’re wondering. Theseus can be a real pest if
he wants to be,” he says, joking weakly, hands awkwardly dangling by his sides.

“That he is,” she agrees easily, desperate to keep the conversation going and chancing a small
smile in his direction. He inclines his head, refusing to meet her gaze, and imagines the silhouette
of her hurt and guilt reflected in her eyes. It brings him no joy.

“Oh, stop whinging, Newton. Talking about me, I presume?” Theseus chooses that moment to
waltz into the room, and Newt’s never been happier to see his brother as the atmosphere instantly
warms by a few degrees. He nearly chokes when Theseus wraps him in a bone-crushing hug,
slapping his brother’s back hard enough to force the air from his lungs. “Good to see you, old
chap. I just heard about the book. Congratulations!”

It’s the first family meeting they’re all able to attend, with Theseus off chasing Grindelwald’s
followers across the continent. The first family dinner since that fateful evening in early
December. Newt cringes at the memory, the day when Theseus had come home with a broad grin
on his face and Leta hanging off his arm. The evening they announced their engagement.
All his food had tasted like ashes afterwards.

He’d ended that night in a drunken stupor, excusing himself from the dinner table as soon as it was socially acceptable, returning to his own flat and the comforts of his favourite bottle of Scottish whisky. The decision to travel to New York had been born of that night’s drunken haze, and of the sheer devastation and hollow longing in his chest. When he awoke the next day, entirely too sober, it hadn’t ceased, so he’d purchased a ticket to travel within the week.

Newt and Theseus had addressed the issue precisely once, the night after Newt’s return from America. Catching up over a pint down at the pub that turned into two, then three, then five until the alcohol had loosened their tongues and they conversed in easy camaraderie, just like they’d always done. They talked about Leta and New York, about Newt’s newfound friends, and the set of expressive brown eyes he couldn’t get off his mind.

Theseus seems to sense his brother’s line of thought and clears his throat, gesturing towards the table as their parents enter the room.

The dinner is a happy affair, more joyous than any other family gathering in recent years, and Newt can’t help feeling like their family is finally whole again. Leta had been such a constant presence in their lives ever since they were children, spending more time at the Scamander estate than at her own family home. She fits back into their space like it’s the most natural thing in the world, taking her seat at the table as if she’d never left.

It all changed the day of the incident at school, that unfortunate fall from grace he’d agreed to take, and Leta’s absence had left a gaping hole in all their lives. It had been nearly unbearable, trying to shoulder his father’s anger and disappointment without her by his side. Now, she has simply slid back into place, like the missing piece of the puzzle you were waiting to complete, like she’s never even been gone at all.

“Leta, dear, how’s that dress for the duchess coming along?” their mother asks after the second course, gently touching Leta’s forearm in a motherly gesture.

Leta swallows delicately before showing an earnest smile. “Swimmingly, actually,” she says. “She’s coming for the last fitting tomorrow —”

A sudden whooshing noise makes her pause, and they nearly jump out of their skin when a heron patronus takes shape in the middle of their dining room, hovering a few feet above the ground. “The Minister of Magic will arrive in twenty-one seconds,” a woman’s monotonous voice announces before it dissipates.

“Good heavens!” Mrs Scamander exclaims as the fireplace suddenly roars to life and large, emerald green flames erupt from its centre. There’s the clatter of silverware against porcelain and the scraping of chair legs on timber as everyone stands abruptly.

“Merlin’s bloody beard, what could Fawley possibly want at this hour?” Mr Scamander muses aloud.

The flames part to emit a tall gentleman around their father’s age, his face is severe, all sharp angles and bones and there’s a tired look around his eyes as he stands before them. He takes off his hat to incline his head in greeting.

“Good evening, Cepheus, Delia. I’m sorry to intrude on your family gathering,” he addresses their parents, nodding at them in turn before smiling at Newt. “Congratulations on the book, Newton. Good on you, dear boy.”
“Thank you, Minister,” Newt murmurs and lowers his head in thanks.

“Good evening, Hector,” Mr Scamander says and gestures towards an empty chair. “Why don’t you have a seat?”

“I thank you, but I don’t mean to keep you long, Cepheus. I’m here on business, and I’ll need to be quick about it.” His eyes fall on Theseus and he heaves a great sigh, hands gripping the back of a chair until his knuckles turn white. “Though, I might as well tell you all since you’ll be reading it in the papers tomorrow.”

“Sir?” Theseus asks and a deep furrow appears between his eyebrows. Newt knows this expression, but he doesn’t have to look at his brother to know this is serious. The Minister of Magic wouldn’t be standing in their dining room if it weren’t a matter of great importance.

“There’s been an incident in New York this afternoon — an attack of sorts,” he concedes and Mrs Scamander covers her mouth to suppress a gasp. Newt’s heart drops to his feet as an ice cold shiver runs the length of his spine.

Tina, he thinks in despair, and clutches his middle as his stomach gives a painful lurch like he is about to lose his dinner. It takes all his willpower not to jump up and Apparate to the Ministry himself, the urge to contact her almost unbearable, yet he knows it’s no use. He’ll have to look to his brother for news.

“Again? Do we know who’s behind it? Is it linked to the incident in Amsterdam?” Mr Scamander interrupts, face as white as the linen covering the table.

Minister Fawley holds up his hand. “It appears to follow the same patterns, yes. We don’t know much, but it comes at a rather devastating loss of human life,” he says, face grim. “But there’s more. It seems during the confusion…” Fawley heaves a great sigh and reaches for his handkerchief to wipe his forehead. “Grindelwald has managed to elude the Americans.”

“Grindelwald has escaped MACUSA’s custody? How’s that even possible?” Theseus asks in disbelief as Newt’s insides turn to ice.

Will we die, just a little?

“We don’t know yet how, and MACUSA are being tight-lipped as ever. If they know anything, they’re not telling us. I thought that perhaps your brother could — since he’s been just recently —” The minister starts, gesturing towards Newt, who snaps out of his thoughts to vehemently shake his head.

“I’m sorry, Minister, but you’re mistaken in your assumptions. I wouldn’t know,” he says and shares a quick glance with his brother.

“Do we know anything yet?” Mrs Scamander interjects and presses a hand to her chest, her face the precise colour of ash as the candlelight reflects off the diamond dangling from her ear.

“There’s been an explosion during a public address, they were extraditing him to Switzerland to stand trial. MACUSA is citing internal investigations, so we know very little.” He wipes his forehead again and manages a thin, reassuring smile that doesn’t reach his eyes. “Of course, even if he manages to return there’s no reason for him to come to Britain. We aren’t in any danger, so these are simply precautionary measures.”

“I will accompany you to the Ministry,” Theseus says without preamble and the Minister nods in thanks before donning his hat.
“It was good to see you all. I wish it would have been under more joyous circumstances, but alas. Good evening.” He bows his head before walking back to the fireplace.

“Thes!” Newt hisses under his breath, catching his brother’s forearm to prevent him from turning away. “One of my friends — she’s an auror at MACUSA.” They share a meaningful look.

“Anything I find out, I’ll let you know,” Theseus whispers as he leans close and squeezes his shoulder before following the Minister into the flames. Newt sags into his chair and wipes a broad hand across his face as he fears for his friends.

“Well, what a pleasant end to the evening,” his mother comments, voice dripping with sarcasm as she folds her serviette and places it next to her plate.

Newt thinks he couldn’t agree more.
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

This was supposed to be Saturday's chapter. I blame the cold meds, apologies!

MACUSA, New York, later the same day

Seraphina Picquery is pacing up and down in front of her desk, pinching the bridge of her nose against the headache blooming behind her eyes. It’s of no use. She looks up at a tentative knock to find Arnold Guzman is standing just outside her office, worrying his hands. His face is lacking its usual quiet confidence, bearing a look of exhaustion and worry, and she sighs. It’s like looking into a mirror.

“Madame President?” His voice sounds equally strained and he seems to have aged five years in the last hour. Seraphina couldn’t care less. She makes an impatient gesture with her hand and he hurriedly steps forward, closing the door behind him.

“How could this happen?” she grinds out between gritted teeth and claws the edge of her desk for support, the vein on her neck clearly visible as she fights for composure.

Guzman blanches and small beads of sweat appear on his forehead. “I — we cannot say. His prison cell should have been impenetrable.”

Her eyes flash with fury. “Well, it wasn’t! We’re going to look like absolute fools in front of the entire wizarding community.” She rubs her throbbing temples. “I don’t even want to imagine what the International Confederation will have to say!”

He says nothing as she rants, taking up her earlier occupation and striding up and down in front of her window. “I want the entire city sealed off. Close immigration, no visitors, no mail, no answering questions until we get to the bottom of this.” She stops to look him right in the eye and he shudders at the vehemence in her voice. “I want this man found!”

Guzman looks like he’s about to protest, opening and closing his mouth like a fish before he withers under her penetrating stare, his body going slack, entirely devoid of any fight he might have left to argue. “What do I tell the foreign dignitaries?”

“The bare minimum, pending internal investigations. We need to identify the dead and contact their respective heads of state,” she murmurs, face solemn before her walls fall back into place and her expression hardens once more.

“Yes, Ma’am,” he says and fingers his collar before wiping his sweaty palms on his slacks.

“How far are your aurors in their training?” she asks abruptly.

He swallows audibly. “They have another month to complete on American soil —” he starts but she doesn’t wait for him to finish.

“I give them one week. You get them to investigate the incident and have them report back to me with their findings. They ship out to France in eight days. We can’t afford mistakes like this,
Guzman,” she says, narrowing her eyes at him.

“Understood. I’ll make arrangements,” he says and bows his head before silently backing out of her office.

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Queenie keeps the box well-hidden in her top drawer as MACUSA threatens to burst at the seams. Tensions are running high as Seraphina Picquery openly calls for calm.

Tina practically lives at the Woolworth building as soon as her cut magically heals itself, and Queenie can see the glow of the protective bubble charm that surrounds MACUSA from their bedroom window at night. It remains there for three days, until all the rubble is cleared and they buried the dead, yet while all the visible wounds might have gone, the healing is yet to begin.

Thirteen witches and wizards lost their lives that day, some MACUSA workers, some mere spectators eager to see the foreign dignitaries and to watch the proceedings unfold. The city is left in chaos, with a wizarding population living in fear and uncertainty as they grapple for some sense of normalcy.

Queenie doesn’t go to work for the duration of their investigation and paces the apartment instead, nearly wearing a path into her carpet as she walks up and down in front of the window.

Grindelwald comes out of the box as soon as Tina leaves the first morning, after a mere three hours of rest, and stands watching her in stoic silence. It’s like he’s waiting for something, for her to crumble and scream and charge at him. She does neither.

“Did you know this was going to happen?” she asks out of the blue, calmly, and with her back to the window, meeting his disconcerting eyes for the first time that day.

“Yes,” he says and he looks foreign against the golden warmth of the familiar walls behind him. It’s a stark contrast, her past and her present, and it taunts her tortured heart. “Would that have changed your mind?”

“I’m not sure,” she answers truthfully and turns to face the outside world. “I don’t know anything no more.”

On the third day, a snowy white pigeon delivers a short missive into her waiting hands. The letter is empty save for a place and time, and destroys itself as soon as her eyes skimmed the words. She uses Tina’s absence to slip out of the apartment and into the night, her powder box tucked safely into the pocket of her jacket.

The establishment is another hole-in-the-wall that reeks of illegal dealings like all the other speakeasies littering the city. Faded paint is chipping from the wall where it isn’t covered with layers upon layers of posters and Queenie wrinkles her nose against the smell of stale gigglewater and ale, briefly wondering whether it’s seeped into the ground and has saturated the building’s foundations before swiftly moving on.

She’s sure to walk with confidence and poise, like she knows exactly where she’s going, casually leaning against the counter to order a drink from the bored-looking house elf behind the bar while surreptitiously surveying the room.

It’s just past ten in the evening, yet it’s still early, especially for an establishment like this, with only two patrons nursing their drinks on either end of the room. A sour-faced troll is spread across three tables on his own, knocking back shots of thick, dark liquor, and an elegant lady is sitting alone in the back of the room, dressed in black from head to toe, save for the scarlet colour of her
lips.

Queenie doesn’t have to think long on which person her contact might be. She comes to stand across from the mysterious woman who keeps her gaze trained on the untouched glass of amber liquid sitting before her. The deep crystal blue of her eyes is both mesmerising and frightening, a striking contrast to the warm richness of the chestnut brown of her hair, perfectly coiffed atop her head.

She looks up suddenly and Queenie feels heat rising at the back of her neck. The woman’s direct gaze is unsettling, yet she cannot pinpoint why, only it feels like her soul is laid bare on this very table and there’s nothing she can do to stop it. Maybe, she thinks, this is how everyone feels around me. Moments later she realises what unsettles her. It’s the silence that sets her on edge; she hears nothing.

*You’re a legilimens,* she thinks on a hunch and the woman’s lips curl into a devious grin.

*Indeed, I am. Smart girl. Gellert said as much,* the voice reverberates in Queenie’s mind and she’s forced to suppress a shiver at the lethal quality of it, dangerous and silky smooth, setting her nerves on edge.

Queenie realises with a jolt that she’s yet to sit or utter a single word aloud, and how suspicious they must look, even within an establishment like this. She catches the stranger’s eye and the woman gives a nearly imperceptible nod as a look of understanding passes between them.

“You sit,” she murmurs, her voice as smooth as the thoughts she projects, gesturing towards the empty chair across from her. It has a soft lilt and a melodious quality to it which painfully reminds Queenie of Newt. *We mustn’t arouse suspicions. We’re being watched.*

“Thank you,” Queenie utters aloud as she sinks into her seat, feeling a set of eyes burning into her back yet doesn’t dare to turn around. *How do I know if I can trust you?*

“Is he doing well?” The stranger’s blue eyes are unnerving, her lips forever frozen in a calculating smile, like a predator sizing up their prey. Queenie lowers her gaze to the rough wood grain of the table as she listens to the woman’s thoughts. *You can’t. Gellert trusts me and that’s got to be good enough for you.*

“Yes, he’s doing well. He’s been staying at the apartment most of the time,” Queenie says. *What’s your name? How can I contact you in the future?*

“That’s good to hear, I shall see him soon. Did you get the present I asked you for?” A well-manicured hand slides across the table, palm turned upwards in silent anticipation. *That’s no matter. There won’t be a reason to speak to me after today. Your Muggle’s memory has been modified as promised and it should be fully restored the moment he lays eyes on you.*

“Yes, it wasn’t easy to find. It’s all in there.” Queenie slides her powder box across the table and cannot suppress the shiver of relief, yet she’s unable to shake off the lingering remnants of disgust for the man as it leaves her hands. *I’m not sure if it was all worth it in the end. If Jacob would know…*

“Thank you. I’ll let my friend know you’re sending your regards.” The woman smiles, her eyes boring into Queenie’s, and the voice in her mind loses its silkiness for just a moment. They’re the first truly honest words she’s said all evening. *We all carry light and shadow within us, and sometimes we need to leave the light behind to do what’s right.*

*I don’t know what’s right or wrong no more,* Queenie’s mind supplies, failing to hide the
bitterness in her words, and the stranger smiles with genuine pity in her eyes.

The heart’s deepest desires can be a dark place indeed. He will understand, because believe me: I have read his mind and he wouldn’t hesitate to do the same for you. I might not share your affinity for the non-magical kind, yet even I can see the beauty of it. The woman pockets the powder box, tucking it safely into the inside pocket of her cascading black overcoat and stands with all the regal grace of a lady born of the higher classes. Her mental shields are back in place as she turns to leave, noiselessly gliding towards the exit without so much as a backward glance.

Queenie remains in her seat long after her companion has left the speakeasy, trying to reign in her thoughts and de-tangle her emotions while willing her body to move, but it’s to no avail. She feels entirely numb.

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GRINDELWALD’S SPECTACULAR ESCAPE!

The dangerous dark wizard’s whereabouts remain unknown following an incident at MACUSA headquarters on the afternoon of February 13th. A powerful explosion ripped through the atrium during a Presidential address, killing an unknown number of officials and bystanders alike. The President remains unharmed, yet she is rumoured to have barricaded herself in her office and is quietly seething behind closed doors, as seems her custom. Any requests for information have been politely refused. “I ain’t telling you nothing, President’s orders. Go stick your nose into some other people’s business, why don’t ya?” an important-looking security wizard tells our local correspondent. The British Minister of Magic, Hector Fawley, remains calm and confident on the matter this morning: “There’s no need to whip up a fuss. Nothing has been confirmed yet, and even if he does return to Europe, Britain is safe from the trouble on the Continent.”

Temper are clearly on edge with our American cousins as the world holds their breath and anxiously awaits an official statement on Grindelwald’s fate. Is he returning to European shores to continue his reign of terror? Where will he strike next, and is anyone safe?

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London, Diagon Alley, three days later

“Now, hold still, lad — or you’ll be lucky if it’s just your ear I’ll be cutting off.”

Newt blushes a furious shade of beetroot as the elderly seamstress directs the scissors to the overlong fabric at his middle, shortening it with a decisive snip. Her fingers clutch an intricately carved wand, moving it in a well-practised swirl to finish the seam with the silvery yarn from its tip.

“I’m so sorry,” he murmurs around a yawn, struggling to keep himself upright as he blinks at his reflection in the mirror.

There are dark circles around his bloodshot eyes, proof of the string of near sleepless nights he’s had. He still hasn’t heard from Theseus and there is no way for him to get any word to Tina. Communications have ceased entirely, and he feels the loss of their connection like he’s missing a limb. Not knowing her fate has him constantly skirting the edge, and the fear seems almost palpable, invading his dreams and occupying his thoughts the moment he opens his eyes.

His mother sits in the comfortable armchair by the window and he can feel the concern in her eyes boring into the back of his head. Newt knows she worries about him, Theseus too, as any mother does, whether her children have outgrown their school uniforms and fought in a war. Perhaps, he
“There,” the seamstress says, lowering her wand with a satisfied nod. Newt steps closer to examine the newly tailored shirt and cannot deny its elegant fit, much more shapely than any of his older garments. He had filled out over the course of his travels, caring for his suitcase inhabitants and hunting down evasive creatures across wild and unfriendly terrain, and his old shirts had struggled to cope, bursting at the seams.

There’s a knock behind them and they all turn in unison. Theseus is standing in the door, hair sticking up in places, face pale, his hand still raised against the door frame as he takes in the scene before him. “Fetching choice, Newton,” he says with a teasing grin, gesturing towards the shirt, barely containing the amusement at his brother’s expense. “Now even your shirt has freckles.”

Newt glares at him, but it’s a half-hearted attempt; he’s too relieved to see Theseus’ face to put any real force behind it. His brother looks exhausted, the dark circles under his eyes speaking volumes as he moves to lean against the wall by their mother’s side, and Newt’s heart beats faster when he considers what Theseus’ presence might mean.

“You mustn’t tease your brother, Theseus. That pattern is highly fashionable,” Mrs Scamander interjects, her features softening as she gazes at her youngest son with fondness in her eyes. “I think he looks very handsome.”

Theseus masks his snicker behind a hasty cough and their mother’s face darkens considerably. She sends him another pointed look before smoothing out her features and turning back towards her friend. “Delphine, is that all the measurements you need?”

“I’m just missing the undergarments,” says Delphine. Newt gulps, sending his brother another annoyed glance when he makes a strangled sound, face bright scarlet as Theseus bites his knuckles to keep himself from laughing. “Undergarments? Mother, is that really necessary — “ Newt protests, and his freckles darken in embarrassment as heat creeps onto his cheeks, but Delphine neatly cuts him off.

“Goodie gumdrops, lad! There’s no need to be shy. Nothing I haven’t seen before. Now, off with it!” she says and smiles knowingly, increasing the network of fine, friendly wrinkles around her eyes and at the corners of her mouth. Her wand describes a neat semi-circle and he gasps at the sudden gust of cold air at his nether regions, suppressing the urge to cover himself, entirely bare. Newt’s face is aflame and he wants the ground to swallow him whole as Delphine takes one look at him and turns to his mother with a mischievous twinkle in her eye. “Well, Delia. You and Cepheus always knew how to make ‘em.”

His mother gives an amused chuckle that morphs into a hearty laugh as her sons share a look of clear mortification. “Have mercy on my lads, Delphine. I think we have embarrassed them enough for one day.” Her gaze settles on her eldest. “Theseus, dear, what brings you here?”

The blush on Theseus’ face rivals his brother’s as he shuffles in place, awkwardly clearing his throat. “I came to see Newt, actually.”

Her expression falters. “It’s about that fanatic, isn’t it?”

“Mother,” Theseus cautions and she nods, swallowing the smart remark she had meant to make when he sends her a meaningful glance.

She catches on quickly. “I’ll put the kettle on,” she says pointedly, blue eyes turning serious as she indicates for Delphine to follow her into the adjoining room. Newt breathes a sigh of relief when
he is finally dressed and smooths a hand over the new mother of pearl buttons on his front. Theseus comes to stand close to him as soon as the last of their mother’s skirts disappear through the door.

Newt cannot bring himself to address the erumpent in the room, deeply afraid of the answer, but Theseus seems to sense his brother’s distress and puts him out of his misery.

“I couldn’t find out much. MACUSA have cut all international communication and refuse to give any more details while their investigations are pending. It’s almost like they think we had something to do with it and Fawley does nothing.” There is bitterness in his voice when he says it and his face pulls into an angry frown. Newt gives a small nod, swallowing the urge to press him for more.

Theseus sighs heavily and Newt knows the news cannot be good. “Thirteen dead, many more wounded, some of them MACUSA aurors. I couldn’t find out whether there were any women among the casualties.” His face twists with pain. “I’m sorry, Newt.”

_Aurors. Casualties._

Newt feels lightheaded, struggling with air as he reminds himself to breathe, shaking badly as he places a steadying hand on the mantelpiece behind him. He doesn’t want to think of the possibility, doesn’t even want to consider the ramifications of his brother’s words, yet he knows he has no choice. “I think if… Queenie would have… if something happened to Tina they would have found a way to let me know,” he says without conviction, knowing he is grasping at straws.

“Don’t despair just yet, little brother. No news is good news, for now.” Theseus pauses and his lips twist with suppressed curiosity. “This woman, the auror — Tina. Who is she to you? You told me she is a friend, but are you certain that is all?” he asks, cocking his head to the side, eyes narrowing in question.

“I care for her,” Newt pauses and his gaze is startlingly direct when he meets his brother’s eyes. “Very much.” He’s known it for a while, yet saying the words aloud sends a shiver of delight down his spine. There’s a surge of euphoria at the centre of his heart, growing larger and larger until it feels about to burst from his chest, sending tendrils of warmth to the tips of his toes.

Theseus lips pull upwards into a beaming smile. “Merlin’s beard! My little brother, taken with a girl! Newt, that’s —” He pauses and a sudden look of understanding crosses his face, eyes dancing with honest excitement when he leans closer. “She’s the reason for your manic determination to finish your manuscript and that hurry to apply for a travel permit.”

“I wasn’t _manic_,” Newt grumbles and blushes a delicate pink, momentarily forgetting about his perils.

Theseus scoffs. “You worked like a man possessed and your flat was a mess. We didn’t see you for a month.”

“Well,” Newt says and can’t help the smile pulling at the corners of his lips. “I might have forgotten to wash or shave for a couple of days.”

Theseus barks a raucous laugh. “You looked like a caveman, Newt. Smelled like one, too, and you scared Archie from Transportations half to death. He thought you were some homeless muggle that stumbled in from the street,” he says with a lopsided grin. “And you’re surprised they refused you?”

Newt gives a noncommittal shrug, but his hand shakes as he stuffs it into the pocket of his slacks.
That refusal is still a sore spot. “I promised to hand her a copy of my book in person, Thes, and a Scamander —”

“— Always keeps his word,” Theseus finishes, ducking his head to catch Newt’s eye, and takes hold of his brother’s arm to give it a hearty squeeze. “I know, father never failed to remind us. I’m on your side, Newt; you have my word. If she’s important to you, she’s important to me. I’ll do whatever I can; I swear it.”

Newt bites his lip to keep it from quivering as he blinks the moisture from his eyes. He reaches out to take a hold of Theseus’ shoulder in thanks, unable to formulate the words, and they remain locked in their one-armed embrace for a moment longer.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Lesson one: if you're ill and taking cold meds, DO NOT POST YOUR WORK. This should have been Tuesday’s chapter, so if you’re wondering why it looks familiar... please turn back to the previous chapter. Sorry about the confusion, hope it's still entertaining. ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The Docks, New York, late February

There’s still snow on the ground when Tina finds herself at the docks once more. The sky is ice blue and bright and bitter cold. Her breath comes in small white puffs and she rubs her hands together to generate some warmth. It feels like déjà-vu as she surveys the crowds gathered in front of the gangway, reminding her of a farewell not too long ago, only this time it’s her clutching the suitcase full of personal belongings.

Queenie stands beside her, shoulders pushed back and head held high, silently watching the crowds as the wind tousles her golden locks. They don’t have to speak, and even though Queenie is no longer able to read her sister’s thoughts they know exactly how the other feels. Tina reaches for her, gently squeezing her fingers as she blinks against the sting of tears and the bright winter sun. It’s a glorious day, yet Tina cannot find any joy in it.

The cold feels empty and lonely, like her heart, and the impending separation eats away at her. Her thoughts travel across the ocean as they often do these days, wondering, longing for a word or a glimpse of unruly ginger curls. It’s been a long few weeks without him, and the coming months of complete isolation promise to be even longer.

I’ll be so close, yet so far, she thinks and lowers her gaze. I didn’t even get to say goodbye.

“I can’t believe you’re leavin’ me,” Queenie says, ripping Tina from her thoughts. There are tears in her voice, yet it isn’t laced with the bitterness or accusation Tina expected as she turns to face her sister.

“I know. You have no idea how hard that is,” Tina murmurs and doesn’t try to fight her own tears, letting them run freely down her cheeks.

“Just as hard as letting you go, I think,” Queenie says and gives a watery laugh. She wants to be positive, wants to be strong, to show her sister there’s no need to worry. “I’ll be fine, Teen. You know I don’t need no alarm clock no more.”

“I know you don’t,” Tina whispers and closes her eyes against the memory of eight-year-old Queenie, wailing and clutching at Tina’s skirts as she’s about to leave for Ilvermorny, leaving her sister behind.

A gentle hand on her cheek brings her back to reality and Queenie’s eyes shine with renewed moisture as she holds her sister’s gaze. “I know where you went just now, Teenie. Don’t. It’s in the past, you don’t have to worry about me. I should be the one worrying about you.”
Tina knows; it’s the exact reason why she’s fretting so much. Queenie looks pale and thin, her hair unusually limp, and the forced, happy smile doesn’t reach her tired eyes.

“I’ll be alright,” Tina says, and her voice sounds weak to her own ears. “You just be careful, yeah?”

“Always.” A tearful sniff. “Just promise to come back to me,” Queenie whispers, throat tight, nearly choking on her tears. “And write to me. Every day.” Tina chuckles through her tears.

“I’ll do everything in my power, I promise,” she says and embraces Queenie, pressing a kiss to her forehead just the ship sounds its first warning. Tina’s legs feel like they’re made of lead, growing heavier and heavier with every step she takes along the gangplank, each step taking her further away from her sister. She chances one last look at the top and raises her hand in farewell.

Queenie returns the gesture, waving and waving and waving until the ship looks like a small toy boat bobbing along the horizon. Only then does she turn, with a renewed determination in her step, and draws one fortifying breath before taking a left turn at the crossing, decisively moving in the opposite direction of her apartment.

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The street is busy with cars and customers when she rounds the corner, a lively neighbourhood that radiates the same cheery optimism she sees reflected in him.

*Kowalski Quality Baked Goods* is painted across the front in golden letters, just as he imagined it and she cannot help the broad smile spreading across her face. She finds she doesn't want to, either, choosing to wear her bright happiness on her sleeve for everyone to see. A small bell above the door gives a cheerful ring as she enters. The shop is still busy at this time of day, bustling with activity. She suppresses a gasp when she sees him behind the spotless counter, smiling at a customer as he hands her the wares.

He looks like he's dancing when he thanks the lady and turns back around, flitting between the till and the shelves at the back, calling to his assistant with the same kindness and broad smile he gives his customers. Her heart swells in her chest, aching with love and longing for him, and it takes all her willpower not to give in to it with him so tantalisingly close. Just a little longer.

Queenie stays back and pretends to peruse the wares as the shop slowly begins to empty, and she's once again speechless at the intricate likeness he's managed to achieve. The first time she came here, right after she'd spotted the advertisement in the newspaper, she spent hours admiring his art, for that is what he is to her: an artist who uses his heart to shape his life and his craft alike.

It's when the last client jingles the bell on her way out when Queenie finally approaches the counter. She's nervous and doesn't know what to expect; there's no script for situations like this, no rigid framework or rule-book to follow. It's just her and him and the great unknown.

Queenie bites her lower lip in anticipation, sweetly folding her hands in front of her skirts. Jacob’s usual smile falters as his eyes roam her face and a deep furrow appears between his brows. There's a burst of light in his mind, a colourful spark of recognition, and she feels it even before he forms the words.

She rolls on to the balls of her feet, not knowing what to do with the happiness bubbling in her chest as she beams at him. Jacob touches his fingers to his neck in answer, where he *knows* the scar to be, returning her smile when she gives a watery laugh. He walks around the counter, his eyes never leaving hers as he goes to turn the little sign to closed before coming to stand mere inches from her.
Queenie jumps into action with an agonising cry, a sound unlike anything he’s ever heard before, like the death throes of a wounded creature. He’s barely got time to lift his arms, but her Jacob never fails her, catching her as she barrels into him. The dam breaks as all the pent-up stress and guilt and heartache comes bearing down on her, crashing over her as she crumbles in his arms.

“Hey there, doll. You’re alright,” Jacob murmurs and strokes her back while she openly weeps into his shirt.

Queenie cannot find it in herself to care.

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Late February, Newt’s flat, South London

The first owl pecks at his window early one morning before he’s even had his first sip of tea, and Newt squints at it in disdain before opening the window to let it in. The sun is barely making an appearance on the horizon and it’s much too early even for the daily newspaper, so he is quick to free the bird of the missive tied to its leg. He’s disappointed when the ink at the front isn’t his brother’s elegant midnight blue but a dark, glittering emerald. It’s no less familiar but truly unexpected, and entirely unwelcome.

Newt lays it aside without opening, burying it under the stack of unread letters, no longer interested in what his former teacher has got to say.

The last time he’d spoken to Albus Dumbledore it had ended in disaster.

Pickett gives a hesitant chirp from where he’s perched atop Newt’s shoulder, raising one twiggy arm in question, but it goes unnoticed. He scowls unhappily and pinches Newt’s cheek, making him frown in apology. There are too many thoughts and feelings clouding his mind, with the upcoming book signings and Tina’s continued absence weighing heavily on his heart. Her last letter sits propped up on his mantelpiece, and what used to be a comfort is now a painful reminder, yet he refuses to take it down.

Better a painful reminder than none at all, he thinks.

Newt refuses to forget, stubbornly hanging on to her memory, and this makes it a little more real. He closes his eyes and imagines her slow, delighted smile, the tearful laugh at the docks, her unguarded expression and the obvious delight at his promise to return. He nearly scalds himself with his tea and sighs, deciding he’s entirely too distracted and pushes it away. Pickett’s leaves droop atop his head as he reaches out to soothingly stroke an arm along Newt’s stubbled cheek.

“I’m alright, Pick,” he says to pacify the troubled bowtruckle, but Pickett isn’t easily fooled. He climbs down onto the table, using Newt’s arm like a rope as he descends, raising himself to his full height as he glares at his friend. “Pickett, what did we say about sticking your leaves into other people’s affairs?” The bowtruckle blows him a raspberry and Newt grins against his better judgement. “Really?”

He stands with an exasperated huff, ignoring Pickett’s tirade of angry clicks as he pours his tea in the sink. It gurgles as it disappears down the drain and he finds it oddly satisfying. Fitting. He’s in a sour mood for the rest of the day and it doesn’t get better as it wears on. The next owl arrives a mere two hours later, accompanied by a second, then a third and a fourth until he has a large stack of identical letters sitting on his kitchen table. Newt feeds them to the fire one by one and watches with satisfaction as they crumble and turn to ash.

This continues the following day, and the next until the end of the week when he receives an
angry missive from his publisher, complaining of a similar avalanche of correspondence with his
name scribbled across the front in emerald green ink.

It follows him wherever he goes, and his frustration levels reach their saturation point early Friday
afternoon when there’s a soft knock at his office door. Newt curses, expecting the man himself
behind the door when he throws it open. He starts when it reveals a smiling young witch instead.

“Hello,” she says with an ecstatic smile that spans the entirety of her face, arms thrown wide. “I
made it!”

“Ah, seems that you have.” Newt’s brows crinkle in a bewildered furrow. “And how may I help
you?”

“Oh heavens, pardon my manners! I’m Bunty. Your new assistant.” Her hand shoots out with
clean efficiency and he gives it a hesitant shake, still fighting the fog of confusion.

“I wasn’t aware I had one.”

“You didn’t, until now. Mr Worme sent me, says you might need a hand now that you’re getting
regular correspondence.” The tips of his ears turn pink as she peers behind him and adds,
“Certainly looks like it.”

Newt follows her gaze to the shelves that occupy the far end of his wall, crammed to the brim with
all manner of instruments and bottles of various sizes containing pieces of hide and preserved
specimen floating about in clear liquid. The large chest of drawers at the opposite wall holds many
of his files and smaller items, some of its drawers no longer closing with its contents spilling out
into the open.

His desk is shoved in a small corner like an afterthought, piled high with precariously leaning
stacks of papers and letters, the floor next to it covered in sketches he’d just been examining. The
rest of the room is full of stacked boxes and barrels of feed; every inch and every free ledge has an
occupant. Her eyes swivel from his face to his office and back, and he starts as the sickle drops.

“Ah, do come in, please.”

“Thank you, Mr Scamander.”

He waves it off. “Please, call me Newt.”

Bunty circles the room, stepping over stray boxes and expertly avoiding the papers on the floor,
coming to stand at the centre with both hands on her hips and a look of fierce determination that
reminds him distantly of his mother. “By Aedh and Dubhghall, this is not going to be an easy feat.
Mr Worme wasn’t exaggerating.”

“I don’t see how any of this concerns Mr Worme. The manuscript was delivered in due time and I
am meeting all my deadlines, so…” he trails off when she cocks her head, one eyebrow raised in
disbelief.

“Young colleagues avoid your office and nearly didn’t want to let me close. They say there are
things exploding in here.” As if on cue one of his sick direcrawl chicks pops in and out of
existence with a thunderous crack.

“Maybe just a smidge,” Newt concedes, inclining his head, and manages a crooked smile.

“May I?” she asks, unaffected, gesturing towards the mess on his desk and he gives a permissive
wave of his hand.
Bunty brandishes her wand at the sketches on the floor and they flutter reluctantly, but do not move. She turns to him with a stern look on her face and he lowers his head to hide his satisfied smirk. Why should his possessions be any more compliant than their owner? Like master, like man.

Newt has a fitting remark at the tip of his tongue but Pickett chooses that moment to make an appearance, slipping from his coat pocket to wave a wiry arm at the perceived intruder. Newt prepares himself for the usual squeal of horror and immediate repulsion and is thoroughly surprised when Bunty expresses neither.

“And who do have we here?” Her smiling face leans closer to the furious bowtruckle, her long, red curls falling forward to frame it like a set of brightly-coloured curtains. “Aren’t you a handsome little dear!”

Newt’s eyebrows disappear beneath his fringe when Pickett quiets, equally flummoxed, and the colour of the bowtruckle’s little face changes from its usual quiet sage to a furious emerald. It’s the first time Newt has ever seen the creature blush. Bunty reaches out a hand and Newt is once again left perplex when Pickett doesn’t recoil but reaches to touch her finger with the tip of his before crawling along her arm on spindly legs.

“Beautiful, isn’t he?” she says with Pickett happily dangling off her finger and Newt feels all his earlier irritation drain away.

“He’s certainly something,” he concedes, “as is the lot of them.” The corners of his mouth lift with the beginning of a smile as he chances a look at her.

“I’m not worried, Mr Newt. I come from a big family and younger siblings can be harder to manage than a flock of angry pixies.” He finds this assumption doubtful but decides to let it slide. Bunty waves her wand at the sketches littering the floor and this time they line up neatly, stacking themselves on a clean pile atop his desk. She smiles in triumph. “Now, I think we could both do with a proper cup of tea. How about I’ll go put the kettle on.”

She hands Pickett back to him with a wink and Newt’s smile broadens as his bowtruckle chirps after her. Maybe, he thinks, a little help isn’t so bad after all.

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His next disturbance comes a mere two hours later when a soft knock sounds at his door. “Enter!” he calls, expecting Bunty, back turned towards the door as he rummages through the contents of a messy drawer.

“Newt?” The voice makes him whirl around on the spot and his eyes grow wide as he spots Leta lingering in the doorway. He blinks at her for a moment before turning away again.

A harassed-looking Bunty presses into the room behind Leta. “I’m so sorry, I tried to tell her you’re not seeing visitors—” she says but he waves her off.

“What do you need?” He addresses Leta instead. It comes out short, more sharp-edged than he intends it to, and he gives a small wince when he sees her jerk away from him as if struck. Bunty discreetly flees the room, firmly closing the door behind her.

“What has gotten into you?” Leta counters and folds her arms in front of her chest, taken aback by the hostility and frustration in his voice.

His contrition is short-lived and he slams the drawer shut with more force than necessary before turning to glare at her. “Nothing. Everything. I don’t know. You never come to see me here, we
haven’t spoken properly in nearly a decade and you’re about to marry my brother, so I repeat: What do you need, Leta?"

“Do I need an excuse to see my soon-to-be brother?” she says weakly and he raises one disbelieving eyebrow before looking away. Her entire frame seems to cave in on itself as she heaves a great sigh, all the fight leaving her body at once and she becomes his Leta once more, worrying her fingers. “I want to talk to you, Newt. We are going to be family. I don’t want this thing to hang between us forever like an invisible shadow. It’s separating us and follows us around wherever we go.”

He doesn’t say anything at first, not trusting his voice and feeling entirely numb, overwhelmed with the conflicting emotions raging within. How often had he wished for the opportunity to talk to her, to ask her why, to tell her what it did to him? To find out whether it had all been a lie. Now that the moment has come, he no longer feels so sure; he’s buried the pain and memories long ago, deep within, and he secretly prefers it that way. There’d been a time when he would have welcomed the opportunity to lash out at her, to make her hurt the same way he had done, but the urge has long since passed.

Tina has inadvertently helped him cover the hole he hasn’t been able to fill on his own, and he isn’t certain he wants to unearth it all. Not now, not ever. He knows one word from her will undo it all, and he resents the power she still holds over him.

“Please?” she says in a small voice; her large, expressive brown eyes are pleading up at him and he knows he is lost even before meeting her gaze. He gives a small nod and doesn’t have time to dwell on it as his mouth forms the words on its own violation. “Yes. Yes, alright.”

They stand looking at each other for a beat, then two, before Leta breaks the spell as she sends him a grateful smile. “Thank you, Newt, truly. It means a lot to me. You —”

Newt interrupts her by holding up a hand. “Please don’t say it.” Her eyes fill with tears and he swallows at the sight. “I can’t hear it. Not yet.”

“I understand,” she murmurs and lowers her gaze, fighting her own hurt, pain clearly edged across her face. “I didn’t mean right away. Could we — would you have time after your book launch at Diagon Alley?”

“Yes,” is all he trusts himself to say as he avoids her gaze.

She wipes at her eyes before schooling her features into a practised air of indifference as her walls come up once more. “Very well. I shall see you at Flourish and Blotts on the 19th.”

He doesn’t acknowledge her when she leaves, listening for the swish of her skirts as she makes her way to the door. She lingers briefly with her hand on the door handle and he wonders if she’s going to say any more before she utters a small sigh and closes the door behind her.

Newt is alone again, free to retreat to the safety of his own mind as he turns towards his desk once more. There are reports waiting to be filed, letters to be read, papers to be signed. It all blurs before his eyes and he rubs a tired hand across his face.

He directs his wand at the forgotten mug of tea that balances precariously atop a stack of folders to his left, reheating its contents as it floats towards his outstretched hand. Its familiar flavour coats his tongue as the warmth soothes his shaky nerves, alleviating the slight tremor in his hands.

There are too many questions weighing on his mind, and it isn’t the first time he considers the vial of Swooping Evil venom stashed away in his shed at home. He sighs and dismisses the thought,
lifting his cup to his lips to take another calming sip.

*No. I’ve been running from these feelings for long enough. It’s time to face them head-on.*

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**North-Eastern France, early March 1927**

They arrive in France a week after leaving New York and Tina thinks she’s never been so glad to reach solid ground.

She’d been suffering for most of their voyage, spending much of it below deck feeling like her stomach had become detached from her body. Her colleagues seemed to have adjusted to the constant, gentle sway of the ship without difficulties, while she’d still sported a slight green sheen every time she passed a mirror.

Cherbourg is a busy port city, and the noise and stink remind her of home, making her think of Queenie with a painful jolt until she hears two seamen calling to each other in French. It pulls her back into reality, into the here and now, and to the task at hand. A portkey brings them to their final destination. It proves to be too much for her still abused stomach. Her feet barely touch the ground when she's forced to bend over, one arm curled around her belly as she wills her stomach to hold on. It’s to no avail.

A gentle hand on her shoulder steadies her once she’s able to straighten.

“Th-there, that’s a girl. Take a few deep breaths. You’ll get used to it,” says a gently accented voice behind her. It belongs to a woman Tina’s never met before. She appears a few years older than Tina, with serious grey eyes and long, blonde hair flowing freely around her shoulders.

“I’m sorry,” Tina mumbles and wipes her mouth with the back of her hand while trying to swallow the embarrassment.

“No need to apologise. Never used a portkey before?” the woman asks and Tina shakes her head, careful not to make any sudden movements. “First time’s always a rough one, don’t take it to heart.” She thrusts her hand forward. “I’m Frida, one of the Captains. Welcome to the Aerie.”

Tina accepts the proffered hand and the handshake is firm and genuine, revealing a steely strength behind Frida’s easy demeanour. “Tina Goldstein,” Tina says and Frida sends her a crooked smile.

“Well, Goldstein. Let’s get inside before the mud soaks through the soles of your shoes. It’s an especially vicious kind around here,” Frida says and motions towards the chateau behind her. “We’ll have you take the physical and get you evaluated for training.”

The structure ahead looms darkly against the bright blue sky, a forgotten reminder of times past, its spires overgrown with ivy and stained glass windows gleaming in the afternoon sun, like the castle in a fairy tale Tina’s mother loved to tell.

Frida’s earlier warning proves to be true, and by the time they reach solid ground Tina’s shoes are soaked to the skin. They stay that way in the weeks that follow. The chateau is called *the Aerie*, a name that’s oddly befitting, with aurors arriving and departing without reprise, leaving the roost to circle the countryside like all-seeing birds of prey.

Inside there isn’t much comfort as the ICW refrained from using magic lest it be detectable, yet modest accommodations are set up on the upper level. Tina doesn’t mind sharing a room with her fellow female aurors; it calms her mind and soothes the sting of separation from Queenie.
Frida takes her deep into the bowels of the building, where a makeshift hospital wing has been installed. Tina is prodded and pinched, asked to open her mouth wide and stripped to the skin. There isn’t much dignity left by the time they finish.

“All clear,” one of the healers says upon completion, and Frida gives him a curt nod, motioning for him to leave.

She’s taken to a small adjoining room, empty save for a small table at the centre. Tina’s eyes grow wide at the instruments laid out at the table top as Frida motions her closer. She holds out a familiar golden tube for her to see. “Lunascope,” she says and picks up a small vial. “Weedosoros tincture… please do continue.”

Frida gestures to the remainder of items and Tina gives a decisive nod before taking over, “Spy glasses, concealable maps, first aid kit, quill laced with Moonseed poison, chocolate, firewhiskey.” Her voice only wavers minutely at the last item. “Suicide pill.”

“Very good. We expect you to carry this with you, fully stocked at all times. It’s imperative you look after it. If you do not have a suitable vessel, we will provide you with one.” A pause. “Now, wand arm, please,” Frida says, holding out her hand expectantly. Tina complies, eyes going wide when Frida trains her wand at her wrist. “I’m sorry, this’ll sting a little.”

Tina hisses at the burn, watching a flash of crimson flame shoot from the tip of Frida’s wand and into her skin. “What’s that for?”

“It’s to monitor your progress,” Frida says simply, dropping Tina’s arm. “Come on now, I’ll show you to your quarters. You will need all the rest you can get before training begins tomorrow.”

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It’s five days into their training when Tina and the two fellow female aurors are called in for a special briefing at the Captain’s personal suite. President Picquery herself is leading the meeting. Most of MACUSA had been wary of her plans to travel to Europe and leave her deputy in charge, yet she insisted on proving her determination to see this through. Tina thinks she’s just stroking her wounded ego.

Seraphina Picquery and Arnold Guzman are deep in conversation when Tina and her colleagues arrive. Their conversation comes to an abrupt halt and the Director of Magical Security excuses himself shortly after, giving them each a curt nod of acknowledgement before the clink of his boot buckles follows him out into the corridor.

“Please, have a seat,” Picquery says and gestures towards the three empty armchairs she's placed in front of her desk.

Tina glances at the three manilla folders sitting prominently at the centre of her tabletop; they're calling to her, mocking her as Tina’s heart begins to hammer wildly in her chest. They'd been forewarned to anticipate an early assignment, but she had not expected it before she’d even completed the first week of training.

They each take a seat with matching wobbly smiles and trembling hands. There's no mistaking the quiet anticipation that fills the room. The underlying tension creeps around them like a beast of prey, circling closer and closer until it wraps itself around her neck, pulling ever tighter until it becomes difficult to breathe. Tina swallows against the lump in her throat, her eyes never leaving the files even as Picquery lays a meaningful palm across the top.

“Your special assignment, ladies,” she says and presents them each with one of the brown
envelopes. “Please familiarise yourselves with your targets. I expect you to treat this with the utmost secrecy. Not a word, even to your assigned partners. I am confident you are all ready to take on the responsibilities that come with such a task.”

The folder feels heavy in her hands and Tina’s fingers tremble badly when she lifts the lid. Inside she finds a stack of papers in various sizes. Identification, aliases, a foreign birth certificate. Atop the files lies a small sepia image of a man.

It's like a token image a lover would give to his beloved, something to hold and cherish in times of absence, and a cold shiver washes over her at the thought. It's a magical photograph, yet his likeness barely moves. His face is handsome, all sharp angles and high cheekbones and an elegantly sculpted mouth, yet his eyes are lacking emotion entirely, frigid cold as they stare back at her.

For a moment there’s an odd feeling of familiarity, a spark of recognition as she stares into his eyes. She’s sure she’s seen them somewhere before, but she cannot explain the feeling. He lifts his chin in challenge and the corners of his mouth pull upwards into a cruel, arrogant smile.

“We believe these men to be some of Grindelwald’s most trusted officers. They’re part of the Inner Circle that pulls the strings.” A pause. “You will need to get close to them, earn their trust, get to know them and use their weaknesses against them. The smallest crumb might help us break their ranks,” Picquery says and stares at each of them in turn, dark eyes severe, and Tina fights to keep herself from shrinking in her seat. “We need to break into the Inner Circle, whatever it costs us.”

“How exactly do you expect us to do this?” Tina turns to face the auror who’d voiced the question. Saoirse is a short, plain-faced woman barely out of Ilvermorny, yet Tina knows there’s a brilliant mind hidden behind her dull blue eyes.

Picquery gives her a wry smile. “You are a woman, are you not, Miss O’Connell? You’ll find the female persuasion is a powerful weapon; it has caused wars and decided them, and there are few men who are immune to the pull of a warm, feminine body. Use this to your advantage.”

Saoirse blanches at the unabridged truth, the colour of her skin now matching the whitewashed walls behind her. Tina feels something akin to pity rise in her chest as she watches the younger woman cower in her seat, albeit struggling with her own sinking feeling of dread slowly seeping into her bones. She smooths a finger over the name written across the top of the paper.

*Silenius*. Silenus Rosier.

Tina takes a shaky inhale as a cold shiver runs the length of her spine and chances another look at the image sitting in her lap, where she finds Silenus’ sly smile has broadened into an ugly sneer as he stares back at her.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to Katie Havok for supplying the name of Tina’s new target. ;)
Chapter 5

March 7th 1927, London

The day of the launch party dawns bright and promising with the sun standing high in the cloudless sky while the city bears the first tentative signs of spring.

Newt leaves his great coat unbuttoned as he heads towards Flourish and Blotts on stiff legs, attempting to hide the disdain he feels as he approaches the shop. He didn’t ask for any of this, neither the book signings nor the fancy launch parties. All he’d wanted was to explore the world and write about misunderstood creatures in the hope his fellow wizards would come to see them in a different light. Then he’d seen the glimmer of pride in his mother’s eye at the mention of a glamorous party, a celebration in his honour, and he didn’t have the heart to crush her hopes. At least Bunty will deflect some of the attention.

It’s long past closing time when he arrives at Diagon Alley, and the street is lacking any sign of life save for the beam of light that slants over the cobblestones in front of the bookshop. The front window shines brightly among the row of darkened businesses, gleaming like a beacon of warmth, emitting a merry glow as it beckons. He’d wanted to invite Tina and Queenie to join him, perhaps even Jacob, and he tries not to let his fear and sadness get the better of him, ignoring where it clamours against the cage of his ribs.

Worrying means you suffer twice.

Never has his philosophy been so hard to follow. He’s surprised at the number of guests he sees through the fogged-up glass and his stomach does a little backflip as he realises they’re all here to see him. “When did I become such a creature of national interest, Pick?” he asks the little bowtruckle tucked away in the safety of his coat pocket.

Pickett gives an indignant chirp at the obvious disdain in Newt’s voice but doesn’t get to comment any further as Bunty and Augustus Worme appear at the door. “Mr Scamander, splendid you’re here. Quick now, they’re all waiting to shake hands with you.”

Newt is dragged inside without another word and he’s passed along from important journalist to interested scholar, shaking hands and ploughing through awkward introductions until he loses track of time. He is grateful for Bunty, who never leaves his side and doesn't press him to make a public address.

It’s well past nine o’clock when the crowd finally begins to thin and Newt has some space to breathe.

His mother finds him a short while later and thrusts a silver goblet into his hands. It turns out to be water and he downs it gratefully, wetting his parched throat after what feels like days upon days of talking. “Thank you,” he rasps and she smiles at him before patting his cheek with a proud look.
on her face.

“Congratulations on your book, Newton. Quite the formidable feat, I must say. I knew you had it in you, my boy.” Newt turns, instantly recognising the voice, and finds himself face to face with Albus Dumbledore.

“Good evening, Professor,” Newt murmurs and has difficulty hiding his surprise.

Albus Dumbledore is elegantly dressed as is his habit, exhibiting a casual air of nonchalance as he stands before his former student. “It’s good to see you after all this time,” says Dumbledore and smiles, holding out his hand for Newt to shake. “I don't want to take up much of your time while you’re still busy. Would you mind if I join you and Miss Lestrange here for a drink at the pub? She mentioned you are headed there afterwards and that would be an opportune moment to catch up.”

Newt spots Leta nervously hovering behind Professor Dumbledore and it all makes sense to him then. It had all been a ruse, her heartfelt pleading empty words once more. He cant his head to the side, attempting to swallow his disappointment, but he knows he’s been unsuccessful when she cowers down, guiltily hanging her head to avoid his eyes. “Of course,” Newt says, his focus shifting to the older wizard facing him. “We’d be delighted.”

“I know just the place. I'll take us there once you’re ready to go,” Dumbledore says and smiles at Newt’s short nod of acknowledgement.

They say their goodbyes a brief while later and Dumbledore side-along Apparates them into the heart of the financial district. The streets surrounding St Pauls Cathedral are entirely deserted this late in the day and they meet one lonely passerby as they make their way to a small muggle pub tucked in between two imposing Portland-stone structures.

The interior is dimly lit, the flickering light of sparsely-placed candles reflecting off the dark wood panelling on the walls. Dumbledore purchases three mulled ciders and leads them down a flight of narrow stairs to the basement room where they take up the empty armchairs in front of the fireplace.

“I have recently taken a fancy to this muggle concoction. It isn't Butterbeer but it is rather good, I must say,” Dumbledore says as he levitates a steaming mug to each of his companions. Newt gives his thanks before taking a tentative sip and finds it surprisingly good, with the heady aroma of apples, brown sugar and spices coating his tongue as comfortable warmth spreads through his body.

They remain quiet for a while, silently sipping their drinks, lost in their own thoughts until Dumbledore clears his throat and begins to speak. “First, I'd like to congratulate you again on the success of your book, Newt. I'd love to hear more of your fantastic travels, but I fear now isn't the time.” Newt thinks it's the same thing he's told him a year ago when they met, just before Dumbledore had sent him on a wild goose chase across New York. “I need your help, dear boy. Yours and Miss LeStrange's.”

Why me, Newt wants to say. Was nearly getting myself killed once not enough? But Leta beats him to the punch: “What could we possibly do to help you, professor?”

They stare at him expectantly. “There are strange things happening across the continent, as I'm sure you're both aware. Unexplained disappearances and mysterious incidents. I think I've found the origin of it all, but I can't get close enough myself to be sure.” Dumbledore laces his fingers in front of his face. They're long and fine-boned, with skin that's unmarred and smooth unlike Newt’s own calloused, freckled hide.
“I still don't see how we can help you,” Leta interjects while Newt waits patiently for Dumbledore to elaborate.

“Are you familiar with obscurials, Miss Lestrange?” Dumbledore counters her question with one if his own and Newt’s head snaps up at the mention.

“Of course I am. Everyone is, but there hasn't been one for centuries!” she cries, inadvertently echoing Tina’s shocked words on the same topic. Newt sees a flicker of something cross Dumbledore’s face at her words — guilt? Pain? — but it’s gone as quickly as it appeared.

“Mister Scamander here met one in New York a few months ago,” Dumbledore says and watches her surprise with a bemused twinkle in his eye.

Leta turns to Newt with a shocked expression on her face, but he stoically stares into the flames until his eyes cut back to Dumbledore, curiosity piqued. “What’s happening on the continent, professor?” Newt asks.

“A number of muggle children have gone missing. Vanished without a trace. Simultaneously, there’s been a few strange incidents along larger townships, mainly on busy market days,” Dumbledore says and his face pulls into an unhappy frown. “The Muggles think it's a weather phenomenon, but any witches and wizards at the scene of the incidents always reported seeing a child shortly before some ominous force seemed to rip through the crowd, wreaking havoc before disappearing into thin air.” He snaps his fingers for emphasis.

Dumbledore knows he has their undivided attention as he continues. “At first I thought these were random attacks, entirely uncoordinated and undisciplined, but I am now convinced they follow a set path, cutting a clear line across the continent.”

“Do you have any idea of who is behind all this?” Leta asks and Dumbledore sends her a meaningful glance.

“I doubt Grindelwald is directly involved. But, oh yes, it's his doing. The beginning of the attacks coincides with the arrival of a Circus Arcanus at the port of Amsterdam a few weeks ago.” Dumbledore makes direct eye contact with Newt. “They're a menagerie of oddities and strange human creatures, and they just finished a North American tour. Rumour has it they brought with them some dark-haired boy from America, who has the ability to turn to dust at will.”

“Credence,” Newt whispers immediately, remembering the tiny lick of dust disappearing through the subway’s open ceiling. “I saw — I mean I had hoped — he survived?”

“It seems so, yes. I remembered what you told me about him in your telegram,” Dumbledore says. “He might be involved, though to what extent I cannot yet say with certainty. I believe if we find Credence Barebone, we will find our answer.”

“I had no idea he managed to regain his human form, I thought only the obscurus survived,” Newt says, the familiar feeling of guilt burning deep in his chest, and he nearly buckles under the weight of his failure to save Credence, that day on the subway tracks. Could he be this lucky — could this be a second chance? Tina’s image enters his mind and a pain of a different kind settles over his heart. “I would very much like to see him, if I may.”

Dumbledore nods. “We need to find the children. Find them and we will find Credence. I have been able to discern some facts concerning his parentage.” He smiles warmly. “Nothing you need to worry yourselves with just yet.”

Leta looks at Newt with a thousand questions reflected in her eyes, pleading with him for answers,
but he feels no inclination to grant her wish. The sting of her renewed betrayal is too fresh on his mind. It’s obvious she lured him here on Dumbledore’s orders, her desire to reconcile merely a lie to get him to agree.

“With all due respect, Professor. I still don’t see why we should be involved,” Newt says, meeting Dumbledore’s eyes in challenge.

Dumbledore leans close. “I understand, and I will try to explain.” A pause. “You must understand; I cannot show myself openly. It’s far too conspicuous. I’m always in his sights.” Newt frowns at this, waiting for Dumbledore to continue, but his teacher doesn’t elaborate.

Why? Newt wants to ask. Why would he be watching you?

Leta speaks for him. “So you think Grindelwald can be stopped?” She raises both eyebrows in mild disbelief. “And why are you taking such a particular interest in him? Why is he watching you?”

Dumbledore leans forward on his knees to look her square in the eye. “Miss Lestrange, you may know from your fiancé’s dealings that our government is maintaining its rather ignorant stance on this matter and is refusing to act appropriately.” He pauses to smile. “As for my personal involvement — let us just say I merely wish to reconcile my own shortcomings and the mistakes committed in my youth.” She shrivels under the intensity of his gaze and looks away in embarrassment. There is no mistaking in what he was hinting at. “I need your help. You will get answers, but we cannot speak about it here, it’s much too dangerous. I shall explain it to you in due time.”

Newt frowns at this but decides to let it rest while Leta sits staring at her hands. He senses there is more to it than Dumbledore is prepared to tell them tonight, and it leaves a bitter aftertaste on his tongue.

“Await my owl, and it’ll all become clear.”

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The Aerie, France, mid-March 1927

Winter surrenders its iron grip on the European continent with mulish reluctance, slowly making way for milder, brighter weather while the days grow longer. March brings more storms and unrelenting downpours and turns small puddles into boggy swamps.

“Damn it,” Tina swears, wiggling the foot stuck ankle-deep in mud. It makes a wet sucking sound but doesn’t budge, mocking her as it refuses to surrender the unfortunate boot, and she utters another string of colourful curses. Frida was right, out here mother earth is a formidable foe in its own right, a whole different beast to what she is used to.

Tina gives an exasperated huff, carding her hand through her hair as she looks around before drawing her wand to free her foot. The field is hopelessly waterlogged, oversaturated soil sticking to the underside of her boots until her feet become too heavy to lift, weighing her down like the thoughts plaguing her mind. She is never quite able to wash it out, staining her hands and skin, and it feels permanently etched onto her soul.

It clings to everything, filling every last gap and small crevice she hadn’t been aware of before; a sticky, formable mess that hardens if not removed in time, nearly turning to stone before crumbling into a million pieces.
The earth is so different here, a fine powdery dust that clings to everything, whether it’s wet or dry. It comes in a myriad of colours; yellow, grey and warm ochre, and even a beautiful, deep red that makes her gasp the first time she sees it. It's the exact colour of Newt’s messy curls.

Newt.

Her soul aches every time she thinks of him. She misses his regular correspondence more than she can express. His formal, stinted letters had gained length as his words increased in warmth, giving her reason to hope, a hope she now clung to with frenzied desperation, the nourishment that had carried her through the dark. Now they’re all but a memory, a thought she guards close to her heart.

Murky skies and sodden earth is all France has turned out to be, and Tina struggles to hide her disappointment in the weekly letters to Queenie. It’s the small indulgence she allows herself. She cannot tell her anything of what she’s doing, so she fills it with her thoughts and longing, and for a moment she can pretend she’s just an ordinary woman writing to her sister.

The sister she left behind, abandoned. The one thing she’d sworn she’d never do.

It still feels odd to be on her own, as if she is missing a limb without Queenie by her side, even after weeks of training behind her, with days bleeding into each other to the point where she cannot tell where one ends and the other begins.

She fears for her sister, an incapacitating worry as relentless as an April thunderstorm, and she feels helpless with the great expanse of the Atlantic Ocean between them. Queenie is her own woman, Tina knows; yet she thinks she’ll always worry about her sister regardless of how many years pass or whether they find themselves at opposing ends of the earth.

The death of their parents joined them, fused them in a bond far stronger than blood, a connection near impossible to sever.

It’s the only thing keeping her sane as she trudges through the sodden French countryside. Their training keeps them outside for hours, each exercise more fierce and unforgiving than the last, until their clothes are soaked and their spirits caked in mud. Her fingers hurt from countless hours of wandless magic and assembling and deconstructing non-magical explosives while her head aches, exhausted by interrogation techniques and covert operations. Worst case scenarios. As if there’d ever been an option.

On top of training, there are near nightly callouts, and Tina cannot remember the last time she woke without her alarm blaring in her ears.

I couldn’t be stealthy now if I tried, she thinks bitterly as she makes her way to the showers, mud and earth trailing in her wake.

The attacks have increased tenfold, and the pressure to find the source is mounting, yet progress is slow. The crime scenes never yield much evidence except for complete destruction and loss of life, as if invisible menace sweeps in to cause havoc, there one moment and gone the next, disappearing into black nothingness without a trace.

It’s like deja-vu.

Only this time, she doesn’t need Newt to point out the obvious. Grindelwald had been trying to use an obscurial for his twisted objectives, so there was no reason for him to lose interest. On the contrary, she suspected he’d used the newfound knowledge to his advantage. This time, she thinks, he’s actually succeeded.
At times like these, when the sky seems to rest on her shoulders and an immobilising fatigue seeps into her bones, the desire to write to Newt is like a blazing wildfire, powerful and all-consuming, and it takes every last ounce of strength she can muster not to give in. Being so close yet unable to communicate is painful on the best of days and pure agony on others.

She wants to pick up a quill, write a letter or a postcard; a single word would do. *I’m here, I’m alright!*

The secrecy surrounding her assignment and the total halt of communications following Grindelwald’s escape meant she hadn’t been able to get in touch with him or let him know why their correspondence had to cease. There’d been no warning, no possibility to explain. No goodbyes.

Dark thoughts enter her mind, unbidden, at times when she feels loneliest. *What must he think of me? And is he thinking about me at all?*

Tina banishes them as soon as they surface. Deep down she knows he cares for her, even if she’s just a friend to him. For Newt Scamander’s heart resembles the suitcase he carries in more ways than one. It’s a vessel of infinite holding, of goodness and warmth, and once you’ve seen inside it’s impossible to forget.

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While her sister fights her inner demons an ocean away, Queenie is battling her own back in New York. Her gaze climbs the length of the Woolworth building as she lingers at the front door with her heart in her throat as she turns to the man at her side. She reaches for his hand to give it a reassuring squeeze, an encouragement meant for him as much as herself.

“You alright, darlin’?” he asks and his calm, caring warmth fill her mind before he voices the words, making her heart sing and boosting her confidence in the righteousness of what she’s about to do.

“Just peachy,” she says with a smile, leaning close to kiss him right there in the brilliant morning sun, in full view of MACUSA’s headquarters and all her colleagues. He doesn’t comment, but he cannot help but feel like it’s the last kiss before battle, a contact tasting of fear and a finality that makes his breath hitch in his throat.

“Oh, don’t worry, honey,” she whispers and gently cups his cheek. “It’ll be okay. We’re gonna be fine.”

He nods, trusting her words, and her beautiful blue eyes hold his own as their gazes lock. Jacob knows he would do anything for this woman, following her into the depth of hell if it meant he’d be by her side.

“Ready?” she asks and squeezes his hand again, blinking up at him as she sifts through his mind.

“Never been more ready,” he says and they share one last look before turning in unison, leaving their old lives behind as they walking through MACUSA’s gilded doors and into the unknown of their future.
The days following his launch party pass in a daze of congratulations, of answering letters and accepting invitations. Newt loses count of the stuffy dinner parties he’s asked to attend after the second day, and he wonders whether he’ll suffocate before long. Bunty is a godsend, sorting through his post and answering on his behalf; she even charms a quill to sign his name and lets him stew behind his desk in private.

There is one piece of correspondence he is waiting for with burning curiosity and the third day sees the awaited letter slide onto his desk. He fingers the simple white envelope with barely-suppressed urgency, swiftly cutting the flap to reveal one sheet of paper bearing a single line of writing in the familiar emerald ink he’d recognise in a heartbeat.

*In the space between two royal lovers, right along the water’s edge, you shall find your answers when the last light extinguishes in the night.*

Newt rereads the line once more before feeding the letter to the fire in the heath and Pickett sticks his head out of his breast pocket to utter a curious chirp. “Don’t worry yourself, Pick. I know exactly what I’m doing.” The bowtruckle lifts a leaf in disbelief, cocking his head, but refrains from any further comment.

That night he eats his evening meal in front of the fire with unusual haste before donning his coat and scarf and bolting out the door. The evening is crisp and smells of snow, but he decides to stretch his legs and walk the short distance from his flat to the river.

The air turns frigid as the last of the sun’s warmth disappears behind the buildings while Newt is standing atop Albert Bridge and gazes across the water to where Victoria Bridge straddles the Thames. The embankment to his left is brightly lit, its slender street lamps casting long, silver reflections across the rippling waves below.

He pulls his collar up to shield himself from the biting wind, an ever-present companion along the river’s edge and waits. What for, he isn’t entirely sure. The sky above turns from blue to black until a few lonely stars appear along the firmament. Fog rises from the water below, lending a gloomy eeriness to the view as night descends.

A lonely figure glides along the brick wall separating the footpath from the water, popping in and out of existence as the darkness between the street lamps swallows him whole. Newt thinks he’s lost sight of the man when one of the street lamps flickers and extinguishes. He blinks again as the next in line follows suit. Before long the embankment is shrouded in darkness.

Newt doesn’t think twice before Apparating into the midst of it.

Dumbledore steps out of the fog, dark coat moving in the wind, his hat pulled low to cover his eyes. “I knew I could count on you and your sharpness of mind, my boy.” Newt doesn’t answer, gazing at him with silent curiosity. “I know you are looking for answers and I will try to give them to you the best I can.”

“How me?” Newt blurs the thought that’s been burning at the forefront of his mind, his breath coming in large white puffs as he speaks.

Dumbledore leans against the stone barrier as he lowers his head in thought before countering Newt’s question with one of his own. “Are you familiar with the Deathly Hallows, Newton?”
Newt jolts, taken aback. “The children’s story?”

“The very one. You see, when I was young, my best friend and I discovered it’s not as simple as that. We might know it as a story, yes, but a story deeply rooted in truth.” The water laps against the stone wall below, loud in the deafening silence between them. “What would you say if I told you they were real?” Dumbledore raises his head to meet his eyes.

“I’d say it’s a big heap of codswallop, and that you’re going soft in old age,” Newt jokes weakly and is surprised when Dumbledore utters a booming laugh.

“Very good. Yes, I assumed you would.” His amusement falters. “Now, this childhood friend of mine had questionable ideals and even darker motives, and I didn’t see them for what they were. I might have been blinded by affection, perhaps.” Newt swallows at the meaningful look in Dumbledore’s twinkling eyes and tries not to think of Leta’s innocent smile. “Once I realised, it was too late. His motives never ceased, they strengthened and intensified. He found others who shared his beliefs. They’ve come to trouble us all.”

Newt feels a chill climb the length of his spine, a cold that has nothing to do with the frigid temperatures of the night. “Grindelwald,” he whispers, eyes going wide. “You knew him as a boy?”

“I did, yes. I could have stopped him then, but my hesitation prevented me, and I missed my chance. Now it is too late for me. He’s made good on his word and hunts the Hallows.” Newt opens his mouth to protest, but Dumbledore raises his hand to stop him in his tracks. “Think about it, Newt. His strength, his ability to best even the most capable aurors this century has seen. There’s nomistaking it.”

“Think about it, Newt. His strength, his ability to best even the most capable aurors this century has seen. There’s no mistaking it.”


Dumbledore jumps at the words, eyes wide. “Yes! He is in possession of the elder wand, I’m sure of it.” He pauses. “And this is why I cannot move against Grindelwald. Newt, it has to be you.”

Newt frowns, turning away. “I still don’t see how, professor.”

“You bested him, Newt. Your actions disarmed him when you fought him in New York. I believe the elder wand’s allegiance is no longer with Grindelwald.” A beat. “It lies with you.”

Newt digests his words but finds the information too large a chunk to swallow. “Even if that were the case, what could I possibly do against him?”

“I believe you’re holding the key to defeating him. You and the Barebone boy. We need to find Credence and fast before he joins Grindelwald in his search for the remaining Hallows. If he should succeed and find them all...” His words hang in the air like a faint whisper lingering in the wind, their meaning perfectly clear. “Now, are you willing to follow me?”

Dumbledore’s gaze is sharp and calculating as he stares unblinkingly into Newt’s eyes. The place is eerily silent except for the river softly gurgling below. “I’ll do anything in my power to help,” says Newt eventually. “I’ll be helping Credence, not you. What do you have in mind?”

Dumbledore spreads his hands in front of his chest as his face splits into a conspiratorial smile in the dark. “Well, how would you feel about joining the circus?”

***

The early morning sun has not yet crept above the horizon when Tina wakes. They always rise before dawn, and one look at the crimson sky outside assures her she hasn’t overslept. Piquerry has
called for another progress meeting at sunup, so she quickly dresses and performs her morning routine with haste before hurrying down the large, central staircase and into the basement.

The meeting chambers, communication centres and strategy rooms are all located within the chateau’s vast underbelly. There are only four women at the Aerie, most of them Americans, and while they participate in general training units and go out on emergency missions with their male counterparts, they each have a personal assignment to fulfil.

Tina shudders when she thinks of the cold blue eyes and arrogant smile as she strides down a dimly lit corridor. She has not made much progress with Silenus Rosier. She has barely spoken to the man. They met once a few nights ago, and his presence had made her mouth go dry until her words got stuck at the back of her throat.

She wills her mind to go blank as she knocks on the door, two short raps and one longer, and waits for a response before entering the room. They’re all present already, looking at her expectantly as she sinks into the one remaining empty chair.

“Thank you for joining us, Miss Goldstein,” Picquery acknowledges her before sitting back and folding her hands in her lap. “Now, Winifred, if you’d please relay the same information you told me last night.”

Frida stands and ignores Picquery’s obvious slight at her name. “Our informants tell us there’s to be a large, private ball at Rosier’s country estate. Dancing, gambling, that sort of thing. He’s invited most of Grindelwald’s highest ranking officers, so it’s likely this isn’t simply an informal meeting.”

“You think it could be an official gathering,” Picquery concludes.

“Yes. The Chateau is surrounded by dense forest, far out in the countryside and I’ve heard rumours of a large underground vault. It’s an ideal place.”

“I’ve been there,” Tina says and everyone grows quiet. She thinks back on the moment she first laid eyes on Silenus Rosier, his blue eyes more frigid in person than in the photograph. They’d frozen her to the spot, rendering her mute when she was introduced to him by one of their informants.

Picquery’s calculating gaze lands on Tina and there’s no hint of sympathy in her voice when the president addresses her. “Miss Goldstein, I understand you have yet to make close contact with your target.”

Tina cringes at the term but tries not to show it. Her stomach twists with nerves as she forms a reply. “That’s correct, Madame President.” She swallows. “The conditions weren’t right the first time we met.”

“Make them right, Goldstein, do whatever needs to be done. This isn’t a game.” Picquery stands and paces the length of the room as agitation seeps into her features.

“What if Grindelwald comes to the meeting? Do you want us to move in?” Saoirse voices the question on everyone’s mind.

Frida shakes her head. “No. Find out where he’s staying and what his movements are. We proved simply catching him won’t do, we need to identify the entire network and lay it bare. His influence goes too deep, people started listening to his whisperings.”

Picquery glowers at each of them in turn. “You’ll all go and report back to me immediately upon return. I am expecting results. From all of you. Have I made myself clear?”
“Understood,” they reply in unison and Tina hangs her head.

They file out of the room, leaving a disgruntled-looking Piquery behind. Frida hurries to catch up with Tina in the corridor, gently pulling her aside as the other women begin to ascent the stairs. “Don’t take it to heart, Mädchen,” she says and Tina frowns at the foreign word. Frida laughs and it sounds eerily hollow as it echo's from the walls around them. “Yes, I am calling you a little girl if you keep sulking like that.” Tina’s frown deepens and Frida’s smile slips from her face. “I am not trying to upset you, Tina.”

“Coulda fooled me,” Tina says, turning away, but Frida hurries to catch up with her.

“I am not. Believe me, I know how it feels. This sort of work isn’t easy. It’s hard, its dirty, it’s unpleasant. But it must be done,” Frida continues and ducks her head to catch Tina’s eyes.

“What if I can’t do it?” Tina asks, voicing the nagging fear that’s been growing within her ever since they received their assignment. “Not that, anyway.”

“Why not?” counters Frida and Tina gawks at her. “They’re not asking you to fall in love with him, darling. You need to take all your feelings, put them in a little box and shove it under your bed before you leave tomorrow. Whatever happens, whatever you need to do, it’s just a job.”

“I don’t know if I can,” Tina whispers.

“You’re too focused on the morality behind it. I understand, we all do, but believe me when I say this: He won’t have any qualms about taking you to bed if that’s what it takes. It’s a transaction, nothing more.” Frida shrugs.

“How does that make me any better than a cheap harlot?” Tina says bitterly, wrapping her arms around herself in a self-soothing gesture.

Newt. What would Newt say if he knew? Her lips press into a line to suppress the sudden prickling at the corner of her eyes and she looks up at the ceiling, breathing evenly until the urge passes. There’s no time to dwell on it, get yourself together. You might never see him again, anyway.

Frida throws her hands in the air. “It’s your reasons for doing it. Look where we are, there’s a war looming on the horizon! Men use curses and lethal weapons to fight for what they believe is right. And us women?” She pauses for effect. “We don’t have to resort to violence; we don’t have to hurt anyone. Think about it, Tina: We get to make the world a better place — with love!” Tina attempts a smile but knows she falls flat when Frida cocks her head with sadness in her eyes.

“Your problem is you feel too much in that big heart of yours. It’s commendable, but it hinders you.” Tina thinks back to New York, to Credence and the mess she’d created because her heart wouldn’t allow her to turn a blind eye. “I don’t doubt you, Goldstein. You have great instincts and a sharp mind, you wouldn’t be here otherwise. Use them. Don’t let your heart take the reins.” Tina nods, still doubtful.

“I have an idea,” Frida says and Tina looks up at her sudden, excited voice, wholly uncharacteristic for the serious, solemn woman she’d come to know. “Come with me.” She drags Tina up two flights of stairs and into the makeshift shower rooms. An old, withered mirror is the last remaining witness of former grandeur. It has a large crack running the length of it, splitting it clear in half.

“I am not pretending to be a woman interested in Grindelwald’s philosophies, you’ll have to look the part,” she says, conjuring a small wooden stool for Tina to sit on in front of the mirror. “And right now you still look too much like you. These women ooze power and confidence. They think
they’re better than the rest of us, and they aren’t shy to flaunt it with whatever they’ve got.”

“What do you have in mind?” Tina asks slowly, meeting Frida’s eyes in the mirror.

“A new haircut would be a good idea. Something fresh and fashionable, something clean-cut and simple. To the point.” Frida stands behind her and runs her fingers through Tina’s hair before raising her eyebrows in question.

“Yes — yes, fine. I can always transfigure it back the way it was if I don’t like it.” Tina consents and Frida gives a short nod and a smile. Tina closes her eyes as Frida works, feeling the magic swirling about her head, and the soft *swish* as her hair falls to the ground.

“There,” Frida says and takes a step back. “Much better.”

Tina opens her eyes one after the other and dares to take a peek at herself in the mirror. The rigid lines and clean edges emphasise her prominent cheekbones and the sweep of her chin, framing her face in a crisp, dark bob. It no longer falls around her face in a soft, playful wave, but moulds to the hinge of her jaw.

Frida was right; it looks exactly like a French society *mademoiselle*, and nothing like herself.

“It’s perfect,” Tina breathes and Frida beams at her. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Now come on,” Frida says and her mask of indifference slips back into place. “Don’t dwell on it too much. It’ll make you doubt yourself, and doubt doesn’t have a place in your mission. It’s dangerous.” She sends Tina one last, meaningful look before leaving her to her own thoughts.

Tina listens for Frida’s receding footsteps as they make their way down the stairs until they fall short and another, more pleasant sound fills the silence.

There’s an old piano standing in one of the corners in the large drawing room below. One of its legs has splintered and it is missing some keys, but otherwise, it looks no worse for wear and someone has taken to playing it every evening.

A jolly, familiar melody fills the room and Tina smiles ruefully. She recognises it immediately, even though it is missing the accompanying trumpet, and feels an almost overwhelming wave of homesickness rise up within her. It’s Queenie’s favourite song, and she imagines her sister’s soft, silvery timbre when a scratchy but even voice carries the lyrics through the halls.

“*Oh ain't she sweet,*

*Well, see her walking down that street.*

*Yes, I ask you very confidentially,*

*Ain’t she sweet?”*

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Newt is surprised at how easily they slip into a routine. Life at the circus suits him far better than expected. They’re constantly on the move, only staying in one city four days at most before travelling on. It reminds him of his time aboard the *HMS Discovery*, where he spent half his days sticking his head into burrows and crawling through the dirt on his hands and knees, and the other half furiously scribbling away in his notebook aboard the ship, always on the move.
He cannot be sure how Dumbledore managed it, but their thickset, scruffy leader had accepted them into their midst without qualms. On the contrary, Skender had welcomed the idea of adding a double act of nundu tamers to their band of human oddities with open arms: “Animals are always a tremendous hit with the kids,” he’d said before giving Newt a hearty slap on the back, nearly making him stumble.

Interactions with Leta are amicable but strained and he tries to spend as little time alone with her as possible, but the nature of their mission forces them to communicate and work together. The first few days are difficult, but it becomes easier with time.

The open hostility they receive from some of the other circus members is far more difficult to endure. They all come from different corners of the world and different walks of life, yet they all have on thing in common: they’re considered strange and unwanted, forced to exist on the fringes of society. Newt cannot fault their lack of trust in strangers, especially since he often feels the same way. They’re disappointed to find Credence nowhere amidst their ranks, and Skender avoids their questions when they ask about the boy made of dust.

They’re two weeks into their journey with the mismatched band of self-proclaimed outlaws when they meet Maledictus. She’s a loner, strange even within this group of human oddities, and likes to keep hidden in the shadows. Newt comes upon her by chance, attracted by the sunlight that catches on the pearlescent blue scales covering her arms and legs. She’s weary of him at first, of his many questions and kind words, yet he soon manages to draw her out of her shell.

There’s a reason why she prefers solidarity. It’s to protect herself from others, and to protect them from her sudden, violent outbursts. Her skin is littered with defensive wounds where she’s not covered in scales. “I was bitten by a monster, now I’m slowly turning into one myself,” she says one day, looking up above her head, oddly fascinated by the collection of dried fruit and plants hanging from the ceiling of his shed.

Newt, who is mixing an ointment for a nasty gash on her shoulder, nearly drops his pestle. “What sort of monster?”

“A hannya,” she explains. “It happened back in Kyoto when I was little. When my grandmother found out she cried all through the night.”

“I’ve never heard of such a creature,” he says, pensively stirring the salve. “Are they venomous?”

“I’m not sure,” she concedes and shrugs her shoulders, giving a small wince when it aggravates her injury. “My grandmother says I’m possessed. I’m doomed to turn into a hideous monster, piece by piece, until I lose all my sanity and control over my actions.”

“I’ve met someone like you, once,” Newt says and seizes upon the opportunity to ask about Credence. Neither he nor Leta have dared to do so, and time is ticking by. “There was an evil, dark force within him. It broke free whenever he was at his most vulnerable, when he lost control over his emotions.” She remains silent, looking at him expectantly. “Maledictus, there was a boy here with you, at the circus. He travelled with you from New York.”

She recoils from him and he can see fear and suspicion reflected in her eyes. “What do you want with Credence?”

“I’m here to help him. I’m a friend,” Newt says and steps closer, one hand clutching the mortar with the balm.

She leans away from him and eyes him wearily, reminding him of a frightened creature ready to flee. “That’s what they all say,” she hisses. “Did you take him away?”
“No! No, I did not take him away. We met a few months ago in New York.” Newt blinks away the harsh burn of the memories. “We couldn’t help him then. I hope we can now.”

“You,” she breathes and he jumps at her tone. “You’re the British wizard who tried to help him.”

“Yes, that’s right,” Newt says and holds up the ointment in question.

She nods her consent and relaxes, sinking back into her seat to let him look at her wound. “He was my friend, you know? He understood. He wasn’t afraid of me, or my outbursts. Credence never treated me any differently from the others. He’s not like them.”

“Like who?”

“Everybody else. Skender seems like a nice guy, always friendly, always taking everybody in, but don’t let that fool you. He says this is our family, that we’re outcasts, that nobody else wants us. It’s all just talk.” Maledictus speaks rapidly, like she’s been holding this in for a long time and the dam’s finally broken. “The circus is just a front. It’s all just for the money. He’s collecting us.”

“What on earth is he collecting you for?” Newt whispers, although he already knows.

“Look around you, Newt. It’s no coincidence we’re all dangerous mutations, half-monsters and possessed creatures. The fiercer the better.” She takes another deep breath to calm herself. “Skender has his own little lackey, his name is Grimmson. He calls him his informant, but he’s really a snatcher.”

Leta emerges from the depth of the case, wiping her hands on a clean towel by the door and, having overheard Maledictus’ last sentence, moves closer. Leta raises both hands in a placating gesture when Maledictus shrinks back and bares her teeth until Newt intervenes.

“You’re alright, she’s my friend. Leta is my friend. You can trust her,” he assures her, but he’s looking at Leta when he says it, who starts and stares before gifting him with a hopeful smile.

Maledictus uncurls from her spot in the corner, yet she still eyes Leta with a suspicious frown before relaxing again. “Fine. I trust you, Newt, so I trust her as well.”

“Good, that’s good,” he says and licks his lips. “Maledictus, this Grimmson… has he ever snatched a child? A young child? Like Credence?”

“Yes,” she breathes without skipping a beat. “It started not long after Credence disappeared. Sometimes it’s more than one at a time, but he keeps them hidden, and they never stay for long. Where he takes them, I couldn’t say.”

Newt and Leta share a look before turning as one. “If you see this man, or a child, anything at all. Would you tell us?”

“Who are you, really?” Maledictus asks instead, eyes swivelling back and forth between them, considering them. “Why do you want to help them? Help dangerous monsters like us?”

Newt shakes his head. “You’re not a monster. The fact that you’re different doesn’t make you any less of a human being.” His words stop her in her tracks. “If anything, it makes you unique. Credence is hurting, and all I want is to find him.”

“You think you can help him?” she asks with hope glistening in her eyes.

“Yes. Yes, I do,” he says with conviction, “but I’ll need yours to do it.”
Chapter 7

Somewhere in Paris, Mid-April 1927

A large pile of rubble and broken timber rises before them like an overgrown molehill where once stood an elegant opera house. One of Paris’ most brilliant jewels, it had attracted witches and wizards from across the country and beyond. Now it lies in ruins with its innards spilling out onto the street. The dust has barely settled when they arrive, carefully picking their way across broken stone and wood to collect what little evidence they can find. A low moan sounds from under one of the piles and Tina shivers.

They’re not allowed to intervene, only to observe, and it’s the hardest part to stomach. Today isn’t any different. Tina risks a sideways glance at her partner Kyuho, a young Korean-American wizard she’d helped train when he first joined MACUSA. He wears his solemn expression like a mask, pale and serious, and she knows he’s equally affected. Tina likes him and his endless optimism. In many ways, he reminds her of Jacob.

“Nothing again.” Kyuho frowns, turning one of the smaller stones with his foot.

“What are we missing, Q?” she asks and he smiles at his nickname before giving a helpless shrug.

“Wish I knew,” he says and burrows deeper into his coat. It’s nearly one in the morning, and the early April air still holds a chill. “I’m going to ask Novak if he’s got anything useful from the witnesses before he Obliviates them all.” Kyuho leaves Tina to stand alone at the bottom of the pile as he goes to talk with one of their colleagues. The street is packed with witnesses and curious onlookers alike, and their voices carry all the way across to her, thrumming noisily like an angry beehive.

Something about it feels achingly familiar.

They don’t have long before local law enforcement arrives, she knows, yet she cannot shake the feeling that something is amiss. She bends down, picking up one of the smaller stones, thoughtfully turning it over in her hand. A flash of colour catches her eye and she leans closer to get a better look. Something had been trapped under the stone. It’s a colourful poster, red and gold, with the picture of an acrobat at the centre, contorting his body in an unnatural angle as if to escape from the curling letters surrounding him.

*Circus Arcanus* it reads, advertising its upcoming shows with the promise of a display by *the most grotesque human oddities the world has to offer!* Her hands smooth out the crumpled paper when Kyuho joins her once more. “This one’s a bit different. It’s got the same M.O as usual. A large explosion, no flash, total destruction.”

She frowns at him. “How’s that any different?”

Kyuho whistles through his teeth. “He said it didn’t look like a bomb, more like a spell — or dust. Like a dark cloud,” he continues and the final pieces all fall into place. Tina gasps. She’s had her suspicions, yet she’s no longer able to deny the truth.

“It’s like back in December,” she breathes. *By Morrigan, please, not again.* She raises her wand and mutters a few of the well-practised detection charms under her breath, followed by a series of complicated incantations they’ve learned since their arrival. Tina recoils as if burned, shivering from the remnant of dark magic that lingers in the air.
It feels positively alive.

Kyuho nods as if he read her mind, forehead creasing into an anxious frown. “There’s more. He said the last thing he remembers is seeing two small children in front of the opera house. They were handing out leaflets of some sort. A circus, I think he said?”

Tina stares down at the pamphlet she’s holding. “Like these, you mean?” She holds up the scrap of paper for him to see.

“Possible. Couldn’t hurt to check it out.” Kyuho stuffs his hands in his coat pockets. “Now we better get outta here before law enforcement makes an appearance. Or I freeze my ass off.”

Tina slips the paper into her inside pocket to keep it safe while her mind is racing a million miles a minute as she considers the possibilities, and it isn’t the first time it strays to Newt across the channel, the feeling of helplessness pressing against her ribs.

An obscurial. If only I could tell you, I’m sure you’d know what to do.

She squats down to survey the scene at a different angle when her eyes land on a woman on the sidelines. Her clothes stand out among the well-dressed theatre crowd like a simple blowfly among a flock of butterflies, worn and much too light for the time of the year. Her haggard, dark face looks drawn as she peers at them from the confines of the scarf she’s draped over her head. There’s something in her eyes that draws Tina to her, a pleading, helpless look she’s seen countless times before.

“I’m going to talk to this woman. She looks like she’s got a story to tell,” Tina says and Kyuho splutters.

“I — what? Goldstein?” He calls after her, but she ignores him and crosses the street. “Goldstein! Hey!”

Her hunch proves to be correct a few minutes later.

The woman runs towards her as Tina approaches, recognising the sure, determined shape of her stride. Tina nearly jumps out of her skin when a fragile, bony hand closes around the lapels of her coat with a desperate strength she didn’t expect. “Ma fille!” The woman cries, but Tina only shakes her head in apology. The woman’s face falls, but she understands immediately and continues in broken English, “My little girl. Gone.”

“Your daughter was at the theatre?” Tina asks and the woman shakes her head so vehemently the scarf nearly dislodges from her head.

“No!” She cries and tears fill her eyes. “They come and take her away. She gone! Help me, please?”

“I’m sorry, I can’t —“ Tina stutters and the lady gives a violent howl, pulling her close to sob into her shoulder as Tina sends Kyuho a helpless look.

He looks behind them where a group of dark-clad figures emerges from the crowd. “We need to get out of here.”

“Do you mind?” Tina hisses and motions at the woman in her arms. Together they prop her up and lead her away from the scene. “Is there somewhere we can go?” The woman motions for them to follow and she leads them down a crooked alley between two buildings, deeper into the labyrinth of filthy streets and broken houses behind the theatre.
Her home is on the third floor of one of the shabbier buildings and Tina briefly wonders how much magic is required to keep it from folding in on itself. The entire family lives in a single room apartment, where the windows are permanently obscured with grime. Tina counts five children, both boys and girls, but no husband. The woman sits down at the kitchen table and the chair creaks precariously but takes her slight weight without further complaint. Two of the youngest children immediately attach themselves to their mother, watching the strangers with dark eyes full of distrust and fear.

Tina clears her throat. “So, Mrs…?”

“Charbonneau. We take French name when we come here,” she explains and lifts one of the children into her lap.

“Do you know who might have taken your daughter, Mrs Charbonneau?” Tina leans down to meet the woman’s eye.

“Grimmson,” she utters and her face darkens. “Very bad man. He take her. He take all children. Bring them here to do this. Do bad things!” Her shaking hand points to the outside.

Tina’s heart sinks further at the woman’s words, close to shattering into a million pieces as she thinks about the implications. She shares a meaningful look with her partner before turning back to their witness. “Grimmson. Is he behind all this?”


“Do you know where we can find this man?” Tina asks with one hand in her coat pocket, fingering her wand for comfort.

The woman grimaces. “He bring her to circus.”

Tina fishes the flyer from her pocket to show it to Mrs Charbonneau. “You mean this circus?”

The woman gasps and reaches for the paper. “Yes! He bring her there. Nobody believe me.”

“Don’t worry,” Tina says with conviction. “We do.”

It turns out the woman does not have any more information or the language barrier prevents her from telling them, and they need to take their leave before the French aurors put the entire block on lockdown. Tina promises once more to look for Mrs Charbonneau’s little daughter, staring into the woman’s red-rimmed eyes with confidence before turning to leave.

“Did you see her...?” Kyuho asks once they’re outside.

“Yes,” Tina says and swallows hard. “Consumption. I don’t think she’s got long. Regardless, we need to find that child. You know why.”

“You think these kids… they’re like that boy in December. The boy Grindelwald was after?” Tina nods and Kyuho’s eyes grow wide as he makes the connection. “What if he’s collecting them, raising an army?”

Tina gives an uncertain shrug. “I don’t know. It would be convenient. A device or a spell can be disarmed, but they can slip in and out of a crowd unnoticed. They’d be hard to control, but I don’t think that’s something he’d worry about. It would explain many things.”

Kyuho looks thoughtful. “What are you thinking?”
She smiles wide, eyes sparkling with excitement at the first real lead in weeks. “I hope you aren’t scared of clowns, because I think we should pay that circus a visit, don’t you agree?”

“I think we’re here,” Skender announces after spying through a gap in the carriage’s outer walls.

Newt welcomes the thought. The constant rattle has set his teeth on edge and his bones ache from staying in one place for too long. He can’t wait to unfold himself from his uncomfortable position on the floor. They’d been travelling by train for the better part of their journey from Nancy to Paris, a necessity since most of their companions would be unable to Apparate. Newt knows his creatures welcome the decision, yet he envies them their comfortable place in the case. Their carriage smells of sweat and cattle dung and doesn’t offer any amenities save for a thin layer of straw, which does nothing to ward off the stubborn night chills.

Leta shivers next to him and burrows closer in the blanket he’s conjured for them, seeking his warmth. Newt lets her, knowing she’s never had to endure anything like this. He’s had far worse. The train slows and the brakes utter a crescendo of metallic shrieks until they come to a standstill. Newt’s joints complain when he rises, holding out a hand to pull Leta to her feet. She looks exhausted, the dark circles under her eyes more prominent than before. It’s time they both had a proper rest.

Skender leads them out of the station and into the city, down one of the broad avenues until Newt’s bones start to ache with pain of a different sort. He’s glad for his endurance from looking after his creatures, yet he knows Leta does not, and her steps are becoming shorter and slower as they go. They turn left into a crooked alleyway, and their surroundings change as if they’d just walked through an invisible gateway.

Where the avenue had been clean and lined with tall, respectable houses the street they enter is anything but. The narrow spaces between houses are littered with all manner of rubbish and refuse, and its pungent smell precedes it. None of the houses are the same height or width, precariously leaning onto each other like oversized dominoes.

The street is busy despite the late hour, and Newt notices more than one scantily-clad lady with red-painted lips giving him the eye. The crowd resembles the buildings framing the street, men and women of all sizes, hunched over in their grubby clothes. Leta’s eyes grow wide as they continue on.

“What is this place?” she whispers, quietly and with no small amount of fear colouring her voice.

“Stay close to me.” Newt switches the case to his other hand so he can wrap his free arm around her shoulders.

There are children playing in the street at this hour, their toes poking through their worn shoes and dirt caking their faces as they stare. Newt has difficulty looking away from the hunger in their eyes, whether it’s for food or something else he cannot say, and he’s grateful when Skender leads them to the entrance of a shabby inn. The building is narrow, wedged in between two larger structures that loom over it on either side. The inside is sparse but surprisingly clean.

_Better than what I had in Calcutta_, Newt thinks, as they ascend the creaky old stairs, yet he cannot help the feeling of unease trailing close behind.

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_The same evening, La Roseraie, Brocéliande Forest, Bretagne, France_
Fingers of dense white fog creep along the courtyard, spilling from the darkness and into the soft glow of the manor’s countless windows and doors. The house is impossible to miss, even under the cover of a moonless night, gleaming white against the dark forest forming a perfect circle around it.

Its approach is brightly lit in invitation, framed by large marble statues stretching lazily atop their stone pedestals, their elegantly carved bodies and delicate faces awash with love and fear and sorrow. Tina’s flowing gown emulates their dramatic drapery as she passes, a dark cloud fluttering in the wind, marking her as one of their kind. Each step feels foreign in her tight-laced boots, yet she doesn’t allow it to show, infusing it with a practised confidence and poise that adds a sinuous sway to her hips.

Yesterday’s events still trouble her and she’s itching to investigate their lead at the circus, but this evening is an opportunity she cannot pass. Her worries and anxieties will have to wait as she folds them up and hides them away for later. Now isn’t the time. Any distraction could be lethal.

Her heels click across the two-toned marble floor as she makes her way through a narrow passageway and into the light. The entrance hall is as elaborate as the rest of the house, with a delicate stone and domed glass ceiling spanning over a central atrium framed by sweeping marble staircases on either side.

Tina pivots on the spot behind the safety of a statue, burrowing deeper into the collar of her coat as she scans the room, and her eyes find him immediately. He is standing far back from the crowd, a lone dark figure lurking in the shadows as he observes the other guests enjoying themselves. The majestic eagle surveying its prey, ready to swoop down in the blink of an eye.

She takes a moment to study him in kind, surreptitiously sweeping the hall as she weaves between spectators, drawing ever smaller circles as she documents the firm set of his jawline and the calculating, wintry eyes she’d only seen once before. A violent shiver runs the length of her spine when their eyes meet across the room. His gaze pierces through her like a poisoned arrow, pinning her to spot, and her heart begins to hammer wildly in her chest. He cocks his head in challenge, a curious curl to his brow, and his lips pull into a devious smile.

It’s a dangerous game they’re playing, a complicated sequence where one misplaced toe could mean the end, where she’s supposed to be the hunter and he the prey, yet when he turns his body to face her she cannot shake the feeling that their roles have been reversed.

Don’t screw this up, Goldstein! she tells herself, stubbornly maintaining her stance as heat rises on her cheeks.

He peels away from the wall and out of the shadows, casually striding across the room until he comes to stand beside her. “I don’t think we’ve had time to become properly acquainted yet.” His accent is silky smooth with a dark timbre that makes the hairs on the back of her neck stand on end.

“I’d like to think nothing in life is predictable,” she counters and earns herself a smile. “What would be the fun in that?”

“Flora said you’re interested in the cause, she never mentioned where you’re from.” He holds out his hand for her to take and her scalp prickles when he lifts her fingers to his lips and kisses her
“Remind me of your name again, please.”

“Alice,” she breathes, assuming the alias set out for her and slipping into the foreign robe as the mask slides into place. Transformation complete. “Alice Liddell.”

“Silenus Rosier, at your service,” he says, all smoothness and grace with a dangerous, lethal undertone that doesn’t allow room to think, to question, to fear. “Why don’t you join me for a drink?”

He hasn’t relinquished her hand and places it in the crook of his elbow instead, pulling her along and through a tall set of double doors that stands gaping wide in invitation. The adjoining room is lavishly decorated with delicately stuccoed ceilings, their intricate swirls and floral patterns gilded with precious gold, and its walls hung with elaborately embroidered tapestries depicting medieval hunting scenes and blushing maidens in the woods.

Tina cowers at the decadence; even though MACUSA’s imposing entrance hall doesn’t lack in pompous splendours, it isn’t anything like this. While the Woolworth Building’s innards evoke a sense of comfort, of righteousness, of all that’s good in this world, the Rosiers’ manor house crawls with cold and arrogance. No warmth and forgiveness are left among its walls, making her shiver. She’s hyper aware of every step across the black and white marble floors, and the echo of her heels feels uncomfortably loud to her ears as it bounces off the walls.

He leads her over to a table laden with crystal bottles and carafes of varying sizes, filled with various brilliantly coloured liquids; warm amber, tantalising purple and electric green. He picks up a tall, slender bottle filled with a deep crimson liquor and pours them two glasses. “Well, Alice, tell me. What brings you to our part of the world?”

Tina swallows thickly, having expected this question, and launches into her well-rehearsed answer. “I’m here to see if I can make a difference and be useful to the cause. I refuse to live like this any longer. We need change, and I believe Gellert Grindelwald is the right man to do it.”

“He certainly is, yes. Non-Magiques are poor, unfortunate souls unable to govern themselves. Look at the Great War, what would have happened if wizardkind hadn’t quietly intervened from within? Tragic. They need our guidance.” Tina jolts at the familiar words, words she’s heard spoken once before, but in a different context and a warm, benevolent tone. Spoken by a man with a heart of gold, not a soldier with a soul as cold as ice.

“My sister is in love with a No-Maj,” Tina blurts before she can stop herself. His eyebrows creep up his forehead until they nearly touch his hairline. “He’s a nice enough fella, but if the Statue of Secrecy continues as it is, they’ll brandish her a criminal. I couldn’t bear it.”

“In love with a Non-Magique? How curious! I suppose one could get attached to them and keep them like a pet?” Tina swallows the sudden, unexpected rage bubbling from within when she thinks of good, honest Jacob Kowalski and the way he looked at her sister.

“Yes,” is all she manages tensely, brushing her fringe out of her eyes in a self-soothing gesture. “You see how I have some personal incentive to see the current laws adjusted.”

“I can, certainly, and how fortunate it is, too. Since Gellert is back here with us and the international communication has been disrupted, we have been unable to communicate with our associates across the Atlantic. Perhaps you would have an idea how we could bridge this gap?” He lifts his glass to his lips and takes a confident sip without breaking eye contact.

“My husband works for The Ghost. I’m sure he’d be happy to assist.”
“Your husband? He isn’t here with you. Don’t you miss him?” he asks casually.

“Our marriage is a marriage of convenience. His interests lie... elsewhere,” she says and his smile broadens at her words, “and that leaves me free to live my life as I please.”

“Convenient indeed,” he murmurs and lifts his glass to clink it to hers. “We will find a place for you within our network. Enough of scrabbling along like cockroaches in the dirt. I know there are many like-minded souls across the Atlantic, but they’re scared to speak out. Your husband might be just the man to help us mobilise.” He re-fills her glass before leading her to the roulette table at the centre of the room, where a small crowd has already gathered around the board. They make space for him as he approaches.

Silenus picks up a stack of chips and places them on her open palm. He leans close enough for his scent to fill her nose; he smells of lemons, of white river lilies, and danger. “How about a little game, Alice? What do you say?”

His breath tickles her ear and Tina closes her eyes against the wave of nausea at the pit of her stomach. Now or never. We make the world a better place — with love. “I’d love to,” she says and places the entire stack of chips on the scarlet number seven just as the croupier calls:

“Rien ne va plus!”
“You can take this room here.”

Newt sticks his head through the door to a look around the space. It’s small and empty except for one narrow single bed crammed into the far left corner, and his eyes flit over the gaping holes in the walls before cutting back to their companion.

Hakarl Snakursson seems nonplussed by the scrutiny as he scratches his stubbly, pointed chin, but Newt isn’t easily fooled. He understands human behaviour well enough to see the lethal strength in Hakarl’s wiry frame, and the calculating mind driving his actions. Hakarl is tall enough to have to bend his head against the low timber ceiling above, looking like a fish out of water within the narrow confines of the corridor.

Leta squeezes past them both and strides into the room, turning on the spot to face them. “This is perfect.”

Hakarl noisily snorts his nose and spits at their feet, but doesn’t comment. Newt shuffles uncomfortably, shifting his case from his left hand to his right, and it creaks noisily as one of the fastenings snaps open. The case emits an ominous growl, reminding him of his duties, and he hastily reaches to close the clasp.

“Thank you, Karl,” Leta says and Newt thinks she almost means it. Hakarl gives a noncommittal grunt, bearing his teeth before disappearing down the corridor.

Newt follows Leta into their room and slides the door closed behind them. He lingers by it, watching her as she alights on the shoddy single mattress. It creaks cheaply when she shifts and her face distorts into a grimace. An awkward tension rises as they grapple for something to say.

It doesn’t happen often these days as they skirt around the subject of them as if abiding by some unspoken agreement. A silent pact hanging above them like a cloud, following on their heels, wrapping around them like a rope, pulling tighter and tighter as time goes by.

Newt’s throat constricts the longer he fights the words clamouring against his lips, nearly buckling under the weight of it as it presses heavily on his mind. It’s too much. “I should do my rounds,” he murmurs and makes to descend into his sanctuary night.
after night. Deep down he knows the truth as he sees the gaping distance between them grow larger day by day, and he wonders if they’re ever going to bridge it again.)

Newt breathes a sigh of relief when his boots reach the spongy floor of his shed, fingers finding the ends of his bow tie as he sheds his layers, unearthing himself, finally whole again. Not quite whole yet, he thinks ruefully as he discards his shirt. His gaze settles on the rudimentary sketch pinned to the wall above his workbench, and he smiles at the memory.

He’d been healing still, two days after the incident on the subway, and Tina had insisted on helping him with his chores, and he’d fallen asleep on a bale of hay halfway through. Tina’s delighted giggle had roused him from his sleep, and she’d presented him with her sketch of him. She’d made him promise to destroy it, but he’d kept it, staring at it from time to time as he was slaving away at his manuscript, drawing strength from the memory of her mirth.

Now, this memory is all he has left of her.

The creatures’ many calls and squawks offer a familiar comfort and he closes his eyes, letting it wrap around him in a soothing embrace as a quiet calm settles across his heart. Newt knows he won’t be able to keep it up forever, hiding away whenever they’re on their own. He shakes his head, attempting to sort through the maelstrom of feelings clouding his mind and reaches for the nearest bowl to start on his evening chores. Anything to occupy his thoughts. His mind settles into the quiet state of contentment as he busies his hands with sorting through a box of apples for Dougal.

It was a mistake to agree to this scheme. He’s sure of it. Dumbledore’s plan is reckless at best and pernicious at worst and surely doomed to fail.

(He’s only agreed to it to get out of London, he tells himself, to join in the fight, to be useful. Sitting at home only gives him time to brood, and he’s never done well with staying idle. Tina’s unknown fate nearly drives him out his mind with pain and worry, a new concept he refuses to embrace, and he convinces himself being useful is the next best thing to finding her alive.)

There’s a gentle tug at his sleeve and he turns just in time to see an apple lift from the box, hovering in mid air seemingly on its own accord. “Hey there, Dougal,” Newt greets his invisible friend. “No need to hide, these are all yours.”

Dougal makes a pleased sound, and Newt swears it would have been a sigh if the demiguise were human, before gradually flickering into visibility. The creature remains rooted to the spot, head cocking sideways as his eyes swivel up to the ceiling and back to Newt before turning blue for the briefest of moments. Newt’s shoulders slump in defeat as he follows Dougal’s line of sight. “If only I could see what you’ve seen, my friend,” Newt says wishfully, reaching out to stroke Dougal’s silvery fur. “I can’t possibly go up there.”

The demiguise’s expression remains impassive, and he gives a pleased hum at the attention, blinking owlishly up at him before crawling away. Dougal loads more fruit into his arms, intent on spiriting it away to his den, and his eyes turn blue once more before he slips from visibility and scurries away, apples bobbing up and down as he goes.

Leta is with him every second of his existence, asleep or waking, since they embarked on this clandestine operation and it’s become painful to breathe the same air. He can try and shut her out, disappear into the case and leave her behind, yet her ghost follows him wherever he goes. Even in his dreams.

Newt grimaces. There’s no helping it. He leaves the box sitting on his worktop and retraces his steps, climbing up the ladder and back to the surface and the girl he’d just run away from.
Tina stands out in the fields at the end of a night spend scouring the streets to no avail, letting the wind tousle her hair as she looks back at the Chateau.

Today’s raid had been especially bad. Her heart had skipped a beat before restarting with a painful lurch, nearly jumping out of her mouth when she’d spotted a mop of coppery curls among the victims of the newest attack. She’d sifted through the rubble in a blind panic, removing plaster and stone until he was free, looking up at her through dead, unseeing eyes. It isn’t him, it isn’t Newt, she kept repeating, over and over to calm her racing heart.

She blinks against the sting of tears and lowers her gaze to her feet. It’s been weeks, and while the building’s neglected silhouette is familiar, it isn’t like coming home. The mud is gone from below her feet, the ground now awash with colour, with poppies swaying in the lazy breeze, their scarlet heads waving in welcome every time she returns.

Or is it a warning?

She closes her eyes against the glare, yet it seeps through her eyelids, staining them red. Sometimes she thinks they’re permanently edged on to her mind and she sees them even when she closes her eyes at night.

They penetrate her dreams.

Queenie, dressed all in black, glossy hair bouncing in the wind as she puckers her blood red lips to blow Tina a kiss. Newt, beaten and raw, bright red stains seeping through the white cotton of his shirt, colouring his lips as he sends her a rueful smile.

It’s always the same, recurring over and over on days she feels especially vulnerable, and there’s nothing to stop it. Frida suggested a dreamless draught, but Tina’s pride prevents her from giving in. She’s stronger than this, more resilient even as her body aches with the exhaustion of yet another sleepless night, worsened by the constant worry plaguing her mind and heart.

A remedy arrived one week ago.

Tina reaches into the inside pocket of her coat to retrieve her newest companion. The small leather book feels warm in her hands, radiating the kindhearted goodness of the words within. Her finger traces the silver dragon edging gracing the front before following along the title.

Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them by Newton Scamander.

The pages are rumpled with use, even after such a short time. She’s already memorised the text. The first page only bears two lines:

A dedication.

To friendship, the most powerful magic in existence.

She likes to think it’s a recent addition, a final flourish added following their fateful week in December, where a series of unexpected events sparked an unforeseen friendship. The evil around her surrenders its grip and ceases to exist when she reads the words aloud, imagining his voice. The blood on his lips is gone when she closes her eyes. Instead, she sees his creatures in front of her inner eye, wild and beautiful and strong.

Her wand weaves through the air without thinking and a soft, blue smoke breaks from the tip like dust, swirling to form the shape of a familiar beast. The little niffler scuttles around her head,
stopping to smell her nose before dissipating into the air. Tina laughs, really laughs for the first time in weeks, and when her gaze falls onto the field of flowers at her feet she knows there will be no crimson petals haunting her dreams tonight.

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Queenie clenches and unclenches her fingers as a painful cramp takes hold of her hand, experimentally wiggling her wrist to relieve her aching muscles. The enchanted iron shackles are wound tight, unforgiving and unyielding as they dig into her delicate flesh.

She sighs in defeat and tries not to think about Jacob. This has all gone so horribly wrong. Queenie is alone in one of the interrogation rooms, one she’s seen countless times in her sister’s mind. There’s two white-roped guards flanking either side of the door outside; the faint din of their thoughts carries through the wall and into her room. She strains her ears and listens carefully, yet she only reads fear, and something akin to pity.

Jacob had been taken from her as soon as they’d entered the building, and there’s no telling what they’ve done to him, or where he’s being held. If he hasn’t been Obliviated yet. Queenie doesn’t yet share the same deep connection she shares with her sister, whose mind calls out to her among a sea of people even if they’re miles apart. Jacob connects with her on a different level, filling every nook and cranny of her heart until it feels ready to burst.

The door opens with a sudden bang as it collides with the adjacent wall, ripping her from her reverie when its ancient hinges moan as it falls back into place. She’s no longer alone with her own thoughts, and while her three new companions remain silent and their faces carefully neutral, their minds are all the more articulate.

Queenie knows two of them. Walter is in his mid-fifties, short and nearly bald. He’s a quiet man, and very reserved, yet his mind is always kind. Mary leads the department of magical security while Arnold Guzman is overseas, and her mind is sharper than her mouth might suggest.

The second woman Queenie has trouble placing at first. Her auburn curls and steel blue eyes are unfamiliar, and her mind is unlike anything Queenie has ever heard before. All three of them sit down across from her, watching her. Walter and Mary lean forward in expectant anticipation while the woman sits back and folds her arms across her chest, waiting.

Queenie’s careful as she dives deeper into the stranger's mind. She pulls back immediately when she comes up against a well-built mental shield, but it’s too late: The woman’s eyes snap to Queenie’s at lightning speed, interest piqued.

“Miss Goldstein,” Mary begins, eyes severe, and a deep, stern furrow appears in the centre of her forehead. “Do you understand the gravity of the offence you have committed?”

“I think I do, Ma’am,” Queenie says and sits up straighter, unafraid as she faces them without reservations. “I’m guilty of loving a gentle, kind-hearted man who ain’t never gonna hurt a fly, and you’d understand if you’d let me explain.”

“This kind-hearted man you claim to be in love with is a No-Maj, Miss Goldstein. I don’t have to remind you of the law. There can be no exceptions.” There is kindness in Walter’s tone as he says it, and their minds are awash with sympathy and pity, yet their faces do not show it.

She says the same thing he said, yet there can’t be a future for them. Poor, unfortunate girl, why did she have to fall in love with a No-Maj? Queenie’s eyes cut across to the nameless woman and their gazes lock.
“If you was really thinkin’ me unfortunate you’d hear me out,” Queenie hisses at the stranger. The woman’s eyes grow wide, pupils dilating in shock before her gaze turns razor sharp and calculating as they stare at each other. Queenie knows immediately she’s been found out. Naked panic rises in the back of her throat and she hastily checks her own mental barriers, not wanting to give away too much before having a chance at making her point. The woman leans across to her over the narrow table separating them. “You’re an unregistered legilimens,” she breathes, astonished and furious at once, and her expression changes rapidly as the conflicting emotions flicker across her face. Mary and Walter freeze in their seats.

“So what if I am,” Queenie says with vehemence and no small measure of venom in her voice. Tears burn at the corner of her eye, but she refuses to give in. This is a fight she must fight by herself, for Jacob and her sister.

“That’s a Section 11C, Miss Goldstein,” Mary says with an unhappy curl to her lip. “You have to disclose it so special precautions can be taken around you.” She wipes a tired hand across her forehead.

“There’s no rule that says when I need to disclose it. I’m doing it now, ain’t I?” Queenie experiences the first wave of fear as their faces remain unmoving, and she plays the one trump card she still has up her sleeve. “What if I were to volunteer to go into service for MACUSA.” She consciously lowers her mental barriers, save for the one Grindelwald taught her to keep undetected, opening her mind like a book and laying herself bare.

Walter perks up at this and leans back in his seat, considering her. “That could be an option. Would save me from fining you, too.”

Mary clears her throat and folds her hands in her lap. “We are forgetting what we are here for. This matter will be dealt with later on. You’re still guilty of violating Section 3A, and many more besides.”

“He’s no simple No-Maj!” Queenie bursts out, nearing desperation. “He remembered things on his own — the venom didn’t work on him.”

“The only reason it wouldn’t have worked —” Walter begins to interject.

“— is if he has magic running through his veins,” the stranger finishes, having plucked it right out of Queenie’s head.

“Impossible!” Mary breathes.

“He’s been bitten by a venomous magical creature,” the other woman continues as she sifts through Queenie’s memories. “It might have altered his physiology, yet he isn’t able to perform magic on his own.”

“He could see Mr Scamander’s beasts, too,” Queenie adds, eager now that she’s finally being heard.

“Like a squib,” Walter muses aloud, pensively scratching his chin. “There’s a simple way to find out, you know.” He turns to the guard at the door. “Tell Sam to bring in the No-Maj — and call for Verity, while you’re at it.”

Queenie giggles at the image in his head, elation and incredulity making her feel giddy and light-headed, yet she doesn’t allow herself to get her hopes up too high.

“You better not be lying to us, Goldstein,” Mary warns.
“Never,” Queenie promises and crosses two fingers where they’re shackled behind her back. Jacob is frogmarched into the room, eyes wide with trepidation until his gaze falls on her, and Queenie tries to infuse her smile with warmth and reassurance. Small beads of sweat stand high on his forehead, but he appears otherwise unharmed.

“Mr Kowalski, you have been brought here today to evaluate whether you have sufficient magic in you to be welcomed into the wizarding world,” Walter begins and Jacob nods dazedly. “Are you and Miss Goldstein aware of what it entails, should you pass the test? I’m not sure if you’ve considered the repercussions. You’ll be her legal dependant, her responsibility — and you will need to cease to exist in the No-Maj world. Are you prepared to take on these burdens?”

“Yes, yes I am,” Jacob says without skipping a beat, now sweating profusely, but Queenie thinks he’s never sounded stronger and surer than today.

There’s a sharp knock and a harassed-looking Abernathy bursts through the door, preceded by a small, white terrier Queenie’s never seen before. The dog immediately hones in on Jacob, straining on its leash in a bid to get to him, and he bends down, pleasantly surprised at the interruption. “Hey there, little fella,” he cooes and straightens. “I didn’t know youse had normal animals in here, too.” The dog yaps excitedly and wags its stubby tail so hard it’s entire rear begins to shake.

Go on, tell him, Mary projects and Queenie beams at her, barely containing an elated sob as she turns to him.

“We don’t, honey,” Queenie says and smiles through her tears. “Verity is a crup, a magical breed of dog. She’s used to detecting magical blood, and you’ve just passed the test.”

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The room is pitch black when he lifts the lid, the full moon’s soft, silvery rays the only source of light penetrating the dark. It reminds him of the countless walks they took at school, stealing out of their common rooms and combing the forest for one creature or another with only the moonlight for company. The ghost of a memory is the last push he needs to fold back the lid and lift his head from the case. He draws a shaky breath, ready to speak into the void when he’s interrupted before he can even formulate the question in his mind.

“I’m not sleeping,” comes a quiet whisper from the darkness, and the bed frame squeaks noisily as she leans forward and into the shaft of moonlight that falls in through the window. Half of her face remains hidden in the shadows, her expression unreadable, shrouded in mystery. There are silvery tear tracks staining the cheek nearest the window and Leta lifts her hand, surreptitiously wiping at her eyes.

I put them there, he thinks but stares down the beast of his guilt when it rears its head. Now is not the time.

Newt pulls himself fully into the space with surprising grace and moves to sit by the window, where he folds his legs and draws them up to his chin, soothingly rubbing his cheek against his knees. They sit in silence for what feels like an eternity, their heartbeats keeping time like the ticking of a clock. “Newt, are you well?” she asks, and her voice only trembles minutely at the end.

Her tears are gone and the Leta sitting before him now is the one he always knew, open and vulnerable, the childhood friend he always cherished, the girl he loved, not the troubled young woman she has become.
“I’m fine,” he murmurs, unsure whether she’s caught the words until he hears her laugh, short and humourless, and watches her shaking her head out of the corner of his eye.

“You’re not being fair,” she says and doesn’t try to hide the resentment in her voice, making his temper rise under his skin.

I’m sure you’d know a thing or two about that, he thinks a little nastily, and utters the words before he can stop himself. She shrinks further into herself, eyes going wide, and he experiences a short moment of regret, there and gone again, before his anger distracts him once more. “Yes, well —“ he begins, but she cuts him off, sounding tired, and he cringes at the defeat in her voice.

“I am sorry, Newt. I truly am.” He knows she means it. She always does, it’s something he never doubted. This time, however, it’s simply not enough, and he feels heat rising at the back of his neck.

“What for, exactly?” he hisses, fingers clenching into fists. She recoils at the sharpness of his voice as years of unanswered questions, of painful loneliness and hateful memories wash over him, breaking to the surface, unchecked. The sudden, white-hot rage nearly blinds him as it burns behind his eyelids. “My expulsion? Lying to me during the war? Marrying my brother? Dragging me into this mess without my permission? Take your pick!”

She inhales sharply, chest working. “Newt, if you’d just let me explain —” she tries, but he doesn’t let her finish.

It’s as if he’s standing beside himself and watching it all unfold, horrified yet powerless to stop it. “I don’t want your explanation or your apologies, Leta. I cannot give you the justification or absolution you need.” He pauses to take a deep breath, then two, then three until he’s calm enough to continue. “Do you have any idea what this did to me?”

What you do to me, still? How it kills me a little every time I see you with Theseus?

The words hit their mark with unerring accuracy and she flinches, shrinking away from him with every angry syllable he utters. He expects her to argue like she always does, to draw strength from the unwavering pride and willpower she carries within, or glower at him in furious defiance, but she does neither. She takes his accusations, blow after blow, and doesn’t fight it.

Leta endures his anger, taking it into herself with an eerie sense of calm, riding it out. She hangs her head in quiet shame until her shoulders betray her, shaking under the pressure as silent tears resume their paths across her cheeks. Gone is the elegant poise and cool confidence, and his anger deflates like a punctured balloon at the sight.

“You must hate me,” she utters after a time, as quiet and hollow as he feels. Newt opens his mouth to protest, but she ploughs on, “I don’t blame you.”

“I don’t hate you,” he says after a time, surprised at the calmness of his voice. I couldn’t hate you if I tried. “I’m angry at you, Leta. I’m hurt and confused perhaps; but never that.” Newt swallows, fighting the urge to go to her, bile rising at the back of his throat as his stomach twists in shame. “Look, Leta, I’m —” Sorry for yelling at you? Ashamed of myself? A beat. “I think this was a bad idea, I should have never come back up —“

“No, please stay,” she rasps, voice heavy with tears, but she doesn’t shy away from his eyes until he finally averts his gaze. “Yell all you need. I can’t blame you for the way you feel, but I hope you’ll let me explain one day. I am so sorry I hurt you, Newt.” She wipes at her tears and takes a stuttering breath as her characteristic stubbornness slips back into place. The sudden, grave seriousness in her eyes touches his very core. “I could live with the idea of you hating me, of
never speaking to you again, but I couldn’t bear the thought of losing you. I won’t apologise for that.”

Quiet descends as she waits while he digests her words, yet this silence is different from before. It isn’t the calm before the storm, rife with tension about to overflow, but a gentle calmness after the worst of it has passed. It speaks of quiet hope and new beginnings. The destruction it left in its wake still lies in shambles at their feet, yet for the first time Newt sees a sliver of light on the horizon, a silver lining perhaps.

Maybe, he muses, there is hope yet.

Leta meets his gaze and he knows she is thinking the same thing as she chances a small smile, and he nearly misses it in the dark. “I’m sorry,” he says and means it. “I didn’t come up here to make you cry.”

“I know,” she says instead of I understand. They sit in silence once again until she turns to him, considering him, dark eyes shining with compassion. “There’s something that’s been bothering you, Newt.” It isn’t a question. “Something else. It’s that *Daily Prophet* article on Grindelwald’s escape. I’ve seen you reading it, over and over. What are you hoping to find?”

“I’m not quite sure,” he admits and the look on her face lends him the courage to continue. “I have friends in New York and I — there’s no way for me to contact them. I keep reading it to remind myself that their names aren’t between the lines, and it’s a good thing.”

“You — are you worried?” she asks in mild disbelief, forgetting about the seriousness of the situation for a moment, and he snorts a humourless laugh.

“I suppose I am,” he says and tries to keep the bitterness from his voice.

“What’s her name?” Leta asks without skipping a beat and Newt’s head snaps up in shock. There’s a gentle twinkle in her eye which he has difficulty placing at first. Is she happy?

“What do you mean?” he splutters.

“The only time I’ve ever seen you worry like this was when it concerned me or a creature. You forget how well I am able to read you, Newt,” she says and he experiences a pang of resentment before reigning in his emotions. “I know that look.”

He sighs as the scaffolding holding him up collapses and all the tension bleeds from his frame. “Tina. Her name is Tina,” he concedes, smiling gently. Her ears perk up at the name and he adds hastily, “She’s an auror at MACUSA. And she’s a friend.”

Leta makes a non-committal sound. “She must be quite the formidable woman if she caught the eye of one Newton Scamander,” she jokes and he sends her a half-hearted glare. “I’m glad, Newt, honest! I want you to be happy, is all.”

The conversation moves into dangerous territory, about to charter untested waters, a subject he has no desire to breach tonight, so simply nods his head and lowers his gaze to his lap. If she senses the reason for his change in demeanour, she chooses not to comment on it. Her expression turns thoughtful as they sit in companionable silence, not unpleasant. Newt catches himself admiring her familiar features exposed to the light, taking in her bottomless eyes, the elegant high-set cheekbones and the wide sweep of her lips. How often had he dreamed of her face? Loving it and hating it in turn, more times than he can count.

It haunts him still, the moment he closes his eyes. Sometimes there’s a short reprieve, a few days and weeks where she’d left him in peace. He’d welcomed the change in New York when his
newfound friendships had distracted him from her face. It’s the reason for his brusque dismissal when Queenie had attempted to talk to him about her, refusing to let his pain and suffering invade his newfound happiness. Then there is Tina, good and righteous Tina, who steals into his thoughts more often these days, but even the goodness of her heart can’t always keep Leta’s image from pushing her out.

Newt closes his eyes and lets his head fall back against the wall, defeated, as his anger lies crumbling at his feet. He knows the way he feels about Leta hasn’t changed, and possibly never will if the magnitude of his anger earlier is anything to go by.

He doesn’t fall asleep until the sky outside begins to turn from black to blue.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Cue enter another cute little creature :)

The morning after their arrival in Paris passes in a blur, filled with the flurry of activities that come with setting up their stage and sees them working on opposite sides of the tent. Newt welcomes the diversion and gladly uses it as an excuse to avoid Leta for the better part of the day. He feels guilty about the previous night, and the time apart gives them time to mull it over and calm their minds. The familiar, awkward tension is all but gone when they meet in their room to settle for the night, washed away by the tempest he’d unleashed, and they share a hopeful smile before slipping into a familiar nightly routine.

Newt slams his case shut when a sudden, sharp knock startles them out of their reverie and Leta shoots bolt upright, the fear of being discovered deeply etched across her face. The knocking resumes, loud and unrelenting. “Newt!” His eyes grow wide when a familiar voice sounds from without. Maledictus. “Come, quickly!”

***

Tina and Kyuho flit through the shadows on silent feet, peering left and right as the inns’ crooked window shutters come into view. She’s glad for the neighbourhood’s seedy nature, providing the perfect cover. Known as the neighbourhood of deception, Beaubourg is used to shady creatures and human oddities. Its residents have learned to look the other way and turn a blind eye, accepting and embracing its shady obscurity as the natural course of life.

The familiar tingle of anticipation simmers low in her belly as adrenaline curses through her veins, the promise of excitement at her fingertips. Finally, finally, the long drought of disappointment and empty leads might come to an end. Their gazes meet and the share a meaningful glace. “Ready?” he breathes and she nods sharply once.

Kyuho raises his fist against front door, once a handsome forest green now pale and frazzled-looking, and chips of faded paint rain down like powdery snow in time with his knocks.

***

Maledictus’ fingers dig curl around Newt’s biceps like a vice, digging into his skin hard enough to leave bruises as she drags him down the seven flights of stairs to the basement. Leta’s hurried footsteps and erratic breathing is his only proof she’s following them. They exit through the back door and into a dark, narrow passageway. Leta covers her nose against the stench of the outhouse, but Newt remains unfazed. His senses are on high alert, muscles tense in anticipation of what they’re going to find.

Maledictus approaches a large, fabric-covered shape among the rest of the circus’ bulky possessions, lumped together next to the potent aroma of the rubbish bins. She pulls off the linen blanket without preamble, revealing a large cast iron cage, cold and cruel, the kind he’s seen countless times before, the kind he’d had to pry open time and again while rescuing a creature.

This time it’s no different; it’s the creature within that differs. Part of him had expected an injured
crup at the sight, maybe a kneazle — what else should be lurking around Paris’ stone-faced jungle? A small human girl stares back at him, dark-eyed shining in defiance as she bares her teeth at him, her small face streaked with dirt. Her dark, unkempt curls frame her face like a lion’s mane, fierce and angry as if ready to pounce like the creatures he encountered in the wild.

She sits huddled in a corner, pressed against the iron bars of her confinement, trying to get as far away as possible. In many ways isn’t any different from the creatures of his case. He knows immediately why Maledictus called him, and he turns to her in breathless anticipation, skin prickling in excitement. “She’s one of them, isn’t she?”

Maledictus nods. She stands pressed against the far-off wall with fear in her eyes, peering at the cage as if it contained a fully grown dragon rather than a five-year-old child. “Yes. I came to you when I saw them bring her down here. I don’t know where they kept her before.”

Large, angry red marks colour the girl’s skinny wrists, rubbed raw where they have been bound with a primitive rope or shackles, and Newt’s stomach drops at the sight. He’s healed countless cuts and gaping wounds on his creatures, some which never close, and many bear the emotional scars for the rest of their lives. Anger and bitter resentment spread through his chest, and he fights to keep himself from punching the wall in frustration.

He sinks to his knees in front of the cage and watches the child scramble desperately to get away. “It’s alright, you’re alright. We won’t harm you, see? There’s nothing to worry about.” The girl doesn’t move, frightened and shaking as tears form in her eyes. “Can — would you like me to get you out of there? How about that?”

There’s no reply, only more tears and pitiful whimpers.

“Do you want me to —?” Leta offers and steps close as the girl begins to weep openly, her pitiful wails stopping Leta in her tracks.

“No, I think… let’s get you out of here, shall we?” Newt taps his wand to the metal lock and it rattles noisily but doesn’t budge. He tries a different spell, then another, and another until he’s all out of options. “I wonder… Pick, I could use your help,” he whispers into his breast pocket and it shivers when Pickett emerges leaves first.

The little girl’s eyes grow as large as saucers as she watches the creature scramble along Newt’s outstretched arm and climbs onto the metal lock. A soft click tells them he’s been successful moments later, and the lock falls to the floor with a clatter. Pickett serves as a distraction, and the girl’s tears subside as the tension bleeds from her frame, forgetting her fears as she crawls closer to ogle at Pickett’s spindly legs.

Newt smiles at the obvious wonder in her eyes. “His name is Pickett. He’s a bowtruckle.” Her eyes shrivel back to Newt, eying him with obvious distrust as she remains frozen to the spot, but she’s no longer straining to get away.

Newt pats his sides in search of an icebreaker and smiles when he touches something hard on the inside pocket of his jacket. An idea forms in his head. “Well, I’m sure you know what this is.” He produces a piece of dark chocolate and holds it out to her, letting it hang in the space between them like the peace offering it is.

He can barely blink before she’s snatched the chocolate out of his hand, stuffing it into her mouth in one piece, making him smile. “See, I’m not here to hurt you. We just want to get you out,” he says as she stares back at him expectantly. “I’m Newt. What’s your name?”

She gives him a blank stare, furrowing her brow, and sudden understanding fills him. “Of course.
Oh, um. *Comment tu* — oh, bugger it all to hell!” He growls and runs a hand through his hair. His clumsy attempt at French and his impassioned outburst seem to do the trick, piercing her outer shell to tear down the last of her barriers as she shakes her head and giggles.

“Find that funny, do you? Alright.” He lays his palm on his chest. “Newt. And this,” he says, pointing at his bowtruckle, “is Pickett.”

“Newt, let me,” Leta says and lays a hand on his arm. He gets off the filthy floor and dusts off his trousers as he watches her crouch down low in front of the child.

“*Ma petite,*” she murmurs in perfect French. “You’re alright, you’re fine.” The girl doesn’t flinch. “*Je m’appelle Leta, et toi? And you?*”

“Mariana,” the child utters quietly, and the echo of her name bounces off the narrow walls surrounding them. Leta reaches out a hand in invitation and Newt, expecting Mariana to bolt, gawks at her she puts her tiny hand in Leta’s larger one.

Leta swiftly hauls her out of the cage and into her arms as she rises in one fluid motion. “Let’s get out of here,” she hisses and he nods his agreement.

***

Kyuho raps on the door of the inn just as Newt and Leta slip into the darkness, unknowingly providing them cover as they make their way up the stairs. “Are you sure this is it?” Tina whispers as they wait. “You think we can trust your source?”

Kyuho shifts from one foot to the other and stuffs his hands into his coat pockets. “Positive. There’s a healthy black market around here, what with all the regulations they slapped on recently. I paid that old hag more than twice what she deserved, and she knew it.”

“Well, here we go,” Tina whispers, preparing herself as noisy shuffling draws closer from within the building.

Hakarl opens the door with a gruff, “Yeah?” His lips pull tight over his angular, yellow teeth as he scrutinises them openly and without scruples. Tina isn’t moved.

***

They make it to the foyer when there’s a sharp knock at the front door, making them freeze in their tracks. Newt pulls them into the shadow under the stairs, pressing them flat against the wall. Their breathing sounds extraordinarily harsh to their ears as they wait and Newt closes his eyes against the familiar butterflies in the pit of his stomach when Leta’s perfume fills his senses. Hakarl’s shuffling footsteps draw closer and they hold their breath as he cracks open the door.

“We’re looking for Grimmson,” comes a male voice from outside, but Newt doesn’t listen long enough to recognise the foreign accent as they cower, contemplating their options.

“Now!” he hisses and pushes Leta towards the stairs, thanking whoever is behind the door for their impeccable timing.

***

“Grimmson, eh? Depends who’s asking,” Hakarl says, wrinkling his nose.

“Someone willing to pay the right price.” The man’s bloodshot eyes land on Tina for the first time when she speaks.
Hakarl nods. “I’ll see if he’s in.”

They’re lead to a tiny room in the basement, crammed under the stairs like an afterthought, the smell of mould and damp enveloping them like a wet sheet. A borrow befitting a dirty rat, Tina thinks and wrinkles her nose in disgust. Grimmson is a wiry, furry man with grey hair and a grey voice. He sits chewing dried meat when they enter and motions for them to take one of the empty chairs around the shabby table.

Kyuho steps forward, conscious of the way the man eyes Tina with open disdain. “I’m Pryxis, this is my business partner Aguila. We’re potion makers from New York. We need someone to find us one special ingredient and our sources tell us you’re the best for the job.”

“Word spreads quickly in these parts, yes. Hakarl tells me you’re after some magical creature,” he says, his Scandinavian accent more prominent as his partner’s name rolls off his tongue. He runs a primitive blade over his calloused fingertip, the noise setting Tina’s teeth on edge.


“Couldn’t find that at home?” he asks and waves the knife in their general direction.

“I’m Korean,” Kyuho deadpans, unimpressed.

Grimmson shrugs, nonplussed. “My apologies, you Orientals all look the same to me.” Kyuho grits his teeth, but says nothing. “It’s none of my business, but what do you want with a dragon egg, anyway?”

“You’re right, it’s none of your business,” Kyuho hisses through gritted teeth and Grimmson raises both hands in a placating gesture.

“Chinese Fireball eggs aren’t the easiest to come by, you see. This could get me in serious trouble,” he says.

Tina suppresses a snort at the irony. “You don’t strike me as someone used to worrying about morals.”

He fidgets nervously under the intensity of her gaze and lays a hand on his chest, feigning outrage. “I’m a man of honour, miss. I’m not saying it’s impossible, but I need to see what’s in it for me.”

“I’m sure we can make it worth your while,” Tina says, leaning forward on her elbows, “but how do we know you can deliver?”

Grimmson scratches his chin. “If you come to our show tomorrow night I can give you a little taste. I only deal in top quality goods, I assure you.” He extends his mighty paw across the table and Tina senses their meeting is coming to an end.

Kyuho shakes the proffered hand, eyebrows raised in challenge. “In that case, you better put on one hell of a show.”

***

Newt and Leta descend into the case as soon as they make it to the safety of their room, where Newt goes about trying to find the child some food and cleans her wounds. Leta helps the best she can, hovering close in case they need her, letting them communicate with their hands and feet, and plenty of laughter. Newt’s sun-drenched nature quickly draws Mira — a nickname that sticks like glue the first time he’s used it — out of her shell and into the open.
He watches her, grinning to himself as she babbles on in French and a language he remembers from his days along the Eastern Front. Her features give her away as one of the many Romani children roaming Paris’ inner city these days; the dark hair and dark eyes stare out of a grubby face. “Maybe,” he says as she cackles, curling in on herself when he tickles her belly, “there’s even a child under all this dirt.”

Leta looks up from her perch on a stack of boxes. “Newt, what are we going to do with her? We need to get in touch with Theseus or Dumbledore — she cannot stay here,” Newt opens his mouth to protest, but his words wither on his tongue at the finality her eyes. “Especially while Maledictus is close.”

Newt frowns. “What does she have to do with anything?”

“It’s no coincidence she acted that way earlier on,” Leta explains as he furrows his brow in confusion. “She said she was bitten by a hannya. Did she tell you what that means? She’s slowly turning into a child-devouring monster, Newt. Being this close causes her pain.”

Newt scoffs as he watches Mira munch on a crust of dry bread. “I have many dangerous creatures in here, Leta. I don’t think Maledictus even comes close!”

Leta stalks across his shed to stare him straight in the face, a single finger poking his chest in time with her words. “You can’t stick them all in your case and collect them like they’re one of your creatures, Newt!”

A deep furrow appears between his eyes. “Whyever not? I’m not collecting them, Leta. My case is a sanctuary for whoever needs it, creature or human. A safe place away from all the evils out there.” He looks up to directly meet her gaze.

_It’s my sanctuary away from you_ hangs between them like a bad smell, tainting the air yet refusing to dissipate.

Leta steps away from him, genuine tears forming in her eyes until she squares her shoulders and the familiar look of defiance is back on her face. “I’ll go give Mira a bath, then.”

_You don’t have to fight everyone all the time. Especially not me_, he wants to say, but can’t bring himself to do it. Newt makes a permissive gesture with his hand and Leta picks the girl off his workbench. He watches the back of her head until she’s out of his sight, sinking down on a stack of boxes and rubbing a tired hand across his face.

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_The Aerie, late April 1927_

The day Jacob and Queenie arrive in France is humid and the air is heavy with the smell of rain, and it doesn’t take long for the heavens to release their welcome committee. Queenie tries not to dwell on it. Her hair is plastered to her skull by the time they land on the apparating platform at the Aerie. The sky is the colour of freshly-hewn steel where it hangs low above the Chateau, its heavy, dark clouds nearly touching the highest spires.

“Mercy Lewis!” Jacob breathes at the sight of it’s imposing view and Queenie giggles at his use of expletive.

“Magnificent, isn’t it? Don’t let it fool you, this won’t be a walk in the park.” Frida steps up to greet them, lips spread thin in a tired smile, her magical umbrella shielding her from the worst of the downpour. “Welcome to the Aerie. You must be the legilimens and the muggle we’re
“Muggle?” Jacob frowns at the unfamiliar word, unsure whether it’s meant as a slur.

“That’s how they call No-Majs over here, honey,” Queenie explains and Jacobs looks appeased. “He’s a squib, not a Muggle.”

“Jacob Kowalski, how are ya?” he says and extends his hand in greeting.

Frida’s eyebrows disappear in her hair. “A squib? Well, I’m sure we will find a use for you somehow. I’m Frida, one of the captains here.” They shake hands. “And you are?”

“Queenie Goldstein, Ma’am.”

“Goldstein?” Frida's eyebrows creep high on her forehead and Queenie gives a tight smile at the woman’s surprise.

“Yes. Tina’s my sister.” Queenie plucks the question right out of Frida’s mind. “No, I wasn’t permitted to tell her we were coming.”

“Oh dear,” Frida mutters under her breath and straightens. “Well, let’s get you inside before you catch your death. You can clean up in the washroom before I’ll take you up for your physical and evaluations.” Frida waves at the guard, marching them briskly through the elaborately-carved double doors and into the cavernous entrance hall where they leave a trail of mud and moisture in their wake.

A set of hurried footsteps approaches from the sweeping marble staircase to their left and freezes mid-step. Tina stands erect, still as a statue as all the colour drains from her face to match the pale parlour of the limestone walls. One hand moves to cover her mouth while the other blindly gropes for the railing, knuckles turning white as her fingers curl around the stone.

“Queenie,” she breathes and takes a step closer. “What what are you doing here?” Her eyes fall on Jacob and her foot treats empty air. Tina catches herself with her arm to glare at her sister. “Oh, Mercy Lewis! What did you do?” She quiets, eyes wide, freshly out of curses, patience and breath.

It’s not the reunion either of them expected. Jacob shifts nervously from foot to foot, loosening his collar as the awkward tension thickens and rises to fill every last crevice in the room. He clears his throat, unable to stand the deafening silence until pressure bends at the peak, crashing over their heads as it breaks. Tina utters a single, strangled sob and descends the stairs two at a time. Queenie steps forward to catch her and the force of their embrace nearly makes them tumble to the floor. They’re both wiping away tears once they part.

Tina regains her composure first, and her walls slide back into place as a stern furrow appears between her eyebrows. “Explain,” she hisses.

Queenie opens her mouth as Kyuho appears in the doorway with his auror jacket slung over his arm, hat in his hand. “Hey, Goldstein! Let’s go!” Tina and Queenie turn in unison and all the colour drains from his face. “Oh, holy mother of dragons!”

Tina raises one pointed eyebrow in a “you don’t say”- gesture and crosses both arms in front of her chest as Queenie heaves a defeated sigh. “Go, Teen. Seems important. We’ll talk when you get back.” She meets her sister’s eyes. “I’m not gonna disappear. I promise.”

Jacob puts a steadying hand at the small of her back as Tina reluctantly turns to leave. They watch her depart the way they came before turning back to Frida. The captain wears her amused smirk.
openly and without shame. “Well, at the very least you two are going to make it much more interesting around here,” she comments and leads them deeper into the building.
Chapter 10

Tina is seething quietly as they land in a crooked alleyway near the inn. She is distracted enough to ignore the smell that made her gag immediately upon arrival the previous night. The houses on either side seem to lean precariously close, looming even darker than she remembers. The soft popping sounds of apparition fill the humid evening air as the rest of their team arrives.

“You alright, Goldstein?” Kyuho asks and Tina straightens to square her shoulders.

“Let’s just get this over with,” she bristles and Kyuho knows not to press his luck, the knot of shining dark hair at the crown of his head moving in tandem as he nods his affirmation before he turns to address the group. “Remember what we said. Keep your eyes on the exits and watch the spectators. Look for familiar faces, but keep a low profile.”

“What are you going to do?” one of their colleagues asks.

“Same as you,” Kyuho says. “Wait for our signal.”

“Understood,” they murmur in unison.

They divide into small groups to disappear among the crowd. Tina and Kyuho round the corner and find themselves in the midst of a great spectacle as the circus prepares for its nightly show. A colourful tent sits in the middle of the square as the performers flood the street, some of them floating in large bubbles above their heads, attracting the crowds and drawing them in. The enticing smell of popcorn and caramelised sugar perfumes the air, beckoning them closer.

The tent’s interior is far larger than it appears from the outside, swallowing scores of people at an astonishing rate. All the seats are taken by the time they arrive, but Tina doesn’t mind, keeping her eyes trained on the exits as they move closer to the centre of the arena. It’s easier to slip in unnoticed and stay hidden among a boisterous group of spectators like this, concealed behind a broad set of shoulders or ducking around a long set of coattails. Their murmured voices sound like the swarm of nesting sparrows, rising to bounce against the canvas ceiling above and muffling every other sound.

Tina circles the ring while her eyes circle the crowd, leaving Kyuho to sniff around behind the stands. They watch for a sign, an abnormality, something out of the ordinary to catch their eye. It’s like looking for the wolf among the flock of sheep. She keeps moving once the show begins, light-footed and silent as a cat; like a black panther creeping closer to its intended target.

A thickset, well-dressed gentleman ambles on to the stage, pointing his wand to his throat, and his scraggly beard bounces along as his booming voice fills the tent. “Mesdames et Monsieurs, witches and wizards… hold on to your hats and pocket watches before they run off with excitement.” His arms open wide. “Welcome to Circus Arcanus, where the impossible is possible.”

Neither of the first two acts catches her interest. A bulky, giant of a man lifting a car and its passengers on one hand while balancing an elephant in the other, and a tall woman contorting her body in complicated knots, limbs elongating to wrap around her like snakes at her command. Tina doesn’t mind them, carefully scanning the crowd instead. Grindelwald is behind all this, she is sure of it even if she doesn’t yet know how, and she is looking for a familiar face among the sea of spectators.

A growl redirects her attention back to the arena, where a large metal cage now separates the stage
from the audience. “Our next performance brings you a very special beast, a rare creature all the way from the desert plains of Africa. An airtight protective shield has been put in place for your safety, ladies and gentleman, but rest assured… Mr and Mrs Lebrun here will make it purr like a kneazle.”

Tina gasps, eyes trained at the majestic creature sat on a small pedestal within the cage. It rears its mighty head as its collar inflates like a set of bellows and opens its mouth to give another illustrious roar. Tina knows this creature. She’s seen it before, safe in its habitat within Newt’s magically expanded suitcase, and inscribed within the pages of his book. The lamps above rearrange, their individual columns of light convening as one on the creature and the young woman beside it, reflecting off her glittery blue gown whenever she shifts, constant and graceful, full of natural confidence and strength.

Her dark hair lies in a shining braid across her back and she wears her proud, regal smile like it's part of her costume. Part of her act. Tina shifts as a sense of deja-vu overcomes her like she’s seen this woman once before, in a dream or in someone else’s distant memory. She steps closer to get a better look at the woman’s face, and the angle permits her an unimpeded view into the cage. The lights above shift minutely and they illuminate a person watching from the sidelines.

A flash of copper. Golden eyes. A gentle tilt of the head.

The crowd ceases to exist as all the air is pressed from her lungs. Could it be? Here of all places? Tina nearly loses her footing, stumbling forward as her mouth falls open. Her heart beats against the confines of her ribs, moving upwards to lodge deep in her throat. She shivers and her insides turn to ice when the pieces fall into place. The woman next to him is Leta Lestrange, the beautiful girl in the picture. His wife? Tears prick at the corners of her eyes and she sucks in a painful breath, biting her lip against the slow ache blooming under her left breast.

He strides along the perimeter in the same duck-footed walk she remembers, eyes trained on Leta and the beast before sweeping his gaze across the spectators at the front.

She knows she shouldn’t stay, shouldn’t be seen, but she’s frozen to the spot, unable to move a muscle as she watches the light illuminate the freckles dotting his cheek. He turns his head and their eyes meet, locking gazes across the distance as if he’d been searching for her, and his eyes widen in shock. An electric current rushes through her and it’s the push she needs to break through the fog. Tina moves with a sudden jolt, remembering her training as she slips away into the crowd, fighting the nausea churning in her stomach.

Newt moves along the iron bars, eyes searching the crowd for the phantom he thinks he’s seen, and she ducks behind a large gentleman at the back. A million and one questions plaque her mind when a gentle tap on her shoulder makes her whirl around on instinct, wand drawn. “Hey, whoa! It’s just me,” Kyuho whispers, hands raised in a placating gesture and she makes to lower her wand. “You alright? You look like you just walked through a ghost.”

You’re not wrong. “I’m fine,” she bites out, making sure they’re well out of earshot as she leans towards him. “Find anything?”

Kyuho gives a short nod. “I found Grimmson and his shady lackey lurking around the back. He didn’t seem happy, kept yelling at the guy for not paying attention and letting her escape. This could be our missing girl.”

Tina nods. “Let’s talk to him, see what he’s got to say. If he offers us something we can always pick him up for illegal smuggling and let the ICW take him apart. Their flyer was at the scene of the crime, he’ll have to submit to questioning at the very least.” She scoffs. “These guys always have a price. He’ll talk.”
She glances back at the stage before they walk out of the tent. The nundu is gone and with it its red-haired caretaker and his companion.

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Newt thrusts his case at Leta the moment they get off stage and disappears without a word. He slips into the thong of spectators unnoticed, elbowing his way through the mass of people crowding around the stage. Those dark eyes, he could have sworn it was her. Was it a hallucination? His mind showing him the things his heart longs to see? On and on he pushes, craning his neck and straining his eyes but it’s to no avail. The streets outside the tent are deserted save for a few stragglers and passersby as the full moon breaks through the clouds, spilling its silver light across the cobblestones.

“What are you doing out here?” Leta closes the flap behind her as she joins him. “Why did you run off like that?”

“I thought I saw —” He stops short and wipes a tired hand across his face. “Nothing. Let’s go back inside. I need to talk to Theseus.”

Leta looks like she’s about to say something when Newt brushes past, effectively cutting her off.

***

Back at the inn, Grimmson shows Kyuho and Tina down into the small basement room they’d visited before. A large metal crate looms prominently in the far left corner, and he approaches it immediately upon closing the door. “Now, I promised I’d show you something interesting, didn’t I? Have a good look at this. Got them freshly delivered today.” He opens the crate to reveal a clutch of familiar, grey-blue eggs. They’re smaller than a dragon egg, fitting comfortably into Grimmson’s palm as he picks one up. “Don’t look like much, but wait until you see the inside. The Purest silver, I tell you!”

“Occamy eggs,” Tina breathes, astonished at the sheer number of them.

Grimmson nods. “That’s right. Rare things, these are. Special delivery for one of my best clients. So you see, I might be able to help you out with that dragon egg of yours.” He gives them a devious smile before closing the crate.

“I’m sure we can come to an agreement,” Kyuho says and pulls a leather pouch from his inside pocket, its contents jingling merrily as he puts it down on the table.

Grimmson opens it, removing one golden coin to scrutinise it against the light. He seems satisfied. “Well, we might have a deal, then.” They shake hands. “I’ll speak to my contacts and see how quickly they’ll get their hands on one. How do I contact you?”

“You don’t,” Tina interjects, stepping out of the shadow, noting his little jolt with satisfaction, knowing it’s really her he’s intimidated by. “We’ll contact you.”

He nods his consent and the conversation is over. They take their leave, stepping into an alleyway around the corner before Kyuho takes her aside. “You want to take him in now?”

“Yes,” she says after a moment’s hesitation. “It would take days to get clearance from Congress. He gave us probable cause. Let’s wait for the show to finish before we sweep the place. This way we’re bound to find them if there’re any children in here.”

Kyuho nods in agreement as they move to rejoin the rest of the team and Tina tries to put on a
brave face, choosing to focus on the task at hand rather than the hollow pain spreading through her chest and the tears burning in her throat.

*Maybe I imagined it all and he really only saw me as a friend.* She lowers her gaze to watch the cobblestones at her feet. *That’s what you get for hoping, Goldstein. He forgot about you the moment she came back into his life.* She remembers Leta’s brilliant light and the radiance of her smile. *You’ll never compete with her.*

***

Newt takes two steps at a time as they ascend the stairs, not bothering to watch the rest of the performance, and his mind wanders to a million places at once. Could it have been her? If so, what is she doing here? He directs his wand at his nightstand the moment he closes the door behind himself, and a small, ornate pocket mirror comes sailing across the room, landing neatly on his open palm.

“Thes,” Newt says and barely two seconds pass until a familiar eye appears on the glass resting in his hand.

“Thank you for checking in, little brother, I was starting to get worried.” His brother’s voice sounds tired and strained, more so than usual. “There’s been another attack not far from where you’re staying.”

“I know,” Newt breathes, steeling himself. “Thes, have you any news of Tina?”

Theseus doesn’t answer straight away and Newt’s heart sinks. “I managed to speak to a friend in the auror department. She’s not among the victims who died at the explosion, but Newt — he couldn’t find a record of her. No file, no mention of her name. It’s like she never existed. Same for her sister.”

“How’s that possible?” Maybe his mind didn’t play a trick on him after all. Could it be?

“There are rumours. We don’t know for sure, Fawley won’t tell me anything, but I met the French head of law enforcement yesterday. Something is going on over there. It’s possible MACUSA has sent their own team of aurors after Grindelwald. You and Leta will need to be careful not to attract attention.”

A violent knock nearly heaves the door off his hinges and Newt flips the mirror shut, slipping it into his waistcoat pocket where Pickett gives a surprised squeak. “Where’s Mira?”

“In the case,” Leta whispers back. “What’s going on?”

“Open up, Englishman! I’ve got a bone to pick with you!” Grimmson’s voice penetrates the wood and he gives the door another brutal beating. It shivers and sighs before surrendering to brute force.

Grimmson and Hakarl spill into the room, dragging a squirming Maledictus by the hair and Newt instinctively steps in front of Leta, who stubbornly walks around him to stand by his side. Hakarl bears his shark-like teeth at them in an ugly sneer and Grimmson’s eyes are bulging out of their sockets as his face distorts in anger. “Where is she?” he seethes, spit flying every which way in his agitation.

“Let her go,” Newt says instead and Hakarl tightens his grip on Maledictus’ hair, making her whimper. “She’s got nothing to do with this.”

“So you don’t deny it?” Grimmson growls, stepping closer. “Get the girl, then! I haven’t got all
goddamn night!” He’s close enough for Newt to smell his rancid breath. “You better do as I say, Creaturelover or I’m going to carve this monster here a nice new face, and your wife is next!” He points his wand at Leta, and Newt growls dangerously at the back of his throat as something snaps deep inside.

Their exchange is cut short when a blast downstairs lifts the front door off its hinges, the shock waves making the building shiver ominously.

Grimmson freezes, horrified, before turning to them with renewed fury in his eyes. “Did you send for them, Englishman? They coming to save your freckled arse? Well, how about they come and collect it in pieces!”

***

“Clear the building top to bottom and take any individual on the premises into custody.” Kyuho’s gaze sweeps the group. “Backup is on its way and will be stationed just outside. Take your positions.” They stand back as Kyuho aims his wand at the battered front door and it proves no resistance when it flies open, colliding with the opposite wall with a colossal bang.

The aurors file into the building one by one, rushing up the stairs to make use of the element of surprise. Tina lets Kyuho lead a team down the basement to confiscate the eggs while she makes her way upstairs, led by an inexplicable longing as she searches for a familiar face. Her feet carry her up the steps, muscles only complaining minutely and she’s grateful for the gruelling duelling sessions they’d undergone as of late.

She reaches the final landing and spies down a dark corridor when a familiar voice reaches her ears and she presses her lips into a thin line as anger and disgust rise in her throat.

“. . . they coming to save your freckled arse? Well, how about they come and collect it in pieces!”

It’s a split-second decision as something roars to life deep within, making her growl like an angry wildcat, and her steps grow in confidence as she moves around the doorframe and raises her wand.

***

Leta’s hand creeps down her side in increments, reaching for the wand concealed in her coat pocket when Grimmson points his own stubbly stick at their faces. The sound of rapidly approaching footsteps makes them pause, but there’s no time to think before a dark silhouette rounds the door, preceded by a surge of blinding blue light that hits Grimmson squarely in the chest, sending him flying into the adjacent wall.

Newt blinks against the light, stunned as the figure Apparates the short distance across the room to slam Grimmson into the wall once more, the tip of their wand digging into his throat. The stranger is a tall woman dressed in a long leather duster and her short, dark hair gleams like chestnut satin as it reflects the low light of the room. Grimmson forces a smile. “Ah, Aguila, good to see you again.” She slams him against the wall once more and he groans.

Tell me one good reason why I shouldn’t hex you into oblivion right now,” she hisses with a distinct American drawl. A familiar voice.

Newt stumbles forward when Leta’s hand shoots out to steady him, her face distorting with worry and honest confusion. He knows he should be alerting Theseus and Dumbledore and send them a warning of what’s to come, but he remains rooted to the spot, unable to tear his eyes away. A second, leather-clad figure appears in the doorway, casually ambling into the room to survey the scene. “Well, well, looks like you’re enjoying yourself, Grimmson. When was the last time a
woman had you pinned against the wall?”

The woman turns toward the voice at the door, showing her face for the first time, and Newt gasps in shock as Tina’s familiar dark eyes meet his own. It hadn’t been an illusion. “Tina…” Theseus was right. You're here, alive and well. Newt can’t take his eyes off her, mystified, as he struggles to grasp she’s real. Tina senses his need for reassurance and sends him a thin, lopsided smile before a flash of sadness crosses her face and she turns to avert her gaze.

“Pryxis, care to call off your dog?” Grimmson says between gritted teeth and Tina slams him into the wall a third time, lips curling over her teeth in an angry snarl.

The man inspects his fingers, unimpressed. “Sorry, no can do. You made her angry, now you deal with it.”

“You’re under arrest in the name of the International Congress of Wizardry,” Tina says and Grimmson falters.

The shock hits Newt like a herd of angry hippogriffs. The ICW. Of course. It all makes sense to him now. His brother’s inability to find her. Her disappearance. The foreign auror sightings across the continent. Newt snaps out of his daze, seizing a moment when both aurors have their attention elsewhere and casts his Patronus, watching its silver light slip through the window unnoticed.

Grimmson’s face turns ashen. “On what grounds?”

“Trade of restricted substances and dangerous goods, and endangering the International Statute of Secrecy. Sadly there’s no option to arrest you for being a slimy sleazeball, though I’d gladly do it,” the stranger explains and turns to Newt and Leta. “You two are going to come with us as well.”

Newt protests as the man reaches to confiscate his wand. “No, I need my case. Please.” Newt turns to Tina with a pleading look. “Tina, please! You know… The creatures.” Leta’s eyes grow large as saucers at the name. Tina’s face hardens, expression unreadable, but she gives the tiniest nod of affirmation and he’s satisfied.

“Did you let them know?” Leta whispers to him as they’re lead down the stairs. Tina is behind them, half dragging, half pushing a complaining Grimmson along, her fingers digging into his biceps hard enough for her knuckles to turn white. Another auror pulls Hakarl along while Maledictus follows without protest.

“I sent them my Patronus,” Newt whispers back, trying to infuse his words with reassurance. “It’ll lead them to us, wherever they’ll take us.” A cacophony of yells and shouts greet them in front of the inn and they have to shield their eyes against the glaring bright light of a protective bubble that indicates the perimeter.

“Goldstein, do you know this man?” Tina’s colleague asks once they’re outside, pointing at Newt.

She nods and her voice sounds tired and drained when she speaks. “Kyuho Chun, meet Newt Scamander, British National and magizoologist and his… wife, Leta Scamander.”

Newt swallows at her words and his eyes grow wide with realisation. Of course, she’d been to the show and would have heard Skender’s introduction. He wills her to look at him, so he can tell her she’s so incredibly wrong in her assumption. It isn’t true, he wants to say, but his throat feels swollen and dry. That’s a nice mess you got yourself into, old chap. That’s what happens when you coddiwomple through life without considering the consequences.

“You got yourself into quite the mess,” Kyuho says with a knowing smile, unwittingly echoing
Newt’s thoughts. “I’ll send word ahead and you’ll be taken side-along to headquarters. I’m sure Congress will be interested to hear your story.”

He exchanges one look with Tina, who hands Grimmson to one of her colleagues and turns back to the inn without as much as a word. Newt looks after her, stunned and worried and hurt, overwhelmed by the whirlwind of emotions, yet the feeling of elation overshadows it all. *Thank Paracelsus, you’re alright*, he thinks as the familiar hook in his navel pulls him away.

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They land softly on uneven ground, shrouded in complete darkness. There’s the constant sound of people apparating beside them, but he cannot make out their shapes in the night. How far they are from Paris he cannot say. “Come on, let’s go,” Kyuho says and pulls him along.

“Newt?” Leta sounds frightened, blindly groping for his hand and he squeezes hers in reassurance. The silhouette of a building comes into view, scarcely illuminated by the light seeping through its windows. Gravel crunches under their feet as they approach the main doors where a guard waves them into the lofty foyer.

Newt’s eyes go to the ceiling on instinct, taking in what would once have been handsome frescoes, and are now a mere remnant of their former glory. Spiderwebs and a thick coating of dust tell the rest of the story.

“Welcome to the Aerie, I.B.I.S headquarters. The ICW has convened an emergency meeting. They’ll be ready for you in a moment,” Kyuho says he leads them into a small, windowless room off to the side. “Wait here, I’ll come to get you when it’s time. No funny business.”

Newt is about to give a fitting reply when the door at the far off wall flies open and he finds himself with an armful of Queenie. “Oh, I knew it was you! I heard you the moment you arrived, but I thought I was having hallucinations at first,” she says, pulling away to look at him at an arm’s length.

“Well, you’re not the only one today,* he thinks and feels her pluck the memory right out of his head.

She winces and bites her lip. “Oh honey, that’s such an awful mess!” Her eyes turn soft. “Teenie will come around, you’ll see. She’s had a rough few weeks. Just give her time.”

He nods, suddenly feeling tongue-tied when an unexpected warmth spreads through him, calming his mind, and he raises a questioning eyebrow at her. She smiles. “I’ll explain it all later. They’ve come to take you in.” Her eyes come to rest on Leta before cutting back to him. “I’ll find you after. Jacob is waiting to see you, too.”

“Jacob?” His mouth falls open at the revelation as his mind teams with a million new questions, but the door to his right opens before he can formulate a response. Kyuho enters to lead them into the adjoining room. Its ceiling rivals the entrance hall, with six large crystal chandeliers flowing from the ceiling, now shrouded with dust and spiderwebs, their light reflected in the tall windows along the far-off wall.

The meeting chamber is large, yet it’s filled to the brim. Kyuho leads them into the centre where the crowd has formed a circle, reminding him of the circus arena, and he suppresses the shiver of deja-vu as he looks into some familiar faces. Madame Piquery stands ahead of the crowd, royally dressed in a deep purple robe, both arms crossed across her chest in clear agitation. “Mr Scamander,” she says with an unhappy frown. “I’d like to say it’s good to see you, but would you please care to explain how you managed to get yourself in the middle of an international
The door opens and Tina enters, inching forward with purpose, gingerly setting the case down next to his feet. He sends her a grateful smile before she retreats back into the crowd. “I’d be interested to hear your story too, Mr Scamander; especially, since we’ve been looking for you for the past month,” the English ambassador interjects and Newt swallows.

He opens his mouth to explain when the door flies open a second time and Theseus and Dumbledore enter, coming to stand beside Newt and Leta. “Maybe I can explain,” Dumbledore suggests with smiling eyes.

“And you would be—?” Piquery begins, but the British envoy interrupts.

“Professor Albus Dumbledore!” He says in a booming voice. “It’s true then, what they’re saying. He’s here on your orders!”

Dumbledore smiles. “I’ll simply repeat my words, Minister. Mr Scamander here isn’t particularly good at following orders.”

“Not following orders? How do you explain away that he was found along some unsavoury characters in the eyesore of Paris? What do you say?” The crowd gasps at the revelation.

“I’d say I would expect you to protect my little brother from a similar fate to what befell him in New York last year, Minister;” Theseus interrupts with a voice of authority, cool and collected as he faces the delegate.

“Oh? Do you mean to say you know about this, Chief Auror Scamander, seeing that we found him in the company of your future wife?” He grins nastily, but Theseus doesn’t so much as flinch.

Newt’s eyes find Tina in the crowd, watching her face, but her expression remains carefully neutral.

“I needed Mr Scamander’s help and he was gracious enough to give it.” Dumbledore spreads his hands in front of him, radiating calm and peace as if this interrogation were the most natural thing in the world to him. “Our government chooses to ignore Grindelwald and the threat he poses. I knew him as a boy. I’ve seen what he’s capable of. This is only the beginning. Something’s got to be done.”

A collective murmur takes the room, only quieting down when the British delegate raises a hand.

“What is it you know, Dumbledore.”

Dumbledore ignores him and directs his gaze at Madame Picquery instead. “I’m surprised you didn’t recognise it, Madame President. It started into your own city mere months ago. These uncoordinated attacks that don’t leave any evidence, appearing out of thin air and without a trace.” He pauses, smiling sadly before delivering his final blow. “Obscurials.”

“The audacity!” someone gasps and Dumbledore smiles, small and humourless.

“You might be surprised, Mr Dumbledore, but we have considered the possibility. We have had two operatives report similar findings.” Piquery’s voice is calm but laced with fury. “Do you have proof?”

“I do,” Newt interjects and the room quiets immediately. All eyes focus on him and he swallows. “I do.”
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Apologies for this being so late; I did not deem myself fit enough yesterday to press the 'publish' button let alone form a coherent sentence. Seems like the angst train is stationary for a bit, so have some fluff (I think?) to start off the weekend. :)

Another thing to add: Jacob does mispronounce some spells or ask for clarification here and there. This is in no way meant to make him look dense (on the contrary, he's interested and wants to learn). Please do keep in mind he's only been reintroduced to the wizarding world a few weeks prior -- I know *I* would struggle with it at first!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Leta Lestrange is shorter than Tina expected, looking small and fragile framed by the pair of tall Scamander brothers on either side. Her face shows neither fear nor curiosity, her gaze proud and direct as she faces the international delegation without batting an eye, like the most natural thing in the world.

*Of course,* Tina thinks, *this must be the perk of growing up as part of the most privileged and influential pureblood families in the world.*

Theseus Scamander looks nothing like she imagined him from Newt’s letters. He’s a few inches taller than his brother, with darker hair and fewer freckles, yet their shared parentage cannot be denied. He looks equally severe as the middle-aged man to his right, a tall, proud pillar next to his fiancée. Dumbledore seems almost casual, unfazed by the hundreds of pairs of eyes directed at him like spears, yet there’s something about him that makes her uneasy.

Tina’s ears are ringing from the sheer onslaught of information and a faint pounding behind her temples announces the beginning of a headache. None of it makes sense to her yet. Newt never indicated a connection with his former mentor that went beyond a genial friendship. His involvement is a mystery, making her head spin as she tries to make light of it, but she comes up empty.

“Show us.” Piquery makes a permissive gesture and Newt bends to flip open the case, ignoring the gasps as he lowers himself into it.

Newt re-emerges a moment later with a small girl in his arms. Her dark curls bounce as she looks around, frightened by the undivided attention they receive, and she buries her face in the crook of his neck. The crowd recedes, gasping with open fear, widening the circle in their middle, and Tina snorts at the irony.

A room full of adults, frightened of a child. Again.

“Who is this girl?” The French delegate demands.

“Her name is Mariana, Madame President,” Newt shifts the girl in his arms and she clings to him, her skinny arms wrapping around his shoulders like a vice. “They kept her in a cage at the circus.”
“Auror Chun, Goldstein,” Picquery says and Tina and Kyuho step forward. “Is this the child you have been looking for?”

“I think so, Ma’am,” Kyuho says, standing tall. “From what our informant tells us we believe the people smuggler at the circus is taking them directly from their families. None of Grindelwald’s known associates was present this evening, so it’s unclear who comes to collect them.”

“That’s a question we will be putting forward during the interrogation, make no mistake,” says the Swiss Delegate, waving his fist so vehemently he makes the medals on his uniform clank and jingle. He rounds on Picquery. “You knew about this? That little mission wasn’t sanctioned by any of us!”

“That’s because it was brought to my attention by two of my aurors,” Picquery hisses defensively. “Chun and Goldstein investigated the December incidents in New York, so they are familiar with the signs. If I had waited to get permission the circus would’ve long left town!”

“You’re telling us you knew Grindelwald was collecting potentially dangerous, unpredictable children with unknown, destructive powers and you didn’t care to inform us?”

“That isn’t all,” Dumbledore interrupts and everyone stares in anticipation. “The powerful New York obscurial, the Barebone boy you so callously ordered destroyed last year, has somehow managed to survive and he’s made it to France.” A collective gasp of horror. “His current whereabouts are unknown, but if what I uncovered about him is true, we cannot let him fall under Grindelwald’s influence.”

A myriad of voices drowns him out as everyone tries to speak over one another, but Tina hardly hears any it. The ringing in her ears threatens to overtake her senses, feeling light-headed as spots appear in her vision.

Credence is alive.

“Again, Dumbledore, we’ll need to see some proof —“ the British delegate says with a sneer. Dumbledore neatly cuts him off once more. “The Maledictus you’re holding in your cells can verify our report. The two of them have been close before.”

“What are we waiting for then, let’s bring her before Congress!” someone shouts and his plea is echoed tenfold.

“There’s more,” Dumbledore says and waits for the voices to die down. “I do not believe the obscurials are his main objective. They serve as a decoy; a way to further his cause, yes certainly. But they’re just a distraction.”

A distraction from what, Tina wants to say, but her mouth feels dry as sandpaper.

Her eyes cut across to where Newt is standing, still holding the girl, and she has to fight the irritation seeping under her skin. How long have you known? Why didn’t you tell me?

“He’s hunting the Deathly Hallows,” Dumbledore says and watches the room explode anew.

“Like the children’s tale?”

“That old story?”

“Have you lost your mind?”
“You go too far, Mr Dumbledore,” the British delegate says, a clear threat evident in the coolness of his voice.

“On the contrary. I don’t think I’m going far enough, Minister,” Dumbledore says with equal fervour. “If you gave it one ounce of thought you’d know it’s true. Gellert Grindelwald is in possession of the Elder Wand, there’s no way around it.”

The delegate smiles. “Take care, Dumbledore. You don’t want the entire international community against you. If you’re making allegations like that, you will need to show us proof; they’re just a fairytale for all we know.”

“I know, Theophilus, because I’m not alone in my assumption. They’re anything but a children’s tale,” Dumbledore says and his words coax another shocked gasp out of them. “My good friend Nicholas Flamel has been researching the resurrection stone for years. His name might sound familiar.”

“Of course! And I suppose my cat owns the cloak of invisibility since I can never seem to find him,” says the French Delegate with a sarcastic, haughty smile.

Not one person laughs.

An awkward silence descends like misty rain, soaking into their hair and clothes and making them shiver. Madam Picquery clears her throat. “What do you propose?”

“We need to prevent him from acquiring the remaining Hallows and find them before he does. I don’t want to imagine the consequences should he succeed,” Dumbledore says, voice grave and face severe. “None of us could withstand the strength of an army of inferi. Not the ones he’s considering.”

Tina swallows thickly as she considers the inevitable. According to legend the stone only has one purpose and it isn’t one she’s inclined to experience.

The British delegate shakes his head in disbelief. “How do you know all this? Are you closer acquainted with the man?” A pause. “I demand an answer, Dumbledore, if I’m supposed to believe any of this codswallop you’re trying to tell us!”

“I knew him as a boy. All I have to go by are the foolish musings of our youth, yet childish desires can feel tantalisingly real, so why not pursue them once you hold the means?” Dumbledore says.

Newt shifts awkwardly from one foot to the other as Mira begins to cry. Leta holds out her hands and Newt transfers the child into her arms, where her cries decrease to pitiful whimpers. Tina’s eyelids feel laden, her body heavy and slow as a faint streak of silver in the sky makes her aware of the hour. Another day is dawning, yet she feels like she’s been dreaming for the last few hours.

“Perhaps it’s prudent to postpone this matter until the morning,” one of the delegates suggests.

“It is morning,” Picquery reminds them, “yet I agree we might all see clearer with a little bit of rest. Let’s adjourn until midday!”

The crowd voices its agreement before slowly dispersing. “Dumbledore, auror Scamander; a word please!” the British delegate demands, indicating for them to follow, leaving Newt and Leta to their own devices.

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Newt turns on the spot, surveying the crowd with searching eyes until they come to rest on Tina’s
face. She meets them head on and without shame, delighting in the way his eyes crinkle at the corners. His smile is soft yet a little apprehensive, and Tina guesses she must look the same way.

They approach each other slowly, carefully as the delegates weave between them, and she’s reminded of the last time she’s seen him on the pier along the crowded dock, where he promised his return; the place where he touched her hair, and her heart. The words stick to her throat when she opens her mouth, and heat rises on her cheeks. Tina brushes her hair behind her ear in a self-soothing gesture, momentarily forgetting how short it is, and he bashfully lowers his eyes.

She’s overwhelmed by the whirlwind of her emotions, switching from elation to hurt and confusion at a rate that makes her head spin. There are so many questions plaguing her mind and she cannot settle on which to ask first, so she pushes them aside. Later.

“It’s not the way I imagined I’d see you again, Newt,” she says when she finally finds her voice, her face carefully neutral.

“Well, I suppose I did say I’d prefer your investigative talents pursuing me.” He flinches at his own words and Tina wants to laugh at the irony. She bites her lip and manages a small, wobbly smile. He chances a look on her face and feels helpless but to return her smile with one of his own.

“I’m terribly sorry to interrupt,” a velvety, smooth voice breaks the spell. Leta steps up next to Newt, shifting the little girl in her arms. “I am —”

“— Leta Lestrange,” Tina finishes and Leta’s eyebrows disappear beneath her hair. “I’m sorry, I — Newt told us a little about his friends.”

“Only good things I hope,” Leta says, and her tentative smile extends all the way to her eyes. “You must be Miss Goldstein. Newt told me about his American friends, too, you see?” Tina blushes, smiling demurely before lowering her eyes to her shoes.

“Hullo, little brother.” Theseus chooses that moment to rejoin them, slapping Newt across the back with boisterous, brotherly enthusiasm, making him stumble. “Well, aren’t you going to introduce us, Newton?” Tina frowns at the elder Scamander’s antics until she sees the residual worry and relief reflected in his eyes. Theseus Scamander was worried about his little brother.

It’s like looking into a mirror, she thinks with a small smile. We’re the older siblings. It’s our job to worry.

Newt coughs and sends his brother a dark look before turning back to Tina. “Miss Goldstein — Tina — meet my brother Theseus, head of Magical Law Enforcement at the Ministry of Magic.”

Theseus regards her with genuine interest, openly considering her before offering his hand in greeting. “Theseus Scamander, how do you do?”

“Tina Goldstein,” she says, taking his proffered hand and briefly meets his eyes before redirecting them to his brother.

Leta and Theseus share a knowing smile behind their back.

“Newt!” A booming voice startles them out of their reverie and they turn in unison as Jacob comes running across the room.

“Jacob!” Newt says and doesn’t hesitate to step up to his friend. The two men meet halfway across the room, where Jacob envelopes his friend in a bone-crushing bear hug.
“Hey pal, how’ve you been?”

Newt presses his lips into a thin line, eyes suspiciously bright as he pulls away. “You have no idea how glad I am to see you, Jacob.” Pickett emerges from Newt’s coat pocket with a series of furious chirps at being squashed, but his demeanour changes when he lays eyes on Jacob.

“Oh!” Jacob beams at the bowtruckle. “Hey there, little fella, remember me?”

“I can tell you Jacob’s just as happy to see you, Newt.” A teary-eyed Queenie appears at their side and envelopes Newt in another gentle embrace. “Just like Tina is, I’m sure.”

Queenie turns to smile at her sister, but Tina reciprocates only half-heartedly. The sting of her sister’s betrayal is still lodged firmly within her heart, deep and unyielding, and her stubbornness prevents her from brushing it aside. Suddenly it’s all too much and Tina finds it hard to breathe. “I’m sorry, I have to get some rest before we begin interrogations tomorrow. If you excuse me,” she says and turns on her heel.

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“Teenie…” Queenie’s eyes are full of pain and sorrow as they follow her sister out of the hall, an open window to her inner torments until her shields pull up like a curtain. She wipes away her tears and manages a watery smile for their benefit. Jacob follows her gaze and gives a guilty shrug, wrapping an arm around Queenie’s shoulders. “You gotta excuse Tina. Poor gal’s been having a rough couple of days.”

“We only arrived two days ago,” Queenie says by way of explanation. “I couldn’t warn her about Jacob and she didn’t take it well. Now the news about you and Credence —” She makes a helpless gesture with her hands as her words trail off and fall away, yet their meaning is loud and clear.

Newt stares at the door Tina had vanished through, heart aching for her, imagining her pain and wanting nothing more than to follow. Don’t be daft, you don’t know if she’d even want to see you, he thinks and Queenie’s head snaps around to meet his eyes, stopping him in his tracks.

“What exactly is the ICW hoping to achieve here?”

Queenie swallows, defiantly holding his gaze as she delivers the words. “I ain’t telling you much. I can’t.”

“How did you not know about this?” Newt interjects and Theseus glowers at him.

“I wouldn’t be surprised if any of the national law enforcement agencies would be informed. Cavendish said only a handful of ministry officials got briefed on it. Top secret.” Theseus spits the words with uncharacteristic venom as his face darkens, frustration rolling off him in waves.

“You don’t think it’ll work?” Leta asks in a small voice.

Theseus shakes his head, lips pressed into a thin line. “I have a good idea of what’s going on,
mind. But I’d need to know specifics before I can even form an opinion! Hector Fawley decided Britain is staying out of this, so why would I?” He laughs, cold and humourless as his hands clench to fists at his side. “I’m surprised Cavendish is here at all!”

Newt cocks his head to the side as he considers his brother. Theseus’ instincts had proved themselves in the past, during the war and countless times since, and Newt trusts him explicitly. Now is no exception. “What are you thinking, Thes?”

“Espionage,” Theseus says without missing a beat and Newt’s eyes go wide as saucers, “though it seems more organised than anything I’ve ever seen before.” Queenie presses her lips into a thin line but neither confirms nor denies his assumptions.

“Maybe we’ll find out more at the meeting later,” Leta suggests, covering Theseus’ fist with the palm of her hand. Theseus turns his wrist to thread their fingers and Newt averts his eyes at the intimacy of the gesture.

Theseus scoffs. “They’re not going to invite us for afternoon tea, make no mistake. It’s going to be an interrogation, and we’ll be glad if we get away without being accused of treason,” he says darkly. “Then they’re going to Obliviate us.”

“Obliviate? You mean…” Jacob snips his fingers and Theseus nods. Newt contemplates his brother’s words and swallows hard as his heart rate accelerates. He’d no sooner want to forget Tina was here, alive and well, then forget about his own mother.

The delegation has cleared out by the time Dumbledore rejoins their group, wasting little time on introductions and general pleasantries before relaying the ambassador’s words. “We’re to stay here until the investigations have concluded and we’ve been cleared. They’re setting up our quarters in the east wing.”

Newt snaps out of his reverie to shakes his head in protest. “That isn’t necessary, I’ll be perfectly comfortable in my case.”

“That’s all fine and well, Newton, but the more civilised among us would prefer a room and a bed, primitive as it might be,” Theseus says and Leta sends him a thin smile in thanks. “The child can stay with us, we’ll look after her.” Newt shrugs, but doesn’t answer.

“Come on, you can bunk with me.” Jacob throws a companionable arm around his friend and begins to lead them deeper into the building.

Newt is amazed how he seems to take it all in stride and doesn’t even bat an eyelash at the copious amount of magic on display, yet it shouldn’t come at a surprise. He smiles at the memory of Jacob’s childlike wonder at his case and its inhabitants, embracing his new reality as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

I suppose love doesn’t just make you blind.

They say their goodbyes to Leta and Theseus when they part ways on the top of the stairs as Dumbledore excuses himself to speak with the other foreign dignitaries. Newt can’t deny he’s glad to see the back of them for a while.

Jacob shares his quarters with five other men, a small room that boasts six wooden bunk beds and a small porcelain sink crammed into one corner like an afterthought. A curtain replaces the door to lend some sense of comfort. “I’ll have to look after the creatures, they’ll be wondering where I am,” Newt says and lifts his case to make his point.

Jacob nods, eyes shining with obvious longing as they fall on the case. “Whatever you need, pal.”
Newt places it on the floor below the window, deftly unfastening the clasps, and he’s halfway down the ladder when he reverses course to stick his head back into the room, an indulgent smile playing on his lips. “Actually, I could use some help down here.”

He winks as Jacob breaks into a delighted grin and scrambles to join him. Queenie finds them half an hour later. Newt joins Queenie on the steps of his shed once he’s finished his rounds and they sit in companionable silence, basking in the warm mid-morning sun of his case while watching Jacob feed the occamies. One of the hatchlings has wound itself around his forearm, squawking happily, and Jacob’s bemused laugh carries all the way across to them on the wind.

“Is Tina alright?” He hadn’t meant to say the words aloud, but he cannot help himself. A part of his mind had stayed with her, and he finds himself unable to enjoy the familiar comfort of his case.

Queenie heaves a heavy sigh. “I don’t know. Teenie’s been here since early March, and training’s been tough.” Her gaze turns distant, eyes incredibly sad. “I can’t hear her no more; not like before. She ain’t telling me things. Protocol forbids it. It’s been real hard for both of us, even if she’d never admit it.”

Newt’s heart contracts at her words and a familiar ache spreads through his chest. Queenie’s eyes turn impossibly soft as she recognises the tentative feelings colouring his thoughts. “I was terribly worried about the both of you when we got news of Grindelwald’s escape and when Theseus couldn’t find you, I —” Newt falters, looking at his feet.

“Oh honey, no, we’re okay now. I wish we could have sent you a letter,” Queenie says, reaching for his arm. “We was so proud of you when we heard about your book. I sent one to Teenie as soon as I could get my hands on a copy.”

“You managed to keep in touch?”

Queenie grimaces. “MACUSA allowed me to send her letters, yes, but I didn’t know where she was.” She sighs at the question on his mind. “No, I couldn’t have told her about Jacob, she would’ve worried herself sick.”

“There’s no need for her to worry. Jacob’s a good man,” Newt says out of the blue, staring right ahead and Queenie hums in agreement.

“He is, and so are you, Mr Scamander.” She smiles as he bashfully lowers his chin, a soft pink tint colouring his cheeks.

“Youse talking about me?” Jacob plops down on an upturned crate next to them, grimacing as he wipes the back of his hand across his forehead.

“Just how fortunate we are that Newt’s murtlap is a feisty one,” Queenie says with a wink and Jacob groans at the memory.

“I’ll have to take some notes on its side effects on muggles for future editions; it’s terribly fascinating,” Newt says and Jacob raises one pointed eyebrow at him. “I’d like to ask you a few questions — if you’d be amenable, of course.”

“Sure,” Jacob says before turning to Queenie. “You think Tina’s going to be alright?”

“Give her a few days. Tina’s incredibly stubborn and headstrong, but she’ll come around,” she says to Newt as much as Jacob. She sends Jacob an empathetic smile as she sifts through his thoughts. “Oh no, honey, she ain’t blamin’ you. It’s just been a bit of a shock to see us here and then with Newt turning up and all... Don’t you worry yourself, she’ll be right as rain in no time.
“Teenie’s stronger than she looks.”

They turn in unison to watch one of Newt’s dung beetle scuttles across the floor, busily rolling its charge past the niffler den, slightly too close for comfort. The little thief gives a terrified squeak and throws it a nasty look.

*I do hope you’re right, Queenie,* Newt thinks, leaning back to enjoy the company of his friends.

Chapter End Notes

A big thank you to ravens-and-writings for supplying the name (and backstory) to the British ICW delegate. She's the greatest! :)

I am having everyone call the Maledictus not by her given name (which we now know; it's a spoiler so I won't mention it), but simply 'Maledictus' because this story was written over two months ago when we knew far less about the new movie.

Again, please do be mindful of the tags!

Tina doesn’t ascend to her quarters but takes the stairs down to the dungeons instead, following the labyrinth of tunnels and doorways deep into the ground. It’s much colder down here and a constant dripping sound fills the air. Her own shadow follows her like a spectre, creeping up close before growing longer and flitting ahead.

She isn’t sure what made her come here. Maybe it’s her need for confirmation, maybe she simply wants to meet the last person who’d seen Credence alive. Tina grimaces and clenches her fingers at her sides as she considers her motivations. Is it guilt? Deep down she knows there’s more to it than that. He didn’t have the strength to break out of his cage of pain and suffering on his own, and she’d seen a little bit of herself in him. *I’d do it again in a heartbeat. I wish somebody had helped me when I needed it.*

Now, he needs her more than ever, and she isn’t going to turn her back on him ever again.

A single guard is stationed in front of the door leading towards the holding cells and he raises two questioning eyebrows as he sees her approach. “Do they need them yet?” the man asks with curiosity in his voice, though its physicality is like friction — like a stone rubbing across a large rock, and with a distinctively Slavic intonation.

“No, I need to speak to one of the prisoners, please,” Tina says, keeping her face carefully neutral.

“Has that been sanctioned?”

“No.” Her mouth tightens when he whistles low through his teeth.

He looks over her shoulder, hesitating briefly before opening the door for her. “Well, you better know what you’re doing.”

The space behind is darker and colder than the rest of the basement and Tina wraps both arms around her torso as she walks. She finds the woman she seeks at the end of the corridor. A pair of suspicious eyes stare back at her from the dark as Tina’s fingers wrap around the iron bars of her cell, grounding and comforting her despite the cold. “Maledictus?” she asks into the dark and the shadow shifts minutely, but doesn’t answer. “I promise I mean you no harm, I just need to ask you some questions.”

“Who are you?” a voice answers after a time.

“A friend,” Tina promises. “I’m not here to hurt you.”

The eyes blink. “That’s what they all say before they use you, beat you or worse. How do I know
“You’re telling the truth?”

Tina gives a helpless shrug. “You can’t. You’re just going to have to trust me.” The voice remains silent. “You had a friend once,” Tina says haltingly. “He was my friend too. Only I couldn’t protect him when he needed me most, and I think he needs our help now, too.”

There’s a scraping sound when Maledictus rises to her feet and steps into the light. “You’re here about Credence.”

“Yes, I —” Tina pauses, unsure how to continue.

“We knew each other in New York? I helped him once, but let him down in the end? I nearly got him killed?”

“You’re American, aren’t you?” Maledictus is now close enough for Tina to make out the colour of her eyes, yet just out of reach. “You’re not one of these Second Salemers?”

“No. My name is Tina Goldstein. I’m an auror from MACUSA.” A pause. “I attacked one of them once.”

Maledictus’ eyes grow large. “You… he talked about you all the time. The nice, kind woman who hexed his stepmother!”

Tina grimaces at the memory. “Yes.”

Maledictus’ eyes shine with sadness as she lifts her hands in silent apology. “I already told Newt everything I know. Credence left without a word. He behaved strangely all day, got into a fight with Skender and talked about a woman who needed his help. His aunt, maybe?”

Tina’s knuckles turn white as her fingers squeeze the iron bars. “An aunt you say?”

“Yes. Her family name was on his birth certificate; that’s why he came to France.”

“How did he learn she’d need his assistance?” Tina fights to quell the excitement prickling under her skin and she shivers in the dark.

“Credence never said! He just took off and I haven’t seen him since!” Tears track down Maledictus’ pale cheeks, glittering in the light.

“Maledictus, did you ever see some strange people looking for him, talking to him? Someone neither of you knew?” Tina presses on.

“No! I —” she starts, then retracts her words. “Yes. There might have been.”

“What did they look like?”

“A — a man and a woman, dressed in black. Smart looking, no ordinary folks. The lady had cold, striking blue eyes, I remember. They scared me.” A pause. “Credence, he — he seemed confused after, but he never told me what they said.”

Tina closes her eyes. Could it be? Was she the connection? “A woman with long, dark hair and bright red lips,” Tina murmurs to herself.

Maledictus gasps. “Yes! How did you —”

“It doesn’t matter.” Tina takes a steadying breath and steps back. “I can’t make any promises, but I will try to find him. With all my might.” Her eyes soften. “I’ll try and get you out of here as soon as possible. That I can promise you.”
Maledictus sends her a hopeful smile as Tina backs away, making her way to Picquery’s private quarters as soon as she’s bid her goodbyes. The President receives her with her usual sour frown, none to happy about the disturbance.

“I haven’t got all day. Make it quick, Goldstein,” she says and crosses her arms in front of her chest. Her demeanour changes as she listens to Tina recounting the information she just received and a deep furrow appears on Picquery’s forehead as she digests the news.

“Did the article print in the Ghost as planned?” Tina asks once she’s finished.

“Of course, it all went according to plan.” A look of understanding crosses Picquery’s face. “Their coded message was printed as planned and we have aurors surveying the area. They’ll arrest anyone on sight.” She pauses. “Go find Rosier immediately after the meeting, see if you can find out more about this woman. We need to know who she is. Report back to me as soon as you return.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Tina says and turns on her heel.

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The second council meeting proves to be no interrogation, but an inquisition, and by the time it concludes the sun is beginning to dip below the horizon, washing the walls in warm oranges and reds. It takes much arguing and all his persuasive skills on Theseus’ part, but he manages to appeal to the British envoy and they’re permitted to join the programme in exchange for providing information, once their involvement is cleared.

The word treason isn’t mentioned again once Dumbledore reminds them of the possibility of an army of inferi. Theseus’ experience and combat skills are highly valued among the delegates, and he’s immediately assigned to the ongoing training programme, while Leta’s exceptional potion skills are put to the test in the medi wing.

Newt’s assignment leaves a bitter aftertaste in his mouth. He is asked to study Mira, to evaluate the obscurus and experiment with a potential cure. He thinks of the last time he attempted the same, naive but with good intentions, and the result still haunts him in his dreams.

_I promise you, Mira_, he thinks, _I won’t let it come this far. Never._

“You’ll undergo an examination and a physical early in the morning, then you’ll evaluate all the operatives to adjust the training modules if necessary,” Theophilus Cavendish informs them before taking his leave and Newt glares at his retreating back.

Dumbledore follows suit, saying a hurried goodbye and leaving with the promise of a swift return once the school year is out. He sends Newt a secret smile before he turns, and Newt knows it won’t be as long before _he_ sees the man again.

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Tina stands with her arms crossed in front of her chest, eyes staring into empty space as they leave the interrogation chamber. Her mind is elsewhere, stuck somewhere between the past and the present and she’s startled when Queenie puts a hand on her shoulder. “Teenie, where are you?” Her voice is heavy with tears. “You’re still blocking me out.”

“Not now, Queenie. Please,” Tina says, sounding more strained and tired than ever. “There’s something I need to do.”

“Now?” Queenie’s face falls. “Are we ever going to talk about this?” Her voice sounds small and
full of sadness, and Tina’s face hardens, tiredness and exhaustion turning her alabaster skin to ash.

“Can’t you let it rest, Queenie?” she hisses. “I’m not sure you understand what you risked to get your way. We could have all been arrested — I could have lost my job, again. You could have been killed!” Her eyes glisten with unshed tears as she speaks, chin trembling minutely.

“But I didn’t, Teenie. We’re all here, together. Isn’t that the most important thing?” Queenie’s expression matches her sister’s as large tears seep from the corner of her eye, travelling the length of her cheek before falling on to her collar.

Tina scoffs, lips pulling into an unhappy frown. “Can’t you imagine this isn’t what I wanted for you? That I didn’t want my little sister carrying a suicide pill?”

Queenie’s expression hardens despite her tears and she closes her eyes, face edged with obvious pain. “Of course not,” she says calmly. “Now it’s just you who’s carrying it.” Tina closes her mouth, unable to formulate the words and Queenie looks at her in bitter triumph, face flushed and streaked with tears.

Tina raises her hands in defeat as she backs away wordlessly, turning on her heel without so much as a backward glance. In her haste, she misses Newt’s shocked face and the way his eyes follow her every step until she disappears from view.

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Tina passes the now familiar alleyway, slipping out of the darkness and into the open. The statues move about lazily in the night, barely turning their heads as she crossed the inner courtyard, footsteps echoing off the stone. The foyer is lit in dramatic fashion, the flicker of the low burning candles breathing life into the shadows.

She follows the black and white chequered floor into the heart of the building, where Silenus waits for her at the centre of his sweeping staircase, standing tall and proud as he looks down at her face. “Mrs Riddell. I hadn’t expected to see you tonight. The bringer of good news, I hope?” he asks with an expectant smile, reaching for her as she steps up to him.

Tina puts her hand in his, suppressing a shiver when he leans to kiss her knuckles. His fingers are ice cold, and she wonders if this man is capable of holding any warmth at all. “I am bringing the news indeed,” she purrs, meeting his eyes and his smile widens as a flash of understanding passes across his face. “The article is in today’s paper and they’re none the wiser.”

“It all went according to plan and they’ll be none the wiser. We make a great time, you and I,” he whispers close to her ear and his breath fans her skin, “I think this calls for a celebration, wouldn’t you agree?” She gasps at the sensation and he grins before pressing his lips to the column of her neck.

Her eyes scan the walls behind him, desperate for some kind of distraction when they come to rest on a painting at the top of the stairs. It’s the likeness of a beautiful woman, with dark hair and mesmerising blue eyes that match the eyes of the man in front of her. Tina’s blood runs cold as she recognises the familiar, haughty smile; the flash of it’s memory clouding her vision with ice cold fear. It’s her, the woman from the blast, the woman Maledictus had seen. You’re the connection, Tina thinks and suppresses a shiver.

“Who — who is she?” she says out loud and he turns to follow her gaze.

“Oh. She’s Vinda Rosier,” His fingers splay possessively over her hip and his lips return to her skin as she sucks in a shocked breath. “She’s my sister.”
Two oblong tables span the length of the room, lined with simple tin cups and plates that are oddly comforting in their familiarity. The space is bare and unadorned as the rest of the place, yet Jacob’s sunny nature infuses warmth into every crevice of the room. “They hired me as a chef, you know,” he explains as they walk into the adjacent kitchen, grinning from ear to ear. “Supervising a bunch of house — how’d you call them? House elves?”

“Yes, that’s right.” Newt smiles at the mental image of good, gentle Jacob shepherding a flock of house elves through the kitchen.

Two of the creatures stand by one of the large ovens, ears twitching attentively, and Jacob sends them a hesitant smile as he lifts a hand in greeting. “Oh, hey there, fellas.”

“Good evening, Master Kowalski!” One of them says in a high-pitched voice as they dip into a low curtsy.

Jacob pulls a face. “I told you, Jacob’s just fine.”

“Yes, Master Jacob,” they say in unison and Jacob groans, shaking his head in resignation. “Please tell me they’re gonna stop that,” he stage-whispers and Newt laughs at his antics, shrugging in apology when Jacob rolls his eyes to the ceiling and pushes Newt down onto one of the benches while he prepares a few sandwiches by hand. It’s nearly midnight, yet they find themselves unable to sleep.

Queenie arrives a few minutes later, Leta and Theseus following on her heels. “Look who I found!” Queenie beams at them, wide enough to show both dimples in her cheeks.

Jacob serves them a simple fare of brie cheese and tomato sandwiches and he even finds a tin of tea leaves to try his hand at a proper cup of tea (he fails miserably). Tina is the only one absent and Queenie tries her utmost not to let her disappointment show.

“Where’s the kid?” Jacob asks when the silence stretches on for too long.

“Sleeping, she was exhausted,” Leta explains, turning to Jacob. “I’ll take some food up for her for later if you don’t mind?” Jacob nods, wrapping one of the sandwiches in brown paper and Leta pockets it with a grateful tilt of her head.

Tina’s colleague Kyuho joins the table and sits down across from Newt with a sheepish, apologetic smile. “Sorry we had to take you in like that, pal.”

“You’re not joking,” Theseus says, dramatically rolling his eyes, and Newt sends him a hearty glare. “I’m sorry, but you’re not the one having to talk a foreign government out of persecuting your little brother every time he decides to steal an abused thunderbird or something of the kind. Don’t remind me of the incident where you managed to blow half the Ukrainian Parliament to pieces with a dragon —“

“He was only a hatchling, and he had the hiccups!” Newt hisses defensively. “You have a terrible habit of blowing things out of proportion, Theseus, just like the size of your head! And I don’t steal them —“

“— you rescue them, yes, which is admirable, but still against the law, Newton,” Theseus points at him with his spoon, smiling brightly.
“You two sound exactly like my brother and I when we get together,” Kyuho says with a chuckle.

Theseus gives a hearty laugh and soon ensnares Kyuho in a fierce debate on transatlantic cooperation. Newt stops listening, drowning out their voices, his mind still occupied with an earlier exchange of words he couldn’t help but overhear. His throat tightens every time he remembers it, making his head spin as his imagination runs wild. A suicide pill. What type of mission would warrant such a thing?

“`You’re so quiet honey, are you alright?’ Queenie asks, laying a gentle hand on his forearm.

“Yes, I’m — “fine is on his lips when he remembers her unique skills and he’s about to ask her to stay out of his head before reconsidering. “I’m sorry, may I ask you something?”

She sends him a sad smile as she plucks the question from his mind. “No, I ain’t carrying a suicide pill because I don’t go outside. My work is gonna be limited to interrogations. If I’d be out in the field that’d be different; all the live operatives are required to carry one.” She points at Kyuho for emphasis.

“What is it?” Newt asks, unsure whether he wants to know the answer.

“Nightshade,” she says without hesitation. “Newt I — I don’t know the specifics of what they do, but they’re working behind enemy lines. You need to talk to Tina if you want to know more.”

He ploughs on before he’s able to stop himself. “So it’s better to die than be captured?”

Queenie winces. “It’s better to die than be tortured,” she corrects and he blanches. “It would put everyone at risk of exposure.”

Newt nods, understanding the reasons yet finding it nearly impalpable and difficult to digest. “How do they carry it?”

“It’s concealed in a hollowed out piece of jewellery.” She points at an unassuming ring on Kyuho’s hand. “With a secret compartment. Hidden in plain sight.”

Tina didn’t wear a ring, he muses, furrowing his brow and she gives him a meaningful look.

“No,” Queenie says, struggling with her conscience. “Newt, I’ve heard she’s got a special assignment. I don’t know what she’s doing, but a ring like that could give her away.” Her statement hangs in the space between them, waiting, until he’s sure Queenie can hear the pieces clicking into place in his mind.

The locket.

She sends him a small, sad smile and he registers for the first time how tired she looks, the dark circles under her eyes and the tightness at the corners of her mouth. Her face reflects the way he feels as he reciprocates with a thin grimace of his own.

Her hand squeezes his forearm and he looks down at her fingers. They’re small and pale yet as elegantly-shaped as the rest of her. “She knows the risk, honey, but she wants to do it. I admire her for it; she fights for a good cause.” She smiles sadly. “Though sometimes I think she fights more with her heart than her head. Other times it’s her heart she’s fighting against, without even knowing it,” Queenie trails off, pressing her lips into a thin line as if to keep herself from saying any more.

His jaw tightens as he grits his teeth and lowers his eyes to his hands. The idea of Tina carrying liquid death mere inches from her heart leaves a bitter taste in his mouth and makes his skin prickle
with unexpected fury. Fury at Grindelwald, at his henchmen, the ICW, even Dumbledore. Then his mind fills with Mira’s innocent, smiling eyes and his heart aches with pain of a different kind.

“You okay, pal? You look pale,” Jacob says, face painted with genuine concern.

“Yes,” Newt says, briefly meeting Jacob’s eyes before focusing on his shoulder. “It’s nothing.”

Queenie’s mind wraps around his like a blanket, soothing and warm, and he turns to her with a grateful smile. “She’ll be just fine, honey.”

“You worried? Hey, what happened to worrying means you suffer twice?” Jacob asks, leaning across the table.

“He’s worried about the obscurial girl because the last time he tried to help the child didn’t—” Newt gives her a pained look and Queenie sends him a sad smile. “Sorry, honey, I can’t help it.”

“What happened?” Leta whispers.

Newt lowers his gaze to his lap. “The last time I attempted a separation, the girl… she died.”

“You don’t think it’s possible to help Mira,” Theseus says. It isn’t a question.

“I don’t know. It’s dangerous. Mira is far younger than the Sudanese girl, so the obscurus might not be as strong. It might not have as much power over her yet.” He closes his eyes against the memories, voice dropping to a whisper. “I couldn’t bear to lose another one.”

“I don’t think I’ll come to that.” His head snaps around at the voice. Tina stands before them, hands nervously clenched in front of her.

Queenie scoots over on the bench and pats the empty space beside her. The rest of the group watches the silent exchange with bated breath, expelling it in unison when Tina takes the proffered seat. Tina reaches for Queenie’s hand on the table, giving it a gentle squeeze and they share a quick smile. A promise to talk later.

Theseus lifts one curious eyebrow at Tina once she’s settled. “You have a lot of faith in my little brother.”

Tina meets his eyes without trepidation, her gaze unwavering. “I trust him,” she says simply, more to Newt than Theseus, and his heart soars. “He knows more about obscurials than any of us.”

She peeks at Newt from the corner of her eye as he bashfully lowers his head at her words. He manages a small smile and dares to study her face through his fringe once she’s no longer looking. Theseus regards the exchange with a knowing twinkle in his eye, a slow grin spreading across his lips. He clears his throat and stifles a laugh when Newt and Tina guiltily avert their eyes, a matching pink flush staining their cheeks.

Theseus decides to put them out of their misery and diverts the conversation. “Mr Kowalski, my brother tells me you’re a muggle. How did you and Miss Goldstein manage to get around Rappaport’s Law, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“Oh well, if it weren’t for Newt and his — what’s that thing called again? A murlap?” Jacob narrows his eyes in concentration.

“A murtlap,” Newt supplies helpfully, taking over. “Yes, Jacob sustained a nasty bite, and I wasn’t aware of its effect on a muggle’s physiology.”
“Jacob’s been declared a squib,” Queenie explains proudly. “He’s one of us now. Officially.”

“I think that warrants a toast, wouldn’t you agree?” Newt says and the group voices their approval.

He produces a bottle of firewhisky from his last excursion in the Scottish highlands which warms them from the inside, momentarily helping them forget what they’re here to do. They’re simply a group of friends enjoying themselves until Kyuho declares the need for Jacob to start his education on the wizarding world.

Jacob takes it all with the wondrous enthusiasm of a boy on Christmas morning, staring openly as he admires the spells and soaks up every tidbit of information like a sponge. Newt watches quietly, a content smile playing about his lips.

Tina looks ethereal in the candlelight, dark hair gleaming, a rosy blush illuminating her face. His heart flutters in his chest when their shoulders brush as she shifts. A slow, tentative smile spreads across her face when their eyes meet and Newt holds her gaze until she demurely averts her face.

“Hey Goldstein, why don’t you show Jacob this thing you sometimes do. You know, those smoke figures?” Kyuho suggests, face flush with drink and happiness.

“Oh, I don’t know —” Tina bashfully lowers her head but draws her wand from its holder and reaches into her coat pocket, producing a copy of his book. Proud, happy warmth spreads from his heart all the way to the tips of his toes at the sight, a heat rising on his cheeks that has nothing to do with the contents of his glass.

Jacob gasps when the first creature breaks from its tip and the miniature image of a graphorn gallops around his head. A horse-shaped kelpie is next, followed by a majestic thunderbird, and Newt stares, mesmerised at the level of detail of its likeness. “It’s beautiful,” Newt breathes, gently nudging the thunderbird with his forefinger before it dissipates.

Tina shrugs, grinning sheepishly. “It’s something I did for myself to pass the time. I didn’t think anyone was watching.”

“I’ll choose the next one,” Queenie says, screwing her eyes shut as she opens the book at a random page, grinning brightly once she scans the paper. “Oh, you’ll know this one for sure, honey.”

Tina giggles, raising her wand, and Jacob groans good-naturedly at the erumpent as it flits through the air above their heads, it’s giant horn held up high.
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Tina tosses and turns in her bed until the sky begins to lighten, unable to calm her mind as her thoughts run a million miles a minute. Jacob and Queenie’s unexpected arrival had left her reeling, but finding Newt in the middle of their investigation has pulled the rug from under her feet.

She feels dizzy lying down.

Queenie snores quietly, slumbering on peacefully in the cot across the room, and a small smile steals itself on to Tina’s lips. Oh, how she’d longed to share a room with her sister, to hear her breathing, safe and sound. This isn’t the way she’d imagined it.

She turns to watch Queenie sleep, frowning when she sees her sister’s angelic face scrunched up with deep worry lines between her eyebrows. Tina fights the urge to reach out and run a hand through Queenie’s hair, reminding herself that there are things she simply cannot fix. She’s always known she wouldn’t be able to protect Queenie forever, but it’s a bitter pill to swallow. Queenie is strong and able, easily surpassing Tina in skill and strength on more than one occasion, yet she’ll always see the little gap-toothed girl, smiling up at her big sister as she danced, blonde pigtails bouncing merrily along.

_Maybe she needs this to prove herself, Tina thinks. Maybe we both do._

Restlessness eventually drives her from her bed and her feet carry her almost as if on instinct to Jacob’s quarters. Tina hesitates, briefly lingering in the doorway and worrying her lower lip until she throws all caution to the wind and approaches Newt’s case. Unbeknown to her Jacob is watching out of one eye, smiling into his pillow when he sees where she’s headed.

She squats down to rap her knuckles against the lid — one long, two short, one long — the signal they’d agreed upon that fateful week in New York. Mere seconds pass until he lifts the lid, golden eyes smiling at her in the dark. “Well, come on then,” he says as if he’s expecting her to change her mind.

Tina takes a quick look around before climbing down after him.

It’s still nighttime in the case when she descends, the usual cacophony of animal calls far quieter than she remembers. The shed’s internal door stands propped open and she takes it as the invitation it is, stepping through and into the main part of the case. Her gaze travels upwards to admire the twinkling stars peppered across its faux ceiling.

A hammock hangs suspended between two cacti in what used to be Frank’s desert enclosure, swinging lightly in the wind, and her mouth twists with a pang of guilt at having woken him from his sleep. Newt has hoisted himself atop the rock at the edge of the enclosure, Franks preferred perch, seemingly unperturbed by the disturbance. On the contrary, he pats the space beside him like he’s been expecting her and she hesitates only briefly before sliding up next to him.

They sit in a heavy silence rife with confusion and doubt, with unanswered questions and accusations. Neither of them knows how to begin, yet Tina can’t help but acknowledge how right it feels to be in his presence. How often had she dreamed of the inside of his case, remembering the golden afternoons spend in his company right before his departure? It’s like coming home. Tina clears her throat, latching on to the first thing that comes to mind. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to
wake you.”

He sends her a small smile, briefly meeting her eyes. “There’s no need to apologise. I wasn’t — ”

“Me either,” she murmurs, looking at her hands in her lap. There’s a tension around the corners of his eyes, and while she’s not yet able to voice the questions she’d like to ask, she senses that something’s been troubling him. “Couldn’t sleep?”

He smiles crookedly. It isn’t a happy smile. “No, not really.”

She notices the stacks of papers and books littering the space and she has a good idea of what he’d been doing, and why. “What are her chances, Newt?”

Newt jumps, eyes wide. He hadn’t expected her question. “I’m sorry?”

Tina infuses her smile with what she hopes to be reassuring warmth. “The little girl, the obscurial. What are the chances the extraction will be successful? And more than the obscurus survives.”

“I don’t know,” he whispers and the uncharacteristic worry and trepidation colouring his voice pulls at her heartstrings.

“I meant what I said earlier, you know,” she says, dipping her head to catch his eyes. “I trust you.” Tina finds she’s speaking the truth despite his actions and the uncertainty in her mind; she might question his actions yet she never doubted his heart. Newt’s persona is like an indecipherable book, deep and mysterious as the sea, and she’s only just begun to learn the alphabet.

He gifts her with a small smile, but the minute quiver in his lower lip gives him away. “Why?”

It’s a simple question, direct and precise as she’s come to know him. This self-doubt, however, is new, yet to her, it’s simply another testimony of the goodness of his heart. She sits up straighter, clears her throat and turns to face him properly. “I trust you because I know you’ll try your damn hardest to save her. It’s not about successfully extracting an obscurus — it’s about saving a little girl. It’s because I know that you’ll fight for her. I’ll tell you a million times over if that’s what you need to hear.”

“Well, someone must, she doesn’t have anybody else. I can’t just stand by and watch.” A muscle twitches in his jaw and he lowers his eyes to his lap.

“I know, and I understand,” she says and means it. It’s the same force that drove her to attack Mary Lou Barebone in New York. Two innocent children left behind, left to waste away while humanity averts its eyes. The Invisibles. Yet much like Newt’s creatures, they’re not invisible to either of them.

Another moment of silence passes between them and Tina is about to open her mouth when he beats her to it. “I’m sorry about — “ Leta? The circus? Everything? She knows she’s got no right to feel this way, but the jealousy nearly blinds her in its intensity. “I never intended to complicate your investigation.”

Tina swallows and closes her eyes at the memory. It had hurt and an echo of the pain remains even after Dumbledore had set it all to rights. Her self-doubt roars to life once more, reminding her of her inferiority, now worsened by the accompanying guilt of having doubted his intentions. “Newt, there’s nothing to forgive.”

He disregards her words, ploughing on as the need to explain himself becomes too great. “I couldn’t deny Dumbledore when he came and asked for my help. Leta came along for the ruse.”

Tina lowers her gaze to where her fingers worry the edge of her blouse. “I never told you of her
engagement to my brother because it wasn’t relevant, Tina.”

“Newt —” she begins, but he cuts her off.

His gaze is open and vulnerable, eyes shining with tears like the day they bid their goodbyes. “I — I don’t think I ever had the chance to tell you how much I appreciated our correspondence, Tina,” he murmurs, the tension in his fingers illustrating the effort it costs him to say it. “I truly did.”

Tina’s equally affected, throat tightening as she fishes for the right words. “I did, too,” she says simply and takes a steadying breath before continuing, feeling brave. “I’ve missed your letters.” I missed you.

Newt averts his eyes as a soft blush colours his cheeks. “I certainly missed the post owl landing on my tea every time without fail,” he says to her shoulder and the tips of his ears turn pink.

Tina smiles, endeared, knowing it to be his roundabout way of saying so did I. “I bet you did.”

“I asked Theseus to search for you when I had no means to contact you or your sister, and when he couldn’t find you, I — I had to fear the worst.” He presses his lips into a thin line to keep them from trembling.

Tina’s heart contracts at his obvious distress on her part. “What happened to the man who never worries?” she jokes weakly, echoing Jacob’s earlier attempt.

“I’m not entirely sure,” he says and chances a small smile. “Perhaps I left him in New York.”

The case is coming alive around them, it’s sounds increasing slowly, almost lazily, it’s familiarity enveloping her like a balming hug. They sit close, feet dangling in the air, shoulders almost touching, close enough for her to feel the warmth radiating off his skin. The sun peeks over the artificial horizon in the distance, flooding the case with light and warmth and reflecting off the front of her locket, catching Newt’s attention.

He turns and reaches out to grasp her locket between his fingers. Her breath hitches in her throat at the sudden closeness. His brow furrows as he focuses on the small piece of metal and the significance of the gesture isn’t lost on her. How did you find out? She wants to ask but finds it doesn’t matter.

A pregnant silence stretches out between them, squeezing into the small space between their bodies, thick and unyielding as it expands to encompass them whole. Tina cringes at the sound of her own breathing; it sounds much too loud to her ears.

Newt runs a thoughtful finger across the front of the locket before letting it fall back into place, where it sits at the centre of her chest, feeling heavier than before. His gaze is brimming with emotions but he doesn’t choose to voice them, lips set into a thin line as he looks away into the distance.

“It’s my job, Newt,” she says after a time, quiet and serious. “It comes with a risk, but I knew this before I agreed to it.”

He stares at his fingers, rubbing them together pensively, face tense. “I don’t see what could be so terrible... what could force the necessity of carrying instant death around your neck.”

“There are things worse than death, Newt,” she whispers.

“You don’t think I know? Dying is a necessary part of life; I see it daily with my creatures. It’s the
natural way of things.” He swallows thickly, pointing at her necklace. “This isn’t.”

“There’s nothing natural about war,” she reminds him and he scoffs.

“I’ll never understand humanity’s need to destroy itself, constantly fighting each other until nothing’s left. I’ve seen it on the battlefields, where I had to witness men and dragons perish by the droves, and those who do survive are just as dead inside.”

“That’s why we can’t let it come to that. Not again,” she says gently. “I’m prepared to take a risk if that’s what it takes.”

Newt shakes his head. “I respect you for it, Tina. Truly, I do, but please don’t ask me to like it.”

He swallows thickly. “I’ve seen enough of my friends fall victim to war. Perhaps I’m just not ready to consider the possibility.”

Newt angles his head away from her, eyes suspiciously bright. Her hand twitches in her lap, itching to reach out to him, but she hesitates, unsure if he’d want to be touched at all. “I wouldn’t expect any less of you, Newt,” she murmurs, choosing to reach out with her words instead. *You’re a beautiful soul, Mr Scamander.*

She waits patiently for him to meet her eyes and they sit in comfortable silence until the sun stands higher in the artificial sky and the case is brimming with life. He doesn’t ask and she doesn’t offer, but they rise as one to feed and water the creatures together, falling into step as if their parting at the docks had been just yesterday.

After they share a simple breakfast of tea and toast, Tina excuses herself to wash up and report for duty. Outside the Chateau is fully awake, the sun slowly creeping higher in the sky and it promises to be a beautiful day.

*Too bad we’re going to spend it inside grilling Grimmson,* she thinks with a wistful glance out the window. Her right forearm itches, not for the first time in the last few days, and she wonders if it’s a bad sign, an omen of things to come.

She peels back her sleeve to inspect her skin and gasps at the faint silver lines crisscrossing her arm. Tina swallows thickly before murmuring a quick concealment charm and letting the fabric fall back into place. *Out of sight, out of mind,* she thinks, and the fingers of her left hand remain wrapped around her right wrist all the way to the basement.

***

The interrogation chamber is as cold and damp as the rest of the basement, a windowless hellhole entirely without light and warmth, yet Tina doesn’t feel any pity towards the man currently chained to the chair at the centre.

*You live in holes like this, so you must feel right at home,* she thinks a little nastily and crosses her arms in front of her chest.

Queenie’s chair creaks noisily as she turns towards her sister, raising one pointed eyebrow at her thoughts. It’s the only time she’s let down her mental shields since her training began, and the first time she feels Queenie’s tentative thoughts brush her mind Tina nearly sobs with relief, yet there’s no time for sentimentality.

Frida had suggested the two of them to join in after hours of fruitless interrogation and no veritaserum at hand. Tina had accepted, knowing full well how uncomfortable Grimmson had felt in the presence of a woman. Two of them might just break his will.
Tina leads the interrogation, posing the most difficult questions while Queenie sits and listens quietly, smiling all the while. Grimmson behaves just as predicted, his face turning ashen the moment the two of them walk through the door. Unbeknownst to him, one wall has been charmed to allow the rest of the team to watch from the adjacent room.

Queenie’s new ability to project thoughts and images into her mind unnerves Tina at first, but she soon warms up to it, soothed by her sister’s familiar presence in her head. They fall into step almost immediately, supporting and complementing each other like a well-oiled machine.

“I’m not telling you nothing,” Grimmson spits, grimacing.

“Are the chains too tight, honey? Shall we have them loosened?” Queenie asks, smiling sweetly.

Tina scoffs from her perch at the table’s edge. “I think he’s fine, Queenie. We can always tighten them and see if it forces an answer out of him.” His eyes widen at Tina’s words. “Now, I’ll ask you again: Who’s your contact.”

“Bloody Americans,” Grimmson mutters but doesn’t say anything further. Queenie tenses at her side and her face falters before she can get a grip on herself as she projects an image of his thoughts to Tina.

It’s the likeness of a woman, tall and proud, with lifeless blue eyes and blood red, smiling lips. Tina’s face hardens at the sight and she leans closer to their suspect to stare him in the eye. “Let me ask you something else. Did this contact ever speak to you about Credence Barebone?”

Grimmson blanches at the name. “What do you want with him?”

“That’s none of your concern. Answer the question,” Tina growls.

“She’s gonna be much nicer if you give her a little something, honey,” Queenie says kindly.

Grimmson gawks at her. “You read minds?” He points at Queenie. “C—can she hear my thoughts?”

“I can, so you know I’ll see it in your head anyway. Why don’t you go ahead and tell us what you know.” Queenie smiles brightly until her dimples show as he stares at her, horrified.

“I got no idea what she wanted from them, alright? Any of them!” he finally bursts out, unable to stand the tension. “I just collected them, I didn’t ask any questions. Most of their parents were glad I took them off their hands, you see?”

Tina grimaces as disgust wells up within her, both at the man sitting across from her and the parents who surrendered their children, their own flesh and blood, to a complete stranger, oblivious to their fate. “Who is she?” Tina repeats, unmoved. Of course, she knows, yet she needs to hear him say it. I need to know more about you, Vinda Rosier. Who are you to them?

Grimmson stares first at her, then at Queenie before conceding defeat. “Don’t know, never cared to ask, but seems like she was up top. She’s arrogant like someone who’s used to calling the shots.”

“What about Credence Barebone?” Queenie repeats to give her sister a moment to collect herself. “You better answer, I can feel she’s losing her patience,” Queenie adds in a sing-song voice, pointing at Tina.

He growls deep in his throat, rotating his neck to alleviate the tension, but caves in the end. “Fine, alright! She asked about the freak early on. Went to talk to him, I suppose.”
“You don’t know if he went with her, or where she took those kids?” Tina glares and sits back in her seat.

“Nah, I wouldn’t know. Never gave me a name, that wench, why would she give me an address?” He cackles at his own incongruous joke. “Like I cared anyhow.”

Queenie signals her sister and they share a near imperceptible nod. “I think we’re done here.” Tina rises to her feet.

“Hey, what’s going to happen to me now? I told you what you wanted!” Grimmson calls after them.

Tina turns in the door to send him one last spiteful look. “This doesn’t change the fact that you’re a criminal and a scumbag, so you’ll be handed over to the French Ministry.” She smiles deviously. “For safekeeping.”

“Hey!” he yells, but Tina slams the door shut behind her, drowning out any further protests.

***

“We need to find out who this woman is he was talking about,” Frida says as soon as Tina and Queenie join the meeting room. The interrogation had lasted well into the evening, but time is non-existent if one spends their day underground.

“How’s that going to help? We already know she’s working for Grindelwald, yet we’re no closer to finding her than finding the man himself,” auror Erik Björnson says and there are multiple sounds of agreement.

“I know who she is,” Tina says without preamble and the room falls deadly silent. “She’s been at the blast in New York. Her name is Vinda Rosier.” The man’s eyes widen at the name. “I’ve seen her picture at La Roseraie.”

“Rosier? You mean she’s related to that bastard, Silenus?” somebody says and Tina barely suppresses a shiver at the name.

“She’s his twin sister,” she confirms.

“Let’s put someone on her tail,” Guzman suggests. “Why didn’t we do this sooner?” Because she’s a woman and none of you thought to look twice, Tina thinks but refrains from saying it aloud.

“Shouldn’t be too difficult to find, just follow the trail of destruction, maybe she’s going to be sitting there waiting for us,” Björnson says, voice dripping with sarcasm and his face distorts in irritation. “What do you think we’ve been doing all day? Sleeping?”

Queenie frowns and Frida rolls her eyes as the men around the room launch into another passionate yet pointless debate. “Auror Goldstein, a word please?” Frida pulls Tina out into the corridor and waits for the door to close behind them. “Since when do you know this information? Why did you never mention it to MACUSA that you saw this woman at the scene?”

“I only learned her name yesterday,” Tina whispers defensively and Frida raises both eyebrows. “I went to meet Silenus after I’d spoken to the Maledictus.”

Frida frowns. “You spoke to a witness without discussing it with one of us first? Are you out of your mind?!”
"I didn’t go as an officer. I — I needed to speak to her about Credence. For myself.” Tina says, swallowing thickly. “I spoke to Madame Picquery.”

Frida sighs and massages her temples in irritation. “Guzman mentioned you had some personal connection to the boy and that you got in trouble in New York on his account. Disobeying orders.” She sucks her teeth. “Next time you come to me, understand? I’m on your side, Tina! I want none of this going rogue business from you here, we can’t afford this sort of thing.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Tina says, defiantly meeting Frida’s expectant gaze.

“Good,” Frida says, satisfied with what she sees in Tina’s eyes. “I’ll hold you to it. Now tell me why you didn’t report this earlier, in New York.”

Tina shrugs. “I couldn't be sure whether it was real or if I’d imagined it. I saw her in passing, a few moments before the explosion, who would have believed me? I didn’t believe myself half the time!”

“She was suspicious enough for you to remember her after the blast, even after you were injured. You have good instincts, Tina, you need to trust them.” A pause. “Do you think she’d remember you?”

“I’m not sure,” Tina confesses.

Frida frowns, her tone insistent as she continues. “We can’t compromise your cover. The moment you see her, you get out of there, you hear me? That’s an order.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Tina says for the second time that evening.

Queenie joins them a moment later, rubbing her temples as she leans against the wall. “They’re all so loud,” she murmurs and Tina smiles sympathetically.

“You don’t look too well, you might want to stop by the medi wing, just to be sure,” Frida says, holding Queenie by the shoulder. “You did good in there.”

“I’ll take her,” Tina says without hesitation and Queenie smiles in thanks. The mediwitch gives Queenie a potion to help with the ache behind her eyes and tells her to lie down on one of the cots while she waits for the medicine to take effect.

Tina sits at the edge of the bed, softly carding her fingers through her sister’s golden curls. “Frida was right, you know? You did great today, Queenie.”

“Thanks, Teen,” Queenie murmurs with a soft smile. “It’s harder than I thought.”

“You’ll do just fine,” Tina says and finds she means it. “I’m sorry, I never meant to imply I thought you wouldn’t.”

“You never did, Tina,” Queenie protests, but Tina shakes her head.

“It was selfish of me, Queenie. You’re like my pillar and my light, the only good thing left in this world. I have to see day in and day out what these criminals are capable of.” Tina grimaces and averts her eyes. “I couldn’t bear the thought of you having to listen to their sick, twisted minds and filthy thoughts.”

Queenie reaches for her sister’s hand to give it a hearty squeeze. “It’s not like I’ve never heard it before.”
Tina smiles and returns the gesture. “I know that. And I know you’re strong and capable, but sometimes it’s so hard to remember you aren’t my little Queenie anymore.”

“That doesn’t mean I don’t need you anymore, Teenie. You’re my sister and I love you. This doesn’t change a thing,” Queenie says and pulls her close. “I’m sorry for lying to you about Jacob.”

“I’m sorry, too. I saw the way you suffered, I should have known. Jacob makes you happy, and he’s a good man. I couldn’t imagine anybody else I’d trust with my little sister,” Tina says, holding Queenie’s face between her hands, leaning in to touch her forehead against her sister’s.

Tina sleeps much easier that night, with the weight of a thousand worries lifted off her shoulders and the bindings around her heart significantly loosened.

Chapter End Notes

Ahhh, some more fluff, even though everyone was expecting angst (to be fair, if you know me, the probability was high). I’ve been looking forward to this conversation as much as you have, so I hope it meets everyone’s expectations. Again, thank you so much for all the kind words! <3

Happy weekend, everyone! :)
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

This was quite fun to write, Newt and Jacob are potentially my favourite brotp out there!

Newt passes his first week at the Aerie with setting up his laboratory in the lofty attic room he’s been granted. Tina and Queenie are deeply ensnared with interrogations, so he only sees them at meal times or if he passes them in the corridors. Jacob is a steady visitor to the lab, flooding it with sunshine and joy every time he steps through the door.

Educating the Muggle has become a nightly ritual and they’re soon joined by the rest of the aurors, sitting in awe at the smoke creatures swirling above their heads. Jacob is a quick learner and knows them all by heart already, yet they’re all too fond of this game to give it up.

It’s one of the few comforts within these drafty corridors.

It doesn’t take long for the laboratory to resemble Newt’s shed down in the case and he fleetingly thinks of Bunty and the way she’d cluck her tongue at the chaos, making him smile. He doesn’t mind the mess and neither does Mira, who seems comforted by the familiar sounds of the creatures. Dougal had taken to her almost immediately, attaching himself to her side the moment she enters the room and remaining there until it’s time for her to leave.

They’re still communicating with gestures, plenty of laughter and giggles, but the child is rapidly picking up words as the days go by, repeating any new vocabulary over and over to test the way it feels in her mouth. Newt still ponders how to tackle the task that lies ahead, overcome with dread every time he looks at her. Sometimes he sees a different pair of eyes staring back at him, set within a familiar face, dark and fearful, helpless in her pain and suffering.

It’s on one of these evenings when he sits on his desk after dinner and ponders over his notes from Sudan when a familiar bird call reaches his ears. He looks up just in time to watch a bulky, grey-feathered bird land on the window sill, shaking itself. It’s a dull and unassuming-looking thing, its large amber eyes staring at him expectantly, noisily rustling its feathers for attention.

Newt rises to greet his friend, eying the piece of parchment tied to her leg. “Good evening Louise, what have you got for me?”

Behind her, it begins to rain.

She opens her beak to utter another dreadful call, undoubtedly lamenting the weather, and he hurries to relieve her of her charge. He’s almost finished untying the string when a sudden noise startles them both.

“Hey, Newt, I thought I —“ Newt wheels around to find Jacob standing a few feet behind him, freezing mid-sentence as their eyes meet a split second before chaos erupts around them.

Newt’s sudden movement frightens Louise and she beats her wings in a hasty attempt to get away. Newt stumbles and nearly loses his footing while her razor-sharp talons tear the paper from his fingers.
Jacob blanches and rushes forward. “You alright, pal? I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean to scare you. You haven’t been to dinner, so I brought you something.”

“It’s alright, nothing that can’t be fixed. She scares easily. Thank you for the food, Jacob,” Newt says, smiling sincerely.

“No problem.” Jacob’s gaze falls on the bird in the window. “Hey, isn’t that an augurey?”

Newt sends him a brief, delighted smile. “Yes, her name is Louise, she just delivered a message.” His gaze falls to the scraps at his feet and he draws his wand, watching the pieces of paper rise in the air and mend themselves. It’s a sepia coloured photograph of the Seine, with Paris’ most famous landmark looming in the background. Newt recognises the familiar script before he’s read the first word.

Newt,

_I have come upon new information, which I believe vital to our cause. It’s imperative we meet at once. Come to the Place de la Concorde at midnight. I shall be waiting._

_Albus Dumbledore_

Newt frowns at the message as if it would divulge any more information if you only stared at it for long enough, but it remains unchanged.

_Galloping gargoyles, how am I going to do this,_ he muses.

I.B.I.S. still treats the newcomers with suspicion. The Aerie’s exact location has not been revealed to them and they’re still taken side-along whenever they need to leave the grounds. A portkey is out of the question, so he’s left with few options to consider. His eyes flit to his case as he shrugs into his coat.

Jacob frowns at his friend. “You going somewhere?”

Newt considers him for a moment, narrowing his eyes at him, and a mischievous smile steals on to his face. _Why not?_ “No,” he says slowly. “We are going somewhere.”

“Yes!” Jacob throws his hands into the air with boisterous enthusiasm and Louise squawks in surprise at his antics.

The rain has stopped by the time they successfully steal out of the Chateau and into the night. Newt knows where the perimeter is guarded, so he leads his friend through the thick underbrush along the nearby stream until they reach a clearing in the trees. Jacob watches intently as Newt bends down to open his case and calls an unfamiliar name, stumbling backwards in wonder as a large creature breaks through the opening. “Whoa!”

Half bird of prey, half horse, the hippogriff’s silvery feathers and fur glimmer even in the darkness of a moonless night. Newt bows, waiting for it to reciprocate before approaching. “Hello, Bertha, up for a little evening stroll?” He runs his fingers through the feathers covering her elegant neck, watching her lower her head in bliss.

“So — we’re going to *fly* to Paris?” Jacob clarifies, eyeing the creature with awe and no small amount of trepidation.

“Precisely.” Newt grins at him. “I hope you’re not afraid of heights?”

The logistics pose a minute challenge until Newt coaxes Bertha to lower herself onto her front

Bertha’s back is broad and familiar, radiating a comforting warmth, reminding Newt of his childhood. He gives her flank a gentle nudge with his calves and she rears up on her hind legs before breaking into a run. Jacob yelps, fingers clutching Newt’s coat for purchase as she soars into the night.

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“This is incredible!” Jacob yells against the wind, forgetting his initial apprehension as he leans over her side to peer down at the world below. Newt’s smile morphs into a happy grin at his friend’s honest delight, reveling in the cool of the night and the wind tousling his hair. The French countryside passes beneath them, all black forests and twinkling lights until Paris sprawls before them, a beacon of light in the dark, its soft glow beckoning them closer and drawing them in.

Bertha rolls on her side, ceasing to flap her wings as she rides the current, spiralling lower and lower until her talons nearly touch the top of the buildings, and Newt directs her to a large, circular square next to the sparkling band of the Seine.

Newt checks his pocket watch. One minute to midnight.

They leave Bertha atop an empty pedestal along the Tuileries, heavily warded and disguised as one of the statues along the gardens. “Now you be good,” Newt says and feeds her one of her treats. “We will be back in a jiffy.”

Jacob raises one sceptical eyebrow. “You think that’s gonna work?” he murmurs out of the corner of his mouth.

“Of course. She’ll be fine,” Newt says and Bertha caws at him, flapping her wings but staying put. Jacob grunts, unconvinced, but lets it slide.

A nearby clock strikes the hour as a tall, cloaked figure steps from the shadows. Dumbledore approaches them with confidence, hat pulled low over his face. “Good evening, Newt. I see you brought company?” He says, smiling tightly. “I don’t think we had the pleasure of meeting at the Aerie.”

“Yes, this is Jacob Kowalski, he’s a good friend of mine,” Newt says as the men shake hands.

Introductions made, Dumbledore side-along Apparates them to a small square across the river, where a tiny, dark green iron building hugs the outside wall of its larger stone cousin. It’s door opens at a tap of Dumbledore’s wand and they step into complete darkness. Newt and Dumbledore ignite their wands, letting their soft, blue light wash the walls. A stairway leads them down into a small, circular room and through a doorway.

Dumbledore goes first and leaves Newt and Jacob to follow. The corridor behind is surprisingly bright, with the street light seeping through the manholes in the ceiling in regular intervals. Newt watches Dumbledore’s coattails round the corner and he hastens to follow, listening for Jacob’s footsteps behind him as they go. A small channel runs the length of the corridor, filled with near stagnant water, emitting a putrid odour which has Jacob gagging until he covers his nose with his shirt sleeve.

They catch up to Dumbledore as he waits patiently beneath a vaulted ceiling, where large algae hang from the stones like overgrown icicles. Newt gasps as he rounds the corner, eyes roving over the wall directly across. The red brick is covered with notes and drawings, arrows pointing to words and symbols he doesn’t yet understand, and the floor is littered with papers, books and all
manner of instruments, haphazardly strewn about as if left in a haste. The writing starts at the
centre of the wall, branching out left and right, growing wider until it spans the entirety of it.

A family tree.

“Did you do this?” Newt breathes, addressing his former mentor.

Dumbledore nods almost imperceptibly, never taking his eyes off the wall. “Yes. I thought it
might be easier to access for us all. The wall is a convenient canvas and the rats were friendly
enough,” he says with his usual, crooked smile.

Newt steps closer to the name at the centre, running a curious finger over the erratic symbol sitting
below. “Corvus Lestrange. Is that —?”

Dumbledore steps up next to him. “Yes, Corvus Lestrange V, father to Leta Lestrange — and
Credence Barebone.” He meets Newt’s questioning gaze. “I knew Credence’s mother. I helped
her cross the Atlantic when she became aware of her condition. She no longer wished to be
associated with the Lestranges and feared for her unborn child.” Dumbledore pauses to consider
him. “Newt, do you know who Corvus Lestrange truly was?”

Newt shakes his head. “I never met him. He died before I met Leta.”

“Corvus Lestrange was one of the greatest seers since Merlin himself, one of my closest childhood
friends, and Grindelwald’s fiercest ally when he started to gain followers,” Dumbledore says, face
grim. “He possessed one of the most complex minds I ever encountered. Corvus would feel magic
where none of us could, and we believed he might be powerful enough to find the Hallows.”

Newt’s eyes widen with understanding. “Grindelwald thinks Credence inherited his father’s
strength.”

“Yes. Grindelwald himself is a powerful mind and a seer. Credence would be a strong ally, just
like his father,” Dumbledore says. “That’s why we need to find him, wherever he is.”

“Your Leta and that obscurial boy Credence are brother and sister,” Jacob murmurs, mesmerised,
eyes large as saucers.

Newt is equally affected until his mind connects the pieces. “That’s why you asked Leta to come
along.”

Dumbledore nods. “Yes. We might need her help when the time comes. Meanwhile, we can keep
her safe from Grindelwald.” Dumbledore grabs Newt by the shoulder. “I’ll need to return to the
Aerie immediately and we’ll need to speak to my friend Nicholas Flamel.”

“Flamel? The Alchemist?”

“The very one. He was an avid hunter of the Hallows himself.” Dumbledore grins at him.
“Elusive fellow, now that he no longer teaches at Beauxbatons. But I imagine a private audience
with one of the world’s leading experts in magical creatures might just tickle his fancy.”

***

Newt and Jacob find Bertha exactly where they left her just as the first streak of light appears on
the horizon, looking a little ruffled but otherwise no worse for wear. “You think she’s going to
find the way back?” Jacob asks as they ready her.

“Oh yes, they’re incredibly intelligent creatures, hippogriffs. She’ll get us there.” Newt refreshes
her disillusionment charm and makes a nearby coven of pigeons fly off to distract any muggles and to mask the flapping of her wings as Bertha soars into the early morning sky.

Jacob senses his friend’s need for space and he doesn’t make an attempt at conversation the entire way. The sun has risen above the treeline as they land safely in the clearing by the river. Newt coaxes Bertha back into the case before they make their way onto the grounds. The poppies wave their welcome as they emerge from the forest, blinking owlishly for lack of sleep, strengthened by glorious euphoria and spent adrenaline.

“Good show, Mr Kowalski,” Newt says, clasping his friend by the shoulder.

They freeze, stopping right in their tracks when they spot their welcome committee. It’s something neither of them was expecting. Five aurors have them surrounded in seconds, wands drawn, while Queenie and Tina come running across the field. Tina remains at a distance, head cocked to the side and mouth twisting into a disapproving frown. Queenie barrels into Jacob with enough force to nearly topple him over, and Newt averts his eyes from the blatant show of affection.

“Explain. Where were you?” Guzman bites out, nostrils flaring, and doesn’t tell his aurors to lower their wands.

Newt licks his lips, thinking quickly. “My hippogriff had to stretch her wings, Sir. They’re very agile things, you see? She gets agitated if she doesn’t get regular exercise.”

Guzman’s eyebrows shoot up faster than a lightning strike. “You got a hippogriff in there?” he asks in disbelief, pointing at Newt’s case, then, “What else have you got in there?”

“Nothing for you to worry about,” Newt says with his reassuring grin that’s always worked before. “They’re all perfectly harmless.”

“I’m holding you to that, Scamander!” He points a warning finger at Newt. “No more nocturnal escapades! Next time you need to take one of your pets for a walk, you clear it with me or Frida. Understood?”

“Perfectly,” Newt says and Queenie giggles softly by his side.

The party of aurors dismantles and makes their way back to the Chateau when Tina steps up to him, fingers wrapping around his biceps as she pulls him to the side. “Where were you really?” she hisses out of the corner of her mouth.

“He begins but the fierce shine of her eye and the tight set of her jaw silence him immediately. “Not here,” he whispers close to her ear.

She wordlessly leads him away from the Chateau and back to the river, where a small array of rocks juts out into the water like a natural jetty. Tina jumps up, balancing with both arms outstretched, lower lip firmly clamped between her teeth in concentration. They find a comfortable seat among the stones and Newt closes his eyes, listening to the soothing rush of the water below and the birdsong in the bushes nearby. Tina repeats her earlier question and Newt relays his conversation with Dumbledore.

Her frown deepens as he goes, and she clamps a hand over her mouth as he speaks of Credence’s family. “It all makes sense now.” Her gaze turns pensive as she looks out over the water. “Why he managed to live beyond childhood. Why he survived —” she breaks off, swallowing thickly. The
subway. Newt hesitates, considering her, before throwing all caution to the wind and placing a comforting hand between her shoulder blades. She jumps at the contact and he’s about to remove his hand when she inclines her body towards him in acceptance.

“You can’t blame yourself forever, Tina.” His thumb rubs soothing crescent shapes into her back of its own volition. “I know Credence doesn’t.”

“I know that, but I can’t help but feel like I’ve failed him,” she says, pursing her lips. “Like I overlooked something I could have done if I just tried a little harder.”

“I know the feeling,” he murmurs and she meets his eyes with a questioning brow. “The little girl I met in Sudan. The obscurial.”

Tina’s eyes fill with compassion. “She died while you were trying to help her, didn’t she?” A pause. “That’s why you’re so worried about Mira.”

“Yes,” he says simply. “She was dying already, but sometimes I wonder if I didn’t — if I didn’t help her along. I tried to ease her pain a little. It’s all I could do in the end, really.”

Her hand shoots out, gently coming to rest atop his knee and he gawks at it, thunderstruck. She doesn’t seem to notice. “You did all you could, I’m sure, and I believe she must have been grateful not to die alone.”

“Thank you, Tina,” he murmurs, eyes shining with sincere warmth as they share a wobbly smile.
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

Brotherly love is another of my favourite things!

The inspiration for the Aerie came to me when I was looking at images of an abandoned chateau in the Somme region. Hauntingly beautiful as abandoned places tend to be, Pont St Remy looks like it's just frozen in time, like a memory. Go check it out if that's something that interests you.

Dumbledore’s arrival three days later brings with it a flurry of activity. Congress is called into session once more, where he lays bare all the information he’s gleaned in months and years of research, unrolling it like a scroll at their feet. He stands at the centre of the room, radiating an authority far beyond his years, delivering his speech with quiet passion and sobering truth. A man truly committed to his task, bordering on obsession without the wildly animated gestures or a manic gleam to his eye.

He speaks with confidence yet doesn’t always tell them what they want to hear, honest and direct, and Tina can’t shake the feeling the man pursues an agenda far beyond the noble reasons he holds before them like a plate of honour, or a shield. He’s appointed as an official adviser and a strategist, inadvertently spearheading the investigation into Credence and the Hallows.

***

The next morning Frida takes Dumbledore and the Scamander brothers on a tour around the Aerie. They know their way around the Chateau well enough, but parts of it have been inaccessible to them until now. Its upper floor is entirely composed of living quarters, connected by doors on either side and bathrooms the size of Newt’s one bedroom flat in London.

The ground floor is light and airy, with high ceilings and walls that are more window than stone. The paint along its walls is chipped and peeling, a tired shadow of its former beauty, like yesterday’s makeup on a cheap harlot. Tall timber doors are set within elaborately carved frames, imposing gateways leading into magnificent ballrooms and meeting halls, and if left open, allow for a direct view from the entrance into the inner courtyard.

Now they follow Frida down the winding staircase into the basement. “IBIS stands for *International Bureau of Investigations and Security,*” she says while briskly leading them down the corridor, “We have three different divisions. Day-to-day operations include active investigative work out in the field while a small part of the team processes intel on site. Then there are the aurors on special assignment.” Newt wants to ask her to elaborate, thinking of Tina, but there’s no time.

They enter a room packed with books and paper scrolls corner to corner, with maps lining the walls from end to end, and the row of central tables bears an arsenal of communication and listening devices. “This is the technical development and monitoring division. We’re surveying all Grindelwald’s known associates for communication.” Frida grins deviously. “If they try to have a party we’ll be hearing about it first hand.”

Two wizards are busy listening while directing a quill to transcribe the message with their wand.
“For now we still need staff to decode the message,” Frida says as they walk past. “We’re working on a self-writing quill that decodes on its own.” They pass through another set of doors into a dimly lit corridor. A skinny staircase twists its ways upstairs to their right with a narrow door going off to the left, squeezed in like an afterthought.

The room behind lies shrouded in complete darkness and improves minutely as Frida flips a switch. “This is our conference room. It’s mainly used to strategise and discuss intel with the undercover agents. We currently have ten male and five female operatives on staff.”

“You have female officers doing undercover intelligence work?” Theseus asks, eyebrows raised in astonishment.

“You’d be surprised, Scamander,” Frida says, one hand on her hip in defiance. “Our female officers have a higher success rate than our men. A woman has ways of getting a man to spill his darkest secrets without the need for brute force or firing a single curse.”

Newt swallows, feeling faint at the implication, reaching to steady himself against the wall. Tina’s strange disappearances and continued absences are no longer a mystery, and an unfamiliar unease settles on his chest, as unwelcome as a scratchy scarf on naked skin. “I’m sure Mr Scamander didn’t mean to imply female officers are of any less value than their male counterparts,” Dumbledore interrupts, attempting to defuse the tension.

“Well, you’ll see once you start training them tomorrow,” she hisses, stomping on, and Theseus utters a little disbelieving laugh.

“I’m not planning on giving them the special treatment if that’s what you’re implying!” he calls after her.

“Good heavens. This’ll be quite the afternoon, I fear,” Dumbledore murmurs and grins at Newt before following them down the hall.

***

The following morning begins bright and early when Queenie shakes Tina awake just after dawn. “Come on, Teenie. You need to be outside in half an hour!”

The international delegation ordered an immediate evaluation of all their operatives as per Dumbledore’s recommendation, and her stomach quivers with nerves at the impending tasks. Testing had never been her strong suit, and some things never change. The practical training units take place in the inner courtyard, where one crippled old rosebush is the only reminder of the garden’s former glory. It’s now a desert landscape of sand and dirt, with dust rising up into the air with every step they take.

It’s affectionately called The Pitch.

Today its fringes are crowded with the international delegation and Tina grimaces as many pairs of eyes follow her out onto the field. Queenie sends her one last encouraging smile before melting into the crowd. Frida and Guzman have pitched the team of female aurors first and they form a neat line in front of the panel of inspectors.

“You’ll be called in alphabetical order to present your wand and complete a short list of tasks for evaluation,” Guzman announces and consults his list. “Goldstein, you first!”

Tina wills her body into forward motion, setting one foot in front of the other with confidence. *Come on, Goldstein. What difference does it make if anybody is watching?* Somehow it feels like the entire world is turning their eyes on her.
“May I?” The question pulls her out of her reverie and she jerks into motion, laying her wand into Dumbledore’s waiting hands. He turns it between his fingers, making a thoughtful hum deep in his throat. “Very interesting. Simple and powerful. Rosewood?” Tina nods. “One of Thiago Quintana’s, I presume?”

“Yes, sir,” Tina says.

He hands it back to her, eyes shining with interest. “Very well, then.”

They ask her to perform a series of simple summoning charms before moving on to more complex silent spells, testing her wandless magic and prodding her reflexes. None of them so much as blinks an eye, making it impossible for her to know how she’s performing, and she’s suddenly seventeen once more, taking her final exams at Ilvermorny.

Dumbledore’s task is last and his lips twist into a smile as he considers her. He produces a walnut from the depth of his coat pocket and sets it onto the table before him. “I’d like you to transfigure this into a toy of your childhood. Any will do. Take your time.”

Tina closes her eyes, visualising the object in her inner eye before raising her wand, performing the spell without uttering a sound. The walnut spins on the spot before growing larger as four legs and a neck sprout from its centre, turning into the small tin horse she remembers from childhood. It’s a Muggle toy they found on the street one day, cream coloured with a myriad of tiny blue flowers, complete with one missing ear.

Dumbledore picks it off the table to turn it over in his hand. Seconds feel like hours before he gives an almost imperceptible nod. “Very impressive,” he murmurs, meeting her eyes. “Very impressive, indeed.”

“Thank you, Miss Goldstein. That’ll be all,” Frida says, dismissing her.

Tina nods and turns on her heel, stalking back out onto the field, cheeks burning with conflicting emotions. Her chest swells with pride at having completed the task, yet she cannot shake the underlying unease deep in her bones, a constant companion ever since meeting Newt’s former professor.

He remains a mystery, an unwritten page, and this most recent encounter does nothing to dispel her misgivings. Her right forearm itches again and she lifts the sleeve to find the now familiar, light grey outline etched onto her skin. It’s darkened since she first noticed it. Tina’s brow furrows in confusion as she runs a curious finger along the lines.

What on earth does this mean?

She drops her arm, pushing her worries to the back of her mind as she scans the crowd. Newt sits two seats down from his brother, searching and finding her eyes for the briefest of moments when she’s standing back in line. There’s a proud smile balancing on his face when their gazes meet across the field and the corners of her lips curve upwards to reciprocate despite the watching crowd.

***

Theseus takes charge during the combat training later that afternoon, joining Frida and Guzman in their efforts. It’s the hottest hour of the day, but dark clouds at the horizon promise coming relief. Newt is watching from the sidelines, curious to see his brother and the aurors in action. He’s flanked by Leta and Queenie on either side, nervously shuffling his feet in the dirt as they wait.
Theseus stands in the middle of the training grounds next to Captain Guzman, shirt sleeves rolled above his elbows and wand in hand. He squints at the line of aurors facing him, shielding his eyes against the blaring sun overhead. Tina is among the group standing in the dust. The earth is red here, rich and fertile, and Newt is beginning to wonder if this place knows any other colours as his gaze flits across the fields of poppies silently watching behind them. Small beads of sweat are forming on Theseus’ forehead, but he pays them no mind as he grins at his charge. He’s enjoying this.

Guzman’s booming voice carries across the field, echoing off the line of trees behind the Chateau. “Right. Scamander here hasn’t seen you fight. He doesn’t know what you’re capable of, so I suggest we begin with a little duelling session to show him where you’re at before we move on to bigger things.” He looks at each of them individually, considering them. “Divide into pairs and let’s get started.”

Their attention returns to the aurors as the first pair takes their positions. Kyuho is facing a bulky French wizard built like a wardrobe, two heads taller than the slim American, yet Newt knows from experience that size is of little importance in magical combat. They bow, wand-arms outstretched and pointing back, and the fight begins. Newt sucks in a shocked breath as he watches them. It’s like nothing he’s ever seen before.

They’re whirling around each other like a pair of dancers, ducking and firing spells simultaneously, apparating and disapparating so quickly they look like an apparition, like they’re a smoke image of their former selves.

“Do they all fight like this?” Leta breathes at his side, equally mesmerised.

Theseus’ eyebrows nearly touch his hairline as he watches, quietly impressed. It ends with Kyuho disarming his competitor, effortlessly ducking a jinx while performing a spell of his own which sees the other man land on his back in a spectacular fashion, sprawled inelegantly on the ground as the dust begins to settle around them.

The next two rounds follow in a similar pattern as Newt watches intently, eyes attempting to follow the bursts of magic as the duellists twist and turn like twin cyclones across the desert. Theseus steps up afterwards, intent of participating after watching it all from the sidelines. Confidence is rolling off him in waves as he stands in the middle of the field, tall and proud, feet hip-width apart.

You just wait, Newt thinks with a smirk, they’re going to wipe that cocky grin off your face.

“Goldstein, how about it?” Theseus asks and Newt feels an uneasy heat at the back of his neck that has nothing to do with the weather. “Why don’t you show me what you’ve got?”

“Fine.” Tina steps forward, rolling up her shirt sleeves as she goes, briefly meeting Newt’s eyes across the field before focusing on his brother.

Theseus smiles crookedly, swiftly unbuttoning his own shirt and throwing it aside, leaving his upper half entirely bare. “Ready?”

Newt frowns as the heat at the back of his neck expands, making his skin boil and tingle as the hair on his body stands on end. Theseus, what in Merlin’s name are you up to?

Leta gently nudges his side. “Stop growling!” she hisses with an amused shine to her eye, barely able to contain her mirth at his expense.

“I wasn’t,” he mutters. Much. “Alright, maybe a little.” She shakes her head at him, grinning, as
Queenie quietly giggles at his other side, the sound of ringing silver bells, and the corners of his lips twitch with the beginnings of a smile.

Tina out in the field doesn’t flinch, doesn’t raise an eyebrow as she watches Theseus’ antics, unimpressed. “You done?”

They stand facing each other, bodies curling in for the customary bow before the duel begins. Newt has difficulties following their movements as they circle each other, faster and faster until he’s unable to tell where one ends and the other begins. They come to a sudden halt when Theseus is thrown on his back, slithering in the dust, but he doesn’t lose the grip on his wand and the fight resumes. They seem evenly matched until Tina misjudges the movement of his hand, expecting a well-placed body-bind, and isn’t fast enough to shield herself when he yells “Expelliarmus!”

Her wand flies into his waiting hand.

He’s on her in seconds and she lands on her side, panting heavily with Theseus’s wand lightly digging into the column of her neck. “Good work,” Theseus praises her with an honest quality to his voice. “You almost had me. Now only remember not to overestimate your opponent’s intelligence. Don’t always expect the unexpected.” He holds out a hand and she takes it, letting him haul her up to stand.

“Thanks, I’ll keep that in mind.” Tina dusts off her slacks, locking eyes with Newt once more and sending him a tiny smile.

Theseus comes sauntering towards Newt, his discarded shirt haphazardly thrown across one shoulder and accepts the drink Queenie hands him. “You’re up next,” he says, addressing his brother.

“What did you do that for?” Newt hisses.

“What’d you mean?” Theseus asks, knowing full well what his brother is referring to and Newt feels his blood boil anew.

He clenches his fists at his sides and glares at his brother. “Was that really necessary?”

“I just wanted to see how she’d react.” Theseus’ self-satisfied grin expands from ear to ear. “Exactly as I predicted. She didn’t even bat an eye.” Newt’s brow knits in confusion and Theseus groans, grabbing him by the shoulder. “The woman only had eyes for you, you bloody idiot!”

Newt looks at him, gobsmacked, blinking owlishly until Theseus lightly slaps his cheek, shaking him from his reverie. “Nonsense.”

Theseus scoffs, lips pulling into a lopsided grin. “Mother’s blind hippogriff could see what’s going on here, Newt. But keep deluding yourself.”

“Arse,” Newt mutters under his breath but lets his brother drag him away to join the waiting group on the field.

Guzman clears his throat and grabs Newt by the shoulder, thrusting him forward. “Scamander… the younger will demonstrate the best way to protect yourself from an obscurial.”

“It’s called an obscurus, actually,” Newt corrects him and all eyes land on him. “You’ll be protecting yourself from the obscurus, not the host.”

Guzman frowns, cheeks darkening in mild irritation. “Well, yes. Fine. Go ahead then.”
Newt twirls his wand in his fingers. “An obscurus is a powerful force of dark magic. It doesn’t have a physical form when unleashed, so most common spells and curses won’t affect it.”

“If none of them will have any effect on it what do you suggest we do? A shield?” one of the aurors asks.

“No, I don’t think an ordinary shield will suffice,” he says slowly. “You need a far more powerful spell, the strongest shield a wizard can produce.”

“You’re thinking of something specific?”


“You’re all capable of producing a corporeal patronus, I take it?” Theseus interrupts and he’s met with a chorus of affirming yeses. “Good. Let’s see them.”

They line up neatly, stepping forward one by one and raise their wand to let a shimmering, silver animal break from its tip. Tina radiates confidence when it’s her turn, gaze turning inwards as she recalls her memory before clearly enunciating the incantation and watching the patronus soar high into the air. Her eyes widen at the sight and all the colour drains from her face as her mouth falls open in shock.

A large dragon circles high above, focusing its pupil-less eyes on the wizards below as the sun reflects off its glittering scales.

Theseus stares up at it in wonder. “Newt, isn’t that—“

“— an Antipodean Opaleye, yes,” Newt breathes, mesmerised by the sight. He’d recognised the beast immediately, without having to look at its eyes or the shape of its scales. It’s as familiar to him as the inside of his case.

_Could it be?_

Tina watches it disappear, still looking dazed. Theseus tries and fails to hide his grin. “I suppose this isn't the shape you expected?” Tina shakes her head, speechless.

Kyuho stares. “Wasn’t yours a horse before?”

“I — yes,” she stammers, flabbergasted, looking at her wand as if it had sprouted wings.

Kyuho turns to Newt and Theseus. “Is this something that can change just like that?”

Theseus clears his throat and tries not to gloat at his brother’s shocked intake of breath. “Well, we don’t know for sure how these things work. Usually, it’s a… life-changing event that influences it, or strong feelings towards someone closely linked to this particular creature.” He pauses for dramatic effect. “It’s not unheard of for lovers to have matching patroni.”

“Well, that’s all nice and dandy, but we’ve wasted enough time on this,” Guzman bristles. “Let’s get on with it.”

Newt watches the remaining charms in a daze, focusing on his breathing as his chest rises and falls, willing his frantic heartbeat to slow as he avoids looking at Tina. This isn’t how he’d expected the afternoon to end.
Here, have a healthy dose of Newtina to start off the week. Please, as always: Be mindful of the tags!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Queenie watches Tina bolt the moment the training session concludes, her face the colour of freshly fallen snow, and notes with glee as Newt follows after her sister. She’s seen the images in his head and withdraws to give the two of them some privacy.

*You might not think it, but you deserve all the happiness in the world,* she thinks at her sister.

The wind picks up as the clouds move in front of the sun and she shudders at the sudden loss of warmth.

*Hello, little sparrow.*

Queenie jolts violently for an entirely different reason and she gasps, mind turning inwards, drowning out all external sounds. *No.*

*No? Isn’t this what your sister calls you?* His voice sounds soft, familiar, yet it has a dark edge to it she hasn’t heard before.

*What do you want?* Queenie wills it to sound harsh and strong and confident, yet she hears the distinct quiver in her voice. Weakness. He’s bound to sense it.

*I need your help.*

*No,* she thinks with vehemence, eyes screwing shut against the tears burning at the corner of her eyes. *I’m done. I did my part, I betrayed my family. Now leave me alone.*

*You’re done when I tell you, my sweet. I’ll follow you wherever you go, make no mistake. You will help me.* There’s nothing soft and sweet about his voice as it cuts through her mind like a blade, it’s underlying threat slicing deep to reignite the wound in her chest.

A warm hand on her shoulder startles her and the connection is broken. Dumbledore’s eyes shine with honest compassion when she turns. “Are you alright, Miss Goldstein?”

She isn’t sure whether he’s thought the question or voiced it aloud, but she decides to answer him regardless. Isn’t this what normal people do? “I —“

His face turns serious. “Come with me. You look like you’ve had quite the fright.” Dumbledore’s hand gently stirs her away from the crowd and into the building. His quarters lie at the far corner of the Chateau, overlooking the river, and she feels calmed by the conglomeration of instruments occupying every surface in the room. He waves his wand and a small metal tin flies at him, hovering expectantly in mid-air, and he extracts two yellow sweets before offering her one. “Here, that’ll help.”

She hesitates, eyes flitting back and forth between his face and the sweets on his palm, and
deeming it safe, pops one in her mouth. A sugary lemon flavour coats her tongue and she smiles appreciatively. His mind is unusually quiet, had been from the start, so it comes at a shock when it’s barriers vanish, opening like the floodgates of a dam.

Queenie gasps, nearly swallowing the sweet as she sifts through his head. She finds layer upon layer of thoughts and memories, interwoven so tightly she cannot say where one ends and the next begins, making it near impossible to untangle. It’s like a labyrinth of wisdom and fact and she’s lost within it, not knowing what she’s looking for. She tenses when his mind reaches out to hers in turn, breaking through its barriers with ease. Tears fill her eyes as it fills into the darkest corners and she’s powerless to stop it.

“Tell me,” he says, kind and gentle like a father would, and she covers her mouth, sobbing behind her hand.

He knows. All of it.

“He — there’s a connection between us. I thought it was broken now that he’s so far away.” She takes a heaving breath. “But it ain’t gone. It feels different.”

“Why is he contacting you now?”

“I don’t know! There’s something he wants. He didn’t say.” She wipes her eyes with the back of her hand, lower lip trembling as she fights for control. “I don’t know how to break it.”

“Don’t,” he says and her head snaps up. “Is it a two-way connection? Can you see into his mind?”

“I—“ She stammers, too shaken to formulate the words.

“We can use this to our advantage, listen in on him.” A pause. “Find out how much he knows of the Hallows’ whereabouts.”

Queenie shrinks back, fear rising under her skin and making the hair on the back of her neck stand on end. “You don’t mean that.”

“Oh yes,” he says, gaze sharp and piercing in its intensity. “Nobody needs to know about this, for now, it’s just between you and me.” The unspoken threat of exposure hangs over them like a dark cloud, menacing yet unacknowledged, and Queenie swallows against the lump forming in her throat.

She bites her lower lip, weighing her options, but every turn she takes brings her down to the same conclusion. There’s no way out. She remembers the complex roadmap of his mind and wonders whether she’s escaped one twisted, formidable man only to stumble into the waiting arms of another. Which one is the more dangerous, she’s yet unable to say.

“Agreed,” she says and holds out a hand. His lips pull into a lopsided smile as he wraps his fingers around hers, giving them a hearty squeeze, and she swallows thickly.

What have I done?

***

Tina’s heart hammers wildly in her chest. The shiny silver dragon appears in front of her inner eye as it hovers above the field once more. She falls against the nearby wall, putting a hand to her chest, willing her heartbeat to slow.

What does this mean? Am I broken?
Rapid footsteps approach behind her. “Tina!” She turns to find Newt hurrying down the corridor, slithering to a halt a few feet away. His face is flushed and hair tousled, yet there’s a peculiar glint in his eye she cannot yet place.

“Newt!” she says, feeling lightheaded as she steps up to him. “What — what was that?!”

“Tina—” he begins, but she pays him no mind as her trembling fingers wrap around his biceps, tight like a vice, and Newt yelps in surprise. He gently pries her hands off his arm to draw his wand, intent on showing her if she’s unwilling to listen.

“She’s not unheard of for lovers to have matching patroni.

Well done, Goldstein, she thinks. Now you’ve gone and made a complete fool of yourself.

“Did it always take this shape?” The words shoot out without thinking, before she can stop herself, not yet able to address the truth hovering above, crushing in its intensity, far larger and more imposing than the creature sitting before them.

Newt shakes his head. “No. It changed after I returned from New York. It was a raven before.” Her brow knits in confusion and he lowers his gaze to his shoes. “Leta.”

He whispers it, yet it sounds much too loud to her ears in the quietness of the corridor. Her heartbeat hasn’t slowed and she wonders if he can hear it, too. His words shake her to the core, making her feel lightheaded when she thinks of their implication. Tina shivers as the skin on her arms erupts into goosebumps that have nothing to do with the weather and her mouth feels dry like sandpaper as she meets his eyes.

They both know.

He steps closer and she stares, breath hitching in her throat at the look in his eyes. “Tina, I—“

The alarm around her wrist sounds an angry wail, startling them both and the spell is broken. “I’ll need to —“ Tina begins, awkwardly shuffling her feet.

“Yes,” he says to her shoulder, giving a tiny nod of understanding.

“Goldstein!” They spring apart and Newt’s patronus vanishes into thin air as Frida sticks her head around the corner. “Let’s go!”

They hurry to follow her into the entrance hall where a group of aurors is already assembling. Guzman appears at the top of the stairs and all eyes turn to him, expectantly waiting for him to elaborate. “There’s been another incident in central New York City,” he says and the group makes a collective sigh of disapproval. “We don’t have all the information yet, but it looks professional and well organised. A large-scale explosive was detonated at 9am this morning. We’re expecting the No-Maj casualties to reach the hundreds.”

Tina’s insides turn to ice. She remembers the newspaper article they printed for Silenus and the hidden message it contained. MACUSA aurors should have been on standby. What if they hadn’t
“Goldstein.” Frida appears at her side, keeping quiet, but her look says it all. Go to La Roseraie. Find out what he knows.

***

Newt watches her detach from the group, a lone figure standing away from the crowd. She looks around as if she’s searching for something — or someone — and smiles when their eyes meet across the room. It isn’t a happy smile, weak and with no small measure of sadness, and he sends her one of his own, as warm and encouraging as he can muster.

Be safe, it says.

She gives an almost imperceptible nod and lifts her wand above her head, directing it at herself. Her sensible uniform transforms into an elegant evening dress, jet black and reaching well below her ankle, her lips now stained crimson, bright like the poppies along the fields. Tina turns without so much as a backward glance, shoulders rigid with tension as she slips through the door, the hem of her dress billowing behind her.

Newt stares at the spot from where she vanished long after she’s left his sights.

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The sun has barely set when she walks up the now familiar gravel path. The sky above is almost violent in its beauty, powdery clouds of pink and orange and red; deep purple at the fringes, where night has already begun. A servant leads her through the hall and into the elegant drawing room. It overlooks the gardens and the oval lake, now a sea of colour as the sky reflects on its surface.

Silenus sits nursing a glass of cognac in front of his fireplace, the stark angle of his jaw more prominent in the flickering light. His lips pull into a smile when he meets her eyes. “Good evening, Alice.” He gestures for her to sit and she joins him on the sofa, willing herself to move with grace and confidence.

“I came as soon as I heard. Let me congratulate you,” she murmurs, lips pulling into a smile. “He must be pleased with you, as he should.”

“Oh yes,” he says, casually leaning back against the couch. “It was one of my more brilliant ideas. I had Vinda hide a second message, the real target, in one of the adverts. Just in case we have some of MACUSA’s sniffer dogs reading along.”

He passes her his glass and she takes a fortifying sip, relishing the burn as she steels herself for the night to come. He is gloriously happy, buzzing with energy, and she knows from experience he’s not bound to be gentle. “This isn’t all he’s got to thank me for tonight,” Silenus says, eyes gleaming with pride, and he stands, extending a hand towards her. “Come, let me show you something.”

Silenus leads her into a small, windowless room at the top of the stairs. Candles burn in their holders, lending their flickering light to dispel the darkness. The room is empty save for a large table at its centre, taking up nearly all the space. A large sheaf of parchment is spread across it, covering its surface in its entirety. The paper is midnight blue, appearing almost black in the darkness, crisscrossed with fine silver lines of an intricate drawing like constellations in the sky and Tina gasps as she realises what she’s looking at.

A blueprint.
“Is this a castle?” She swallows and turns to face him. “For Gellert Grindelwald?”

He smiles, stepping close enough for her to feel his breath on her cheek. “A fortress. And I’m going to build it for him.”

“You designed this?” she asks, gasping as he turns her and presses her back against his front, one hand splaying possessively across her stomach.

“All of it. That’s what I do. I’m one of his fiercest, most loyal allies and he knows it. He told me as much.” His other hand comes up to circle her throat and she experiences a moment of blind panic as his fingers squeeze tight before releasing her. “I’ve scored him more than one victory tonight, with your assistance. Let me repay the favour.”

Tina shivers and she feels him smirk against her shoulder, mistaking her repulsed reaction for one of pleasure. The paper folds itself with a flick of his wand, stowing itself away in a hidden drawer below the tabletop as his hand slips beneath the material of her dress.

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Tina doesn’t return that evening.

Sleep is slow in coming, and after tossing and turning for hours Newt finds himself wandering the corridors instead. Moonlight floods the tired carpets through tall, full height windows; bright squares of illuminated dust in the darkness.

He meets a few aurors still awake at this hour, yet there’s a sliver of bright light under the door to the conference room when he passes. The soft murmur of voices reaches his ears and he raps his knuckles against the door without thinking. They fall silent immediately as the door opens a crack. “Password?” Frida’s voice sounds demanding despite the hour, and it makes no secret of its suspicion.

“Ursa Minor,” he murmurs and is allowed in.

A large map is spread across one of the tables when he enters, with Guzman and Picquery crowding around it, matching deep furrows marking their faces. They look up when he enters. “Mr Scamander, how can we help you?” Guzman’s voice sounds as sour as the expression on his face. “We’re in the middle of a briefing here.”

“It’s alright, Arnold. Mr Scamander has been vetted. Let’s focus on the issue at hand, shall we?” Frida says and Guzman’s mouth snaps shut, looking like a scolded child as he shuffled over.

“We had a team of aurors lying in wait at the corner of 46th and Madison as planned. How’s it possible they managed to change target at such a short notice?” Picquery asks, the vein in her neck plainly visible.

Frida crosses her arms in front of her chest. “They might not have, we don’t know. Goldstein’s out investigating, so we will know more when she returns.”

Picquery consults the wall clock at Frida’s words. “Goldstein’s been gone since early evening. Shouldn’t she have returned by now?”

“We don’t exactly put a time limit on our investigations, Madame President,” Frida hisses. “It’ll be as long as it takes.”

“I want to be notified as soon as she does. This is the second such incident in four months with more than a hundred No-Maj casualties. After what happened in December, we’re going to look
like fools in front of the international community if we can’t stop this soon.” She gives a tired sigh, briefly looking at Newt as he opens his mouth to say something. “And no, this time simply obviating the whole city won't do, Mr Scamander.”

Guzman wrinkles his nose like he’s smelled something bad and Frida looks at Newt with renewed interest. “I heard about your heroics last year, Mr Scamander.”

“I would hardly call them heroics,” he says with a small smile, eyes focusing on a point next to her left ear. “I was glad I could be of assistance, and I needed to release my thunderbird anyhow, so…”

“You did our country a great service, Mr Scamander; however, I fear this time it’s no longer enough. We need to see progress here, otherwise, I’ll be withdrawing my aurors from this operation,” Picquery says, looking at Frida and Guzman in turn. “We need all the manpower we can get in the States, I can’t afford to have them waste time over here.”

“We’re doing all we can,” Frida assures her, but Picquery shakes her head.

“We need to do more. Dumbledore will have to start pulling his weight. I want a staff meeting early morning to discuss his strategies. Now I’ll retire if there’s nothing further.”

Guzman shakes his head. “No, Ma’am.”

“Well, then.” Picquery moves towards the door, turning once more with her hand on the handle. “I want to be notified as soon as Goldstein returns.”

“Where has Miss Goldstein been sent?” Newt asks after a time.

“Can’t disclose this information, Scamander. It’s classified,” Frida says and Guzman grunts in affirmation before moving over to the wizards at the comms station. Frida turns to Newt with a compassionate gleam to her eye. “I’m sorry, I wish I could tell you more.”

“I understand,” he murmurs and meets her eyes. “Miss Goldstein is very capable, and I trust her instincts. She’ll not return empty-handed.”

Frida smiles thinly. “She’s good. A little reckless perhaps, and she needs to start listening to her head instead of her heart, but she’s got the right mindset. Covert operations are dirty, but by no means thankless work. One single agent could tip the scales and decide our fate one way or another. It’s significant pressure, but they all knew what they signed up for.”

“Yes,” he breathes, feeling a sense of pride well up in his chest. “Tina always fights for what she believes in.”

Frida opens her mouth to reply when Guzman’s voice fills the room. “Frida, I’ll need your help to formulate this message, please.”

She excuses herself with a small, apologetic smile and Newt is once again left to his own devices. The clock in the corner turns half past three when he decides to return to his room, if not to sleep then to research Mira’s condition. There aren’t many documented cases of obscurials and even fewer notes on a possible cure; so far he’s only been able to assess what not to do, but he’s no further in developing her treatment.

Newt is so lost in thought he almost doesn’t recognise the person standing at the top of the stairs when he ascends from the basement. Tina is leaning against the wall, eyes screwed shut, and
“Mercy Lewis, Newt. You scared me,” she breathes and he frowns at the uncharacteristic unease in her voice. It is then he realises how unsettled she is, with her face turned away from him to hide in the shadows, and a fine tremor in the hand pressed to her sternum.

“Tina, are you alright?” he asks, concern lacing his voice. She looks at him, turning her face without thinking and he spots the dark bruise blooming on her cheekbone, just below her eye. “Tina.” He puts a finger under her chin, gently turning her head and trying to ignore the way she flinches at his touch. Her hand falls to her side, releasing the fabric at her throat and a wave of nausea sweeps over him when his eyes fall to the purple marks circling her neck. “Merlin, Tina! What— who—?”

“It’s nothing, I’m fine,” she tries to brush him off, stepping away. Newt grits his teeth, jaw pulling tight with the words clamouring to be released, but he lets her go without protest, and watches her flee up the stairs.

He remains rooted to the spot while his head attempts to catch up with his heart, willing away the image of a hand closing around her neck, pressing into her delicate skin. Why had she let her opponent come this close? A second wave of nausea buries him as he considers the possibilities, each worse than the last. His feet take him up the stairs to her room without thought and he pauses outside the curtain-covered doorway, listening for any sound of her still moving around. The soft melody of a familiar jazz song reaches his ears.

She must be the first one to return, he thinks, distantly aware of a set of footsteps approaching.

A surprised intake of breath. “Newt?” Queenie stands before him, nervously worrying the hem of her dress as her eyes flit between him and the doorway. “What’s happened to Teen?”

Her mind reaches out to his, probing his memory with anxious eagerness, and he gives a helpless shrug, voice dropping to a whisper. “She won’t say.”

“She’s shutting me out,” she answers the question on his mind and heaves a great sigh. “Mama used to say music makes everything better; it’s what she does when she’s upset. Can’t have been anything good.”

“Is there something we can do?”

She shakes her head, curls flying, lips pulling into a sad little frown. “No. She’ll come around on her own when she’s ready. She ain’t gonna talk now. I’ll — I’ll go back to Jacob, see if he’s still awake.”

Newt nods his affirmation, too distracted to question where she’d been for most of the night. She tiptoes back around the corner as he steps closer to the doorway. “Tina?” No answer. “I’ll just — I’ll be right outside.”

He slides to the floor, coming to rest with his back against the wall and pulls his knees up to his chin. Pickett climbs to his shoulder, giving a tired, disoriented chirp before allowing Newt to coax him back into his pocket. The corridor is quiet, save for the soft music from the room behind him as he settles in to wait. His eyelids grow heavy and he finds himself nodding off when there are footsteps and the whisper of fabric on the other side of the curtain. “Newt?”

“I’m here,” he says, voice raspy with sleep.

It takes her a moment for her to reply and he imagines her sitting behind the wall, one hand against the stone while chewing on her lower lip. “Tell me something?”
He smiles into the dark. “What would you like me to tell you?”

“Oh, anything.”

He shifts minutely, settling in a more comfortable position by wrapping his forearms around his legs, and exhaled deeply before he begins. “I met Saiesha three weeks into my travels in the Nubian Desert, looking for erumpents. My guide was one of the Nubian bedouins, the Beja people.” The music stops, replaced by the soft sound of undivided attention and he smiles before continuing. “She lived in one of the camps where we stopped along the way. They kept her isolated from everyone else, away from family and affection. She had no one, and when my guide told me she was ill I promised to do my utmost to try and help her.”

The curtain shifts and he can see the movement out of the corner of his eye. Tina walks around him, still not uttering a sound, and comes to sit next to him against the wall, close enough for their shoulders to touch. Newt waits for her to get settled before continuing. A burden he’d been carrying for months is lifted off his back as the story flows from his mouth for the first time since it occurred.

Tina shifts in increments, head slowly coming to rest on his shoulder, close enough for him to bury his nose in her hair if he turned his head to the side. The day breaks by the time he finishes, voice hoarse from use, and the corridor is bathed in the golden light of morning.

“They buried her the next day, there in the desert, a sandy resting place marked with a simple, unadorned stone.” He gives into temptation, angling his face into her hair and closing his eyes to inhale deeply of her scent. “When I asked they allowed me to put a protective spell on the palm leaf they placed atop her grave, so it’ll never wilt and waste away.”

“You’re a good man, Newt, do you know that?” Her voice is barely a whisper but he hears her well enough, feeling the vibrations of her words against his side. He shifts and she lifts her head to meet his eyes. The movement brings her impossibly close, their faces mere inches from each other, and he can feel the soft puff of her breath on his cheek.

“Please allow me to have a look at this?” he whispers, gently touching the pad of his forefinger to the bruise on her cheek. She nods her consent and he marvels at the colour of her eyes, getting lost in their velvety warmth as they fix on his face, never blinking. Newt murmurs a spell under his breath and the pad of his finger begins to glow, spreading its soothing warmth as he rubs it into her skin. “There,” he says softly, dropping his hand and watching with satisfaction as the bruise is slowly fading.

“Where did you learn that?” she breathes, touching her finger to her cheek and chances a small smile. “Thank you.”

“Born out of necessity, I suppose,” he says and his cheeks suffuse with heat at the intensity of her gaze. “And you’re most welcome.”

Their gazes lock and his heart skips a beat as Tina sways closer, lips parting as if on a wordless plea when she clutches her left wrist and groans, eyes screwing shut in irritation. “Morrigan’s bedevilled underpants!”

The moment is gone.

“Are you hurt?” Newt asks and she shakes her head in the negative.

Tina wordlessly lifts her shirtsleeve for him to inspect her wrist, where he finds a hastily scribbled message imprinted on her forearm. “It’s from Kyuho,” she answers his questioning look. “He’s
calling us in for a meeting. Invisible ink.”

“That’s how you communicate.”

“Yes. Here, I’ll show you.” She fishes her wand from its hidden pocket of her blouse and directs it at her arm. “Brachium Diligentum.”

*Understood* appears on her own forearm, glowing silver before sinking into her skin and vanishing. She leans back against the wall and heaves a sigh, body tense with frustration. Newt stands and extends a hand towards her and she takes it without hesitation, letting him pull her to her feet. His stomach does a little flip when she gives it a gentle squeeze, smiling brightly before they part with slow reluctance.

Chapter End Notes

Aaaaand the angst train goes ahead full steam. Sorry, not sorry! ;)


Chapter 17

The meeting is already in full swing when they arrive. Congress has reassembled, and none of the representatives looks much too pleased to be back at the Aerie so soon. “We can’t keep hand-holding operations here every five minutes!” the Peruvian delegate says, dark eyes alight with anger as he points an accusing finger at President Picquery. “How is it possible your aurors weren’t able to read a message they planted in the newspaper themselves? Is your government this incapable of keeping its own law enforcement in check?”

Picquery stands, the small, tight fissures at the corners of her eyes the only indication of the furious storm raging within, her face the picture of calm and composure. Her voice, however, is lethal and razor sharp. It cuts across the delegates like a sword, and they jolt in their seats as if to avoid its wrath.

“My aurors were unable to prevent the attack because there was a second, hidden message sent independently from us,” she hisses, hands balling into fists at her sides.

“A second message?”

“Yes. Hidden within the advertisement at the bottom,” Frida butts in, clearing her throat as all eyes turn to her. “The code-breakers were focusing on the main body of the article only.”

“Be that as it may.” Picquery’s voice carries over the cacophony of angry voices erupting at Frida’s words. “We need to double our efforts and start seeing results. Otherwise, this circus here is simply a waste of time.”

Dumbledore steps into the moment of quiet, catching everyone’s attention in a blink of an eye. “I have a proposition to make, if you’ll consider it.” He waves for Theseus to join him. “Mr Theseus Scamander and I have arranged for his younger brother to hold a small academic lecture at the French Ministry of Magic. I believe my old friend Nicholas might know a thing or two about where we might focus our search for the Hallows.”

“Proceed. We need progress, whatever little we can get. It’s becoming difficult for me to justify our involvement in front of my chancellor, as you might imagine,” the Polish envoy says and his silver hair gleams in the ray of sunlight flooding in through the window.

“My Ministre tells me everything has been arranged,” the French delegate smiles, but the gesture doesn’t reach his eyes. “The day after tomorrow in the early evening, we don’t wish for a great disturbance.”

Tina grimaces at his tone but chooses not to dwell on it as she chances a sideways glance at the man at her side. Newt’s eyes are trained on the delegation with near single-minded focus, but the way he shifts his weight from one foot to the other gives him away. They stand with their hands at their sides, fingers very nearly touching, itching to bridge the gap.
Her heart still beats at a million miles a minute and she feels lightheaded and much too hot in her own skin. She expels a deep breath to try and ease the tension, and his gaze finds hers with unerring accuracy. Newt’s eyes look unnaturally bright, illuminated by the morning light, incandescent, glowing gold as if they’d absorbed the sun. His cheeks bear an adorable flush, accentuating the smattering of freckles across his cheekbone and where they’re darkest on the bridge of his nose.

Someone clears their throat and pulls her back into reality. She turns to find Frida raising one pointed eyebrow at her. “I called your name three times, Goldstein.”

“I’m sorry, Frida,” she murmurs, smiling sheepishly. “I haven’t had a chance to sleep yet.”

Frida grimaces and bites her lower lip, face contrite. “Sorry, Mädchen, but that’s not going to happen anytime soon.” Tina’s eyelids flutter with exhaustion but she tries to hide her disappointment as Frida pulls her away to the back of the room. “I need you to contact Rosier. Invite him to the talk, it’ll be a good opportunity.”

“You want me to meet him again.” Tina tastes bile in her mouth at the notion, the memory of his hands on her still too fresh on her mind. Their plan had failed spectacularly, wasn’t it enough?

“Yes. Those plans you told me about, the blueprints of that fortress. I haven’t shared the information with Congress because right now all we have is your word,” Frida whispers, leaning closer to her ear. “I need you to steal them.”

Tina blanches, feeling the back of her neck infuse with heat as her hands turn clammy and cold, and she wipes them on her slacks on instinct. “How do you expect me to do that?”

Frida looks around surreptitiously before thrusting a small crystal vial into Tina’s hand without anyone noticing. “Slip this into his drink. It’s a tasteless and odourless poison. You’ll need to be careful with it, it’s very potent. A small dosage won’t kill him, but he’ll be asleep for some time. He won’t know what hit him.” Tina clutches the bottle to her chest and gives a tiny nod, not trusting her voice to formulate the words as her stomach ties itself into knots.

“Better go soon while they’re still arguing and wasting everyone’s time,” Frida whispers. “Let me see your arm.” Tina wordlessly holds out her wand arm, knowing exactly what Frida is asking for even before she rolls up her sleeve. The lines have darkened, forming the faint outline of a flower, and Tina stifles a gasp when she recognises it. It’s the exact likeness of the poppies out in the fields. “You’ll have to use a concealment charm on this. It’s too prominent now,” Frida says, dropping Tina’s arm and briefly meets her eye before turning to leave.

“She’s sending you out again, isn’t she?” Newt wears a sober expression as he appears by her side and she gives a tiny, helpless shrug. “Now?”

“Yeah. I need to send a message; I won’t be long.” He sends her a questioning look and she knows exactly what he’s asking for. “Newt, you know I can’t tell you.” Tina reaches for his arm to give it a gentle squeeze before she loses her nerve and turns on her heel.

She feels his eyes on her back, watching her, the entire way to the door.

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The meeting stretches well into the morning and when Tina doesn’t return within a few hours Newt busies himself with his books and scriptures. Research so far has unearthed little and his practical experiments even less, so his frustration levels near their boiling point at noon. Newt tries not to dwell on it, but Tina’s bruised face appears in front of his mental eye more times than he
can count over the course of the morning, and he finds himself unable to focus on little else.

“Goodness, Newt! It’s messier than a dragon’s den in here.” Newt lifts his gaze from his spot on the floor to see Leta standing in the doorway, leading Mira by the hand. He looks around for the first time in hours and realises he’s constructed himself a fortress of books and papers, unable to move from his spot.

“Oh, well, I apologise,” he balances on lanky legs to step across his homemade barrier and nearly loses his footing as his boot snags on a book, catching himself at the last moment to stop and curl his body into a graceful bow in front of the child. “Milady.” She giggles and hides her face in Leta’s robe.

“You asked me earlier to bring her up,” Leta explains her presence.

Newt frowns, tiredly scrubbing a hand across his face. “I did, didn’t I?”

“You did,” she says with conviction, mirroring his frown, then, “Are you alright? You seem a little preoccupied today.”

“I — yes, I’m fine, haven’t slept last night, you must excuse me.” He brandishes his wand and the books return to their places with a flick of his wrist. “It’s good you’re here. I’ve decided I’ve spent enough time turning pages with nothing to show for it. There must be another way.”

Leta’s eyes shine with eager hopefulness. “You know how to help her?”

“Might be. Of course, it’s only a theory at this stage.” He crouches down low in front of Mira and extends a hand in invitation. “Would you like to do some magic with me today?”

Mira’s language skills have transformed dramatically within just a few weeks and Newt is grateful he no longer needs Leta to act as a translator between them. She still refuses to speak on her own or without being prompted, but short syllables and small words come easier as time goes by.

“You think teaching her magic is going to take it away?” Leta sounds sceptical, yet her face is open and hopeful as she turns to him and he smiles.

She’d formed a strong bond with the child as the weeks had gone by, showing a side Newt had never seen in her and his heart soars at the thought. Leta, who had never experienced a mother’s warmth herself perfectly radiates maternal pride every time her eyes land on Mira. She’s fiercely protective of the child, watching over her like a lioness over her cubs.

“You think teaching her magic is going to take it away?” Leta sounds sceptical, yet her face is open and hopeful as she turns to him and he smiles.

“An obscurus is a dark form derived from the repression of one’s magical abilities by an aggressor. Taking away the aggressor and allowing the child to perform magic instead of fighting it might help redirect it,” he says and she blinks at him, one brow raised in mild disbelief. “She needs to learn how to channel it, is all. Mira’s young enough, it hasn’t taken a hold of her entirely yet.”

Leta throws both hands up. “Fine! All we can do is try, isn’t it?” Her eyes fall on the child and Newt notices the softness of her gaze, stunned by the changes in her demeanour. “We need to help her, Newt.”

“I’ll try my best, Leta,” he murmurs, sincerely. For the both of you. “I promise.”

“I trust you,” she says, echoing the phrase she’s uttered countless times before, and the vulnerability in her eyes is still the same, but the strength and determination add a new urgency to her voice. “I know you will.”
Maybe she has changed, he thinks.

Leta sits and watches quietly as Newt experiments, playfully trying to get Mira to show some of her magic. The task proves far more difficult than expected, for while she isn’t phased by either of them performing magic with their wands, she’s nearly hysterical with fear the first time Newt makes a feather levitate with his hand. Her eyes roll back, turning jet black as wisps of dark smoke wrap around her hands and arms, engulfing her body until only her silhouette remains.

“Shhh…. There, there, Mira, it’s alright,” Newt tries, holding out his hand in invitation. She shrinks away from him, mortified, yet remains in her human form and doesn’t transform any further.

“That’ll take time,” Leta says, gently stroking Mira’s dark curls when she finally calms, cowering in Leta’s lap. “Who knows what she went through.”

“I don’t know what’ll happen to her if I can’t help her,” he murmurs, crestfallen, rubbing his fingers in a self-soothing gesture. “They’ll never let her go back to her family.”

“She developed the obscurus where she came from; I don’t think it’s a safe place for her to return to. What would the council do with her?” He meets her eyes and Leta’s skin turns ashen at his expression, voice dropping to a whisper. “They’d kill her?”

“Oh, no, at least not outright. They’d keep her like an animal, chained like a dog, and wait for her to die of either misery or loneliness.” He presses his lips into a thin line to keep himself from saying more.

“I won’t let that happen.” Leta’s face shines with fierce determination, chest rising and falling with agitation as her hands ball into fists at her sides. “I’ll make sure they won’t keep her locked up. She’s a child. If she cannot be returned to her family, we’ll be her family.”

You’d know about being locked up in misery, living with a fragmented family, only a pile of shards left for you to sift through.

“Yes,” he says simply, rendered speechless by her uncharacteristic vehemence and the weight of the knowledge of her past.

Leta meets his eyes and a silent understanding passes between them. Whatever had happened in the past, they had both gone their separate ways, grown into their own. It’ll take time to learn each other again, but they’re both willing and determined to put it all behind them and start afresh. His heart had been rebelling against his head these past weeks, sowing doubt, but their shared concern for the innocent child between them, their common goal, had reunited them for the first time in years.

“She won’t have to go through the same things you did, Leta.” His voice breaks with emotion, turning raspy and rough around the edges. “I’ll do everything I can, I promise.”

Her eyes shine with genuine warmth and gratefulness when she smiles at him. “Thank you.”

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The street is deserted when she arrives, the tiny bird singing in one of the hedges the only witness to her presence. It flies away as she passes, trilling an urgent warning, and she wants to tell it not to worry, that she isn’t a threat, then frowns at the notion.

Don’t be a fool; you are carrying poison and lethal magical force, and the power to use them.
The vial she carries under her jacket grows heavier the more she dwells on what it represents, burning through the material of her clothes. She isn’t sure whether it’s the exhaustion or the myriad of emotions she’s experienced within the last forty-eight hours, their dips and turns more violent than any of the roller coasters along Coney Island, but time seems to slow as a tightness constricts her throat. The invisible hand of fear closes around her neck, squeezing tight like Silenus’ fingers did the night before.

*If they told me I would be carrying poison intended for another, would I have believed them a year ago? Would I have laughed it off?*

Her knuckles collide with the solid timber of the entrance door, rough and plain, and the sound makes her jump. Footsteps shuffle closer from within and the door opens a few inches as an eye appears on the other side. “Password?” A voice whispers, lips moving close to the wood.

“Cassiopeia,” Tina murmurs, stepping closer.

He gives a tiny nod. “What is your superior’s code name?”

She licks her lips, mouth impossibly dry as she follows along with protocol, proving her identity. “Lyra. Who’s the person who recruited you?”

“Aquarius.” The door opens to admit her. “Please, come in.”

She follows him through the corridor and up the stairs, glimpsing a flash of movement and a pair of eyes around the corner, but they’re gone as soon as she turns to look. The rural dwelling was chosen for its location and the occupant’s loyalty. A safe house. A way to communicate with the outside world.

The room he leads her to is empty save for a desk and chair facing a window, and the owl waiting atop her perch. The quill and roll of parchment sit on the table top, exactly the way she’s left them. She pulls out the chair and dips the quill into the small pot of ink before pausing to collect her thoughts.

The door clicks closed behind her as she begins to write.

*Dear Silenus,...*

***

Guzman unrolls a large map across the table in the conference room and indicates for them to step closer. The French Ministry’s *Grand Palais* resembles an upside-down letter T, with three main corridors meeting under an enormous domed ceiling. It’s the evening before their mission at the French Ministry, and they’re assembled to discuss strategies. Newt will be accompanied by Dumbledore, Leta and his brother, acting as his assistants and representatives in lieu of his publishers.

Tina, Kyuho and Frida are to come along for protection, mingling with the crowd while Queenie is expected to observe from the gallery. “Now, I want you to listen closely.” Guzman points at Dumbledore and his charges. “You here especially.”

“I’m sorry, *Captain*, but I believe we’re all very much able to hold our own.” Theseus protests, face darkening considerably as he meets Guzman’s eyes without trepidation, unblinking as he gazes back at him in challenge.

“It’s not you I’m worried about, Scamander, but your brother and your fiancée. They’re *civilians*. Amateurs,” Guzman growls, sighing heavily at Theseus’ unhappy frown. “Don’t get me wrong,
I’m not questioning your ability to defend yourself, but this is a delicate, highly sensitive operation.”

“We are aware,” Dumbledore chimes in and Guzman glowers at him.

“One wrong move and we’re not only endangering ourselves but every person present at the lecture. This isn’t child’s play,” Frida says, stepping in. “One wrong move could expose us all.”

Tina stands next to her superior, silently fingering her locket, eyes distant with her gaze trained on the map.

“There’s no room to stray from the path, and I’ll need you to follow your orders no matter what.”

Guzman’s gaze lands on Newt, who sighs and rolls his eyes to the ceiling. “No improvisations, no heroics, no funny business. Have I made myself clear?”

“Very,” Theseus says, arms crossed in front of his chest, unimpressed.

“Good, now we’ve covered the basics, let’s move on. You’ve been assigned code-names,” Guzman barks, wiping his forehead in agitation.

Leta frowns. “Code-names?”

“Of course. Everyone’s got to have one. We can’t exactly throw your real names around.”

Guzman consults the piece of parchment in his hand.

Frida clears her throat. “You’ll be using these throughout the evening if you need to communicate with one of us, so remember them. I trust you’ve been shown how to use the invisible ink charm?”

They nod their affirmation. “Good. Just remember to concentrate on the person and the message you intend to send.”

“Everyone’s code names are on the list.” Guzman points at the wall behind him. “Now let’s go through our agenda one more time. Frida?”

“I’ll be attending as a German government official, keeping in the background to keep an eye on the door with Auror Chun,” Frida confirms, rattling off her orders.

“Very good,” Guzman says, turning to Newt. “They’ll be keeping the doors secure and you’ll have Goldstein and me in close proximity just in case. You focus on the lecture and get Flamel to meet you in private.”

“The talk will likely be in the main atrium.” Frida points to the large intersection at the centre. “It’s got a viewing gallery that runs the entire length of the cupola, right under the ceiling. Queenie Goldstein will be listening in from up on the second floor and watching out for trouble.”

Guzman nods. “Whatever happens, do not look our way. Do not acknowledge one of us unless you’re being addressed. We cannot be seen together.”

“We’ll be arriving separately, and will stay separated unless necessary. Use the invisible ink charm if you need to get a message across to us. We’ll be watching your back so you’re free to obtain the intel you need. In this you’ll be on your own,” Frida says and Dumbledore gives a short nod of acknowledgement.

“If there’s nothing further?” Guzman asks and is greeted with silence. “Very well. Good luck to us all.”

***
The Grand Palais is a far cry from the British Ministry of Magic’s dark underground dwelling. They’re polar opposites in more ways than one. The French Ministry chooses to hide in plain sight, overground, with plenty of sunlight. The glass and iron ceiling appears to be floating above, elegantly curving over the rest of the building. Newt delights in the drawings and scriptures scurrying along the glass, where agile kelpies flit around the iron frame, playing catch, and docile erumpents amble across the dome to butt their horns in greeting.

The atrium is crowded with people when they arrive, and Newt wills the swarm of pixies in his stomach to settle. The guests are whispering and pointing at him as they make their way to the podium at the front. His gaze sweeps the room and he glances at Queenie out of the corner of his eye, where she’s leaning on the balustrade one level above. Guzman is blending into the mass of people to his right, keeping close watch over any new arrivals.

Frida and Kyuho are nowhere to be seen. He’s about to turn away to fetch his notes from the case when his gaze lands on Tina standing at the centre of the corridor, dark eyes skimming the crowd as if she’s searching for something.

Or someone.

She wears a dress of lethal simplicity, a proud warrior dressed to kill, its midnight blue silk flowing around her like water, all the way to the floor. His throat goes dry and his tongue sticks to the roof of his mouth as he watches her, mesmerised by the transformation.

Newt cannot tear his eyes away from her, cataloguing the confident sway of her hips and the small, secret smile gracing her lips as she seeks and finds her target, gathering the hem of her dress on her thigh while she walks further into the atrium. She moves with uncharacteristic surety and poise as she glides along the floor, and he plucks at his bow tie to loosen the fabric around his throat, taking large gulps of air to ease the sudden lightheadedness.

A dark-haired gentleman moves to greet her and Newt gasps when she leans in for the customary French greeting, pressing her cheek to his with obvious familiarity. She turns to take a seat next to the stranger, and Newt frowns at the possessive hand he splays over her back, where her dress dips near scandalously low, leaving little to the imagination. It’s a gesture of ownership, like he’s trying to brand her as his, and Newt nearly topples over when he realises it’s this hand, these cursed fingers which left their mark on her delicate skin.

His mouth tastes like ashes.

Theseus clears his throat at his side. “Now isn’t the time to stare, Newt.” There’s no teasing in his brother’s voice, only dead seriousness, and it’s the push he needs to wrench his thoughts away from Tina. They’re here on a mission with a clear purpose, and they’ve all got their roles to play. Tina is strong and capable, he knows, yet his inner dragon roars with blazing fury at the thought of what this man might do to her.

Touching her hair. Caressing her skin. Kissing her lips.

Dumbledore’s elbow gently collides with his side. “There he is.” He juts his chin in the direction of an elegantly dressed, elderly wizard with long, silver hair and a beige, brocade trimmed velvet robe. The man stalks across to them to greet Dumbledore with an enthusiastic hug, kissing both his cheeks. “Dumbledore! It’s been too long, my friend.”

“That it has, Nicholas,” Dumbledore says with twinkling eyes, turning to grip Newt’s shoulder with fatherly pride. “Let me introduce you to the man of the hour. Author, magizoologist, and a former pupil of mine, Mr Newton Scamander.”
Flamel shakes Newt’s hand with equal enthusiasm. “Nicholas Flamel. Mr Scamander, it’s always a pleasure to meet a fellow scientist, especially one so young and knowledgeable in his field.”

“I’d hardly call it knowledgeable, Mr Flamel; I’m merely curious and rather invested in bettering our understanding and acceptance of these extraordinary creatures,” Newt says to his shoulder and manages a polite grimace.

“Ah, and he’s modest, too.” Flamel smiles and exchanges a meaningful glance with Dumbledore. “Well, I look forward to hearing your thoughts on the matter. We shall have more time for an in-depth discussion afterwards.” He claps Newt on the shoulder before going to take his seat.

“He’s an interesting fellow, but quite charming in his own right,” Dumbledore says with a crooked smile. “A brilliant mind.”

The quiet murmur dies down as Flamel takes his seat as if he’s the man everyone’s been waiting for, and Theseus turns to Newt with a serious, sober expression. “I think it’s time.”

***

Queenie lets her gaze take a turn about the room, sweeping across elegantly dressed ladies and handsomey decked gentleman bathed in the soft early evening glow. She spots Kyuho and Guzman in the crowd and she has a direct view on Newt at his podium from where she’s standing.

His magically-magnified words float up to her through the cacophony of thoughts surrounding her like a swarm of buzzing bees. “— through countless hours of research. It’s imperative we consider our own actions which may be driving these formidable beasts from their habitats —“

_Hello, again._

Queenie freezes as a familiar presence fills her mind, eyes going wide with recognition and her heart skips a beat in her horror. The velvety smooth quality of the female voice wraps around her like a glove, caressing her, yet Queenie trembles with fear, tasting the underlying strength and danger as it probes her.

“— they’re an interesting subspecies I encountered in the subtropical rainforest of Southeast-Asia —“

She looks up, willing her racing heart to slow as her eyes swivel to surreptitiously scan her surroundings. There. Queenie freezes, trying not to let her unease show as her gaze falls on the familiar, black-glad figure with a pointy hat. Vinda Rosier glides along the perimeter, one hand stroking the balustrade as she goes, and other guests make way for her without being prompted. She never takes her eyes off Queenie, honing in on her like a cat knowing the bird has nowhere to go.

_We need to talk._

She’s trapped.

Chapter End Notes

Not too much direct Newtina interaction here (they need to get their heartbeats back
to normal and catch a breath), but bear with me... it's all got a purpose. ;}
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

Part two of the French Ministry mission. :) 

I have assigned code names for every character, but they won't all get mentioned in the story, so it made no real sense for Guzman or Frida to rattle them off. These would be used with informants or when sending messages. Nevertheless, here's the list in case you're curious (and yes, these are all constellations):

Tina: Aguila
Kyuho: Pryxis
Guzman: Aries
Frida: Lyra
Dumbledore: Phoenix
Theseus: Pegasus
Newt: Draco
Leta: Columba
Queenie: Musca

Tina shifts in her seat, trying and failing to shake the feeling of unease, like something is horribly, terribly wrong. She can see the back of Guzman’s head from where she’s sitting, and wills herself to breathe, knowing Kyuho and Frida are concealed among the crowd behind her, yet she doesn’t dare turn around.

Newt stands tall behind the podium, cutting a smart figure in his suit and bow tie, and she fights the urge to catch his eye. Dumbledore and Theseus hold watch behind him while Leta looks on, eyes lowered demurely. The perfect highborn lady.

Her eyes catch sight of her sister, drawn by an inexplicable need to check on her, and her heart nearly jumps into her throat. Queenie is leaning against the balustrade, facing a familiar, dark haired woman, face contorted in worry and open fear.

I need to get word to Frida, Tina thinks frantically, clutching the material of her dress while she contemplates her options, considering and discarding them at lightning speed. “You must excuse me,” she says sweetly, turning to Silenus with a smile. “I’m going to the powder room to refresh.”

“Of course,” he murmurs, putting a hand on her thigh. “This is all terribly dull; we could get out of here if you’d prefer.”

She suppresses her anger at his arrogant words, fear taking a hold of her once more and she smiles at him in thanks. “Certainly, we can leave as soon as I return.”

“Let me escort you.” His hand feels heavy on her back as he walks her towards the exit, burning her skin where it presses into her spine.

Tina takes a long steadying breath as she leans her back against the bathroom door once she’s finally alone. She knows she’s only got moments — seconds perhaps — until this might all go sour, and she extracts her wand to direct it at her forearm.
Leaving with SR to preserve cover. VR talking to Musca.

The reply is near instantaneous. Do not abort mission. Good luck.

Her arms tremble badly as she grips the basin for support, willing her racing heart to slow. Do not abort the mission. Remember what you are carrying around your neck. Get a grip, Goldstein! You’ve got work to do.

There’s no way to know if her cover is still intact, if she’ll be safe or walk right into a trap, but there’s nothing to be done about it. Worrying certainly won’t help. Worrying means you suffer twice. Tina grimaces, thinking of Newt and drawing strength from the memory of his smiling eyes. She turns, magicking a smile on to her face before exiting the bathroom as if nothing is amiss.

Be safe, little sparrow, the thinks hard at her sister, hoping beyond hope Queenie will hear. Don’t worry about me. I’ll be alright.

***

What do you want from me?

Queenie doesn’t want her thoughts to sound so small and frightened, but fear has taken a firm hold of her, pulling the reins as her stomach contracts painfully, and she’s unable to fight it.

I know he’s spoken to you. We need your help. Vinda comes to stand in front of her, body relaxed and unafraid.

Queenie tries to mirror her stance, infusing her gaze with confidence as she stares in defiance. I already told him I ain’t helping you. I’ve done my part.

Oh, naive little girl. Did you really think you’d ever be done? You’re done when we say so. Vinda smirks.

Queenie remembers Dumbledore’s words and swallows against the ball of fear lodged deep in her throat. What does he want?

Vinda turns, looking down at the crowd gathered below. Queenie follows her line of sight and frowns when it comes to rest on the man at its centre. Queenie freezes. What does he want with Newt?

He’s got something Gellert needs, and he can’t get it back until Scamander’s out of the way.

Queenie closes her eyes, feeling the ball of fear sliding down her throat and into her stomach, where it sits, growing heavier and heavier until it’s encompassing her in its entirety. He’s my friend. I can’t betray him like this.

Vinda leans closer, an ugly sneer distorting her beautiful face, showing her real self for the first time as whispers into Queenie’s ear, “Well, it wouldn’t be the first time you’re betraying someone you love, sweet one. Your beloved sister is with my brother right at this moment. One word from me and you’ll never see her again. Remember that.” Queenie sucks in a shocked gasp of air and Vinda leans back with a satisfied smirk.

Good. Await our directions.

She turns to leave and doesn’t wait to watch Queenie crumple to the floor into a heap of despair.
Newt suffers through a flurry of congratulations and handshakes after the talk, but he hardly notices them, preoccupied with the image of Tina leaving with the handsome, dark gentleman plaguing his mind. He remembers the look of naked panic on her face, there and gone again like a flash of lightning, her movements tense and mechanical, devoid of their fluidity from mere minutes before.

He closes his eyes in an attempt to clear his mind and clenches his fingers into fists to keep them from trembling. Flamel has ushered them into his private study, a tastefully decorated room with views across the inner courtyard.

“Well, Mr Scamander, I must say that’s an interesting observation on murtlap bites. Extraordinary how they affect a muggle’s physiology! Fascinating subject.” He pours them each a snifter of dark golden liquid, swirling it around the glass before holding it up against a light.

“Oh yes, quite,” Newt murmurs, accepting the tumbler, staring into it as if it might hold the answers to the questions on his mind. Who is this man? Where is he taking her?

“Nicholas, we’re here on serious matters,” Dumbledore interrupts Newt’s train of thought, drawing his mind to the issue at hand.

“It’s about him, isn’t it?” It isn’t a question so much as an observation, and Dumbledore nods, face grim.

“Yes. I suspect — no, I know — he’s after the Hallows.” Flamel regards them with a sceptical tilt of his head and Dumbledore’s face hardens. “Don’t say it, Nicholas. The signs are there, surely you must have reached the same conclusion.”

Flamel sighs heavily and collapses onto the chair behind his desk like a sack of potatoes, rubbing his forehead. “Indeed, I have. And I have a very good idea why you’re here, Albus. I wish I could help you.”

“But you can!” Dumbledore protests, face infusing with colour, temper rising. “You’re the world’s most knowledgeable expert on the resurrection stone. We know he’s likely already acquired the Elder Wand — imagine what the stone could do if it fell into his hands.”

Flamel’s face goes white as the wall behind him, devoid of colour, and his voice drops to a frightened whisper. “I don’t want to imagine it, Albus.”

“Then help us!”

“You don’t understand, it’s not as if I don’t want to help you,” Flamel says, face distorting with pain. “I truly cannot do it. All my research, the records, birth certificates — they were stolen from my home two months ago. It’s all gone.”

Dumbledore leans forward on his knees, burying his face in his hands. His voice is a low, terse whisper when it comes, near inaudible, muffled by his skin. “It’s all gone?”

“Then must be something that can be done, surely,” Newt says and Flamel shrugs apologetically.

“My dear boy, I wish there was. Unless you find who has taken them I don’t see a way.” He pats Dumbledore on the arm in feeble apology. “I’m sorry that your efforts were in vain.”

“It’s not a setback, it’s simply a holdup,” Dumbledore says, forcing a smile. “We will find another way. Can we count on your assistance, should we need it?”
Flamel nods. “You have it. Anything I can do.”

***

They rendezvous in the atrium, bumping into each other as Dumbledore leads them from Flamel’s office. Frida is clutching a panic-stricken Queenie by the arm, wide-eyed and with a face the colour of the marble tiles at their feet, motioning for them to follow her into a deserted corridor. She rounds on Queenie as soon as they’re out of earshot, a deep furrow forming between her brows. “Tell me. What in Merlin’s name did Vinda Rosier want with you?”

Newt’s eyebrows rise to his hairline at the mention of the name, and the uneasy tingling at the back of his neck intensifies, his insides churning. Queenie doesn’t react at first, eyes raking over them as she attempts to steady her breathing. Her voice is deadly quiet and heavy with fear when she speaks. “Where’s Tina?”

Frida’s eyebrows knit together as her lips press into a thin line. “Auror Goldstein is following her assignment as planned.”

Queenie gawks at her, eyes wide and fearful. “You let her go with Rosier?”

Frida’s face hardens. “There’s no indication her cover’s been compromised, so her part of the mission is going ahead.”

Queenie opens her mouth and her beautiful face distorts into a mask of agony as she lets out a sob and howls like a wounded animal. “They know! They know exactly who she is and you let her go with him!”

Newt’s insides turn to ice as the blood freezes in his veins. Theseus’ hand moulds to his shoulder, fingers digging into his flesh, but he welcomes the pain. It’s the only thing grounding him right now.

Frida’s face drains of colour, eyes going wide with realisation before she can stop herself, and she clears her throat as if to swallow the lump forming there. “There’s nothing to be done about it now.” Kyuho reaches for his wand, about to direct it at his forearm when Frida’s fingers wrap around his wrist to stop him, face severe. “Don’t! This would only endanger her further! If she doesn’t send a distress signal, we simply need to trust her abilities to complete the mission.” Or perish in the attempt.

It’s the words she isn’t saying, yet they linger in the air like a bad smell, clogging their senses and making it difficult to think past the fear settling in their bones. Frida looks around the group. “Let’s head back to the Aerie. She’s doing her part, let us do ours.”

***

Daylight has long since faded away by the time Tina and Silenus pop into existence outside La Roseraie. The fires have been lit along the path, indicating the way to the door. Tina shivers as unease creeps up her spine, rising steadily like evening fog over the river, unable to shake the feeling she’s being led to her doom like a pig to slaughter. His fingers curl around her biceps like a vice as if he expects her to run, and she wonders briefly if they’re going to leave a mark.

The house is as deserted as always, his servants making themselves scarce as soon as they arrive, and he leads her to his favourite drawing room to sit by the fire. A carafe of wine and two glasses appear at the snap of his fingers, it’s dark red liquid glowing like rubies against the firelight as he pours. It’s their customary drink of choice, yet today he could have poured a glass of vinegar.
instead; to Tina, it would have tasted just the same.

She tries to hide the nervous tremor when she accepts the glass, resting it in her lap, clutched tight between her fingers.

“Well, Mrs Riddell, wasn’t that a bore. I don’t see why we should handle these creatures any differently. What’s wrong with the way we’re doing it now?” He takes a sip from his glass and chuckles darkly. “Frankly, I wonder who invited this self-proclaimed expert. I’m sure it was Flamel, he’s just the same. I could never stand him when he taught at Beauxbatons.”

Tina nods along politely, taking measured sips of her drink. She’s used to his monologues, his preferred way of conversation, and listens quietly until he loses interest.

“I’m certain he must have hated me equally in return.” He smiles devilishly. “Only I got him to pay me back for all the years of suffering.”

“Oh?” Tina meets his eye, raising a pointed eyebrow to feign interest. Just keep him talking.

“Yes. You see, he had something Gellert needed. Old Flamel kept it locked away at his house.” He licks his lips, eyes gleaming with excitement. “I got Vinda to lure him away under the pretence of some scientific consultation and went to his house. His safe was easy enough to crack.”

Tina swallows thickly, hoping beyond hope it hasn’t reached Grindelwald’s fingers yet, thinking carefully how to phrase her next question. “Gellert must be pleased with you, or does he not know of it yet?”

Silenus grins at her, showing his snowy white teeth. “He’s glimpsed at it, but I’m keeping it safe for him. My family vault is impenetrable.”

He smiles, touching his hand to his throat where Tina knows he keeps a small, silver key around his neck. “He must be grateful to you,” Tina murmurs if only to keep him talking.

“He is, he knows he can trust me. Once he’s achieved his plans I’m sure to be… adequately rewarded for my efforts.” He leans back in his armchair, feet splayed wide in front of him, and trails his eyes up and down her body without shame.

Tina squirms under his gaze, feeling exposed, and tries not to jerk away when he runs his forefinger from her chin down the length of her throat to her sternum, smiling deviously when he feels her swallow. He rises to his feet, wordlessly reaching for her hand to pull her upright. She follows him, letting him lead her to the foot of the stairs before tugging him to a halt. “I think I’d like another drink, wouldn’t you?” she says, consciously infusing her voice with velvet, honey sweet.

“Of course,” he says, kissing her knuckles, “as you wish.”

She makes sure to hold his gaze until the wall comes between them, sending him one last enticing smile before turning a corner. Their glasses are where they left them, and she pours the last of the wine before pulling the thin crystal vial from her pocket. She uncorks it and watches the clear potion pour into the crimson liquid, gently swirling it around to combine. The glasses are a heavy weight to carry when she ascends the stairs.

Don’t lose your nerve now, Goldstein. It isn’t going to kill him.

Tina takes one deep, steadying breath before pushing open the door with a gentle nudge of her hip and puts the glasses down on the nightstand beside the bed. Silenus looks at her expectantly, wintry eyes aglow with predatory hunger, and she wills her lips to pull into an alluring smile. He
is sprawled across the mattress in a pose of relaxed, cocky confidence; half sitting, half lying down, shirt untucked and opened at the top.

Reality catches up with her then, and time comes to a grinding halt as he grins up at her and reaches for the material of her dress. Life does have funny ways of working out. Its intricate patterns intersect and mingle in a random, unpredictable fashion, often changing course without warning.

It’s an organised chaos, an unforeseeable chain of events making up the present.

It’s a whirlwind of emotions, with images and memories zooming past at lightning speed, and the sudden, intense awareness of where she is and what she’s about to do nearly makes her stumble. She catches herself and her lips pull into a slow, sensual smile as she reaches behind her, careful to touch his fingers as she passes him his glass. Silenus doesn’t break eye contact as he sips it and she watches his tongue sweep across his bottom lip.

He drains the rest of it with one large swallow before reaching for her glass to put it aside, drawing her closer and in, trapping her between his legs. Tina squeezes her eyes shut as he touches her, withdrawing into the safe, happy place she escapes to whenever she is with Silenus.

A place filled with warmth and a golden sun, with kind, smiling green eyes and freckled skin.

***

Newt watches the moon reflect on the water’s surface below, seeing yet not seeing it as its mirror image ripples softly in the current. The river is quiet tonight, almost perfectly still, yet his mind is the exact opposite as he tries not to ponder the possibilities. The knowledge he now carries makes his stomach turn and he wills himself not to imagine Silenus Rosier’s cruel, merciless fingers pressing into Tina’s moonstone skin.

How could she agree to this? Is fighting the cause worth such sacrifices? He knows it’s what it is, a sacrifice; an exchange, offering herself up for the information she needs, yet this knowledge doesn’t make it hurt any less.

(Deep down he knows it doesn’t matter who she’s with and why; it would still hurt in equal measure, yet he thinks he’d try to be happy for her if she found a suitable, kind-hearted man of her own choosing.)

For the first time in his life, Newt experiences the urge to wrap his own fingers around another man’s throat as pure, white-hot rage burns through his veins. He’s never known hatred, but he thinks it must feel much like this.

Newt curls into himself, soothing his cheek over his knee as he leans against the window.

Sleep won’t come easy tonight.

***

The potion takes far longer to take effect than she anticipated and Tina’s nerves are nearing their breaking point by the time he succumbs. She’s careful as she tests his state, gently prodding his torso with her forefinger before lifting his eyelid to find his pupils fully dilated.

*Out for the count*, she thinks a little nastily and brandishes her wand. The leather band around his neck gives easily enough, the surrounding wards no match for her newly-acquired curse-breaking skills.
An idea forms in her mind as she turns the metal in her hand, eyes flitting back and forth between the object on the bedside table and his face. He gives a hearty snore and that decides it. She fists his hair and yanks hard, her hand coming away with a generous amount of silky strands. Tina dresses with haste and pockets the silver key alongside his wand and hair, carefully tucked into a handkerchief, and turns on her heel without so much as a backward glance, leaving him sprawled inelegantly across the bed.

Finding the room with the blueprints proves far more difficult, and she’s beginning to wonder if it’s a hidden room or one that moves places at will when she comes across the familiar doorway with a fat-cheeked cherub above the architrave. Small beads of sweat appear on her brow as she unlaces its wards and countless jinxes, and she’s nearly sobbing with relief when it clicks open with a gentle sigh.

The drawing is spread across the table like the time he’d shown it to her, it’s silver ink glowing in the semi-darkness, lighting her path. Tina replicates it with a flick of her wand and stashes it with the little silver key in her pocket before silently fleeing the room.

The halls are deserted and she makes it outside without being challenged. Her feet step silently but her breathing turns rugged by the time she passes through the main gates and breaks into a run, clutching the material of her skirt with desperate fingers. The warded border shimmers lazily in the hazy morning light, shrouded in mist with the sun not yet peeking above the horizon.

She’s gone in a cloud of dark fabric and dust before the first ray of sunshine breaks through the trees.
Chapter Notes

I apologise in advance to every French-speaking reader for my twelve-years-stale Highschool French. I hope it's not too terrible.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They gather at first light to recount the conversation with they had with Flamel. Guzman’s dark skin turns ashen as they relay Flamel’s account in detail. “He claims they’re stolen — so it was all for nothing?” Guzman stands with both hands at his hips, jaw set tight and nostrils flaring like a raging bull’s, ready to charge.

“Two months ago, yes.” Theseus mirrors his stance, cocking his head to the side in challenge, willing him to continue the argument. “Do you mean to imply he’s lying?”

“I’m not implying anything, Scamander. Fact is, I agreed to send you off to get information and now you return empty-handed, and with one of my operatives in a potentially dangerous situation.” Guzman leans closer, eyes bulging, and makes a terrible attempt at a British accent. “Pardon me if I’m not amused.”

Theseus opens his mouth to protest, closing it promptly when Leta’s hand lands on his forearms and she sends him a meaningful glance, dark eyes flashing dangerously in the dim light of the petroleum lamp. Now isn’t the time. Picquery stands with a sigh, hands balling into fists at her sides. “Fact is, Arnold, should Goldstein’s cover be compromised we might all be in danger of exposure.”

Guzman snorts, face pulling into an angry frown. “Goldstein of all people.” Guzman rounds on the President, who doesn’t flinch when he points a trembling finger at her face. “I told you it was a bad idea when you selected her to come along. She’s reckless and doesn’t think of the consequences before running into things head on. I knew this would end in disaster.”

“She’ll be alright.” Frida’s voice is gravely serious, yet it drips with confidence as she steps into the light, arms crossed in defiance. “This mission wasn’t her call. I sent her off.”

Guzman scoffs. “With all due respect, Frida, but you don’t know her as I do. You haven’t worked with her for long.”

“You’re right in that assumption, yes. But I’ve worked with her closer in the last few months than you ever have, and I’m saying she’ll be alright.” Frida’s eyebrows disappear beneath her fringe as she glowers at him. “A person’s abilities are not only defined by the way they wield their wand, Guzman.”

President Picquery clears her throat. “That’s enough, Arnold. We cannot waste our time arguing about this. Surely Flamel’s research cannot be the only option we have. We need to keep searching.”

“No, we don’t.”

They turn towards the new voice when Newt’s breath hitches in his throat and relief washes over
him like a tidal wave as his eyes fall on Tina’s silhouette in the door. He takes a quick inventory of her body, noting her dishevelled hair and wrinkled clothing, her makeup no longer crisp and fresh, looking a little shaken but very much alive.

*Thank Paracelsus, you’re alright.*

Newt fights the urge to go to her, to make sure Silenus hasn’t left any more marks on her. Queenie streaks across the room to meet her, a flash of blonde curls and green silk, nearly toppling Tina over with the intensity of her embrace. “Oh.”

Tina turns her face into her sister’s hair, eyes squeezing shut in reaction, and her hand trembles badly as it comes to rest on Queenie’s shoulder, grabbling at the material of her dress, holding on for dear life. They part with matching sets of shining eyes and elated smiles. Everyone’s eyes follow Tina from the door to the central table where she empties her pockets and Newt squints as she produces her wand, enlarging the items with a gentle flick of her wrist.

The paper crackles softly as she taps it to unfold the sections. It blooms under the tip of her wand like the petals of a flower, and a collective gasp goes through the group as they marvel at the scintillating constellations across the page. Picquery is the first to regain her voice. “What is this?”

“Nurmengard,” Tina says simply, meeting the president’s gaze. “Grindelwald’s new fortress. Rosier is building it for him.”

“It’s true then,” Dumbledore whispers and Newt tears his eyes away from Tina to send him a questioning glance. “I suspected it long ago, but I wasn’t sure until now.”

*Another thing the two of you planned, then.*

“There?” Frida’s question rings out like a shot in the silence of the room.

“I don’t know, he never disclosed its location.” Tina’s voice falters. “Maybe he never fully trusted me.” *Maybe he always suspected,* are the words she doesn’t say.

“You won’t return to La Roseraie after today, this much is clear,” Frida says, stepping up. “Thank you, Auror Goldstein.”

“That isn’t all,” Tina says, producing a small silver key and holding it up against the light. “His vault at Gringotts holds something he stole, something Grindelwald wants.”

Dumbledore looks at her with renewed interest. “Did you say he stole it? Did he — did he tell you where he took it from?”

“Yes,” she breathes, kneading her fingers. “It belongs to Nicholas Flamel. I don’t know what it is, but it must be important.”

“The documents!” Dumbledore’s eyes shine with wicked glee, and his voice trembles with barely suppressed excitement as he continues. “We need to get into the vault.”

Theseus turns and stares at him as if he’d grown an additional head. “You do realise this is Gringotts we’re talking about? We can’t simply walk up to the counter and ask them to show us the way. It’s not like we have a key!”

“But I do,” Tina says, lifting the object in her hand for emphasis. “And I have an idea how to get in.”

Guzman stares and Frida reaches to manually close his jaw with a satisfied *I-told-you-so* look on
her face. “Let’s hear it, Goldstein.”

“Silenus is still unconscious and will be for a while yet,” she begins, fingers wrapping around the table edge until her knuckles turn white.

“Ten hours,” Frida confirms.

“We have until noon, then. Plenty of time to get in and out before he wakes.”

“How do you plan to get past the security checks? They won’t let you pass unless you can verify you’re the owner,” Guzman muses aloud.

Tina smirks, reaching into the hidden pocket of her dress and produces Silenus’ wand. The wood clatters as it lands on the table. “All I need is someone to come along and assume Rosier’s identity.” She unfolds the handkerchief to show its contents. “This shouldn’t be a problem with a little bit of Polyjuice Potion.”

Frida nods. “Very well. I’ll arrange for the Polyjuice Potion for Auror Chun and some Wideye Potion for yourself, Goldstein. I’ll need you to be alert and awake out there.”

Theseus clears his throat. “With all due respect, but I think it might be better if someone else accompanies Miss Goldstein.” He turns to Kyuho. “I’m sorry, I don’t mean to offend, but Gringotts regularly keeps dragons and all manner of creatures to guard its vaults. My brother would be far better equipped for the task.”

“Out of the question!” Guzman bellows, gritting his teeth. “I won’t send an untrained civilian on a delicate mission of this nature.”

“Captain Guzman,” Theseus says and his voice is laced with a quiet, lethal fury, making Guzman shrink where he stands. “My brother fought in the war. His methods might be unconventional and far from traditional, but he’s more than qualified to complete this mission, I assure you. I needn’t remind you it was Newt who first captured Grindelwald.”

Picquery steps up, speaking with finality and leaving no room for further arguments. “Enough! It’s decided, then. Mr Scamander and Miss Goldstein will prepare and leave immediately. Meeting dismissed.”

Newt gulps, meeting Theseus’ gaze and frowns at the satisfied gleam in his brother’s eyes.

Thes, what have you done?

***

Tina frowns into the cup she’s holding, desperately willing the pewter-coloured potion to turn into coffee instead. It leaves a metallic aftertaste as she swallows, and she grimaces at the feel of it sliding down her throat. Her stomach gives a painful lurch, reminding her the last time she’d eaten was more than twenty-four hours ago, yet she’d sooner drink another helping of this potion than bring any food past her lips.

They’re going through the last of their preparations and Tina is grateful when Queenie stops fussing over her. Clothes and makeup refreshed, she turns to where Newt is standing, considering his case where it lies propped open on the table in front of him. They hadn’t spoken a word since she returned, and she’s confused by the firm set of his jaw every time he looks her way and never meets her eyes.

Tina’s about to ask about the case when he raises his wand and transfigures it into an elegant
black satchel before turning to her with a sigh. “I’m glad you’re back unharmed, Tina.”

He’s dressed in an unfamiliar black suit, crisp and angular, his collar lacking his customary bow tie and she cringes at the unpleasant aftertaste it leaves in her mouth, shocked at how different he looks. Tina tries not to be hurt by the way he lowers his head to avoid her gaze or the carefully neutral tone of his voice. He turns away before she has time to react, speaking to the wall in front of him. “I think we should go.”

“Yes,” she murmurs and decides to let it go, making a mental note to confront him when they return.

*There’s plenty of time to talk afterwards,* she tells herself.

***

The Parisian Gringotts is located in the north of the city, in a building overlooking the canal. It’s imposing white stone columns are oddly familiar, echoing its cousin on Diagon Alley, yet the perfectly cylindrical dome crowing the structure is not, looking weightless despite its monumentality, its gleaming white walls pierced by countless windows at the top and a row of delicately framed arches at the base, sitting side by side as they span the full circumference.

Tina turns to Newt in the shadow of the building they Apparated to, adding a few strands of hair to a silver flask before wordlessly handing it across to him. Newt swallows it dutifully and without comment, breathing through its revolting taste as it slides down the back of his throat.

*Rotten fish. I’m not surprised,* he thinks with a grimace. *Rotten to the core, just like you.*

His skin crawls and shivers, coming alive as his entire body groans through the transformation. Afterwards, he gazes at his hands in wonder, marvelling at the smooth, even skin spanning his fingers.

Fingers that touched Tina’s skin. Burnished it. Brutalised it.

He looks up to find her staring at her shoes, wide-eyed and pale, and he doesn’t miss the way she avoids looking at his face. “Come on, let’s go,” she murmurs to his left ear before stepping out into the light.

Sunlight streams through the open skylight of the dome when they enter, bathing its interior in a misty morning glow, and Newt raises his eyes to the ceiling to surreptitiously watch the clouds sail across the sky. “*Bonjour Monsieur Rosier, ;*” one of the goblins greets them in a pompous, bored-sounding drawl to offer his assistance. “*Comment puis-je vous aider?*”

Newt swallows, remembering the few sentences of rudimentary French they drilled into him before leaving the Aerie, and he clears his throat, forcing his eyes to hold the creature’s gaze without blinking. “*J’ai besoin d’accéder à mon coffre-fort.*”

He tries not to wince at the sound of his voice, instead infusing it with nasal arrogance, raising an expectant eyebrow to prove his point. His fingers tighten around the handle of his case, concealed as an elegant black leather satchel, and he’s glad for the familiar weight of it in his hand.

The Goblin nods, unimpressed. “*Bien sûr, monsieur.*”

Newt leans over him and schools his features into a steely glare. “*English, please. It would be terribly rude to my companion here, who isn’t in command of the language.*”

“Of course, monsieur. Madame,” the creature says, lips pulling into tight grimace which could
charitably be called a smile. “Follow me, please.”

They suffer through the procedures unimpeded, passing their identity checks with ease as the wand Newt produces is deemed satisfactory, and are led down a set of impressive marble stairs. Newt ponders their options when daylight gives way to dim electrical lamps as they move underground. The corridor is a far cry from the cave below Gringotts at Diagon Alley, with its tiled floors and stuccoed ceilings, yet it bears the same air of secrecy and importance, and of valuable goods well protected.

*How are we going to get rid of you?* he thinks, watching the Goblin’s back as he waddles in front of them.

This they hadn’t discussed during their whirlwind departure, mere hours after Tina returned, and her demeanour tells nothing of her current state. It’s impossible for him to gauge her thoughts as she walks by his side with a near-impenetrable gaze, features carefully neutral, and not a sound coming from her lips.

***

“Hey doll, you alright?” Queenie turns into Jacob with a grateful sigh, burying her face in the crook of his neck and seeking comfort in his familiar scent. The smell of home.

“Just peachy, honey,” she murmurs into his skin. “I’m just worried about Newt and Teenie, is all.” She knows she’s lying, but she keeps this little detail to herself. Jacob is her constant, her rock, her safety anchor, and she can’t bear the thought of losing him.

Jacob laughs, deep and strong, and his whole body reverberates with the sound. “They’ll be alright, too. You’ll see, they’ll be back before you know it.” A pause. “I think being alone and away from here might actually do them a world of good.”

She leans away to meet his gaze, eyes dancing with curiosity as his lips pull into a knowing smile, pulling her along. Queenie beams at him as she shifts through his thoughts, unable to suppress the giggle fighting its way to the surface. “Oh Jacob, I hope you’re right.”

*Hello, Little Sparrow.*

Queenie freezes as the smile slips from her lips, fingers curling around Jacob’s biceps in shock and horror. His brow furrows as he seeks her gaze, but she lowers her eyes to the floor. “Queenie?”

*What do you want?*

*I’ve missed you, dearest, it’s been too long. I’m coming to see you. We’ll be reunited soon.* There’s an edge to the sound of his thoughts, probing deep before withdrawing without warning.

“I need to see Dumbledore,” she whispers and extracts herself from Jacob’s embrace and hurries away without an explanation.

Her knuckles hit the door hard enough to bruise and Dumbledore opens it at the second knock, wordlessly pulling her inside as he takes in her expression. “He’s contacted you again.” It isn’t a question, yet she feels compelled to answer and forces her body to comply, inclining her head in a mechanical nod.

“Yes,” she breathes, then, “He’s coming.”

“What?”
She pauses, collecting her thoughts and willing her lips to obey, cringing as the words leave her mouth. “He’s coming to find me.”

“Don’t tell anyone what you know,” Dumbledore says and she frowns, taking a step away from him in shock. “We’ll be ready for him if he does. Let him come.”

***

They come to stand in front of an intricately carved set of oak doors, large and imposing as they reach nearly all the way to the ceiling. It shivers under the goblins touch, silently gliding open to reveal a lavishly decorated room beyond, every visible surface covered in gold.

Their guide clears his throat politely to get their attention. “Here we are. I’ll leave you to your own devices and give you some privacy. Please ring the bell on the table should you need any assistance.”

Well, that was easy. Maybe a little too easy, Tina thinks and tries to ignore the tingling sensation at the back of her neck.

The door falls closed with a soft sigh and they’re alone. Her eyes survey the room, careful not to linger on him for too long. He still refuses to look at her, but she doesn’t mind it now, welcomes it even. The cold, familiar eyes unnerve her, and while she knows this isn’t Silenus but Newt, good and gentle Newt, it’s impossible to swallow the ball of unease forming in her throat.

“What number are we looking for?” His words break her from her reverie and she arrives back into reality with a jolt.

She turns the key in her hand. “2708.” He nods in understanding as he walks along the wall of golden lockers gleaming in the light, scrutinising the number plates engraved just below the ever-present fleur de lis.

“Here we are,” he murmurs and gestures for the key. Tina dares to look at him, really look for the first time since they’ve entered, and is startled when his hair isn’t the jet black mass she’s expected, but his usual auburn curls, staring back at her with his beloved green eyes instead of the wintry gaze she’s come to loathe. Something must have gone wrong; the potion’s already wearing off.

“Newt, you…” She stammers, pointing at his face and he nods.

“I know. Key, please?”

Wordlessly she hands it to him, brushing her fingers against his in the process and they both suck in a shocked breath of air at the jolt of electricity at the contact. Tina swallows hard, willing away the tears when he refuses to meet her eye.

Focus, Goldstein. You still gotta get out of here. Now isn’t the time to be a sentimental sap.

The key slides in and turns without protest, revealing the contents within. Tina stands on her tiptoes, craning her neck to look past his shoulders. “And? Can you see anything.”

Newt reaches inside to extract a small box of gleaming ebony and deposits it on the table behind them. They stare at it for a beat, then two before Tina brandishes her wand, prodding the box with its tip and the lid opens seemingly on its own accord. It’s empty save for a small piece of parchment with silver writing. Tina reaches for the paper with trembling fingers.

I shall not be crossed, it reads.
Her voice is deadly serious when she speaks. “Newt, we gotta get out of here.” She sighs shakily. “Now.”

Tina swallows her fear, willing her trembling heart to slow when an alarm sounds in the distance, and a loud voice shouts through the door, making them both freeze in their tracks. “Thieves! I know you’re in there. We’ve been warned of your arrival, so the auror office has been notified and will be along shortly. Any attempt at escape will be futile. You won’t get out of here alive.”

Their eyes meet for the first time today, staring, unblinking, as understanding passes between them. Tina notes the finality in his gaze, drawing strength from the fierce determination and trust reflected in his eyes. She moves to the door to rattle the handle to no avail. “It’s locked.”

“Pick,” Newt murmurs and Pickett’s leafy, green head appears from behind his lapels. “I need your help.”

Tina watches with bated breath as the little bowtruckle climbs nimbly from Newt’s shoulder, crawling along his arm to stick his spindly appendices through the keyhole with ease. The lock gives within seconds and Tina nearly sobs with relief before regaining her composure. “Stand back,” she tells them and Newt moves away behind the table when she raises her wand.

The door is no match for her magic and falls from its hinges with a magnificent crash, startling the waiting goblin outside as it jumps away with a terrified shriek. A second spell immobilises him, leaving him sitting bound and gagged against the wall. He glares at her, pure hatred reflected in his eyes as they stop and linger in the door.

Shouts ring out as another group of goblins approaches from the far end of the corridor and Newt springs into action. “We need to get to the staircase, come on.”

They run along the corridor, shoulder to shoulder, and he moves faster than her even with his duck-footed canter, breathing evenly while her own breath soon turns ragged and heavy. There’s light at the end of the tunnel and she utters a shout of relief only to stop dead in her tracks when a large shadow moves in front of the opening, imposing in its size and solidity. It moves again, partially emerging into the light and Tina gasps in horror. Its scarlet scales gleam like fiery coals as it utters an echoing growl, cocking its head in their direction as Tina wraps her fingers around Newt’s wrist, squeezing in fear. “Is that —?”

“A Chinese Fireball,” Newt breathes, mesmerised by its beauty despite their precarious situation. “Magnificent. They’re formidable animals, highly intelligent and incredibly fierce.”

Tina scoffs, her voice dripping with sarcasm, intensifying her New Yorker intonation. “Fascinating, but please do tell me: How in the name of Deliverance Dane are we going to get past it?”

“Look at its eyes,” he says instead and she’s about to bite back a choice reply when she follows his gaze. The creature’s eyes are a murky grey, unfocused as they roll in its sockets. “It’s blind.”

She knows he’s right the moment he says it, recognising the dragon’s slow, mechanical movements and the way it turns its head from side to side, touching the walls with its snout. The Goblins catch up to them but remain at a respectable distance, out of reach of its flame, effectively locking them in.

Newt moves before she can stop him, swiftly sliding along the walls to crouch before the beast. “It’s alright,” he tells it, voice warm and even, smiling without a care in the world. “You’re alright. We’re not going to hurt you.”
The dragon snorts, bowing its elegant neck, and Newt jumps and rolls when a jet of flames blackens the walls where he’d been standing mere seconds ago.

“Newt!” Tina screams in terror and her heart leaps into her throat, beating at a frantic pace as her eyes search for his familiar mop of curls. He’s crouched low at the dragon’s shoulder, staring at her from around its leg. She steps forward and desperate tears blur her vision as she shouts at the beast. “Hey!”

The dragon turns its head but doesn’t move, ears swivelling back and forth, nostrils flaring, but it seems unable to pinpoint her location. What if—? She nearly cries with relief. “It’s old! It can’t hear or smell me!” Newt nods. “But how does it know —?”

“Vibrations! It senses movement,” he yells and dives as a second jet of flames shoots out of its nose.

She narrows her eyes, gathering her resolve as an idea takes hold and raises her wand. Newt stares at her, about to protest when she turns and fires at the chandelier on the ceiling behind her. The goblins scream in terror and scatter as it smashes on the floor with a deafening crash. The dragon roars with anger and Tina flattens herself to the wall, smelling its phosphoric breath as it sails past her, and she doesn’t hesitate, doesn’t wait before rushing forward.

“Tina!” Newt reaches for her as soon as she’s close enough, threading his fingers with hers before breaking into a run.

Chapter End Notes

The French translations, if needed:

“Comment puis-je vous aider?” -- How may I help you?
“J’ai besoin d’accéder à mon coffre-fort.” -- I need to access my safe.
“Bien sûr, monsieur.” -- Of course, sir.
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

Part II of the great escape, aka the break-in at Gringotts. It's one of my favourite chapters to date. Enjoy!

Written for njckle.

“We’re never going to make it out,” Tina gasps as they run, the sounds of their footsteps echoing off the walls of the corridor.

Newt pulls her to a stop at the foot of the stairs and pants as his eyes move skyward. “Yes. Yes, we will.” He bends to set down his case, changing it back to its usual battered self with a flick of his wrist before flipping the clasps. She jumps when he whistles once into the opening, short and sharp. Tina opens her mouth to protest, ears perking up at the approaching sets of footsteps clamouring down the stairs when something blue soars from the depths of the case.

The occamy sails about their head in circles, chirping happily as its body expands to encompass the room. Newt snaps his case shut and crouches, body tense as a coil ready to spring. He jumps at an opportune moment to wrap himself around the serpent's scaly body. “Give me your hand!”

“Are you crazy?” she yells and ducks, moving just in time to avoid the first spell sailing her way from the stairs.

“I’ll catch you!” he shouts as the occamy takes another turn about the room. “I need you to trust me, Tina!”

A deep sense of calm washes over her, warming her from within when she realises she does. Tina breaks into a run and his hands are there as he promised, clasping hers with sure confidence to haul her up in front of him. “I’ve got you, Tina,” he murmurs in her ear and she closes her eyes against the pressure behind her eyelids. I know you do.

He wraps one arm around her waist from behind, holding her to him as he urges the creature skywards with a gentle nudge of his heels. The occamy complies, crooning happily as it uncoils and pushes upwards, the end of its tail sweeping the room and knocking the waiting aurors cleanly off their feet.

Tina’s vision blurs as they soar, higher and higher until they break through the opening in the ceiling and out into the light.

***

The sky is a solid, steely grey when they land behind the canal. A spirited gust of wind tousles their hair and brings the smell of rain, announcing its impending arrival even before the thunderous crack sounds overhead.

Newt coaxes the occamy back into his case by flicking a beetle into the air and watches as it disappears into the opening. The shimmering serpent dives after it, thrilling excitedly as it shrinks, growing smaller and smaller until it passes through the lid with ease. He slams it shut as soon as
the tip of the occamy’s tail disappears within and hastens to fasten the clasps, expelling a relieved gust of air when they snap closed. Tina presses a hand to her chest, feeling the rhythmic thump of her heart, still much too fast, and looks around in an attempt to even out her breathing.

Newt straightens and turns to her, eyes flitting searchingly over her form, taking stock, checking her for any obvious injuries. “Are you hurt?” She shakes her head, making her hair fly about her face, but doesn’t speak, and Newt raises his hands as if to touch her before dropping them to his sides with another sigh. “That’s good.”

“What about you? Did he manage to burn you?” she asks, concern colouring her voice as she searches his face.

“No, I’m fine.” He’s back to avoiding her gaze, carefully keeping his eyes on neutral territory and takes a step away from her as another crack of thunder sounds overhead.

Whether it’s the stress, her lack of sleep or spent adrenaline, Tina will never know, but something old and long overdue seems to snap deep within. “What’s your problem, Newt?”

His brow crinkles in confusion. “I’m sorry?”

“Did I do something to offend you? You’ve been so — so distant ever since I returned this morning.” She swallows thickly, voice brimming with emotion. “You won’t even look at me.”

He grimaces and the muscle in his jaw flexes as he fights for control. “You didn’t do anything, Tina.”

“Then what changed —?” A thought occurs and she falters mid-sentence, eyes growing wide with realisation as she turns to him, and it all makes sense. His short and evasive answers, his inability to look at her. His refusal to meet her eyes. Her stomach drops, heart lurching painfully as she stares at him, the new truth weighing heavy on her shoulders. “It’s my assignment, isn’t it?”

Newt refuses to meet her eyes, hiding behind his overlong fringe as he gazes at her shoulder, throat working as he wets his lips, considering his words. There’s an unfamiliar hardness in his eyes when he looks up, body trembling with sudden anger.

“How could you agree to it, Tina?” His fists clench at his sides. “You knew who he was — what he’s capable of!” Newt shakes his head and turns his back to her, bending to pick up his case as the heavens open up. The soft patter of rain fills the stillness between them, its smell a distant promise of summer lingering in the air. “He could have seriously hurt you — or worse.”

Tina staggers back as if he’d struck her, angry tears burning at the corners of her eyes, but she refuses to back down as her own temper rises from within. “I’m an auror, Newt. This is what I do. It was just a job, nothing more. I know who he is and I’m not proud of it, but I did what I had to do.” She makes a sweeping gesture with her hand. “Look what it got us!”

“I don’t doubt your skills as an auror or your abilities to defend yourself, Tina!”

She utters a humourless laugh and her voice sounds much too watery for her liking. “Then what is it? You’ll need to tell me, because right now I simply don’t understand you, Newt.”

“It’s not him, it’s what you let him do to you, Tina!” he bursts out with uncharacteristic vehemence, cheeks flushed with agitation. “When I think about him putting his hands on you. Hurting you. The bruises, the marks around your neck, I — I can’t—“ He sighs in defeat as all the fight drains out him at once. “Forget about it.”

Tina’s bottom lip quivers as she steps closer. “I don’t want to forget about it.” He straightens and
turns, eyes suspiciously bright as he finally, finally meets her own, and her voice drops to a husky whisper, heavy with tears. “Does what I do repel you that much?” She swallows painfully. “Do I repel you that much?”

Newt gasps, eyes growing wide, and closes the distance between them in one single stride. “Never,” he breathes, voice rough with emotion, and his hands come up to frame her face. His calloused thumbs rasp over her skin as his golden eyes burn into hers, bright and fierce and warm. “Quite the opposite, can’t you tell?”

“Oh.” Her lips part on a shocked exhale at the implication of his words.

She looks at him, eyes wide, and her breath hitches in her throat when he leans in, close enough for her to count the golden freckles in his eyes. “Tina, may I —?”

“Yes,” she breathes, voice sounding foreign to her own ears.

He holds still, pausing a mere hairbreadth from her face to watch her reaction, and finding no resistance there, closes the distance to press his lips to hers in the softest, most fleeting of touches. The world around her ceases to exist as she finds herself unable to see, or hear, or feel anything besides the gentle, sweet slide of his lips over hers. She sighs against his mouth and he echoes her before deepening the contact, stealing her breath as he seals himself to her, lips pressing with desperate insistence, and she’s glad for his steadying arm around her waist.

Newt shifts and moves to kiss the corner of her mouth as he nuzzles her cheek with his nose, eyes closed. “It doesn’t matter if it’s Silenus Rosier — or anybody else. The thought of some other man’s hands on you, Tina…” he says roughly, lips moving against her skin, “I can’t bear it.”

Tina gives a watery laugh, not bothering to stop the tears from falling, letting them mingle with the rain on her cheeks, allowing it to wash away her residual pain. She turns her head to seal them together once more, smiling against his lips as she slides her fingers into his damp curls. “You won’t have to,” she promises, whispering against his lips. “I’m never going back again.”

The rain is falling in earnest now, but neither of them seems to notice or care, too wrapped up in the moment and in each other. He reaches up to brush a wet strand of hair out of her eye with a gentle hand, gifting her with a wide, beautiful smile and she beams at him in return, biting her lower lip as an elated giggle works its way out of her.

Her eyes fall on an elderly woman at a café across the street, her body frozen in the act of retracting the awning and Tina gawks at her as the woman meets her eye with a saucy, approving smile and winks. “Let’s get out of here,” Tina says, turning her burning face into his neck and feeling him chuckle in response.

“Of course,” he murmurs and doesn’t hesitate to wrap her in his arms once more, holding her close as he turns on the spot to spin them into apparition.

***

A dark mist advances, skirting along the dark alley before rising up into the air and taking a human form atop a nearby roof. Dumbledore’s smiles in awe as he follows him with his eyes. “Credence, is it?” His voice is low and quiet, yet Dumbledore is sure he’s heard it. “You received my message, I take it.”

The young man turns and his face is shrouded in the dark, hidden behind the shadow of the moon. “What do you want from me?”

“I need your help,” Dumbledore says, and tries not to flinch when Credence gives an angry howl
“You’re just like him!” Credence hisses maliciously, baring his teeth and squaring his shoulders as he meets Dumbledore’s eye. “You invade my mind, unbidden, and call me to your heel like a dog! How do I know you’re any different?”

“I knew him once, better than anyone, and I still know him now. I’ve seen his soul, and I’ve seen what he’s capable of.” A pause. “He’s hurt me, too.”

“How?”

Dumbledore licks his lips. “My sister, she — she was like you. He wanted to use her, use her like he’s using you right now, how he uses all the innocent children who do his bidding. I know he must be stopped, Credence, and I need your help to accomplish it.”

Credence scoffs. “Why should I help you?”

“He’s after something, Credence.” Dumbledore meets his eye. “Something I believe is one of your family heirlooms. An ancient stone of sheer unimaginable magical power.”

Credence furrows his brow and his eyes flash dangerously as his breath comes in quick, uneven puffs. “What are you talking about?”

Dumbledore’s lips pull into a lopsided grin. “I followed your family tree. You’re a direct descendant of one of the most powerful wizards in history. I also know how Grindelwald lured you into his lair.” A pause. “He’s keeping your aunt hostage.”

Credence growls in warning. “Prove it. Tell me how you know all this.”

“I will tell you everything you want to know, all in good time. For now, I need you to trust me, Credence. Grindelwald can be stopped, but it’s up to you. I can’t do it alone.”

Credence presses his lips into a thin line, considering him. “You’re right, I know where the stone is. I haven’t seen it, but I know where he keeps it,” he lies quickly. *Two can play this game.*

Dumbledore narrows his eyes. “Where?”

Credence smiles, fingers clenching into fists at his side. “The fortress he’s building.”

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Credence watches Dumbledore’s retreating back from the rooftop where he’s cowering. *It’s the only way. I’m done being used as a puppet. You’ll get to destroy him, but on my terms. This time, I’ll make you dance,* he thinks before launching himself off the building.

***

The rains have stopped when they arrive on the Arie’s landing platform, stumbling and laughing as they indulge in a last moment of closeness before putting a more respectable distance between them. Their welcoming committee awaits them in front of the main portal with solid, grim expressions save for Queenie, who cannot contain her happiness as an elated grin spreads across her face and she nearly bounces in excitement when her mind brushes against the colours of his thoughts.

They’re shepherded into the conference room without preamble, where Guzman fixates them with his expectant stare. “Well?” His tone is sharp and clipped as usual, and a muscle twinges in the
side of his neck as he waits for their response.

Tina produces the note and places it on the table in front of her. “It was a setup. He knew we were coming. This is all that was left.”

“All for nothing again,” Guzman growls and turns away. “Damn waste of time!”

“We have to pursue every possible lead, Arnold,” Frida argues, pinning him with a pointed stare. “Process of elimination, remember?”

“Fine, then. What do you propose we do next?”

“We need to locate his fortress,” Dumbledore says simply, smiling at Guzman’s disbelieving gawk. “It’s clear, isn’t it? It all leads back to it.”

“What do you think, Scamander?” Theseus jolts when Frida addresses him, tone sober and serious as she stands with her arms crossed in front of her chest.

Theseus considers her, eyes cutting to Dumbledore’s face and back to the note on the table. It’s no secret he’s wary of the older man, yet his professional instincts seem to override his personal perception of him. “I think he’s right, Captain. If there are answers to any of our questions we’ll find them there.”

Frida sighs. “Let’s get to work then.” She turns to Newt and Tina. “Goldstein, Scamander. Good work nonetheless. You’re dismissed, go get some rest.”

Theseus catches up with them at the top of the staircase and claps his brother on the shoulder with a heavy hand. “Glad to have you back in one piece, Newton. I would’ve hated to tell mother you’ve been locked away in a vault somewhere.” Newt sends him a burning glare as Theseus turns to Tina. “I hope he wasn’t too much trouble.”

She smiles as Newt’s cheeks infuse with colour and his eyes spark with irritation. “On the contrary; especially since your brother’s actions got us out of there in the first place.”

Newt sends her a grateful smile and Theseus’ brow knots with a suspicious furrow, eyes darting back and forth between them as he considers them before his lips break into a slow, elated smile. “Ha! I knew it!”

Knew what? Newt wants to ask, but Queenie beats him to it. “These two really look like they could do with some rest, Mr Scamander. Why don’t you come with Leta and me and take a walk by the river with the little one as you promised?”

She takes hold of Theseus’ arm, gently prying him away as Leta appears at his other side. “Oh yes, that’s a great idea. You did promise, Thes,” she says with a smile.

What are you up to? Newt projects at Queenie, knowing how much Leta hates to go on civilised walks, let alone suggesting them.

Queenie turns to wink at him before dragging Theseus away, one girl on either side of him, and Newt gapes after them, cheeks burning at their antics. Tina stands behind him, biting her lip to suppress an amused smile, eyes dancing with residual mirth and his heart leaps at the sight. “We should go to the kitchen to get you something to eat,” he says and watches her shake her head.

“I don’t want food,” she murmurs, meeting his eyes. “Can we just rest, please? I don’t think I’ll be able to sleep, but would — would you stay with me? Read to me a little?”
“Of course,” he says and takes her hand to lead her upstairs, “as you wish.”

He summons his hammock from the depth of his case as soon as they make it to his room, hanging it between the two large timber columns at its centre. She excuses herself to wash the memories of the last two days off her body and Newt takes the opportunity to indulge in a quick bath in the wooden tub down in his case.

Tina inspects the piles of books and papers lining his workshop upon her return, lips pulling into a beautiful smile as he reaches for her and she comes to him easily, slotting against his side as he makes the hammock sway softly with a tap of his foot. His lips skim her forehead as he opens his book, and he repeats the gesture every time he turns the page, inhaling deeply of her scent as his words gently lull her to sleep.

Newt reads and reads, and reads, continuing long after his voice goes hoarse and Tina is breathing evenly against his neck. She looks peaceful in her sleep, worry lines smoothed out and smiling softly. His heart soars at the sight, warm and full and close to bursting with contentment. He sighs into her hair before wrapping himself around her, listening to the steady whisper of her breathing as he closes his eyes to let sleep claim him.
Their break-in and spectacular escape grace every wizarding paper across the country the following morning, and it remains front-page news the following days, causing shock waves to ripple through all of France and beyond. Newt’s publisher sends him an angry message, asking him to explain himself and how on earth he expects this to drive the sales of his book, while Bunty follows up with one of her own, enthusiastically congratulating him on the formidable, if highly illegal, feat.

His book sales double that month.

New wanted posters appear around the country, much to Theseus’ personal amusement, yet Newt thinks this isn’t anything new. Tina laughs about it until her eyes become shiny and bright like the twinkling lights of a seaside promenade, and Newt thinks it’s the most wonderful thing he’s ever seen.

Tina. What is new is this slow, steadily growing entity between them, foreign in its familiarity, gentle and soft, and with a heartbeat of its own; though, he realises it isn’t a particularly a novel development but has been simmering below ever since he left New York.

Fanned by their letters, yet never acknowledged, always ignored.

They barely notice the change, falling into step as if it’s the most natural thing in the world. Easy as breathing. There’s an unspoken agreement between them as they go about their duties during the day in separate ways, addressing each other much like it had always been, save for the surreptitious glances and little secret smiles they share whenever nobody’s looking.

(Or so they think. Queenie is looking, always, smiling brightly behind her hand.)

Tina comes to seek him out in his room every evening and follows him down into the case to assists with his chores. They always end up in the same place afterward, sitting on the sun-warmed stone in Frank’s old habitat, nursing a cup of tea and hot cocoa in companionable silence while waiting for the sun to dip below the artificial horizon.

There he puts an arm around her waist to pull her close, tasting chocolate and contentment on her lips as he kisses her under the twinkling stars. Other evenings she sits with him while he turns page after page for his research on Mira, and listens to him prattling on and on about his work with a small, contented smile on her lips until it becomes too much and he has to kiss it away.

He’s drawn to her like a moth to the flame.

Tina is with him one afternoon, a week after their escape from Gringotts, when Leta brings Mira down into the case for another training session. Theseus is away at the Ministry on urgent business, taking Dumbledore with him to calm the waves as he jokingly put it. The little girl is making steady progress under Newt’s watchful eye and gentle encouragement and seems to have lost her fear of magic entirely.

She’d managed to make a chess piece hover two inches above the ground two days prior, so Newt hopes to repeat the success and build on it. Leta and Tina sit together, quietly watching with bated breath as Newt coaxes the child into performing her magic. He levitates a white knight off the floor, letting it hover above his palm, and turns to Mira with a gentle smile. “Here, can you catch this for me?”
His face falls when he realises her single-minded focus isn’t on him but something else entirely. Newt follows her gaze and smiles indulgently. A bowl of shiny red apples sits on his desk at the opposite wall, glowing like diamonds in the low evening light, and she eyes them curiously, lower lip trapped between her teeth.

“Oh, would you like an apple?” He raises his hand to summon one across the room when she beats him to it, lifting it from its bowl with ease and levitating it into her waiting palm. No sooner have her fingers closed around the ruby fruit than Dougal flits into visibility at her shoulder, thrilling happily as she hands the apple to him with a delighted giggle.

Newt’s initial irritation with his furry friend evaporates as he watches them, heart bursting with pride and happiness. His eyes cut to meet Tina’s across the room and she sends him a brilliant smile, beaming at him wide enough to make the dimple in her right cheek show. Leta watches them with a knowing grin and it isn’t long before she makes to excuse herself. They try not to overwhelm the child, and after Mira manages to levitate the entire bowl of apples at once they decide to call it a day.

Leta hoists the child on her back and climbs up the ladder, sending Newt and Tina a meaningful glance and a wink before closing the lid, and they’re wonderfully alone.

***

“He’s angry.”

Dumbledore’s eyes cut across the dark alley to the young man leaning against the wall. Credence looks pale and tired, shoulders drawn tight like a bowstring, mournful eyes set within large, dark rings of purple. “Angry how?”

“He knows he’s being followed. Someone broke into Rosier’s vault. He thinks whoever’s behind it is after the stone,” Credence says, staring at his feet.

Dumbledore frowns and pulls his hat deeper into his face. “Does he suspect anything?”

“He knows it's you.” Credence takes a deep breath. “The girl he's watching; she led him to you. He’s following your every move, it’s like an obsession. I think — I think he’s scared of you. You and Newt.”

Dumbledore’s eyes bore into his. “Is Newt in any danger?”

Credence’s pale skin tightens around his mouth as his eyes fill with tears. “He’s going to come for him. Newt’s got something Grindelwald wants, more than anything.”

“When?” Dumbledore’s face turns ashen.

Credence swallows. “I don’t know.”

***

Queenie sees Jacob off to his room before tiptoeing back to her own quarters, eyes cutting across the hall to Newt’s laboratory as she passes. A thin strip of light shines from underneath the door and she smiles, sure she’s going to find her sister’s bed unoccupied when she gets in. She concentrates on Newt, gently probing the thoughts on the forefront of his mind before retracting, stifling an elated giggle at what she finds there.

The glass of water in her hands tumbles to the floor in a clatter when another, frighteningly familiar presence fills her mind, making her shiver even before she hears his voice.
Hello, little sparrow. I told you I’d find you! Don’t fly the nest just yet, I’m coming to take you home.

Queenie experiences a moment of white, hot panic when her muscles freeze and her feet refuse to obey her will. She claws the wall as she struggles to even out her breathing, chest heaving with every intake of breath. Not now. Not ever! How did he find them hidden behind their wards?

She wills herself to break through her paralyzing fear, fuelled by adrenaline and love for her friends and struggles to focus her mind, tentatively reaching out until she feels Dumbledore’s familiar presence. He doesn’t ask, doesn’t question why she’s contacting him when he’s away on important business. He doesn’t have to, he already knows.

When?

Queenie shivers as tendrils of familiar thoughts reach out to her again, stronger and much closer than she’s experienced them in months.

Now.

***

Tina lingers as Leta closes the lid behind her and Newt collapses theatrically into the chair in front of his desk. “Outplayed by a demiguise,” he moans, laying a hand across his forehead in dramatic fashion. “I should have known.”

“He is a very charming demiguise,” she says with laughter in her voice.

Newt clutches his chest in mock outrage. “You wound me, Miss Goldstein,” he says and grins delightedly when she deposits herself on his knee.

Her hand goes to his hair, her touch soft and delicate like butterfly wings as she brushes his curls out of his eyes. “You didn’t let me finish,” she says, leaning closer. “Yes, he’s very charming — but he isn’t you.”

She traces his elegant profile from his hairline to the tip of his nose, letting her actions speak the words her mouth can’t yet formulate and sweeps a gentle finger across his lower lip until he smiles and kisses the pad of her thumb. “Anyway,” she murmurs a mere hairbreadth from his lips, “I’ve never favoured blondes.”

Tina closes the distance between them to taste his laughter, plying him sweetly, swallowing his mirth until he’s calmed. “You’ll be the death of me,” he whispers against her lips and is rewarded with a delighted, wholly feminine giggle. Newt vows to do his utmost to hear her make this sound again.

***

Dark clouds move in from the east, shifting in front of the moon and extinguishing the last tentative tendrils of light until the countryside is reduced to a composition of ominous black shapes as Seraphina Picquery stares out into the night.

“I still don’t trust this man.” Guzman stands behind her, dark eyes nearly as black as the night beyond the dimly lit attic they’re standing in, boring into her own as he shoves his hands into his trouser pockets. His posture is a dim reminder of the man who held his post before; a man who died defending it, and Seraphina shakes her head against the memory. It’s difficult when you’re suddenly without your best friend, alone in the world.
It’s something she doesn’t allow herself to ponder, not when she holds the responsibility of thousands in her hands, bound by her duty to her country. “I don’t trust him either, Arnold, but he’s the only chance we’ve got.”

Guzman scoffs. “Albus Dumbledore. I never heard of him until he showed up here. He comes and goes as he pleases and prances around like some fancy, painted peacock, like he owns the place.”

“His Ministry doesn’t like him. He’s too forward, too honest with his opinions. He isn’t a politician, Arnold, and quite frankly it’s what we need right now,” she says and smiles when his lips pull into a crooked grin.

“No politicians, eh?”

“Diplomacy only gets you so far sometimes, and despite how much he’d like us to believe otherwise, Gellert Grindelwald isn’t a man willing to listen to words.” A crack of thunder sounds outside, followed by a bolt of lightning and she jumps at the sound.

“Still, I’m not sure the fact his Ministry fears him works in Dumbledore’s favour — “ Guzman starts, but the rest of his words is drowned out by an earth-shattering crash and an explosive shockwave of magical energy. Seraphina struggles to regain her senses as she stares at the gaping hole where a solid wall had been moments ago.

A dark carriage drawn by skeletal, black horses appears through the opening, their leathery wings pulled tight over their bones. Seraphina gasps as she recognises the beasts. She remains rooted to the spot as a group of aurors bursts through the door, watching, wide-eyed and paralysed with fear as they charge at the intruders.

Seraphina Picquery had never been a fighter, freezing in the eye of physical danger, her words her preferred weapon of choice. Today isn’t any different.

A blast of blue sends two aurors flying against the opposite wall, where they remain, bodies contorted in strange angles, lying unnaturally still. The carriage door opens and a man descends, his blonde hair and beard far shorter than the last time she’d laid eyes on him, yet his two-toned gaze is still as disconcerting as the first time it focused on her.

“Good evening, Sera. Missed me?” he asks, lips pulling into a devilish smile, his gaze fixed on her as he lifts his wand.

There’s a flash of green light, a shout, and everything goes black.

***

“I should go,” Tina murmurs but makes no move to extracting herself from his embrace.

“Yes,” Newt says simply, quietly, blinking up at her through soft, hazy eyes and she falters at the sight. He strokes her cheek with a gentle finger before tipping her chin up to recapture her lips. The kiss slowly gains traction, its underlying tone different from the ones they’d shared up until now.

Tina sighs against his lips, sliding her hands into his hair, and he makes a pleased humming noise deep in his throat, boldly angling his head to encourage a further change in pace. She sits up without breaking contact, body moving seemingly on its own accord as she swings a leg across both of his and comes to sit astride him properly. His hands find a home at the notch of her waist, steadying her.

Her hands migrate along his chest to pluck at his bow tie. It surrenders to her nimble fingers
without protest, and she’s already playing with the buttons on his throat when she notices his hands haven’t moved from her hip. His fingers cramp around the material of her blouse and a fine tremor works through them as he fights for control.

Tears prick her eyes when she realises he’s waiting, waiting for her. She leans back to look at his flushed face and kiss-swollen lips, gently prying one of his hands from her hip to press her lips to his knuckles.

“It’s alright, Newt,” she says softly, murmuring against his skin. “You can touch me.”

She seeks and finds his gaze as she places one last lingering kiss on the back of his hand before pressing his palm against her sternum, just below her neck. “Please.”

He spreads his fingers, eyes never leaving hers as he strokes at her skin, watching for any sign of discomfort or fear. Tina holds her breath as he caresses her throat with reverent, featherlight touches where Silenus had squeezed her without mercy. She swallows thickly as tears blur her vision and she has to close her eyes against the weight of it all.

“Nobody should ever touch you like that again, Tina. No man capable of such cruelty is worthy to lay his hands on you.” Newt thumbs her tears away when they fall in earnest at his words, leaning in to press dry, gentle lips to her neck, over and over until he’s caressed every spot, every inch of skin that’s previously been tarnished.

Gently erasing Silenus’ memory, brushing it away with his kindness.

She slides her hands into his hair and tugs his face back up to hers when it gets too much and all but crushes her lips to his, tasting his shocked exhale as she steals the breath from his lungs. His hands sink lower and she gasps when they brush her front before pulling the material of her blouse from her slacks to slip beneath. She delights in the warmth of his skin against hers, calloused fingers snagging on the silky material of her camisole at her middle.

A low, smouldering heat rises from deep within, infusing her skin to the tips of her toes and making her tingle. She closes her eyes in bliss until she registers another, different warmth at the inside of her forearm, no less familiar yet far less welcome.

Tina breaks away with an annoyed groan, briefly meeting his eyes as they breathe, cheeks flushed and hair tousled. She turns her wrist to read the message, mouth going dry as it sinks in, and she’s grateful for his steadying hands on her hips to keep her upright.

Newt’s eyes shine with honest concern when he meets her gaze. “What is it?”

“Damn it all,” she breathes with no small measure of fear, voice failing her as her tongue sticks to the roof of her mouth, and she wordlessly turns her arm for him to read it for himself. The words stand out bright and clear, their black ink in stark contrast with her alabaster skin.


His fingers dig into her arm and she feels his shocked intake of breath reverberating through her palm on his chest. They spring into action simultaneously, putting their clothes to rights with haste as Tina curses under her breath.

“I need to find Queenie,” she says once she’s in full control again, auror instincts kicking in, voice only trembling minutely at the end.

“You find your sister and I’ll make sure Leta and Mira are safe.” He stops her at the bottom of the ladder, pulling her close to press a kiss to her cheek. “I’ll come find you after.”
Tina knows it’s his way of promising to stay safe, and asking the same of her in return. She nods mutely, not trusting her voice and squeezes his hand before scrambling up the wooden steps. The smell of smoke and despair assaults her nostrils the moment she exits the case and fear for her sister closes around her throat like an iron fist, hard and cold, squeezing tight until it hurts to breathe.

Newt is clamouring up the stairs behind her, but she doesn’t wait for him to reach the top before extracting herself and breaking into a run as soon as her feet hit the floor. He’s right behind her as she throws open the door, only faltering briefly as the sounds of fighting reach her ears, magic spells flying left and right in seemingly random directions.

His fingers wrap around hers to squeeze tight and she turns to meet his gaze one last time before they part, letting her eyes express all the words she might have wanted to say otherwise. They do not linger long before hurrying off in opposite directions, rushing to locate their loved ones, disregarding the danger lurking around every corner as they jump right into the thick of it.
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

We're moving right ahead with the plot as we're gearing up for the last stretch -- I am sorry about the angst, but it does have a purpose!

The fighting continues as Tina runs along the corridor, counting the doors to distract from the fear bubbling within as she dives and ducks an endless stream of curses and spells, some better than others, but she hardly notices as a flash of purple light tickles her cheek.

Queenie.

Tina doesn’t doubt her sister’s defensive spells, not after the training she’d received before coming here, but Queenie isn’t just protecting herself. Jacob, courageous and loyal to a fault, certainly won’t withstand an assault of this magnitude, nor would Queenie idly stand by and watch. Neither of them would.

Don’t do anything stupid, Queenie! she pleads, projecting the thought with all her might.

The short distance from Newt’s laboratory to the room she occupies with her sister in the west wing seems endless, and she’s just hauled herself out of the way of a well-placed stunner, watching it burst against the wall above her head, when her eyes catch sight of something else entirely.

A dark mass rises from the floor below, winding along the banister like a smoky serpent, only to rise to the ceiling once it reaches the top, spreading wide when it can go no further.

A dark mass rises from the floor below, winding along the banister like a smoky serpent, only to rise to the ceiling once it reaches the top, spreading wide when it can go no further.

Tina watches as the mist retracts, swirling like ash in a cloud of smoke and she squints when a pair of familiar eyes stare back at her from within. Sad, mournful eyes she’s seen countless times before, visiting her in her dreams night after night following the fateful day on the subway.

“Credence.” His name crosses her lips at barely a whisper, and she’s sure it’ll get carried away by the cacophony of sounds rising around them, but the mass freezes, holding itself in place as it comes to hover in front of her face. Tina can’t do anything but stare, and everything else disappears as they stand, frozen in time as they look at the ghosts of their past.

I thought of you, every day, she wants to say, yet the words feel weak, inadequate and flimsy as they sit on her tongue. I’m sorry I failed you.

Her eyes go wide when he charges at her without warning, a formidable gust of wind and warmth, knocking her to the ground with ease and she gasps when another curse sails past where she’d stood a split second ago. On a direct collision course.

Credence! Are you the victim or the villain in all of this?

Tina moves towards the cloud, reaching out a trembling hand while murmuring his name once more. He recoils as if burned and snarls at her, dark eyes burning as the mass churns and quivers.

“Credence! Please, you don’t have to do this. This man has no power over you.”
His eyes narrowed into slits. “Don’t lie to me. Everyone is always lying. You, Mr Graves, the redhead. I’m done listening to other people. Grindelwald, he… he understands. He actually wants to help.”

“That’s not true. Mr Graves never lied to you. He wasn’t himself when you met him.” Tina swallows. “Grindelwald thrives on other people’s feelings and uses them against them. He’s not helping you, he’s using you just as he sees fit. Credence, it’s always been him!”

There’s a small change in Credence and for a brief moment, she sees the abused young man she found cowering on the floor all these months ago, gazing up at her with a vulnerable yet hopeful expression as she bends to stroke his cheek. In her heart of hearts, she knows she’s not been able to convince him, but he’d spared her life when he could have destroyed her in the blink of an eye. **Maybe, she thinks, I’ve been able to plant a seed of doubt in his heart.**

She crouches down low on the floor, looking up at him as he reforms and rises back to the ceiling, stunned. A dark figure emerges behind him, a familiar silhouette of dark robes and a pointed black hat. “Rosier!” Tina growls before she can stop herself, and the figure turns, scarlet lips pulling into a vicious grin when Vinda’s eyes fall on her.

Tina’s fingers tighten around her wand as she jumps up and straightens to her full height. Vinda is beside her in a flash, her own wand raised well above her head, ready to pounce. “Oh, if it isn’t my brother’s little plaything,” she purrs, and Tina shudders at the frigid eyes Vinda shares with her brother.

“You’ll find it’s quite the opposite,” Tina hisses and fires the first spell.

Vinda blocks it with a graceful flick of her wrist and an arrogant smile. “Doubtful. Is that all you’ve got, *chérie*?”

“Tina!” She turns towards the voice, nearly collapsing with relief when she notices Queenie hurrying up the stairs with Jacob hot on her heels. Dried tear tracks grace her cheeks, and her clothes are in disarray, but otherwise, her sister looks no worse for wear. Tina takes a few steps in Queenie's direction when Vinda fires a spell of her own, barely missing Tina’s elbow by a few inches.

“Isn’t that cute,” Vinda says, reminding them of her presence, “A family reunion. Tell me, *little sparrow*. Does your sister know how useful you’ve been?”

Tina freezes as a paralysing fear turns her insides to ice and her blood runs cold as she considers Vinda's words. “Queenie, what is she talking about?”

Vinda croons happily. “Oh, look at that! Did I spoil the surprise?”

Queenie begins to cry anew, looking utterly *devastated* as she fights for control. “Teenie, I’m so sorry.” The floor crumbles beneath her feet and Tina struggles to remain upright as a violent bout of nausea makes her feel lightheaded and weak at the knees. *Morrigan, no!*

“What did you do?” Tina’s voice sounds foreign to her own ears, gravely serious, and all the fight drains out of her as her world shatters into a million pieces at her feet.

“It was *she* who brought Gellert to us. Smuggled him out in a little powder box, right under your nose.” Vinda’s voice is velvety soft, yet she might as well have cut Tina with a knife for all the pain it inflicts, plunged right into her heart. “*She’s* the girl on the inside. I suppose two can play this game, no?”

“That’s not — Queenie, tell me this isn’t true!” Tina pleads, heart breaking when Queenie’s tears
grow heavier and her bottom lip quivers, unable to speak.

“I didn’t want any of this to happen,” Queenie stammers eventually, voice clogged with tears. “I couldn’t stop it, I never thought it’d get this far!”

Tina gasps for air as desperate tears burn at the corners of her eyes and she closes them against the hollow ache rising from within, shutting them against the searing pain in her heart as her soul howls at the injustice of it all. She fights for control as her body quivers in reaction, hand trembling violently as she lifts her wand to point its tip at her own sister. “No more, Queenie. You’ll both come with me to turn yourselves in.”

“Teenie,” Queenie says but doesn’t resist as her wand hangs limply by her side, choosing not to defend herself as her face falls and her entire body crumbles in on itself.

Tina takes one step forward when there’s a flash of brilliant blue, fiercely bright, and it doesn’t miss its mark this time, hitting her squarely in the back. Queenie shrieks in terror as Tina freezes, lips parting on a silent gasp. The last thing Tina hears is Queenie’s deafening scream as her legs give out from under her and she falls, falls and falls until she knows no more.

***

Newt runs along the corridor, his trusty friend Archie sweeping along at his side, blocking the spells intended for his human companion. They round the last corner and fall through the door without knocking. Leta freezes, wand held aloft in a defensive stance, lips skimmed back over her teeth as she stands in front of Mira.

She lowers her wand when she recognises him. “Goodness, Newt! I could have killed you!”

He grimaces and makes to get off the floor, rubbing the small of his back. “With all due respect, Leta, but I doubt you’d be able to kill someone.” Newt recalls Archie and stows the cocoon in his pocket.

“I’ve never had a reason to,” she says, glaring as she stabs her wand at him. “So don’t you go giving me one! If you haven’t noticed, there’s fighting going on.”

Newt chuckles despite the situation before regaining his senses and taking a hold of her arm. “Have you contacted Theseus?”

She nods gravely. “Yes, I’ve sent him my patronus. Newt, what’s happening?”

“We’ve been ambushed. Grindelwald must have found a way around the wards. Come on, we need to get out of here!” He pauses for a split second, considering her, before laying his suitcase on the floor and popping the lid. “Get in.”

“And leave you on your own? Out of the question! I’m not some damsel in distress in need of rescuing, Newt Scamander!” Leta protests with vehemence.

“Heading, Leta!” he pleads with her. “I know you’re not, far from it, but we can’t risk Mira getting hurt. She’ll be much safer down there, and she’ll need you to keep her calm.”

Leta ponders this, and he can see the conflict in her eyes as she considers him. A flash of decision flickers across her face and her eyes harden as she presses her lips into a thin line. “Fine. I’ll keep her calm.” She steps close, fingers wrapping around his forearm to squeeze. “You need to promise me!”

He knows exactly what she’s asking. “I’ll be careful, I promise. I’ll keep you both safe until
Theseus arrives.”

Newt leans in to kiss her forehead, and she gives a wobbly sigh before reluctantly extracting herself from his embrace to pick up the child. He watches them like a hawk as she steps towards the case, while he wills his mind not to think of Tina. She’s a formidable auror, he knows, more than capable of defending herself and her sister, yet he can’t shake the disconcerting feeling of dread deep in his bones, the profound sense that something is terribly wrong.

He’s so focused on his thoughts he doesn’t notice the dark shadow slipping through the door until a hard, long object presses into his neck and his eyes widen in shock when a hand closes around his wand-arm, twisting it painfully behind his back. “Now, you better come with me nicely and quietly,” a voice says next to his ear, chuckling menacingly. “Or I’ll carve the little girl a new face.”

Newt turns, twisting like a serpent in the stranger’s grip, but the hold doesn’t lessen. “Now, now, what did I just say? Malfoy, get them!”

A blond-haired man rushes forward, wand raised and pointing at Leta, who stands clutching Mira firmly to her chest. Newt’s stomach drops. “No! Don’t you dare lay your hands on them.”

The man behind him cackles, dark and cold, and Newt shivers at the sound. “You won’t be able to protect them any more than your good-for-nothing girl couldn’t protect herself. Rosier already took care of her. You’ll all come with us whether you like it or not.” Newt remains frozen, body going numb with fear as desperate tears blur his vision.

Tina!

Mira begins to cry in earnest, frightened by the venom in the stranger’s voice, and her eyes roll to the back of her head as a dark mist rises around her. “She’s an obscurial!” Malfoy screams in terror.

“Leave the girl, let’s get out of here!” the other man yells, tightening his hold on Newt and dragging him towards the door.

Newt struggles, unwilling, opening his mouth to call out to Leta’s frightened eyes when he’s bathed in a brilliant blue light.

Tina’s beaming smile is the last thing he sees before it all goes black.

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Queenie screams, her mind and heart ablaze with pain, lungs aching as the breath is knocked out of her.

Tina, Tina, Tina!

Vinda Rosier is behind her in a flash, pressing the tip of her wand into Queenie’s throat, whispering into her ear: “Time to go, sweet one.”

“You’re not taking her!” Jacob steps forward, rolling his sleeves up to his elbows, eyes blazing with determination.

Vinda laughs; it’s a cold, unpleasant sound. “What do you plan to do about it, non-magique? You’re useless. Besides, she’s much better off with us. We’ll keep her safe, whereas here they’ll surely make her pay for her sins.”
Jacob clenches his fists but Queenie's voice stops him in her tracks. “Don’t, honey. She’s right. I don’t have any business being here.” She suppresses a sob. “I need you to stay and look after Teenie.”

He shakes his head, face distorting in pain. “Queenie, no, I can’t just let her —”

Her voice sounds small and dejected, tired of fighting. “Please, Jacob.”

Vinda turns them, pushing Queenie ahead of herself as they ascend to the top of the stairs. Queenie cranes her neck to look over her shoulder and meets Jacob’s eyes with a tearful gaze, mouthing ‘I love you’ before she’s dragged down the corridor and out of sight. Jacob watches after her, unblinking, not noticing the quiet as it falls around him, blanketing him, before he comes back to awareness with a jolt, bending to kneel next to an unconscious Tina, faltering at the crimson stain pooling at her side. “Oh no, no, no, good God, Tina…”

A set of footsteps approaches from above, echoing off the empty halls. “Jacob?”

He turns to the voice, finding Leta at the top of the stairs. Her hair is tousled and her eyes wide in her ashen face as they stare down at him. “Leta, can — I need your help!”

She drops at his side, fingers going to Tina’s neck, and she sighs with relief at the fluttering of life she finds there. “It’s just a Stunner. She’ll be alright.”

“A Stunner? What about the blood?”

“Probably just a scratch. Here, stand back.” Leta draws her wand and flicks her wrist, lips parting to mouth the words in a silent incantation like a prayer.

Tina stirs, gasping for air as her eyes fall open and she makes to sit up. Leta steadies her with a gentle hand on her shoulder, voice shaking badly. “Easy, you’ve been stunned.”

“Where’s my sister?” Tina murmurs and sits up despite Leta’s protests.

“I don’t know,” Leta chokes out. “They’ve taken Newt, too.”

Tina falters, reaching for the handrail to support herself and Jacob catches her as she misses, slipping an arm around her waist to support her. “Whoa, steady. You’re alright.”

Her fingers wrap around the cast iron railing until her knuckles turn as white as her face, her voice rough and strained as she speaks. “Where have they gone?”

Jacob shakes his head. “They said not to follow —”

“Where have they gone, Jacob?” Tina’s voice sounds harsher and more cutting than she intends as her whole body tenses, muscles strung tight like a bowstring; a lioness ready to charge.

A low rumble shakes the building to its foundations, reverberating through its massive stone walls and they turn as one towards the sound. Tina brandishes her wand and hurries up the stairs, one hand pressed to her injured side as she runs, Leta and Jacob following hot on her heels. They pass through the corridor unimpeded, chasing the sound of battle and desperation deep into the heart of the building.

“They’re still fighting. Maybe we can catch them!” She yells over her shoulder. Maybe it isn’t too late. She rounds the corner and nearly loses her footing as she skitters to a halt. Jacob narrowly misses her as he reaches for the wall to break his fall. Her eyes go skywards at the gaping hole in the ceiling to watch a bolt of lightning zip across the darkened sky. Tina shivers as it illuminates
the room like the flash of a camera, permanently burning the image into her mind.

Grindelwald’s arm is wound tight around her sister’s shoulder, dragging her towards the open carriage, grinning maniacally as he lifts his wand to ward off Kyuho and Guzman’s combined spellfire with a lazy flick of his wrist. Her throat works as she swallows around the words stuck to the roof of her mouth, eyes swiveling back and forth between Grindelwald and the lifeless body at the back of the carriage in indecision. Newt sits slumped against one of Grindelwald’s henchmen, head lolling to the side, and Tina wants to cry and scream at the injustice.

She raises her wand, body working on its own accord, and her spell hits the carriage close to Grindelwald’s head. He turns, surprised, fixing his gaze on Tina as his lips pull into an ugly sneer. “Why, Tina… it’s always the same with you. Forever turning up when you’re least wanted.”

“You’re wrong.” Tina’s heart soars at Theseus’ raised wand appears beside her own. “You’re the one who’s unwanted.”

Dumbledore steps up next to Theseus, face grim, but he doesn’t draw his wand. “Turn yourself in, Gellert. You know it’s the only right thing to do. I told you years ago this would all end in tragedy.”

Grindelwald’s grin only falters minutely at the appearance of his former friend. “Well, is that so, Albus? I should think this’ll remain to be seen; before long you’ll be the one regretting your decision. Nevertheless, I suppose it’s time to make my exit, then.” Grindelwald leers and snaps his fingers before withdrawing into the carriage, ready to depart.

The horses raise their leathery wings, disconcerting dark eyes rolling in their sockets as they soar forward. Theseus raises his arm to fire another curse when Tina’s hand shoots out to stop him. “Theseus, don’t! You don’t have a direct shot. What if you hit Newt instead?”

The dark mist rises from behind them, circling the carriage until Credence solidifies on the back seat next to Newt. He meets Tina’s gaze and she holds the connection, unblinking, stubbornly willing him into action, and his dark eyes shine with understanding as he lowers his head in agreement.

*I’ll keep them as safe as I can,* it says.

They watch in a helpless stupor as the carriage passes through the hole through which it came, thunder and lightning chasing after it as it sails into the night. Tina clutches at her throat, tight with tears as her body bows in anguish.

She cries for her sister and Jacob, unable to be together until Queenie succumbed to temptation, driven to do unspeakable things to save her love. Tina thinks of the promise she’d made to her father that day in the infirmary, coughing and sputtering, when he’d asked her to look after her sister, kind-hearted and soft, yet strong-willed and tough.

She’s failed him. Would she have done the same in Queenie’s stead?

*Of course, you would have, no matter which way you turn it.*

Newt. A fresh round of tears seeps from her eyes at the painful memory of his lifeless body, unmoving, almost unnaturally still. She’s failed him, too. Leta and Theseus are embracing in a faraway corner, comforting one another, and a spark of envy curses through her before she can stop herself.

“Oh damn it all to hell!” Tina hisses between sobs, sinking to her knees, unable and unwilling to stop the tears of bitter defeat as they roll down her cheeks.
Guzman bends, kneeling down next to a still figure none of them had noticed until now, checking for a pulse. “You can say that again.” He sighs. “The President's dead.”
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

A fair warning, I am changing official HP canon here, because this is fanfiction and I can. It's nothing big and I believe it doesn't change canon events one bit, but just to be sure -- you have been warned. ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He shivers despite the warmth of a nearby torch along the wall and leans against the stone for support, far from the watching eyes of the guards. His heart is hammering violently against his ribs as he curls to alleviate the pressure in his chest, struggling with the ghost of his past.

“Credence!” He raises his head to find his aunt atop the stair leading up to the main entrance, her dark eyes kind and full of concern as they bore into his own. “Are you alright?”

“I’m fine,” he grunts and turns his face away, squeezing his eyes shut as her footsteps come closer. “I said I am fine — I don’t need your pity.”

“I’m not here to pity you, dear,” she says, and her hand falls to his arm. “These things he asks of you, what he has you do — this isn’t you, Credence. You’re my sister’s son, and it would hurt her soul to see you like this. You are a good man, with a kind heart. Don’t let him use you like this.”

Credence stares as her fingers curl around his arm, marveling at the undemanding warmth of her skin and a rare, familiar feeling blossoms in his chest. Warmth. Hope. Love. Few people had ever touched him without an ulterior motive. It reminds him of the dark-haired woman he saw a mere hour ago, staring at him like he was a phantom or a dream, sure to disappear the moment she closed her eyes.

Usually, he is the nightmare, the apparition everyone longs to forget, but she’d stared at him as if he were the light and she the drowning woman emerging from the depth of the darkest ocean.

His aunt senses the change in him and her hand migrates from his arm to gently stroke at his cheek, moulding her palm to his jaw. “I am leaving. He has decided he no longer needs me.” A pause. “Come with me.”

“I can’t,” he says immediately, feeling a small pinch of regret. “He’d never let me get away. And even if I could — it’s too late for me.”

“It’s never too late for you, my boy. We’ll always be here.” She bites her lip as if she’s debating with herself, meeting his eyes once more before reaching to pull something from beneath her blouse and removing it from around her neck. It’s a beautiful, silver locket bearing the relief of a violin. “I need you to watch over this. My father gave it to me before he died, and I think it’ll be safer with you.”

“What is this?” He asks as she drops it into his palm. She strokes a fingernail across the violin’s neck and the oval clicks open to reveal a black pebble within. His breath hitches in his throat as the pieces fall into place in his mind.

This is it. I’m holding the key. The key to destroying Grindelwald, once and for all.
“This stone has been in our family for centuries,” she explains. “It’s dangerous, and should never be used. We guard it closely, so it’ll never fall into the wrong hands. Grindelwald is after it, searching for it as we speak.”

He raises a disbelieving brow when he understands her intentions. “You want to hide it in plain sight.”

“He’ll never suspect it’s with you. And I know you’ll keep it safe.” She closes the locket and winds it around his neck, gently petting his cheek. “But most importantly, look after yourself, my boy. Come find me if you ever change your mind.” She turns and hurries off, her long cape flowing in her wake.

“I will,” he whispers as he watches her pass through the gates, fingerling the locket lying against his chest. It feels heavy against his skin, warm where it should be cold, and he senses the magic flowing within. “I promise.”

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The searing pain breaks, gradually ebbing away as the words sink in, replaced by a familiar, woolly nothingness.

_The President is dead. Newt is gone. Grindelwald escaped at the hands of your sister._

Her tears subside, leaving only white numbness in their wake, and Tina wipes at the residual moisture on her cheeks, removing the evidence. Like it never happened. “_Krötenarsch und Schrumpelkopf!_” Frida curses, hands on her hips. “Impossible! How did he manage to locate us? The wards we set are unbreakable.”

“They’re strong but not insurmountable,” Tina says automatically, her lips uttering the words while every fibre of her being screams at her not to. She meets Jacob’s fearful gaze across the room, eyes wide and pleading with her, but she hardens her heart against a renewed wave of pain. “I know how he found us.” She takes in a fortifying breath of air. “With the help of my sister.”

Her words sweep the room like a hurricane, shaking it to its very foundations, damaging it beyond repair, it’s seismic shock waves more potent than anything Grindelwald could have wished for.

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Newt groans, grimacing against the spark of pain it inspires and smacks his lips against the uncomfortable itch in his throat, parched and raw. His head lolls to the side, too heavy on his shoulders, and he stares at his tormentor through the messy curls of his fringe.

“The wand will never stay with you,” Grindelwald hisses, cackling in delight, “not if it can choose to follow me instead. You’re weak; a soft, gentle soul. Much too gentle. You might think yourself a scientist, Mr Scamander, but you don’t go far enough in your experiments. It craves power and might most of all, and it’ll find them in me.”

“I don’t take pleasure in another being’s misery and pointless suffering as you do,” Newt mumbles, and his jaw feels stiff and unyielding as a dull ache blooms behind his eyes. “I never asked to be involved in any of this.”

“Perhaps not, yet your trusty friend Albus Dumbledore pushed you right into the midst of it.” Grindelwald stands, sweeping his hand to encompass the room. “Where is he now, the noble man, eh? He’s letting you take the fall for it like the coward he is and always has been! He instrumented it.”
“Albus Dumbledore is thrice the man you could ever aspire to be,” Newt slurs and is rewarded with another blow to the head. He swallows, tasting the metallic tang of blood on his tongue.

Grindelwald sneers, lips pulling back over his teeth as he grabs a fist full of Newt’s hair, roughly pulling his head back to look him straight in the eye. “You,” Grindelwald grinds out between gritted teeth, leaning close enough for Newt to count his eyelashes, “know nothing about Albus Dumbledore or what he’s capable of. Do you think he’ll mourn you?” He lets go of Newt’s hair and his whole body slumps back into the chair. Grindelwald wipes his hand on his trousers as he turns at the door. “We might always find a place for you in our ranks somewhere, Mr Scamander. Think about it.”

Newt opens his mouth to utter a choice reply when another, hated figure enters the room and the words die in his throat. Silenus’ wintry stare lands on Newt and the corners of his lips pull into a calculating grin which doesn’t reach his eyes. Grindelwald puts a hand on the younger man’s shoulder. “Silenus, my friend. I think Mr Scamander here could use some of your gracious hospitality. Would you mind showing him to his quarters?”

“With pleasure,” Silenus purrs, inclining his head and cracking his knuckles as he approaches. His fingers close around Newt’s arm like a vice, strong and unyielding as Silenus drags him from the chair.

Newt cannot say how long he’s been here. Hours? Days? He doesn’t know where he is and hasn’t seen the sun since he arrived, hidden away in the dark with only damp stone and vermin for company. The way sound travels through the walls and echoes off the cavernous spaces makes him think of the countless times he visited Leta and Theseus in the Slytherin common room down in the dungeons.

They walk along a dark, windowless corridor, high enough for a grown dragon to pass, with doors going off left and right, intersecting with dimly-lit passageways to create a disorienting maze deep underground. Silenus walks with grace and determination, one foot in front of the other, straight and confident, yet Newt has no trouble keeping up with his pace despite his injuries. He’s used to finding his own way, walking his own walk, and he doesn’t feel any envy towards the other man’s poise.

His cruelty isn’t something Newt desires.

Silenus’ features flit in and out of the shadows as they pass the petroleum laps lining the hallways, and Newt risks a surreptitious glance at Rosier’s profile. His face is agreeably formed, with an elegant nose and graceful lips, yet his hands are thick and short-fingered, inelegant unlike the rest of him. He throws open a door and ushers Newt inside, and faces him with an ugly sneer. “Newt Scamander. I’ve heard a lot about you.”

“Have you now,” Newt says before he can stop himself. Silenus’ face hardens and his eyes flash dangerously before he gets himself back in check.

“Oh, yes. They all talk about you. The mongrel, the little blonde girl - even her whore of a sister.” He dodges Newt’s weak attempt to take a swipe at him. “Ah, but of course! I forgot. You’re sweet on her, aren’t you?”

“This doesn’t concern Tina,” Newt grinds out between gritted teeth, leaning against the wall for support. “You do with me whatever you want, but you keep your hands off her.”

Silenus grimaces, lips curling with disgust. “I have no desire to lay hands on her again; I don’t usually make a habit of fraternising with animal lovers.” He shudders in disgust. “She let her sister fall in with a non-magique. Disgraceful!”
“You’re wrong.” Newt says, peering at him through heavy-lidded eyes. His body feels tired, so tired. “She let her sister be with an earnest man, a good man, a man worth ten times the likes of you.”

Silenus grabs him by the collar, roughly pulling him close to his face. “You watch your mouth, Scamander. You’re under my roof now, and I make the rules here. Gellert might be finished with you, but I am not.” His face pulls into an ugly smile. “Maybe I should like to place you out by the statues for your little harlot to find. After I’ve made some improvements to your visage, of course.”

Newt crumples to the floor when Silenus let’s go of his shirt and pushes him away, smiling down at him with a satisfied glint to his eye. “Don’t get comfortable. I’ll be back shortly, and we’ll have more time for conversation.” He points to a jug atop the table, filling it with water from the tip of his wand. “Now drink up, I wouldn’t want to be a bad host.”

The door crashes shut behind him, the echo of his departure lingering behind as it reverberates off the solid stone. Newt makes to get off the ground, putting a trembling hand on the wall to pull himself upright. His cell is small and dark, holding a narrow bed and a rough timber table, but no window. The air is stale, barely moving, but he breathes easier now he’s alone. He can feel every bone in his body, aching with fatigue and an exhaustion, unlike anything he’s ever known.

Newt gulps two glasses of water without stopping for air until his stomach is full and hopelessly waterlogged before dragging himself over to the flimsy mattress. There’s nothing to do but to curl in on himself and let sleep carry him away to a place that isn’t filled with pain and cold, and menacing blue eyes staring down at him.

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Tina shifts in her seat with a groan and the creaky, old timber chair echoes the sound. She grimaces as the movement aggravates her aching side, yet she revels in the sting, distracting her and taking away the pain in her heart. Frida sits across from her, a flicker of pity crossing her face, but it’s gone as soon as it appears and she schools her features into a mask of steely seriousness. “I’ll ask you again, Goldstein. What did she tell you?”

They’re in the basement, in the same small interrogation room where they’d interviewed Grimsson not too long ago. Only this time, she’s on the other end of the table with her hands shackled to her chair. Tina moistens her lips. “I had no idea until last night,” she says with defiance, tears of irritation stinging her eyes. “I told you already, and that’s the truth.”

“Auror Goldstein, I needn’t remind you, you’re under oath,” Frida says and her eyes harden. “If you’re not going to be honest with me, you’re leaving me no choice but to have you drink a dose of veritaserum.”

Tina squeezes her eyes shut. “Do it, then!” she spits, voice deadly serious as she meets Frida’s eyes head on. She can no longer tell how many hours it’s been, repeating the same answers like a mantra, over and over. “I have nothing else to tell you.”

Frida lifts her hand and signals to the guard by the door without breaking eye contact. The door opens and shuts twice and a small bottle of clear liquid appears on the table between them. Once free of her shackles Tina reaches for it before being prompted, uncorking the top and downing its contents in a single swallow before setting the empty bottle back on the table with a decisive clunk. “There. Ask away.”

Frida sits up straighter and consults the papers on the table in front of her, voice even and dangerously low as she resumes the questioning. “Auror Goldstein, did your sister ever mention to
you, even in passing, an unusual interest in Gellert Grindelwald.”

Tina doesn’t hesitate. “Nothing beyond what was asked of her.”

“Were you aware of the depth of their connection, then?”

“I wasn’t,” Tina whispers, cold and low.

Frida purses her lips but doesn’t miss a beat before asking her next question. “And did she ever tell you about, or ask you to conceal, the knowledge of the connection between them?”

Tina raises her gaze, tears pricking her eyes and clogging her voice. “No. She would never ask such a thing of me.” She swallows as the truth sinks in even before she speaks the words. “She wouldn’t make me choose between my love for her and the one thing I believe in.”

The door opens and Guzman storms in with Theseus and Dumbledore hot on his heels. “That’s enough, Frida. Clearly, this isn’t getting us anywhere.”

“I beg your pardon, I don’t think you understand the gravity of the situation,” Theseus bites out, face flushed with agitation. “This is hardly sufficient. My brother is missing. He was captured while under your supervision! I needn’t remind you of what my Ministry will have to say once they hear of the incident.”

Frida stands, gesturing towards the guards by the door. “Erik, bring in the squib. He might be more forthcoming.”

Erik returns with Jacob in tow, dragging him along by the arm. He looks around the room with wide eyes until his gaze lands on Tina. She lowers her eyes to her hands, unable to sustain the contact.

“Jacob Kowalski, do you have any idea why we’ve asked you here?” Guzman addresses him, raising both eyebrows with emphasis.

“I am — I am aware, sir,” Jacob answers with military precision. “I mean, how couldn’t I be?”

“Then you know you must answer each question honestly and truthfully to the best of your ability.” Jacob nods. “Very well. I understand you were… intimately connected to Miss Queenie Goldstein?”

Jacob gives a nervous chuckle. “I don’t know what you’re implying, Mister Guzman.”

“I’m not implying anything, Mr Kowalski. Please answer the question.”

“Sure. I — yes. We had to be by law.” He sighs and raises his hands in a halfhearted shrug. “I’m bound to her.”

Guzman nods. “I understand. Did Queenie Goldstein ever tell you of her affiliation with Gellert Grindelwald?”

Jacob meets Tina’s eyes and speaks to her face instead. “No, she never said anything. She’s been quiet lately, like something’s been bothering her. She wouldn’t tell me what’s wrong. I could see how it was eating away at her and I — I couldn’t make it better.” He turns to Dumbledore. “She’s been with you an awful lot, never wanted to tell me what you talked about.”

Theseus jolts as if scalded, eyes opening wide as he rounds on Dumbledore. “You!” he hisses, pointing his finger at him. “You put her up to this, didn’t you?”
“Mr Scamander, if you’d calm yourself, please,” Frida says, laying a hand on his shoulder but Theseus shrugs her off.

“I want to hear him say it. Did she come to you for help and you sent her back, asked her to sustain the connection — encouraged it, even?” Dumbledore says nothing, doesn’t as much as flinch or try to stop Theseus in his rant. Guzman opens his mouth but Theseus isn’t finished as he shakes his head, face contorting in rage. “No! You don’t know Albus Dumbledore! You think this man is your hero, your saving grace, but you don’t know what he’s capable of — what he’s done!”

Frida stands. “What has he done?”

Theseus laughs, cold and without humour. “You think this is the first time he’s made someone else his puppet? Look at my brother. He’s sent him out to spy on Grindelwald on his own, without consenting with his own government.”

“I believe you’ve been involved in this, my dear Theseus,” Dumbledore says, speaking calmly. “And aren’t you the Ministry?”

“I don’t mean this latest endeavour, Professor Dumbledore,” Theseus spits and turns back on the room. “I’m speaking of the time you sent him to New York to look into government affairs right under MACUSA’s noses.”

Tina nearly collapses into her chair, overcome with sudden nausea, doubling over as if she’d been kicked in the stomach. Frida’s face looks pale while Guzman’s mouth hangs open, catching flies.

Theseus has talked himself into a rage, walking up and down the room like a caged animal. “He asked him to find this society of fanatics, the Second Salemers. Check on a boy he’d placed with them decades ago.”

“Dumbledore, is this true?” Frida asks, but Tina finds it hard to follow, ears ringing with the myriad of thoughts assaulting her mind.

_Is that why he came? Did he know about Credence? Did he suspect him? Why didn’t he tell me?_

“You are right, Theseus, your brother was kind enough to look for a child of a dear friend of mine,” Dumbledore says without batting an eye.

Theseus scoffs. “Yes! A child who turned out to be a powerful obscurial wreaking havoc across the city at the time. Very convenient, don’t you think?” He leans closer, eyes flashing dangerously. “Tell me, Dumbledore. Did you know? Did my brother know?”

Tina holds her breath as she waits for the man to answer. Dumbledore nods, smiling sadly. “I had my suspicions, yes. I shared them with Newt to encourage him to help me. He’s somewhat of an expert in obscurials, you see.”

_You manipulated him into it._ Tina thinks, glaring at the back of his head. _You used his kind heart to get him to help you._ She relishes the rage bubbling up from within, distracting her from the hurt and pain threatening to swallow her whole.

Guzman pinches the bridge of his nose, jaw working as he fights for control. “I knew it. I told the President not to trust you. I am not sure whether you’re aware of the seriousness of the charges we’re going to bring against you.”

“How did he keep in contact with Queenie Goldstein?” Frida interrupts, ignoring Guzman’s angry glare.
“Grindelwald is a powerful legilimens capable of projecting his thoughts further than anyone I’ve ever known. Miss Goldstein was to maintain the connection and listen in on his movements. We hadn’t come across any usable information, otherwise, we would have informed you right away.” Dumbledore steps forward, voice rising along with the colour in his cheeks. “With all due respect, would you have sanctioned the move? We’d have waited weeks for your deliberations. Bureaucracy. We would’ve lost precious time!”

“That’s how the world works, Professor. We can’t just go by the hunch of one man,” Frida growls, gesturing wildly. “You’re a consultant, you weren’t sanctioned to give independent assignments. Look what happened!”

“Yes, perhaps I did underestimate the depth of their connection, and I am unsure whether an imperious charm might be cast in such a way, but it’s possible. Nonetheless, we did make some progress.” Dumbledore waits before delivering his trump card. “I think Miss Goldstein was close to discovering where he’s building his fortress. That’s why he took her along.”

“Be that as it may,” Guzman says. “I am putting you and Mr Newton Scamander under a lifelong travelling ban. You’re prohibited from ever stepping foot on American soil again.” He turns to Frida. “Furthermore, I ask for their removal from this investigation on the grounds of espionage.”

“I’m afraid this is between MACUSA and Mr Dumbledore. A national conflict of interest isn’t something the council takes into account, Arnold,” Frida says, looking tired and much older than her years, “and while these are serious circumstances which warrant appropriate actions, we need to postpone any rash decisions until this is finished.”

Tina consciously breathes through her nose, trying to quell her rebellious stomach. It’s all too much. “Frida,” she says carefully and the other woman turns to her. “If that is all, I’d liked to be excused.”

“Of course, Goldstein,” Frida says with uncharacteristic sympathy and waves her wand to remove Tina’s shackles around her ankles. “You’re dismissed.”

Tina stands without so much as a word, feeling everyone’s eyes on her as she throws open the door and flees.

Chapter End Notes

As you can see, the canon divergence is that Credence is now in possession of the resurrection stone. I think it doesn't change canon, because Dumbledore would have still found the ring at the Gaunt's and would have had to open it to destroy the Horcrux, so he would have been cursed etc. Still the same chain of events and the same outcome. ;)
The Rosier’s family estate ”La Roseraie” is located at the heart of the Broceliande Forest in France’s Bretagne region (Brittany), which was said to be Merlin’s legendary forest. Thank you to Lafouk for supplying me with the name.

I know next to nothing about guns or rifles, so please be kind. I tried. ;)

Tina barely makes it to the communal bathrooms before she loses the battle against her gorge, bending over the nearest toilet as her stomach surrenders its meagre contents. She feels filthy and vile, suddenly too hot in the light blouse and slacks, and quickly strips before turning on the water. Tina lets it run while she inspects the gash in her side, fishing her emergency pack from her trouser pocket to apply some dittany. The cut smokes as it closes up, leaving an unseemly scar behind, and she hisses, welcoming the dull ache it inspires.

The warm water traces her body from head to toe when she steps under the shower, filling the room with steam untilshe can barely see two feet ahead of herself. Tina doesn’t care. She turns, fingers clawing at the wet ceramic tiles as she leans her forehead against the wall, letting the tears fall and mingle with the water, her desperate sobs masked by the sound of the running shower.

Her stomach contracts painfully as her entire belly heaves, pressing the air from her lungs and she howls in agony; a pain that has nothing to do with the cut in her side. She closes her eyes against it, riding out wave after wave until it slowly subsides into a dull ache deep in her chest, throat burning as she swallows past the lump lodged deep within.

Why did you do this, Queenie? Why didn’t you come to me?

It spreads from her centre all the way to the tips of her toes and fingers, weighing on her mind and body as she lets herself succumb to the sorrow, indulging in another moment of unbridled self-pity while the water runs cold.

She’s never felt so alone.

Her sobs gradually subside into hiccups when she shuts off the water, shivering as her skin puckers into goosebumps. Every movement feels like a chore as she dresses, mechanical and stiff, and all she wants is to crawl into bed, hide away and lick her wounds. A knock startles her out of her reverie and she opens the door to find Jacob’s distraught face staring back at her.

His eyes shine with compassion and honest worry as he takes in her face. “Are you alright?” She lowers her eyes. “I’m sorry, of course you’re not. Come here.” He opens his arms and pulls her close, momentarily catching her off guard before she regains her senses and her arms hesitantly return the embrace.

“Thank you,” she murmurs when they pull apart after a time and she wipes at her eyes.

“No trouble,” Jacob murmurs, swallowing thickly. He smiles, putting on a brave front, but his eyes give him away. Tina jolts when she realises he must be hurting just the same. “I — Tina, what are we going to do?”
Her brow knits in confusion. “What do you mean?”

“They’ve decided not to send a rescue team.” He pauses. “They’re going to leave them with that fanatic — Grindelwald.”

Tina presses her lips into a thin line, swallowing thickly as she fights against the conflicting emotions inside. She pushes her hurt away, attempting to brush it aside as she lifts her eyes to meet Jacob’s tearful gaze.

“Jacob, I —”

“Please, Tina. You know her! She didn’t want any of this. She’d do the same for you, no matter what.” He swallows thickly. “Newt — he was beside himself when we thought your cover was blown and you were with Grindelwald’s lackey.”

“I know,” she breathes when a sudden thought occurs and she gasps, eyes going wide as she grabs his arm. “Of course! La Roseraie.”

Jacob frowns at her. “Excuse me?”

“I think I know where they are!” Tina says and pulls him along the corridor.

“What are you going to do?” he asks, breathing turning ragged as he tries to keep up with her.

“If they’re not going to do something,” she says with conviction, “we will.”

“You’re going to get them back?”

“We are going to get them back,” she clarifies, sending him a reassuring glance and Jacob beams at her. “And I know who’s going to help us.”

***

Tina raps her knuckles against the door and it opens on her second knock. Theseus takes one look at Jacob’s tear-stained cheeks and Tina’s pale face before ushering them inside. Leta stands from her seat as they enter, anxiously worrying her hands. Newt’s case stands beside the bed, where Mira is sleeping soundly.

“You’ve heard, then,” Theseus says, picking up a glass of amber liquid from his bedside table and taking a generous swallow.

“Yes,” Tina breathes. “Jacob told me.”

Theseus nods. “Bureaucratic arseholes, the lot of them. While they’re considering the risks and calculating probabilities my brother and your sister rot in Grindelwald’s clutches. Merlin knows what he’s going to do to them.”

“We can’t leave them there!” Leta exclaims passionately, eyes blazing. “We’ll need to talk to Fawley. Surely, he’s bound to send a group of aurors —”

Theseus crosses his arms in front of his chest, looking tired and drawn as he speaks to her over his shoulder. “Leta, darling we don’t even know where to start looking —”

“I do,” Tina interrupts and Theseus raises his eyebrows at her. “La Roseraie. Grindelwald uses the Rosiers’ family estate as a base for most of his business here.”
He frowns. “You’re certain? What if he’s brought them to a different country estate? I’m sure he’s got more sympathisers in this country.”

Tina shakes her head, going on instinct as she pleads her case. “I doubt it. Rosier is his chief architect, the structure below has been altered specifically to suit Grindelwald’s needs. Silenus never failed to remind me.” She summons a piece of parchment and a quill from the desk in the corner and kneels on the floor. “Here, I’ll show you.”

Tina draws two rudimentary rectangles with a circle at the centre. “La Roseraie has a central courtyard with a fountain which doubles as a skylight for the auditorium he’s designed underneath.” She points at the top. “The main entrance is up here, so you’d have to cross the entire courtyard to access it.”

Theseus scoffs. “We can’t just walk in the main door.”

“Of course not,” Tina says, drawing a small square to the left of the building. “There’s a hatch that leads straight to the kitchens and storage rooms. The house elves are the only ones using it.”

“It would lead right into the basement.”

“Exactly,” Tina says, pointing to the right half of the building. “Dungeons are over here. Most of the basement spreads outwards much farther than the structure above.”

“The castle’s like an iceberg,” Jacob comments, looking over her shoulder. “Most of it is located underground.”

“We would have to cross nearly the entire lower ground floor to get from the service hatch to the dungeons,” Theseus muses aloud. “Regardless, I believe it’s the best option we have. Wards?”

“I know how to get past them,” Tina says with conviction.

Theseus frowns while thoughtfully stroking his chin. “You don’t think they’ve been changed?”

Tina scoffs. “Rosier is far too arrogant. I’m sure they are the same as the last time I went.”

“Well then,” Theseus smiles crookedly. “What have we got to lose, eh?”

“A limb or two, maybe an eye? Your ego, perhaps?” They all turn in unison towards the voice at the door.

“Frida —” Theseus starts, readying himself to argue their case, but she lifts her hand, silencing him.

“Save your breath, Scamander. I’m not here to judge, and while I might not be able to give you the manpower to pull this off, I will do anything in my power to assist.” She sighs. “Just because I have to follow the council’s decisions doesn't mean I have to like them.”

“What do you mean?” Theseus asks.

“I’ll help as much as I can. I don’t think Miss Goldstein here should leave without her partner.” Tina opens her mouth to protest, but Frida talks over her. “No, I don’t want to hear it, Goldstein. I’ve already spoken to him. And if you’re going to take the squib, you’re not planning on taking him unarmed, are you? He’ll need a weapon to defend himself.” She smiles knowingly. “Come with me.”

She takes them down into the basement, to a room they’ve never seen before. “This place was
used as a military base during the great muggle war. It was never cleared out entirely once they vacated it."

The door sticks until Jacob pries it open. The room is dusty and dark, filled with boxes upon boxes casting ghostly shadows in the blue light at the tips of their wands. Jacob croons in delight when he opens one of the crate and lifts an object from its depth, holding it aloft. “I can’t believe it! That’s a Meunier A6. I haven’t seen one since I left in ‘24!”

“You know how to handle one of these?” Theseus asks with a crooked smile, clearly impressed.

“Yeah, sure. We all had to learn how to use a gun,” Jacob says with confidence, turning the weapon in his hand. “Let’s see if it’s still operational.” He pumps the action, seemingly satisfied with the mechanical click, and peers down the barrel before setting it down with a shrug and a frown.

Theseus lifts a questioning brow and trains his wand on the rifle, murmuring a quick spell. The barrel turns blue before returning to its original state, looking shinier than before, and Theseus smiles in satisfaction. “There. Should be working fine now.” Jacob smiles in thanks as Theseus claps his shoulder and turns to address the room. “Let’s try to get some rest and meet at the landing platform at dusk.”

They nod their agreement before ascending the stairs to their respective rooms. Sleep doesn’t come easy for any of them.

***

The sun is setting blood-red behind the treeline as the sky turns from day into night. Silenus swirls the sip of wine around his goblet, its liquid the colour of the setting sun. Grindelwald is seated next to him in an armchair close to the fire, nursing his own drink.

“You need to stop brooding, one would think you actually cared for the girl,” Grindelwald says, the corners of his mouth twitching into a condescending smile.

Silenus scoffs. “Nonsense. It’s vexing me that I didn’t see through it. I should have listened to Vinda, she had a bad feeling about it from the start.”

“Ah, yes,” Grindelwald says, nodding in agreement. “Your sister is exceptionally bright, yet so are you.”

“Might be. I simply don’t appreciate being made to look like a fool,” Silenus growls.

“Surely not, yet you’d not be the first to fall for a captivating smile or a pretty set of eyes.” Grindelwald chuckles. “Goldstein is shaping up to be quite the thorn in my side. No matter how much I’d like to shake her off she keeps coming back like an ugly rash.”

Silenus raises his eyebrows, interest piqued. “You knew her in New York?”

“Oh yes,” Grindelwald says, taking another sip of wine. “Young and eager, but quite chaotic at times. She was useful for what I needed and had this sort of puppy love for her superior that was quite endearing. I must admit I might have underestimated her, perhaps.”

“I won’t hesitate, should our paths cross again,” Silenus growls into his goblet and takes a hefty sip.

Grindelwald smiles, leaning back in his seat. “Easy, my boy. You will get your moment of glory. For now, we need to concentrate on Nurmengard, which is why I’ll travel to Switzerland shortly.”
“You’re leaving tonight?”

“Yes, and I’ll need you to stay here and oversee my affairs.” Grindelwald meets his eyes, lips pulling back into a toothy smile. “Keep the guests entertained.”

Silenus doesn’t break the contact. “What do you want me to do with the girl?”

“Keep her. She might prove useful in the future. As for Scamander…” He waves his hand. “I’ve seen his mind, I doubt he’d be open to our cause. We don’t need him anymore, so go have some fun.”

Silenus meets his eye and the corners of his lips pull up into a delighted grin. *There we go, Goldstein. I’ll teach you a lesson,* he thinks. *A Rosier won’t be crossed.*

***

They land amidst a thicket of trees shortly after nightfall. The moon and stars are obscured from view, hidden behind the dark canopy of leaves stretching as far as the eye can see. The castle sits at the centre of a clearing, tall and proud, and its illuminated windows glitter like jewels in the night. Tina’s hunch proves correct, and they pass through the wards with ease.

*I knew it, Rosier. Your arrogance will be your downfall,* she thinks a little nastily.

Tina looks around as her fingers dig into the bark of the tree she’s hiding behind. Theseus is a few feet away, concealed by a tall, majestic fir while Leta crouches close beside him. Kyuho appears on Tina’s left as Jacob breaks through the undergrowth with surprising elegance, rifle clutched firmly in his hands. “So what’s the plan?” Jacob whispers as he squats down on Tina’s right.

“I have a bad feeling about this,” Leta says, wringing her fingers. “This is a terrible idea. We should get the Ministry involved.”

Tina scoffs. “Newt and my sister might be dead by the time your Ministry decides to lift a finger.”

“Pipe down, will you? I can’t hear myself think!” Theseus points at the castle. “We’ll wait until they’ve extinguished the lights before we attempt anything, otherwise we might as well go and ring at the door.”

“Look!” Kyuho hisses, pointing at the lone figure walking from the main portal to the edge of the trees. The man is dressed in black head to toe, perfectly camouflaged against the darkness if it wasn’t for his strikingly blonde hair shining like silver metal in the moonlight. “Is this who I think it is?”

Tina gasps and casts a quick protective spell around their hiding space, shielding their thoughts.

“It’s that Grindelwald fellow!” Jacob growls, raising his gun. “Let me —”

Theseus puts his hand on the rifle, pointing it towards the ground. “Don’t. I admire your initiative, my friend, but this would only endanger them more. You’d never hit him from here and these people are serious. We’d never find them again.”

“Where is he going?” Tina whispers, watching the man turn on the spot and disappear into nothingness.

“I don’t care at this point. It certainly makes our task a lot easier,” Theseus says quietly, glancing back at her. “One less thing to worry about.”

They wait for what feels like hours, crouched down low, hiding behind vegetation as they watch.
the lights. Tina doesn’t mind, wiggling her toes to prevent her feet from going numb as Jacob
shifts uncomfortably next to her. She sends him a sideways glance and her lips pull into a small,
encouraging smile as he meets her eye. Tina feels a rush of appreciation and gratefulness towards
the man, a good man with only the best intentions towards her sister, loving her with honest
devotion through both good and bad. Thank you, Jacob, she thinks and squeezes his arm.

“The lights are out,” Leta whispers, breaking the moment.

“Alright, I think it’s time.” Theseus points towards the hedge running along the house. “See these
bushes? We’ll never make it entirely across the way, so we’ll go in stages. Got it?”

“Understood,” they murmur in unison.

“On my mark,” Theseus says, wand at the ready. “Three, two, one. Go!”

They leave their safe sanctuary behind the tree line to scramble across the open field, bent over to
stay as low to the ground as possible. Jacob slides beside Tina, wiping his forehead as they share a
panicked look. They’re all breathing heavily despite the short distance, running on fear and
adrenaline as they crouch behind the bushes.

“The hatch is right ahead, under the second window from the left,” Tina whispers, pointing at a
small timber square by the wall.

“Right.” Theseus looks up at the sky where a cloud inches across the moon. “We’ll go when the
moon is fully concealed behind the cloud.”

“Now!” Tina hisses as the moonlight diminishes, shrouding them in darkness, and they rush
forward to scramble towards the hatch.

Theseus draws his wand and it gives on the first try, opening outwards to reveal a large, gaping
Tina, you and Leta should go first. Take Jacob. Kyuho and I will take the rear.”

“Leta, Jacob,” Tina says, making sure to meet their eyes. “I’ll make sure it’s clear. Wait for my
signal.”

She holds her breath as she slides down feet first. Tina experiences a moment of naked panic as
she hangs by the tips of her fingers, feet treading air, and she squeezes her eyes shut before
exhaling and letting go. She lands with a soft thud, a sound like a clap of thunder in the empty
space, and she holds her breath, counting her own heartbeats as she creeps towards the door, ears
straining for any unusual sound. Her fingers are clammy with sweat when they close around the
handle, pressing down gently to slide open the door.

It gives with a raspy creak, opening inch by inch as the seconds tick by. She crouches down low,
closing her eyes as she concentrates on the words to cast a silent revealing spell and presses her
palm to the floor to feel for vibrations. Nothing. Tina turns to call for Leta and Jacob when she
finds herself face to face with a pair of large amber eyes and floppy ears. “Hello, Miss!” The
creature squeaks, worrying her hands. “How may I help you?”

Tina screws her eyes shut and mumbles a quiet apology before casting a confundus charm. The
house elf’s eyes turn glassy as she smiles and curtsies before turning away, and Tina hurries back
to the opening. Leta jumps down with surprising agility while Tina levitates Jacob the last of the
way as he struggles to reach the floor, and Theseus and Kyuho follow suit. The house elf is the
only living thing they encounter as they crouch-sprint along the corridor.

White candles burn in their holders along the walls, bathing the stones in soft, flickering light as
they hurry to flit through the shadows. Rooms branch off left and right, and Tina stops them at a large set of winged double doors. “That’s the auditorium,” Tina whispers breathlessly. “We’re halfway there.”

They reach a corner, chests heaving as they flatten themselves against the wall. Tina casts another revealing charm and gives a small nod, satisfied when she finds it empty. “The holding cells are along this corridor, aren’t they?” Theseus gasps between breaths.

“Yes,” Tina says, clutching her wand as she struggles through the fog. They hadn’t decided on how to proceed if they got this far, and she’s now at a loss. Her fatigue, coupled with the hurt and fear for Newt and her sister make it difficult to think. The barely healed gash in her side burns like fire.

“I suggest we split up,” Theseus says, sensing her hesitation. “Kyuho, you stay here and keep watch on this end; I’ll take the other. You three check the cells. Send off green sparks if you find them and keep going until we’ve got them both, understood?”

They begin at opposite ends of the corridor, checking each cell for a human presence as they go along. Tina is halfway along the corridor when Leta calls out in triumph. “Here!”

It takes merely a few seconds for her to spell it open, but to Tina, it feels like years until Leta pushes it open and turns to send a jet of emerald sparks towards the ceiling. “I’ve found Queenie. She’s fine!”

Tina’s legs buckle, nearly giving out with relief and she stifles an elated sob, allowing herself a moment to breathe before plowing on. Jacob makes to rush to Queenie’s side when Tina stops him in his tracks. “Jacob! We’ve still got to find Newt! Keep going, they’ve got her.” She swallows thickly. “She’ll be fine, they’ll look after her.”

“Yes, yes, okay,” Jacob whispers and raises his hand, about to knock on the next door when Kyuho cries out in warning. Tina blanches as angry shouting and the sound of spellfire reach her ears, spurring her on as the adrenaline pushes her forward.

_Homenum Revelio, Homenum Revelio, Homenum Revelio_, she thinks, frantically casting the spell, over and over. Where are you, Newt?
Chapter Notes

Part II of the rescue mission, where Newt has lost all sense of self-preservation.
Please, please, please do mind the tags!

Tina lays her hand against the very last door to the right and gasps as her palm reverberates with human warmth. That’s it!

Jacob ambles over and rattles the door. “You think he’s in there?”

“I don’t know, but we’ve got to try.” She raises her wand, murmuring a spell with shaking lips, but nothing happens. Tina tries again, and again, cursing under her breath, but it’s to no avail.

The door doesn’t give.

***

Newt drifts along in the dreamlike state between sleeping and waking, and his body feels heavy, so heavy. The wound on his forehead aches, small shock waves of pain he hardly registers as time goes on. It’s a peaceful place, yet deep down he knows it’s not. He isn’t supposed to be here. There’s something he needs to do, something to worry about, but he can’t put his finger on what it is. Does it really matter?

The muffled sound of voices reaches his ear, a soft, faint sound as if he's underwater. It becomes louder, pulling at him, steadily dragging him up from the depth of this false safety and into reality. The real world isn’t a pleasant place. He’s assaulted with a sharp, physical pain and the lingering ache of his memories the second he opens his eyes, and he groans, wishing for nothing more than to go back to the warm, fuzzy place where he doesn’t have to feel, or hear, or think.

He prefers to stay asleep, forever lost in a dream where Tina is alive and well, far from harm, smiling up at him with a gentle twinkle in her eye.

“You think he’s in there?” A voice sounds from behind the door and Newt cracks open an eye at the familiar sound, knitting his brows, sure his ears must be playing a trick on him.

“I don’t know, but we’ve got to try,” a second voice says and his heart leaps, crying out to her. Tina! You’re alright! “Aberto. Damn it. Alohomora!”

“Let me. They know we’re here now, doesn’t matter anymore anyway.” There’s a series of mechanical clicks and Newt’s ears perk up at the all too familiar sound, but before he can comprehend what’s happening a shot rings out, blowing the lock to pieces.

It gives with an ear-splitting crash, splintering timber going everywhere, and a well-placed kick removes the door from its hinges. Jacob’s head appears in the opening, forehead shiny with perspiration, but Newt has never been happier to see his friend’s smiling face. He stands back as Tina rushes past him, and turns to call out to Leta and Theseus.

“Newt!” Tina cries and drops to her knees at his side.
“Tina?” he murmurs, blinking through the fog, and she breathes a sigh of relief as he meets her eyes. She’s like a guardian light in the dark, soft and warm and bright in a world of thorns and eternal winter. “How — why are you here?”

“Doesn’t matter now,” she says, remembering herself, voice shaking badly. “What creature escaped your case on the steps of the bank?”

He licks his lips but doesn’t hesitate. “My niffler.”

“That’s right.” He blinks at her. “Newt, you need to ask me a question!”

He grimaces, fingerling the bump on his head. “Tina, I don’t think that’s necessary —“

“Newt, ask me a question!” she pleads with him, fingers curling into his shirt as desperate tears fill her eyes. The sounds of fighting come closer. They need to leave.

Pain and desperation roll off her in waves and he’s overcome with the need to stop it, to stop her fingers from trembling. “Right, I — where did we find Dougal after he’d escaped?”

“Macy’s,” Tina chokes out and makes a pained sound, halfway between a sob and a laugh as the tension bleeds out of her and she collapses halfway on top of him, pressing her forehead into his chest. His hands go to her hair, gently cradling the back of her skull, but she extracts herself a moment later, and his brow knots in confusion as he tries not to feel hurt by the action.

“Teen, we need to go!” Jacob calls from the door, using her familial nickname without realising.

“Can you stand?” Tina asks, holding out a hand without meeting Newt’s eyes.

“I — I don’t think so,” he says slowly, willing her to look at him, but it’s to no avail.

Theseus sticks his head through the door and rushes to his brother’s side, threading an arm around Newt’s waist to hoist him upright. “Let’s get out of here,” Theseus grinds out.

They meet Leta and Queenie in the corridor and Tina allows herself a moment to reach for her sister, leaning her forehead against Queenie’s as their hands find each other, squeezing tight. Their relief is almost palpable as they share this short moment of affection.

“We need to leave!” Kyuho says as he grinds to a halt in front of them, panting. “I’ve taken out these two, but there’s gonna be more where they came from.”

They rush along the corridor, treading as lightly as they can, pausing at the corner to listen with bated breath. Tina presses her palm on the floor and it emits a faint, silvery glow. Theseus looks at her expectantly and she raises three fingers.

Three guards.

Tina nods in understanding, reading something on his brother’s face Newt cannot see and pushes off the ground. Kyuho and Tina are in the lead halfway down the corridor as a spell hits the wall close to Kyuho’s elbow, cracking the stone.

Another flash of light shoots through the air, barely missing Jacob’s left ear as it finds its mark, hitting Queenie in the side with enough force to topple her over. She crumples to the floor with a pained cry, hitting the wall at an unfortunate angle, and there’s a sickening crack as her leg bone doesn’t withstand the pressure.

Tina opens her mouth, but no sound crosses her lips as Jacob kneels next to her sister, pushing her
skirt aside with trembling hands, revealing a large, gaping wound and a piece of white, shiny bone. Tina’s face turns ghostly pale and her throat works as she swallows thickly, struggling for control when Queenie’s helpless whimper brings her back to her senses. She kneels next to her sister, hands infinitely gentle as she murmurs a quick pain-reducing charm and Queenie sighs with relief.

Theseus returns to their side after successfully stunning the guard, eyes going wide as they fall on the wound. “We can’t go back through the hatch, it’s too far. Is there another way?”

Tina looks around with troubled eyes and Newt follows her line of sight as it settles on the elaborately carved timber doors to her left. She jumps into action. “In here!”

They stumble in after her with Jacob carrying an injured Queenie, and Theseus and Leta supporting Newt between them. Kyuho charms the door shut behind them. They’re in a large, cavernous space, judging from their echoing footsteps, and Newt wills his eyes to open, gasping as he surveys the place.

The hall is large and perfectly round, dark except for the silvery light falling through the glass ceiling. The moon’s silhouette filter’s through the shallow lake above, flickering gently and it reminds Newt of his nocturnal expeditions in the Great Lake, looking up at it from below the surface. The flash of memory shoots through his mind like lightning, aggravating his head injury, and he bites back a moan.

“What now?” Jacob gasps. “Can’t you Apparate?”

“No, we can’t Apparate out of here,” Tina says, reaching for Queenie’s fingers. “There are wards all around this chamber.”

Theseus glares at the ceiling. “Well, looks like we need to get out the old fashioned way, then. Stand back.” He raises his wand, waiting for them to get out of the way before blasting a gaping hole into the skylight above. “Confringo!” A rush of water and glass rains to the floor, drenching the stones as it hits the ground. The door rattles and groans behind them.

“Tina, you and Leta take Newt and we’ll send Jacob and Queenie up after you. Kyuho and I will hold them off,” Theseus says, pointing upwards. “Go!”

Tina and Leta grab Newt’s arms on either side and raise their wands skywards as they speak in perfect unison. “Ascendio!”

They land on their feet with a dull thud, struggling for balance as Newt groans between them. His limbs feel leaden and heavier than ever before as he struggles, eyelids drooping dangerously as he fights to keep upright. Newt leans against a nearby pedestal, staring up at the statue as it eyes him with unbridled curiosity while Leta and Tina pull Jacob and Queenie out of the hole by their hands.

“You’re alright, sweetheart,” Jacob murmurs over and over and Tina sends him a grateful smile. He picks Queenie off the ground, carrying her slight weight with ease as Tina and Leta move to resume their positions at Newt’s side.

Tina pointedly avoids Newt’s eyes as he searches her gaze, and it confuses him above all else. Before Tina, eye contact had been a necessary evil, an intimate gesture society expected and he loathed beyond measure. Now he craves it, longs for it; it’s a necessity, vital like breathing.

Did something happen? What changed?

Kyuho and Theseus are set upon once more, but there’s nothing they can do but hope they’ll
withstand the attack as flashes of red, green and purple light shine through the hole in the glass. They’re not out of danger yet. “We need to get through the main gate and back into the forest,” Tina grinds out, ushering them across the courtyard and out into the open.

“Goldstein!” Tina freezes in her tracks, eyes open wide as she bites her lower lip, slowly turning on the spot to face the voice. Silenus Rosier stands at the centre of the courtyard, dark long-coat flaring out behind him in the wind, eyes blazing with fury. Newt grits his teeth, heat rising at the back of his neck at the sight of the hated figure.

***

Tina steps in front of the group in a defensive stance, wand raised in front of her. “Porpentina Goldstein… that’s your name, isn’t it?” Silenus says, walking closer in confident strides, grinning deviously, knowing they’re hopelessly trapped.

“Leta, I need you to get them out of here,” Tina whispers over her shoulder.

“How — how could I possibly carry Newt on my own?!” Leta cries with panicked eyes.

“Are you a witch or not?” Tina hisses under her breath, swallowing thickly as a flash of fear crosses her heart and she risks a sideways glance at her sister’s pained expression. “Snap out of it, Leta, and get moving!” Tina turns back around in time to block Silenus’ first curse, trusting Leta to take over and keep them safe until Kyuho and Theseus arrive.

They’re evenly matched with Silenus’ fury and Tina’s desperation, whirling around each other like a pair of dancers as he flicks his wand like a whip in a near relentless onslaught of spells and curses. She parries them one by one, eyes blazing with determination and her own brand of fury fed by the boundless need to protect her sister and her friends. “Is that all you’ve got?” Silenus sneers, distorting his fine, aristocratic features into an ugly grimace of contempt. “You disappoint me, Alice, I expected more. I suppose MACUSA doesn’t teach their female operatives combative skills that aren’t of the horizontal variety.”

Tina grits her teeth, jaw set, and fires another curse with a flourish. “Well, if you couldn’t tell this was all an act, I’m not surprised if you aren’t any better with your wand than you are in bed. This should be over before it’s even begun.” Silenus growls and blocks her attack with difficulty, lips pulling back over his teeth as he flicks his wrist to send another flash of light her way. Tina conjures a counter-attack and their wands lock, red and blue flames fighting for supremacy.

Tina’s fingers wrap around her wand like a vice, squeezing tight enough for her knuckles to turn white as she struggles to hold him at bay. Silenus isn’t looking at her when he opens his mouth to speak again but locks eyes with Newt over her shoulder, delivering each word like a dagger to his heart. “I liked you better when you were staring up at me, singing my name and begging me to —”

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Newt clenches his fists as white-hot fury scorches his veins, nearly blinding him in its intensity and he rises to his feet without thinking and reaches out to channel every last ounce of energy into a blast of brilliant light, growling with fury as he directs it at Silenus’ arrogant smile. Tina’s attention falters for a split second as she turns towards the sound and it’s enough to tip the balance. Silenus’ magic comes dangerously close until Newt’s spell surges forward and meets its mark.

It hits Silenus square in the chest and he falls, eyes wide open in shock, yet the light doesn’t let up even as he hits the ground. Tina wheels around, lips parting in shock, eyes going wide as she gapes at Newt, finally meeting his gaze. “Don’t you dare talk to her like that,” Newt gasps,
breathing harshly. “You’re not worthy to even speak her name.” He glares at Silenus’ lifeless form before his legs give out as the scaffolding holding him up collapses and he crumbles to the floor.

“Why in the name of Deliverance Dane did you do that!” Tina cries and falls to her knees at his side, but he doesn’t hear her as his eyes roll to the back of his head and he loses consciousness. “No…”

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“Leta! Tina!” Theseus’ voice cuts across the fog clouding Tina’s brain and she looks up at the obvious concern lacing his voice. “Let’s go!” Theseus grabs Newt by the waist to haul him over his shoulder and together they run towards safety. Tina’s muscles burn, screaming in silent protest as she pushes on. A group of dark figures emerges from the forest to their right with their wands raised, on a direct collision course. They have mere seconds before the first spell hits the ground, barely missing Tina’s foot.

“They know where we’re headed!” Leta cries, scrambling along to Tina’s left. The ward’s boundary line shimmers innocently in the moonlight a few hundred feet away.

“Keep going and hold up your shield,” Tina gasps, casting another spell to block a curse aimed at Jacob. The short distance to the treeline feels like an eternity as they dodge and dive behind bushes and hedges to avoid the spells and curses raining down on them.

“Quickly!” Theseus cries as he jumps across the line and Tina barely has time to take another breath of air before he grabs her arm and she’s spun into apparition.

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Seagulls and the smell of salt and fish are the first things she registers as she picks herself off the ground. Small pebbles crunch under her feet as she turns on the spot, frantically murmuring protective spells under her breath and letting the wind carry them away. “Tina!” She jolts at the panic lacing Jacob’s voice and casts one last spell before storing her wand. Her fingers tremble so badly she misses twice.

Queenie lies on Jacob’s jacket, whimpering under her breath as he strokes her hair. “Teen… Tina!”

“Shhh, I’m here, I’m here.” Tina falls to her knees beside her sister and strokes Queenie’s matted hair before focusing on her wound. “I need light!” Tina shouts and Leta sets a few pieces of driftwood ablaze.

“Is he alright?” Kyuho asks, jutting his chin towards an unconscious Newt.

“Rennervate!” Theseus murmurs and sinks down next to his brother, leaning over him to gently slap his cheek. “Good morning, sunshine, time to get up.”

Newt groans and moves his head out of reach with a grimace, cracking open an eye to glare at his brother. “Arse.”

Theseus sits up with a satisfied smirk, but the slight tremble in his voice gives him away. “There you have it. Jolly as a niffler in a jewellery shop.”

“Where are we?” Leta asks, unwittingly voicing the question on Tina’s mind. “Dover?”

Theseus scratches the back of his neck. “Oh, um, no — we’re in Normandy. Our parents used to take us here sometimes. I’m terribly sorry, it’s the first thing I could think of.”
Tina huffs, not paying attention to Leta’s shocked intake of breath or Theseus’ watchful eyes as she tears her sister’s stockings apart. She swallows against the waves of nausea rolling over her at the sight. There’s blood everywhere, dark crimson, sticky and warm. She withdraws her auror emergency bag, fishing multiple small bottles from its depth and enlarging them with her wand, grateful she remembered to refill them all before leaving the Aerie.

Tina moistens her lips, seeking and finding Queenie's gaze. “I’ll have to remove the pain-relieving spell to heal you.” She swallows. “It’s gonna hurt.”

“Do it!” Queenie hisses, biting her lip. “I trust you, Teenie.”

Tina hands her a small, silver flask and instructs her to drink. Theseus frowns at the sight. “What are you giving her?”

“Firewhisky. She can’t have a potion for the pain or the spell might not work,” Tina says while pulling the leather belt from her coat and handing it to Queenie. “Here. Bite on this. It’s the best I can do.”

There’s a sickening crunch as Queenie’s bones are put to rights and she utters a blood-curdling scream, a sound so violent her entire body bows off the floor. Jacob is there to fold her in his arms, helplessly stroking her hair as his cheeks glisten with moisture. He doesn’t bother to wipe them away. Tina spills half the essence of dittany as she unstoppers the bottle, shaking like a leaf as she shivers despite the balmy summer night. She pours a liberal amount on her sister’s leg and watches it smoke and hiss until the last of it has closed. “Oh, Queenie!” Tina sobs and collapses on her sister’s good leg, mindful of the injury as they cry and laugh together.

Queenie holds her sister’s face between her hands and kisses Tina’s forehead with trembling lips. “Thank you.”

Tina smiles through her tears as the words stick to the back of her throat and she reaches for the last of her bottles. “Here. That’s going to help with the pain.” She hands it across before turning to Theseus. “We can’t move her right now, she needs a little bit of rest.”

“For course,” he murmurs. “We’ll stay until morning.”

Tina nods when she’s overcome with a hot wave of nausea and jumps to her feet. She makes it to a small group of rocks before her stomach lurches and she bends over as she loses the battle against her gorge. Pebbles crunch as a set of footsteps approaches from behind, but she doesn’t bother to turn. Theseus’ voice is quiet but serious as he speaks. “You need to grow a thicker skin if you want to stay in this line of work.”

Tina scoffs and gives a humourless laugh, wiping her mouth with her sleeve. “I just mended my baby sister.” She raises her hands, fighting a renewed bout of nausea at the sticky, red substance coating her skin and her voice drops to a raspy whisper. “I’ve still got her blood on my hands.”

“If you’re not careful you might have more than your sister’s blood on your hands, Goldstein,” Theseus says, expression deadly serious. “This is just the start. I’ve been through it — and so has Newt. War is coming.”
“I know that,” Tina hisses and straightens to meet his gaze head-on.

“You might know it, but I don’t think you understand.” He sighs. “You weren’t there. It’s not something you’d ever forget.”

“Perhaps we haven’t fought guns and dark wizards,” Tina says, sounding as tired as she feels, “but we’ve had our own war to fight. I’ve been bringing up Queenie single-handedly since I was ten years old. We barely survived, the two of us; I couldn’t have just left her there. I can’t leave her now.” She sniffles. “So if it’s alright with you, I’d like to go wash her blood off my hands.”

“Tina!” Jacob’s panicked cry cuts across to them, carrying in the wind, and breaks through the awkward tension.

“If you’ll excuse me.” Tina doesn’t wait for his reply before stalking off.

“What happened?” she asks with urgency once she’s reached them, crouching down next to Queenie.

“I don’t know, she was fine one minute and now this,” Leta says.

“Teenie!” Queenie cries between hiccups, tears streaming down her face as she reaches for her sister.

“Shock wore off,” Newt murmurs next to them, propping himself up on his elbows with difficulty. “Maybe she could do with a dreamless draught if you have it.”

“I do,” Tina murmurs, fishing the bottle from her bag, and Jacob makes space for her to lie down next to Queenie.

Queenie swallows dutifully and curls into her sister, burying her head in the crook of Tina’s neck. “I’m so sorry, Tina. I’m so sorry,” Queenie repeats, over and over, until the tears gradually subside.

Tina strokes along her back and arms, running her fingers through Queenie’s curls as she hugs her. “Shhh, I know you are, sweetheart. It’ll sort itself out, I promise. You’re alright, you’re safe.”

She knows there’s more to it than this. No spell or potion exists for this sort of pain. Queenie is fearful of the future, of what’s to become of her, and the ramifications of her actions. Tina won’t be able to take away this pain, and she can’t make it better. All she can do is stay by Queenie’s side and lend her strength.

“Teenie, sing for me, please?” Queenie whispers once the last of her hiccups have subsided and Tina has difficulty catching the words over the crash of the waves, but she doesn’t have to hear them to know what her sister is asking, and begins to sing.

It’s their mother’s favourite lullaby, and Tina had often sung it to the two of them after their parents’ passing. Her voice is slightly off-key and grows hoarse over time, but it never falters. Queenie calms in increments, her body gradually losing tension, and Tina breathes a great sigh of relief when her sister’s eyes close and her breathing evens out. Tina remains wrapped around her and her eyes turn skywards as she listens to the sound of the waves.

“You should try and get some rest,” Theseus tells her quietly. “We have about five hours until sunup. I’ll take the first watch and we can take turns after. I’ll wake you when it’s time.”

“Thank you,” Tina murmurs and closes her eyes.
Sleep is a long time in coming.
Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

Part two of the beach, with 100% more Newtina and a smidge more angst.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tina shivers and casts another warming charm. The cold has seeped into her very bones, aided by her exhaustion and lack of sustenance. Her stomach rumbles, tying itself into knots, and gives another painful lurch as she looks out across the water.

It's a beautiful place, tranquil and idyllic, yet raw and wild like the untamed beast it is.

Waves break ashore with a glorious roar a few feet away, their white, foamy tops extending far onto land, lapping at the wet sand and stone before retreating back into the swirling mass. Tall, rugged stone cliffs rise to her left like towering giants, turning their white faces towards the sea as they gleam in the early morning light. The wind has picked up overnight and the clouds form a continuous, impenetrable cover with the promise of rain looming overhead.

The atmosphere mirrors the storm within.

She lifts herself off the ground, wincing at the stiffness in her limbs as she struggles to her feet without waking anyone. A quick check confirms their wards are still holding strong and she wanders to the water’s edge to watch the waves. The seagulls are already awake and she watches tiny, black swallows sail on the wind, hurrying from the sea to the cliffs and back, chatting continuously as the sky gradually begins to lighten.

She bends down just out of reach of the water and picks up a pebble nestled on the ground. It’s slim and dark, its edges perfectly smooth from decades in the sand. It feels good in her hands, quieting her mind and soothing her aching heart as she smooths a finger along the surface. Footsteps approach from behind and she straightens. “If you’re coming to give me another lecture, Mr Scamander, I don’t want to hear it —” She swallows the rest of her words when she finds Newt standing behind her instead. “Oh.”

“I’m sorry, my brother can be a bit of a righteous git when he wants to be,” he says, leaning on a nearby rock jutting out into the sea. His skin is beginning to turn purple where his brother tried to heal his head wound, bound to leave another scar. He leans against the stone with unsteady hands and his skin looks ashen, contrasting with the lively brown of the freckles across the bridge of his nose.

“Newt, you shouldn’t be up,” she says, avoiding his eyes.

He tightens his jaw. “I’m fine.”

“You don’t look it.”

A seagull cries overhead before diving into the waves and Tina follows it with her eyes, shivering in the wind. Newt opens and closes his mouth, stopping and starting until he finds the right words. “I wish you’d tell me.” His voice is quiet against the breaking waves and she has to strain her ears to hear it.
Tina frowns. “Tell you what?”

“Why you avoid talking to me or why you’re looking through me like I’m a ghost.” He rolls his lips, deadly serious when he lifts his gaze, trying not to let his disappointment show when she averts her eyes. “Couldn’t you at least give me a hint of the crime you’re accusing me of?”

She wants to laugh at the irony of his words, but it comes out bitter and dry, entirely devoid of mirth and she grimaces at the sound. “I’m not the one keeping secrets, Newt!”

A deep furrow appears between his eyes. “Secrets? Tina, you’re not making sense.”

Something deep inside groans and shivers before giving way and the dam breaks, burying her beneath a wave of long-repressed pain and sorrow. “New York!” she bites out and he jolts at the vehemence in her voice. “You never told me why you came. That Dumbledore sent you to look for a magical child living with the Second Salemers or that he suspected an obscurial behind the strange disturbances.”

Newt’s eyes grow wide as his face drains of all the remaining colour before an angry flush rises on his cheeks, temper flaring, yet his voice remains deadly quiet. “Would you have believed me?”

Her eyes flash dangerously. “You don’t deny it, then?” she counters, tears burning at the corners of her eyes and her lips bow under the pressure. “Didn’t you trust me enough?”

“This isn’t about trust, Tina!” he says, voice rising above the waves. *I barely knew you* hovers in the stillness between them, loud despite the howling wind and restless surf.

Tina isn’t finished. “We nearly died for it, Newt! What about the letters? Did Dumbledore instruct you to write to me so he could keep an eye on Grindelwald?”

“Now that is quite enough!” he snaps, eyes a blazing emerald, and his fingers contract around the stone hard enough for his knuckles to turn white. “Is this truly what you think of me? I don’t know where I’ve ever given you a reason to doubt the sincerity of my words, or my actions or my — my affections for you, Tina.”

“If we can’t trust each other enough — “

“You’re the one who doesn’t trust me!” he roars, chest heaving with agitation, his curls a mess about his head. His eyes rise from her shoulder to her face to burn into hers and she holds the contact, stubbornly maintaining it until she’s forced to drop her gaze. “Yes! Dumbledore did send me, I don’t deny it. But I was sworn to secrecy, same as you are now. It simply wasn’t mine to tell, no matter how much I would have wanted to!”

They face each other without speaking, quietly seething under their skin. Tina opens her mouth to retort when someone clears their throat behind them. “I’m terribly sorry,” Leta murmurs, looking contrite. “I hate to interrupt, but Queenie is asking for you, Tina.”

Tina’s blood begins to boil anew when she lays eyes on Leta, her image the embodiment of the doubt, worry and fear deeply rooted in her heart. *Did you tell her?* Tina wants to say, but thinks better of it and chooses the only other option available. She flies. “Don’t worry,” Tina growls, looking at Newt, and Leta jumps at the sound of her voice. “We were just finished.”

“Tina —“ he begins, but she neatly cuts him off.

“There’s nothing more to talk about.” She walks away, feeling his eyes bore into her back all the way up the beach.
Newt watches Tina’s retreating back, noting the stiffness in her limbs and the tension in her shoulders as she stalks off.

“Newt…” Leta tries but he closes his eyes, fighting the urge to lash out at her.

*It’s not Leta’s fault,* he reminds himself, consciously breathing in deep gulps of air to calm his nerves. He knows it isn’t, yet he recognised the look on Tina’s face and the way her eyes hardened when Leta arrived.

*Leta’s existence would always hang over us like a bad smell, never really leaving, always lingering behind. You can’t live like this.*

Theseus joins them, passing Tina on the way, and his eyebrows creep up to his hairline at the sight of her face. “What was that about?”

The last of his patience snaps and Newt releases his fury at his brother, a well-deserving target. “What did you do?”

Theseus points at his chest in surprise. “Me? What did *I* do?”

Newt bristles. “You’re the only one who knew of my assignment in New York. What did you tell her, Thes?”

Theseus blanches and his face falls. “I — Merlin, Newt, I was upset. Dumbledore had the younger Goldstein girl contact Grindelwald without our knowing. Picquery is dead.” He waits for Newt to digest the news. “That’s what he does; he destroys lives! I couldn’t let him get away with it, not again. I *had* to say something.”

“You always do this, Thes. You never consider the repercussions and go blurting out other people’s business, damn the consequences!” Newt cries, years of pent up anger and hurt mingling with his pain, robbing him of his ability to breathe, or speak, or think. “Do you always have to take away everything good?” His body aches worse even than the time he fell with his mount during the war, like his muscles and bones are slowly disintegrating, body stripped of its strength.

Theseus steps back as if struck. “I’m sorry, Newt, I truly am, but you can’t take everyone’s feelings into account when you’re trying to avoid a war!”

“Oh no, of course not, especially the great Theseus Scamander, war hero, and selfless martyr, always working for the greater good. Do you ever listen to yourself? You *never* consider anyone’s feelings in anything you do, Thes.”

*Not your brother’s, not even your own.*

“Are we still talking about Goldstein?” Theseus counters and the angry creases on his forehead smooth out, eyes shining with genuine concern.

Newt pauses as Theseus looks at him, really looks, for the first time in years. He swallows thickly. “I told you she’s important, Theseus,” Newt says and grimaces as the ache in his head wound intensifies once more.

Leta rushes forward and catches him as his legs renounce their service and give out from under him. “He needs a healer, Theseus; we have to get off this bloody beach!”

“Easy there, old chap,” Theseus says, catching him. “You’ll see. She’ll come around. Tina’s
stubborn, but so are you. Now you just need to hold on tight.”

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Tensions are running high as they touch down on the Aerie’s landing platform. Nobody speaks as they make their way towards the building, steeling themselves for the inevitable reprimand. Guzman doesn’t disappoint, and his face is livid when he lays eyes on them, lecturing them all the way to the medi wing until Frida drags him away. Tina doesn’t leave her sister’s side even after she’s settled on one of the narrow cots, whispering quietly.

Newt watches her from his bed in the corner, taking in the tight set of her jaw and the thin worry lines across her forehead. She looks bone tired and like she could use a rest herself. “You really need to stop that, brooding really doesn’t look good on you.” Newt glares at his brother, watching him lean back in his chair with his characteristic lopsided grin. It is thinner today, and Newt forces himself to forget the resentment he feels for his brother, remembering he’s still got something to say.

Newt reaches for Theseus’ arm, wrapping his fingers around his wrist. “Thank you, Thes. I mean it.”

“You’re my brother, Newt. I wasn’t going to leave you behind,” Theseus says, eyes suspiciously bright as he squeezes his brother’s hand. “It’s really Goldstein you’ve got to thank. Your girl fought like a lioness.” He sighs. “I am sorry about Tina. I truly am.”

“I know you are, Theseus,” Newt says, settling deeper into the blanket. He feels like he could sleep a lifetime.

Theseus smiles. “It might not always look it, but I do want you to be happy, little brother, and she seems to make you happy. If there’s anything I can do to help…”

“Thank you,” he says again, and means it, knowing there isn’t anything his brother can do.

Frida sticks her head through the doorway, looking around until her eyes fall on Tina. “Goldstein, a word please?”

Tina rises, sharing a meaningful glance with Jacob on the other side of the bed. Her eyes flit across to Newt’s for the briefest of moments and her mouth tightens before she lowers her gaze, breaking the contact. Newt’s fingers tighten around the edge of the blanket as he watches her leave, his mind telling him to let it go while his heart is screaming not to.

He closes his eyes as stars begin to dance at the edge of his vision, heat rising at the back of his neck while his hands turn clammy and cold. “Thes I don’t — I don’t feel too good…”

Newt’s head lolls to the side as he slips from consciousness, dimly aware of his brother calling his name. Theseus’ frantic voice is the only thing following him into the abyss.

***

Tina misses the commotion as she follows Frida out of the medi wing. “Your presence has been requested in the conference room, if you’d come with me, please.” The older woman is silent as she leads her down the stairs and into the basement, and Tina experiences a moment of deja-vu as they push through the doors into the conference room.

Guzman stands over the tables at the centre, looking up at her expectantly. “Goldstein.”

“Teenie!” Tina barely has a moment to prepare herself before she’s ambushed, eyes opening wide
as she recognises the woman.

“Clemence! Mercy Lewis, what are you —” Then she remembers. Of course. The President is dead. “I’m so sorry about your sister, Emmie.”

Clemence Picquery pulls back and Tina is once again astonished how different she is from her older sister. They share an obvious family resemblance, yet where Seraphina looked regal and serious, Clemence’s innocent face and carefree spirit set her apart. The usual mischievous spark is gone from her eye, replaced by an uncharacteristic dull sheen of sorrow and it pulls at Tina’s heartstrings to see her former school friend suffer like this.

“Thank you,” Clemence says, swallowing against a fresh onset of tears. “It hasn’t really sunk in yet. We were at my grandmother’s in Savannah for lunch when — when we got word. Grandma, she… I’ve never heard a human being make such a sound, Tina. I—” She cuts herself off, pressing a hand to her mouth as her eyes squeeze shut.

Tina lays a hand on her friend’s arm. “Emmie…”

“I’ll be alright.” Clemence smiles through her tears, brave and thin, and at that very moment, she’s the ghost of her sister. “Sera left clear instructions. We never anticipated something like this… but she knew the risks.”

“Anything I can do for you,” Tina says, meeting her eyes. “You just ask.”

“Thank you. I’m just so glad you’re here,” Clemence whispers, clasping Tina’s hand.

“Miss Picquery, I’m sorry to interrupt.” Guzman grimaces, shifting uncomfortably. “But we should go ahead with the preparations if we’re to hold the ceremony tonight.”

Tina frowns. “Ceremony?”

“Yes. My sister is going to receive a formal burial in MACUSA’s marble hall as is the custom,” Clemence says, head held high. “But she asked for a traditional burning of her body and the transfer of her ashes to a member of her family for safekeeping until then.”

Tina nods, following Guzman’s finger as he points at the map laid out on the table. “We’ve cleared an area in the inner courtyard and Frida found some strong willow trees along the river. They’ll be cut as soon as the first star appears in the sky and arranged to be ignited at midnight.”

“We haven’t invited the council members as the Presidents passing has not yet been made public,” Frida continues. “I suggest keeping the attendees to a bare minimum.”

“Of course.” Clemence nods.

“Well then, I’ll get it arranged,” Frida says and Guzman makes a sound of approval. Tina barely hears their hushed voices as they discuss the ceremony, too lost in her own thoughts, straying back to a place with crashing waves and clashing words as her eyes scan the room without really seeing it.

Deep down she knows her fears are unfounded, and her mouth twists into an anguished frown at the memory of the pain and hurt in his eyes as her words cut through him, extinguishing their light and dulling their shine. You’re an absolute fool, Goldstein, she chastises herself and hangs her head.

Clemence pulls her aside once Guzman dismissed them, checking over her shoulder to see if anyone is listening before she turns back to Tina. “They just told me — the council has elected me
official envoy to the ICW,” Clemence tells her without preamble, making Tina’s lips twitch with amusement despite her exhaustion. Some things never change.

“Congratulations,” Tina says with an honest smile, glad for the welcome distraction. “It’s what you wanted, right?”

Clemence had followed her older sister into politics, where their obvious differences had been a regular topic of discussion. Seraphina’s decisively firmer grip had propelled her forward at great speed, while Clemence had been known for her kind but no less consequent stance.

With Seraphina gone everyone’s attention is bound to shift to her sister, and Tina is surprised the presidency has not yet been offered to her friend. Clemence seems to have read the thought in Tina’s eyes as she nods in understanding.

“I have been given the choice, but Tina — I believe I can do so much more as an ambassador. Sera was always so frustrated with her ministers and how they blocked her every move. I need to do more.” She takes a deep breath. “And I’ll need a strong president beside me. Someone who understands the need for change.”

Tina narrows her eyes at her friend, stating the obvious. “You already have someone in mind.”

“I do,” she whispers, her voice ringing with urgency as she pleads with Tina. “Teenie, earlier you said you’d help me if I asked.”

“Yes, of course. What do you need?” Tina asks, struggling to keep the sound of surprise from her voice.

“Come to Ilvermorny with me.”

Tina’s eyebrows disappear beneath her fringe. “What in the name of Deliverance Dane do you want me to do at Ilvermorny?”

“I want you to talk to Lally.” Tina’s eyes grow large as saucers. “She’d be the best to fill my sister’s shoes, don’t deny it. If you consider the alternatives they might as well give the presidency to Abernathy.”

“I agree,” Tina says, choosing her words carefully. “It’s true, but you know what she’s going to say. She swore she’d never return to MACUSA.”

“I know. That’s why I need you to go and change her mind.” Clemence meets Tina’s eyes, pleading with her.

Tina groans. “Why me? What makes you think she’d listen to me? I thought you of all people could talk some sense into her—”

“If I go by myself she’ll just dismiss me.” Clemence’s shoulders slump. “She won’t even talk to me since…”

Tina’s eyes soften as she takes in her friend’s composure, noting the defeated, downcast blink of her eye. “Clemence—”

“No, it’s my own fault. I’ve said terrible things, Tina. Unforgivable things, and I was too much of a coward to admit how I felt about her.” Clemence’s eyes shine with renewed moisture and she takes an angry swipe at her tears. “She’d just shut the door in my face.”

Tina sighs with compassion, forgetting about her own perils as she reaches for Clemence’s hands.
“You don’t know that. She might have been waiting for you to come to her.”

“Why would she be waiting for me after all I’ve said and done?” Clemence’s voice sounds quiet and small, quivering with tears.

“We say terrible things when we’re emotional, things we don’t even mean. I’m not saying she’ll be welcoming you with open arms, but I’m sure she’d hear you out if you’d be prepared to apologise. Lally knows.” Tina swallows thickly, ears ringing as she considers her own words. “She knows you, Em, better than anyone.”

Clemence nods, fighting for composure and her eyes are dry when she raises her head to meet Tina’s. “Still, I’ll need you to come with me. You were always the voice of reason, Teenie.”

Tina considers the escape her friend is offering, circling it to view it from every angle. It offers a reprise, a holdup, protecting her from having to choose. You’re a coward, Goldstein, you know you’re wrong. Go talk to him. She does know, deep down, and it fills her with guilt and shame until her anger resurfaces, restoring her pride. You need time to think this through to protect yourself. He violated your trust.

“I can’t answer you right now, Emmie,” Tina says after a time. “I have Queenie to consider, too.”

Clemence nods. “Don’t think too long, Tina. I’ve already spoken to Guzman and he’s granting you leave. Think about it and let me know once you’ve made your decision.” She sends Tina one last pleading look. “I really need your help.”

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Tina presses her forehead against the wall as she hovers just outside the doorway to the medi wing in indecision. Her fingers dig into the stone, it’s rough texture a cool, grounding counterpart to the violent swirl of emotion raging within. She takes one fortifying breath, then another, and another until she feels calm enough to enter.

Newt’s bed is empty, stripped of its linens. Entirely bare.

“Theseus is taking him to St Mungo’s to get better.” Tina turns at Jacob’s voice, meeting his eyes where he holds vigil next to a sleeping Queenie. “Must be somewhere in England, I think.”

“Why?” she asks in a breathless whisper and her hand goes to her neck as she swallows against the painful lump of fear lodged deep in her throat. “What happened with him?”

“He ain’t looking so good,” Jacob confesses, carefully choosing his words. “Passed out cold. Theseus says it’s exhaustion.”

“Exhaustion...” Tina murmurs as ice-cold fear claws at her heart. “When did they leave?”

“Not too long ago.” He smiles sadly, and she realises for the first time how tired he looks. Emotionally drained. “You might still catch them.”

She nods and turns on her heel only to collide with Frida. “Watch it, Goldstein. Good thing you’re here. I’ve just taken Scamander’s statement, now I’ll need yours and your sister’s.”

Tina falters as her shoulders slump in defeat. Newt and Theseus might still be on the grounds, and she’s about to miss her chance. There’s someone else I need to see. If I don’t go now, it might be too late!

Tina is torn between her urge to go to Newt and the need to protect her sister. It’s a fight she
cannot win and her heart aches, close to bursting when she makes her choice. It was never a question. Queenie needs her, now more than ever. “Can’t you let her rest until tomorrow?“

“I’m okay. Don’t worry, Teen,” Queenie’s voice crosses the room, raspy and quiet. “I want to talk.” Their eyes meet across the distance, and Tina’s chest swells with pride even as her heart breaks, marveling at the strength and determination she reads in her sisters gaze.

“You’re going to be disciplined, make no mistake,” Frida says with a stern furrow between her eyes, jaw firmly set. “Your actions will have consequences. For now, I simply need the facts.”

Queenie tells them about the voice in her head, about his demands and Vinda’s threats, about Dumbledore’s advice that went so terribly wrong, and Frida opens her mouth to interrupt towards the end when Queenie raises her hand, effectively silencing her. There’s one more thing she has to say. “He made a mistake.”

“Who?” Frida asks as her lips twist her into an unhappy frown.

“Grindelwald.” A pause. “He didn’t think you’d send anyone after me, so he wasn’t bothered with what I saw. He never suspected I’d tell you, so he let his guard slip.”

“What did you see?”

Queenie exhales shakily. “I think I know where he’s building his fortress. Nurmengard,” she says, voice dropping to a whisper. “I’ve seen it in his mind.”

Chapter End Notes

I’m asking you to bear with me on this. Tina is being infuriating, but she'll realise what an idiot she's been eventually. She is flawed and far from perfect. We all misinterpret things and overreact in real life.
Tina takes the stairs two steps at a time as she hurries towards the west wing. She doesn’t bother to knock before pushing open the door to Newt’s laboratory. Her heart beats wildly in her chest, clamouring against the confines of her ribcage as it contracts painfully. The room is empty, devoid of his instruments and his warmth, and her shoulders slump in defeat as hot, angry tears sting her eyes.

“You’re late.” Leta’s voice is carefully neutral, devoid of apology or accusation, only genuine compassion.

“How is he?” Tina asks, voicing the question that weighs the heaviest on her mind, bracing herself for the answer.

Leta gives a helpless shrug. “I don’t know. Stable for now. He nearly drained himself of all his magical powers when he performed wandless magic.”

Tina heaves a great sigh as a wave of relief washes over her, closing her eyes as her knees go weak. “Thank Morrigan.”

“I’m about to go after them. You should come to London with me,” Leta says and Tina opens her eyes in surprise. “You’re both as stubborn as a rock, but you’re good together. I’ve seen it. Don’t dismiss your happiness for this — this formality.”

“It’s not as simple as that,” Tina grouses, temper rising as heat spreads from the back of her neck.

“Of course it is!” Leta cries, throwing her hands up in exasperation. “Neither of you is entirely innocent in all of this, and you’d have to be mad not to see how much he cares for you, Tina.”

“I don’t think—“

“Exactly, you don’t think!” Leta growls, moving closer. “I know Newt better than he knows himself at times. The man’s entirely devoted to you! He’d move heaven and earth for you if he could.” Tina remembers the blinding light he had cast at La Roseraie, giving the last of his strength and disregarding his injuries as he fought for her, eyes blazing with fury towards the man who had caused her pain. She hadn’t asked and he hadn’t offered, yet he’d saved them all at his own expense.

Tina squares her shoulders, yet her voice lacks conviction and her words sound weak and pointless even to her own ears. “He kept his mission secret from me, even after we became friends. He never told me he knew about Credence.” An ancient fear rises from deep within, infusing her heart with renewed doubt and worry, and all rational thought is powerless against the force of it, making her waver. “How can I trust him after all this?”

Leta scoffs. “Newt’s not without fault, but he’s got his heart in the right place. He’s a good man, an honest man, and if he didn’t tell you he did so because he couldn’t.” She throws her hands up
once more. “I can’t believe you’re doubting him! He’s — I haven’t seen him this happy in a long time, not since—”

Her words hit a nerve and white-hot fury bubbles up from within, threatening to engulf her whole. “I don’t think you of all people should be lecturing me on hurting his feelings.” Tina turns on her heel and makes to leave.

Leta crosses the room in a few strides and comes to stand mere inches from her, nostrils flaring, eyes wild. “You can choose to believe it or not, but I care for Newt. He’s like a brother to me. Yes, I have hurt him deeply, I don’t deny it, but I did it to keep him with me.” Her throat works as she swallows thickly. “It was a little selfish, perhaps, but accepting his hand was the only way for me to ensure he’d come back to me. I knew if he’d have a reason to return when he went off to war, he would. A Scamander always keeps his word.”

“You kept him alive,” Tina breathes in astonishment, and her anger deflates like a hot air balloon.

Leta nods and clenches her fists as her chin juts out in defiance. “I’d do it again in a heartbeat if I had to, so don’t you dare judge me.”

“Have you ever told him? What about Theseus?”

“Neither of them know. I am in love with Theseus, I always have been, but I love Newt just as much, and I want to see him happy,” she says with vehemence. “You make him happy, which is why I need you to come with me.”

“I can’t,” Tina breathes, lowering her eyes to her feet, knowing she’s making excuses. “I’m travelling back to America; I promised to help a friend.” She expects Leta to shout, to argue, to grab her arm and shake her, but she does neither. Leta’s voice is quiet and filled with unexpected sympathy when she speaks.

“It’s very simple. Do you care for him?” Leta considers her for a moment and Tina blushes under her scrutiny.

“I do,” Tina blurts without thinking, breath hitching in her throat when she realises she’s only speaking the truth. “Very much.”

“Then what are you running from?”

Tina squeezes her eyes shut in embarrassment. “What if he doesn’t want to see me after all this?”

“What if he doesn’t — Merlin’s bloody balls!” Tina’s eyes open in shock when Leta curses with feeling. “You’ve got to be joking! Are you really that daft? Have you seen the way that man looks at you?”

“I—“ Tina stutters and finds herself at a loss.

“You’re like me,” Leta breathes, barely above a whisper, voice clouded with sadness as Tina looks up to gape at her. “You don’t expect anything good to happen to you, because you think you don’t deserve it. Now you listen to me: Theseus and I both care for Newt, and seeing him happy is what I want most in this world. I know he deeply cares for you, and looking at you I believe you feel the same. Happiness like this is hard to find — don’t waste it.”

Tina opens her mouth and wills herself to speak but no sound is coming out. Leta’s eyes soften as her mouth twists into a sad bow and she nods in understanding. “I could tell you again and again, but it doesn’t help if you don’t believe it. Go to America, help your friend, but don’t take too long to come back.” She lifts a warning finger. “I’ll come find you if you don’t.”
“I promise,” Tina says, swallowing the emotions welling up inside.

“Good.” Leta gives a short nod. “I’ll take your word for it. He will get through this, and so will you.”

***

Later that evening Tina stands sandwiched between Clemence and her sister, listening to Queenie initiating the traditional funeral song. Queenie’s voice is sure and strong even while she’s still weak; the slow, mournful melody is unlike anything she’s ever sung before, yet no less beautiful.

“Don’t go, Teen,” Queenie had said before the ceremony. “You know he cannot follow you where you’re going. What are you running from?”

Tina’s voice is thin and quiet and crinkles around the edges. “I don’t know.”

They step forward at the cue, joining hands and voices as the magic swells around them, rising from the earth to wrap around their feet before circling the funeral pile at their centre. Tina watches as bright blue flames rise high into the night sky, engulfing the body with dancing light as it hisses and burns. She squeezes Clemence’s hand to catch her attention and leans close to whisper in her ear. “I’ll come with you tomorrow.”

Clemence’s eyes shine back at her in thanks. The fire disappears as quickly as it arose, leaving behind a small amount of silver ashes which Frida directs into an imposing magenta urn with golden etchings, shaped like a regal Egyptian cat. She presents it to Clemence, who accepts it with trembling fingers and a quivering chin.

They leave for Cherbourg before dawn breaks the next morning.

***

The voyage is exceptionally stormy, but Tina welcomes it, quietly accepting it as a fitting punishment. Her seasickness adds to the nausea that’s become a constant companion of late, along with the tight knot of nerves in her belly. Another different truth begins to dawn on her then, but she banishes the thought as soon as it occurs. She misses her friends and her sister, but Newt most of all, like she’s missing a limb, and it pains her to think of them.

She met Dumbledore’s eye on her way out, and she shivers at the memory. Mysterious and deeply private a man, he inspires an unease unlike any she’s ever felt before, even if Newt seems to trust him explicitly. Dumbledore’s recent transgressions have not improved her image of him. The ICW seems to share the sentiment, yet he’s allowed to remain, proving himself too vital to the cause. His presence leaves an unpleasant aftertaste in her mouth as she says goodbye to her sister.

Queenie is reprimanded, her further involvement limited to consultancy rather than active duty, but she promises Tina to stay out of trouble before she leaves.

Tina still worries.

They make it to New York six days after leaving France and Tina barely has time to get her land legs back before they travel on to Massachusetts the next day. Her heart swells the moment Ilvermorny’s spires appear above the morning fog, revelling in the warm feeling of home spreading throughout her chest. The castle rises from the mist like the phoenix from the ashes, it’s four slender towers and circular hall looming tall in the morning light.

Emmie is a nervous mess by her side as they ascend the stone stairs at the main portal, and Tina wraps her fingers around her friend’s wrist to give it a gentle squeeze. “You can do this.” The
massive cast iron gate opens before her fingers touch the brass knocker at its centre and a lone figure appears in the centre of the courtyard. The woman’s dark braids fall over her left shoulder, gleaming like molten metal in the morning sun, contrasting with the warm cranberry red of her simple robe.

Lally’s bright, beatific smile only wavers slightly when her eyes cut from Tina to Clemence. “What are you doing here?” she whispers as she folds Tina in her arms.

“We’ve come to see you, of course,” Tina says with an answering smile. “It’s been too long.”

“Yes,” Clemence agrees, speaking to her feet.

“Well, how about we catch up over some coffee?” Lally bids them inside and Tina elbows Clemence in the side, sending her a meaningful look as they step into the cavernous entrance hall. Tina closes her eyes, letting its familiar cool wrap around her like her favourite coat, smiling at the myriad of memories it inspires.

Once they’re comfortably seated in front of a large window, Lally directs an ornate porcelain pot to pour them each a cup of dark, steaming liquid and Tina accepts hers with a thankful smile, gently blowing on it before taking a grateful sip. Clemence is quiet, but Lally seems not to notice. “Not that I’m not happy to see you,” Lally says, primly crossing her ankles, “but why are you really here?”

Tina clears her throat. “I told you —”

“Teenie, please don’t take me for a fool. I’ve read the papers this morning.” She turns to Clemence. “I’m sorry about your sister, I really am, but the answer is no.”

“Lally—” Tina starts, but she’s cut off.

“No, Tina. The answer’s final and I won’t hear any more of it.”

Tina crosses her arms in front of her chest. “I won’t leave until you’ve at least listened to what we’ve got to say.”

“In that case, I hope you’re prepared to settle in for a long wait because I’m not going to change my mind,” Lally says, narrowing her eyes in challenge.

Tina and Clemence share a quick look and a silent understanding passes between them. Clemence leaves in the early evening after barely uttering a word, while Tina remains, determined to see this through.

***

“Thes.” Leta lays a gentle hand on his shoulder and he jerks upright, blue eyes blinking at her in surprise.

He stands in one fluid motion to fold her in his arms. “Thank Merlin you’re here,” he breathes into her hair and her chest tightens at the pained sound of his voice as he bends to kiss Mira’s curly head.

Leta’s stomach drops and her insides turn to ice, clouding her vision as she recognises genuine fear in his words. The Theseus Scamander Leta knows doesn’t show fear. “Is he alright?” she asks, voice trembling as her fingers grasp the lapels of his jacket, taking in his brother’s lifeless form on the bed behind him. Newt’s skin is a pasty grey and his cheeks have hollowed out, cheekbones sharp as razors. He looks like a ghost of his former self and she closes her eyes
against the sting of desperate tears, feeling helpless.

“I’m not sure.” Theseus sighs shakily. “He’s developed a fever and the healers don’t let on, but I can see it on their faces: it’s serious.” He tries to catch his breath. “I’m going to have to write to Goldstein.”

“How?” she says in a whisper. “She’s still in New York for all we know. You won’t be able to reach her there.”

“I’ll find a way. I have to!” He paces in front of the door to the ward, hands in his coat pockets as he chews on his lower lip. “I still have a few favours I can call on. I’ll get word to her one way or another, she’s had enough time to brood.” He kisses her cheek and ruffles Mira’s hair before bounding out the door, taking two steps at a time as he descends the stairs.

Leta sighs and settles in the chair he just vacated, taking up the silent vigil as her hand closes around his ice-cold fingers. You need to hold on, Newt, just a little longer.

***

“Close your eyes. I want you to concentrate on the memory. Every blade of grass, every stone, every detail could be important.” Queenie complies, letting her eyes fall shut at Dumbledore’s instruction, focusing inwards and on the image she saw that day. She cannot remember how often she’s been here in the days since Tina left, blurring the line between the past and the present until she’s no longer able to discern where one ends and the other begins.

It’s like she’s living by the black lake, walking the graveyard in her dreams, breathing the cool air as the fortress rises against the rugged mountainside. “Tell me again,” Dumbledore’s voice urges. “What time of day is it?”

“Early morning,” she breathes instantly. “The sun’s barely up.”

“Do the mountains enclose you entirely?”

“Yes,” she says, then falters. “...no. I ain’t sure. It’s hazy. They’re far away. The lake looks like a sea; there’s nothing on the horizon.”

Dumbledore gasps and his voice trembles with excitement. “A lake like a sea? Are you — are you certain?”

“Yes. There are no waves, but it’s deep.” She shudders. “It’s so black.”

“The graveyard,” Dumbledore presses on, moving closer. “Can you read any of the headstones?”

“No. They’re — “ The image becomes clearer. “Yes. I can see a name and writing. I — I think it’s German.”

Dumbledore slams both hands on the table between them and she opens her eyes in shock, staring at him as he beams at her. “I knew it!” he cries in triumph and Frida looks at him expectantly. “I know where he’s building it.”

Frida’s eyes go wide. “Where?”

“He spent most of his childhood at the lake. It's his home.”

Frida squeezes her lips into a thin line. “Very well, it’s our best option. I’ll call for a meeting and have them send a message to MACUSA. I’ll need Goldstein to return.”

Queenie takes a fortifying breath before meeting his eye. “Why did you make me say it? Couldn’t you have picked it from my mind?”

“I could have, yes,” he says with a nod, “but a memory is only as clear as a person remembers it. Saying it out loud and answering questions made you see it much clearer, didn’t it?”

Queenie narrows her eyes at him. “You’re a funny man, Mr Dumbledore.”

“So I’d like to think, my dear,” he says and smiles.

Tina settles into her own silent vigil far easier than expected. The students have gone for the summer and only the professors remain, tending to their own experiments and research activities as they prepare for another year. Her internal clock takes far longer to adjust and she often finds herself waking before dawn. After the third day, she takes to walking the grounds, her feet carrying her along familiar paths before she even realises it.

A week after Clemence left her at the gate she’s watching the sun rise above the trees from one of her favourite hiding spots. The large rock juts out from between the trees, hidden behind bushes and gnarly shrubbery, and Tina has to get on her hands and knees to crawl to the edge. The view is breathtaking from here, and Tina’s heart swells as her eyes sweep across the valley below. The forest lies in the dark as the first rays of sunlight peek above the treetops, nearly blinding her, and she lifts a hand to shield her eyes when a noise behind her makes her jump.

Lally appears from the bushes, inching forward until she comes to sit beside her, feet dangling over the edge. “I thought I’d find you here.”

“Predictability isn’t a virtue in my line of work,” Tina murmurs, smiling crookedly.

Lally utters a laugh. “You forget how often we sat up here together. It wasn’t difficult to guess.” She sighs. “It’s good to have you here, Tina.”

“It’s good to be here,” Tina says, turning to her. “It’s almost like back when we were still at school. Only Emmie is missing.”

Lally lowers her eyes. “Look at what’s become of us. You’re a competent auror, Clemence is a successful politician, and I’m head of Thunderbird house.” A pause. “Clemence is married to her work, I’m incredibly lonely and you’re running from something — or someone?”

Tina’s eyes widen in shock and Lally laughs, carefree and loud. “Oh come on, Tina. You don’t think you’re fooling me, do you? Now, spill.”

Tina looks at her hands, nervously massaging her fingers. “There’s — there is someone,” she concedes and tries to ignore Lally’s I knew it! look. “His name’s Newt Scamander, we met in New York last December.” Saying his name aloud makes her stomach clench as sadness presses on her chest, forcing the air from her lungs. He’s constantly on her mind, with her every minute of every day as his memory trails behind her like a shadow, seeping into her bones.

Lally’s eyes grow wide. “Wait a minute, you mean the Brit who Obliviated all of New York City last year?” She whistles through her teeth, impressed. “I read about what happened in the Ghost.”

“He’s a good man,” Tina says, ignoring Lally’s knowing smile.

“So what’s the holdup?”
“I — I don’t even know anymore,” Tina confesses.

“Honey, I can see how much this eats away at you. You’ve barely eaten since you got here and you’ve lost weight you couldn’t afford to lose.” Lally’s dark eyes soften as they meet hers. “Don’t be like Clemence and me. Don’t dismiss your happiness.”

Tina scoffs at the irony. “Someone else said the same thing before I left.”

“Then he or she is very wise,” Lally says lifting her nose into the air, trying and failing to stifle a grin.

“You should take your own advice,” Tina says, turning the tables. “Emmie cares for you and she knows she’s been an idiot. If you’d return to MACUSA to stand for the presidency —“

“I told you that’s a bad idea, Tina. I’m needed here.”

“We need you more,” Tina disagrees. “The country needs you and Clemence needs you, now more than ever.”

Lally remains quiet and reaches into her red robe to produce a familiar cream envelope, holding it out to Tina. “This came for you this morning. It looks important.”

Tina takes the envelope, fingering MACUSA’s golden wax seal at the top. “Let’s make a deal.” Lally narrows her eyes at her. “I’ll travel to London to see Newt if you stand for the presidency in New York.”

Lally heaves a great sigh. “You never played fair, Goldstein.”

“I’m always fair!” Tina laughs as she rips through the seal and extracts the paper. It’s a summons back to MACUSA, just as she expected, and she’s about to stuff it back into the envelope when a smaller piece of parchment slips from within. Her laughter dies in her throat as she comprehends the words and the sudden onslaught of nausea nearly makes her double over in her seat.

“Bad news?” Lally’s eyes are full of concern when Tina meets them.

“I need to go,” she breathes, folding the paper with trembling hands. “Right now.”

“Come on, then,” Lally says without missing a beat, grasping her hand. “We’ll use the fireplace in the Thunderbird common room. I’ll come with you.”

Tina manages a thin smile of thanks as she hurries after her friend, willing her muscles to move when they’re slow to respond, frozen in shock as the letter’s words play over and over in her mind.

Tina,

Newt’s in bad shape and seems to be taking a turn for the worse. We need to be prepared. Hurry to London as swiftly as you can manage.

Theseus
Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

Going forward, I would like to remind everyone again to please check the tags as they'll be updated continuously as the story progresses. The last thing I'd want is to upset or trigger anyone, or cause you to come across something you'd rather not read about. This story is rated M for controversial content, so please be kind to yourself and be mindful of the tags.

MACUSA is whirling with activity by the time they step out of the fireplace, covered in soot and debris, and the transport goblin gives them a nasty look as they dust themselves off. Tina’s stomach twists with nerves and she puts a hand to her aching belly. Lally wraps Tina in a tight embrace.

“You go ahead to the auror’s office as they requested,” Lally says and makes to pull away. “Good luck.”

Tina looks at her, brow furrowed in confused surprise. “What are you going to do?”

“I’ve got to talk to someone,” she says with a small, mysterious smile, squeezing Tina’s hand. “Don’t worry, honey. It’ll be alright.”

Tina watches the tail of her robe disappear in the crowd before making her way to the elevator, directing it up to the major investigations department. Once there she’s shown to her former desk. A quick rummage produces a large white envelope with IBIS’ seal, CONFIDENTIAL printed across its front in red, angry letters. It opens at her touch and reveals a single piece of parchment.

Auror Goldstein,

Your presence is requested on the twenty-seventh of August at sundown. The exact location and particulars of your mission will be sent out to you closer to the date. Destroy this letter as soon as you’ve read it.

Frida.

P.S: I hope you’re well.

Tina presses her lips into a thin line before setting her wand to the paper, watching it burn to ash. She knows what this message means, they’d been warned there’d be danger ahead. Complete your mission at any cost, they’d said. Frida didn’t expect their return. Her hand goes to her stomach as her eyes squeeze shut in pain. This doesn’t change anything, she thinks and reaches for the table’s edge, steadying herself as the guilt threatens to overwhelm her.

“Where are they sending you?” Tina whirs around, wand raised, and breathes a sigh of relief, clutching her racing heart as she stares into Clemence’s shocked face.

“Emmie!” Tina whispers, out of breath. “Don’t sneak up on me like that.”

“I’m sorry,” she says, sounding contrite. “Lally asked me to come find you.”
Tina looks around. “Where is she?”

Clemence’s lips pull into a beaming smile. “Talking to the ministers about standing for president.” Tina returns the smile, feeling genuine happiness bubble up inside her despite her fear. Clemence reaches for Tina’s hand and deposits a small, blue marble in her palm. “Here, I want you to have this.”

Tina lifts it to her eye. “What is it?”

Emmie smiles and takes Tina’s hand. “It’s an international portkey. It’ll take you straight into the Ministry of Magic.”

Tina gawks at her. “An international portkey? Aren’t they reserved for political emergencies?”

“They are, but I’m deeming this an international emergency.” Clemence closes Tina’s fingers around the marble. “Go to London. I’ve already sent word and someone will be there to collect you. He’ll be alright, Tina. Seems to me like your Newt is made from sterner stuff than you might think.”

“Yes,” Tina says, smiling through sudden tears as her voice fails her.

Emmie smiles back at her, eyes shining with her own tears. “You brought Lally back, and she says she’s standing for the presidency. Tina, I — It’s the least I could do. Now go, I don’t think I’ll be able to get another.” Tina nods, pressing her hand against her chest, right above her heart. The cool glass gives her something real to hang on to when her heart feels ready to jump out of her throat, grounding her, yet it serves as a painful reminder that this is all too real. She watches Emmie’s smiling face when the familiar pulling sensation hooks into her navel.

Tina closes her eyes as the colours rush past, breathing through her mouth as the pressure increases before it slows, and she finds herself sprawling on the floor in an inelegant heap, right in the middle of the Ministry’s foyer. Her stomach rolls and quivers, and a bucket appears next to her not a moment too soon as bile fills her mouth.

“There you are, luv, first time’s always tricky, eh?” The reception witch pats her comfortingly on the back. “Welcome to London.”

Tina groans and refrains from correcting her. A quick inventory proves she’s still in one piece. Queenie had warned her once that international portkeys are dangerous and still in their infancy, but Tina decides losing a limb pales in comparison to losing the shy, enchanting man she’s come to care for so ardently.

“Tina!” A well-groomed mop of dark auburn curls appears in her line of vision before a strong hand reaches out to pull her upright and into a bone-crushing hug. Hot tears burn behind her eyelids at the pained tone of his voice. Am I too late? she thinks, not realising when she whispers it aloud.

“He’s stable, he’s going to be fine. He’s going to be fine,” Theseus breathes at her ear, over and over, equally affected as she all but collapses into his arms.

Theseus’ sure, cocky smirk is absent, his forehead marred with deep lines of worry and dark patches of sorrow under his eyes, yet they shine brightly when they smile down at her, speaking of genuine relief. She feels feather light like she’s floating on air when he leads her along the corridor and to a row of fireplaces, dark green tiles gleaming in the flickering firelight of the torches that line the walls.
He steps in first and is gone in a flash of green flames and ash before Tina follows suit, re-emerging in the small, cramped-looking backroom of a pub. Tina manages to land a little more gracefully this time, but only just. Her stomach rolls, but doesn’t fail her. Theseus leads her through the pub and out into the street before she’s able to brush the soot off her clothes, and she briefly wonders if she’s forever going to be covered in it.

The sky is the colour of fresh milk, overcast and cool, yet she feels entirely numb, following Theseus as if in a trance, stepping through the battered-looking shop frontage into a clean and orderly hospital foyer. He lifts his hand to greet the green-robed witch at the reception desk with an air of familiarity, breezing past with a steely look of determination. Tina nods at the receptionist in acknowledgment before hurrying after him.

Theseus rushes forward with Tina following hot on his heels, not paying attention as he leads her further into the depth of the building. Unlike MACUSA, the lift is unmanned and clinically clean, with a bored-sounding mechanical drawl announcing each floor as they pass. “Spell damage,” it says.

They step out into the corridor, bare and scarcely lit, it’s only source of light coming from a single, meagre electric lamp flickering as if in its final throes. Theseus holds her back at the door to the ward, finally turning to her. “Mother and father have gone for the day, so you needn’t worry about meeting them.” Tina lowers her eyes, conscious that he must have seen her harried glances, wondering briefly whether Theseus is equally gifted as her sister, but then she remembers who she’s talking to.

Theseus Scamander, war hero, and head auror. It’s his job to guess what people are thinking.

“We do not know what happened exactly, but he developed a sudden fever a few days ago. It only broke this morning.” Theseus looks even more haggard and drawn under the poor artificial light as he closes his eyes, sounding breathless when he speaks: “They put him into an artificial sleep to let him recuperate, but we don’t know when he’ll wake.”

Tina steps forward, sensing there’s more to it than he’s letting on, and boldly holds his gaze, challenging him, yet her voice is quiet and full of fear when she speaks. “Tell me the truth, Theseus. How bad is it? You would not have called for me all the way from America if this was nothing!”

He looks away, smiling absently, and wipes a heavy hand across his nose and mouth, looking incredibly tired. Tina frowns, agitation rising in her chest as she tries to catch his eye again, pleading with him, and he gives her a curt nod before exhaling in defeat. “He’s recovering now, and while it no longer seems life-threatening, we do not know how it will… affect him long term.”

Tina swallows hard, fighting the sudden tightness in her throat as tears prick her eyes. Get yourself together! How many more tears are you going to shed today? “May I see him, Theseus? Please?” Her voice sounds small even to her own ears and his eyes soften.

“Of course. I had you added to the visitor’s list. You’re practically family, Tina, so please…” He gestures towards the ward in clear invitation.

Tina eyes the large double-winged door behind him, its ancient cast-iron handles and wide timber planks looming over her. It’s her gateway to the past, the present, and the future all at once and sudden memories of a different hospital visit assault her, painful and unbidden, and she blinks back tears before exhaling shakily. Her fingers curl around the solid black handle and she pauses, collecting herself before pushing on. The door gives with the whisper of a creak, sounding much too loud in Tina’s ears and she half expects to find him awake.
The ward is even gloomier than the corridor had been, the thin, grey daylight filtering through the windows at the faraway wall doing nothing to dispense the murky darkness.

Eternal twilight.

There are a few other patients in the ward, some with a relative or friend huddled close, talking in hushed voices so as not to disturb the peace. She finds Newt in the bed the farthest away from the entrance, close to the window, looking paler than she’s ever seen him. His eyes are closed and he’s breathing evenly, his face the shade of the sky outside, and the clinical white of his bed sheets causes his freckles to stand out, making him look small and young and vulnerable.

Tina sinks down in the uncomfortable-looking wooden chair at his bedside. It gives a mild groan of protest at the added weight but doesn’t wobble. She reaches for his hand resting above the sheets while lifting the other to his face, gently brushing the unruly curls off his forehead. His skin feels cold and clammy against her own. “Oh Newt, I’m so sorry,” she whispers and lets her tears fall unchecked as she lifts his knuckles to her lips.

His condition remains the same the next day and the day after.

Tina gradually falls into a routine, always arriving first thing in the morning and leaving before his parents visit in the afternoon, returning only once they’ve gone in the evening. Sometimes reading to him, sometimes wiping his face with a sponge, always watching. Leta and Theseus visit daily after work, always commenting on her tired eyes and forcing her to come to the fifth-floor café for tea and a sandwich.

Tina had been worried about Leta’s reaction to her arrival, but her fears seem unfounded when the older woman wordlessly wraps her in a tight embrace, wiping at her weeping eyes, a grateful smile gracing her lips.

“You look like you could do with a brew,” Theseus says one evening and Tina is too polite to refuse the steaming cup he proffers. She sips it slowly, breathing through her mouth as the smell of warm milk sets her stomach on edge, yet she can’t deny the warm, soothing effect it has on her. After a time she even comes to like it, though she would never admit it to anyone.

It happens the third morning after her arrival when Tina is roused from her sleep by a massive, unfamiliar eagle owl insistently tapping its beak against the windowpane of her guest room. It’s carrying a rolled up piece of parchment, thrusting out its leg at her the moment she opens the window and Tina accepts it with trembling fingers.

The note only bears two words:

He’s awake.

Tina isn’t surprised to find Theseus already waiting for her once she steps through the derelict storefront and into St Mungo’s reception. The perpetual storm cloud above his head seems to have cleared, and while his complexion still wears the look of sheer exhaustion, his shoulders no longer bear the same strain, and he radiates Relief from every pore. “Tina!”

“Theseus, when—?” He reaches for her to pull her into a tight embrace, releasing her before she’s able to react.

“Just this morning. Woke up just as if it were any regular old day, seemingly no worse for wear. Mother and father are with him now.” He watches her closely, considering her anxious
expression. “Will you come see him, Tina? I’m sure he would want to see you.”

“Have you told him I’m here?” she asks, sudden nerves making her stomach clench, and she’s grateful when he shakes his head. “Theseus, I can’t. He needs to be with his family right now, and I don’t want to impose.”

“Nonsense, Tina. I’ve told you before: you’re family. We are all grateful you’re here,” he assures her, giving her hand a gentle squeeze. “Please.”

They arrive at the familiar set of double doors and Tina pauses at the threshold. Sunlight is flooding through the windows at the far end, shining like a golden beacon of hope. An elderly witch and wizard are standing by his bedside, and while she cannot discern their features there’s no doubt as to who they are. Newt is sitting upright, propped up by a wall of cushions behind him as he converses with his parents. Tina watches from the shadows, afraid to step into the light and the repercussions the move might entail.

Theseus senses her apprehension, smiling at her as he gives her shoulder a gentle squeeze. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a slip of parchment, pressing it into her hand. “That’s his address,” he says by way of explanation. “I believe Newt will be discharged in the afternoon, once he’s fully cleared, and I will accompany him home to help him settle in. Come see him then. Please.”

“I—“ she cuts herself off as the words stick to the back of her throat. She needs time. More time.

“Tina,” he says, eyes imploring. “If you want to direct your anger at someone, it should be me. My brother holds genuine affections for you and I believe you return them.” He closes her fingers around the slip of parchment. “Think about it.”

“Thank you,” she breathes.

Theseus makes to step away when he turns to her once more. “I might not have told him you’re here, but he’s asked after you. Your name was the first thing out of his mouth.”

He gives her one last long look before stepping out of the corridor and into the ward. Tina follows him with her eyes, unable to turn away. Newt’s eyes light up when they fall on his brother, lips pulling into a radiant smile, and a sudden wave of longing crashes over her. A longing to have his gaze land on her. See those golden eyes focused on her, seeing her.

It’s all she’d been thinking about for the past few weeks, seeing them every time she closed her eyes, and the longing in her chest intensifies, threatening to crush her. A lone tear makes its way down her cheek; hot at the corner of her eye and cold by the time it rolls off her chin. Shame and sorrow follow her out of the building, twining around her like a piece of rope, choking her, nearly making her stumble.
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

More Newtina coming your way! :)

Tina’s heart is in her throat as her feet touch down in front of a tall red brick building. It’s shaded by large poplar trees at the front, their branches lazily waving in the wind, bathing the house and the pavement in golden, dappled sunlight. It’s the first time she’s seen the sun since her arrival, and it transforms the dark, hostile city into a warm and welcoming place.

(Or is it Newt, warming her heart with his eternal sunshine?)

His building looks friendly and bright. It’s humble in its appearance, yet it doesn’t deter from its obvious charm. Much like Newt, Tina thinks and manages a small smile.

It’s early yet, and Tina decides to wander the neighbourhood for a little while longer. She follows the soft breeze down to the river bank, inhaling deeply of its characteristic scent of mud and salty sea. The Thames smells different from the familiar scent of the Hudson River, and its waters churn darkly below, heavy with sediment this far from the sea. It’s low tide, leaving large swaths of riverbed exposed, and Tina watches the seagulls and pigeons scour them for food.

Westminster and the Houses of Parliament loom in the hazy distance, looking small without their reflections rippling across the water. The wind caresses her skin, gentle fingers tousling her hair, and she closes her eyes at the sensation. She doesn’t regret coming here. Her assignment hangs above her like a cloud, a bad aftertaste that never fades, yet it is of little importance to her now.

What if he doesn’t want to see me? she thinks and her stomach does an unhappy little summersault.

Tina remains at the riverbank until the sun sinks low enough to touch the highest tower in the distance before retracing her steps, laying a hand across her belly to calm the swarm of nervous billywigs. She passes through the gate and makes her way across the courtyard to the inner staircase. A group of filthy children kick a ball against the far-off wall, screeching with joy as it bounces before scrambling after it.

Their laughter follows her up the stairs to the highest floor, and she clutches the swatch of parchment like a lifeline, pausing at the top of the stairs when she hears voices from an open door. Theseus exits and his expression brightens when he spots her. “Tina!” He approaches her with a face-splitting grin. “You have no idea how glad I am to see you.” I feared you wouldn’t come is written across his face.

Tina reciprocated his smile, albeit a little wobbly, and peers past his shoulder at the open door. “Is he—?”

“Yes, he’s fine, but he’s in a right mood. Stubborn old mule. Maybe you’ll have more luck with him.” He makes a sweeping gesture towards the door and she swallows her fear before stepping around him and into the flat. It’s kept comfortably cool, defying the unusual August heat, and she smiles at the sensation, grateful for the welcome reprieve. Newt stands by a table next to the window, his case lying propped open in front of him.
He straightens when he senses her approaching footsteps. “Thes, I told you I’m fine, I don’t need —” The words cut off abruptly as he turns and finds her standing in his living room instead, his face a mixture of surprise and quiet awe. “Tina.”

“Hello, Newt,” she says, worrying her lower lip to keep herself from smiling but failing miserably.

He blinks at her like she’s an apparition, a figment of his imagination and he’s dreaming it all before he drops his eyes to the floor and the wondrous glow falls from his face. “What are you doing in London?”

She utters a short, humourless laugh. “I came to see you.”

His jaw flexes as his lips press into a thin line. “I’m sorry if you wasted your time coming here. Theseus must have told you to come.” A pause. “He shouldn’t have.”

Tina furrows her brows as the back of her neck infused with angry heat, willing him, needing him to look at her, but he refuses, stubbornly staring at his toes. “He didn’t drag me here.”

“Then why are you here, Tina?” he asks and her breath hitches at the look in his eyes. “I don’t need your pity — or your guilt.”

“You have neither,” she whispers, stepping closer. “I’m here because I want to be.” A pause. “I’ll go if you don’t want me here, but I — I needed to see that you’re alright.” Please don’t send me away.

They stare at each other across the room, unblinking, and her fingers twitch towards him, her heart screaming at her to go to him and hold him close. His eyes say what his mouth cannot, and he tries and fails to suppress the smile tugging at the corners of his lips. “You can stay,” he breathes eventually and she has to strain her ears to hear him, “but I meant what I said. I don’t need any help, or pity, or a nursemaid.”

Tina shrugs. “I’m no nursemaid and I’m not here to belittle you, Newt. I’m — I’m here as your friend.” If that is all I can be right now, I’ll take it.

He appears to digest the words, eyeing her from underneath his fringe before turning away. “I’m going to look after the creatures. You’re welcome to accompany me, or you can stay here. Suit yourself,” he says, not unkindly, and disappears down the ladder without so much as a backward glance. Tina heaves a great sigh of relief before clambering after him.

***

Frida, Guzman and Dumbledore are huddled together at the centre table of the conference room. It is well past midnight, closer to early morning, but neither of them seems to notice as they scour the maps and drawings spread out in front of them.

Nurmengard’s blueprints glitter in the flickering electric light while the map varies in colour, with green river deltas interspersed with ochre hills and white-capped mountains surrounding a large expanse of blue. Mighty and deep, Lake Constance spreads across three country borders, shaped like a person with their arms outstretched above their head.

“Right here.” Dumbledore’s finger lands on a spot along the eastern shore with sure conviction and unerring accuracy. “Look at the shoreline. It looks exactly like the blueprint.”

Frida scrutinises him with critically raised eyebrows. “Are you absolutely certain?”
“I am,” Dumbledore confirms, tapping the paper. “There’s only one cemetery bordering the water, and it’s this one right here. It belongs to the village Grindelwald grew up in; his family must own a crypt within its grounds.”

Guzman snorts in disbelief. “And you think he used it to conceal the entrance? Why not use any old grave, why your own family’s?”

“Gellert Grindelwald is a proud man; bloodlines are everything to him. His family was the only wizarding family in the area, he wouldn’t just use any old grave.” Dumbledore meets Guzman’s eyes, lips pulling into a self-satisfied smile when the other man backs down, hands raised in surrender.

“If that’s the truth then the entrance will have the strongest wards and spells imaginable,” Frida says, crossing her arms in front of her chest.

Dumbledore nods, voice grave. “Oh yes. He’ll have layers of wards and protection all along the passageway. The stone’s impregnated with magic. It’s a large tunnel. Large enough to fit a dragon.”

“How do you suppose we proceed? It’s not like we’ll be able to ring the doorbell,” Guzman grouses, scratching his nonexistent beard.

Dumbledore smiles, unfazed. “Unisco Totalum.”

Guzman sucks in air through his teeth. “The binding spell?”

Frida splutters. “That’s highly magic. Few know how to perform it, and fewer still hold the power to cast it.”

“I’m aware,” Dumbledore agrees, continuing on when Guzman opens his mouth to protest. “Which is why I had you teach it to your aurors. You have some of the most capable wizards and witches under your command. Combining their powers to overcome the wards and curses is the only way.”

“Some of them might indeed have the strength,” Frida muses aloud, meeting Dumbledore’s eyes. “Their ink marks will tell us.”

He nods his approval. “Very good. We’ll send a group of aurors into the tunnel, the rest will stay behind to catch any stragglers and protect the entrance.”

“And what, pray tell, would you have them do in there?” Frida asks, shifting her weight from one foot to the other.

“You see this chamber?” Dumbledore points toward a large, rotund room at the centre of the labyrinth. “It’s protected from all sides. If there’s anything he doesn’t want anyone to find, he’ll keep it here. I’m sure of it.”

“You think it’s worth the risk?”

“Yes. Anything we find could be of use against him. I believe he’s already in possession of the stone. This would be the ideal hiding place. Your team will need to take a hold of it.” A pause. “Then they’ll need to set the chamber ablaze.”

Frida’s eyes flash with comprehension. “You’re planning to smoke him out from below.”

Dumbledore smiles. “Precisely. It wouldn’t need more than five witches or wizards, I don’t think.
They’ll combine their magical strength to overcome the wards and set fire to Nurmengard to destroy the castle and everything within it.”

“I agree,” Frida says, face grim. “It’s our only chance. We cannot let him establish a hold of such magnitude. What message would it send to the international community if the ICW would allow it?”

“This is crazy,” Guzman says, eyes going wide. “Our aurors will never make it out alive. If the fire won’t catch them the smoke will finish them off!” Neither of them bats an eye and Guzman gawks at them. “That’s your intention. You’re sending them on a suicide mission!”

“They knew what they signed up for, Arnold,” Frida reminds him, voice quiet and severe. “If Nurmengard is destroyed, it’s a success. Nothing’s ever fair in war, you should know this better than anyone.”

Dumbledore’s eyes flit back and forth between them until Guzman heaves a great sigh of defeat. “We travel to Switzerland under the cover of darkness. The twenty-seventh is new moon, so we’ll be as well concealed as we can. You really think selecting them by magical strength alone is the best idea?”

“It’s the only option we have. Some of them have made good progress. They’re ready. This means we’d be losing some of our best aurors, but it’s a risk I’m willing to take.”

Guzman glowers darkly but doesn’t protest any further. “As you wish. I’ll brief the aurors.”

Frida gives a curt nod, pensively pursing her lip. “Good. I already sent word out to Goldstein. She’s on standby.”

“How are we going to get her there?” Guzman asks, both hands gripping the table edge until it creaks in warning. “We can’t wait for her to travel back to the Aerie.”

Dumbledore makes a thoughtful sound and his lips pull into a slow smile, eyes twinkling with amusement. “You don’t suppose the Swiss would be fond of postcards, would they?”

***

They fall into a routine easily enough.

Tina follows Newt through the case, always two steps behind should he need assistance, but he refuses help even when his hands shake badly enough to spill half his tea. Stubborn to a fault, he insists on making her lunch every day, and Tina lets him, only putting her foot down when he attempts to perform any kind of magic. She leaves quietly every evening when the little golden clock on his mantle chimes nine o’clock.

They dance around each other as time goes on, drawing closer in ever tighter circles until the air is thick with words unsaid and crackling with electricity, robbing Tina of her ability to think. On those nights she’s grateful when the clock chimes the hour and it’s time to leave. He takes care to keep his distance until the youngest graphorn injures himself on the fourth day and Newt’s hands still aren’t steady enough to apply the dittany.

Tina doesn’t ask and he doesn’t push her away when she steps behind him to grasp his wrist, steadying his hand enough for him to dab the ointment onto the wound.

The warmth returns to his eyes after that.

Newt reaches out to softly touch her right wrist over dinner that night, stroking a curious finger
over the artwork just below. The outline has strengthened and the poppy is now a vivid scarlet, its petals swaying gently as if blowing lazily in the wind.

“What’s this?” he asks, meeting her eyes.

“It’s to measure our progress,” she whispers, breath catching as she watches his finger rub gentle circles into her skin. “I’m not sure what it means exactly.”

He makes a low, curious sound in the back of his throat, withdrawing his fingers and she instantly misses their warmth. His tremble steadily lessens while the warmth and familiarity between them intensify, and as the eve of her departure arrives his strength has all but returned. Tina catches him staring at her more than once, meeting her eyes before dropping his gaze to her lips.

Deep down Tina becomes more anxious as the date approaches, unsure whether she should tell him, fretting until she’s a bundle of nerves the night before. Naturally, Newt notices as he always does, watching her with a curious eye all day, but refrains from asking her outright until they settle on the sofa in front of the fire. His need for distance is all but forgotten as he sits close enough for their thighs to touch, his body a comfortable line of warmth against her side.

Tina feels him tense before he opens his mouth, lowering his hands to his lap. “Tina, I—” A sharp knock at the door cuts him short.

“Good evening, children!” Theseus lets himself in and plops down in an armchair across from them as Newt directs a cup of tea to float into his brother’s waiting hands.

“Cheers,” Theseus murmurs and takes a grateful sip before turning to Tina. “Sorry to interrupt, but I’ve got something for you, Tina.”

He produces a thick envelope from his jacket pocket, and IBIS’ bright red seal mocks her from the front. She takes it with trembling fingers and opens the latch without fanfare, scanning the words at breakneck speed. Newt’s eyes are burning a hole into the side of her head, but she ignores his questioning gaze.

The envelope contains her orders as well as a sepia-coloured postcard with ‘Lake Constance’ scribbled on its back. Newt’s gaze flits back and forth between them as he realises neither of them seems surprised by the missive. “You knew about this, didn’t you?”

There’s no accusation in his words, but she cringes at the disappointment in his voice, deciding honesty is the only way forward. “Yes, I knew,” she admits and covers his hand with her own. “I didn’t tell you because I didn’t want this to hang over us all week.” *Our storm cloud is already large enough.*

“They found it, haven’t they?” Theseus breathes, leaning forward on his elbows. “They know where he’s building his fortress.”

She grimaces. “You know I can’t tell you.”

Newt looks up to meet her eyes and she’s relieved to find only genuine concern in his gaze. “Where are they sending you?”

Tina fingers the photograph in her lap. “Switzerland.” She swallows, trying to forget about the words the letter doesn’t say, at least not outright; but, they’re there, shining between the lines. *Prepare yourselves and make sure your affairs are in order.*

“I’ll get you a portkey to France,” Theseus says, face serious. “Unofficial and untraceable, of course. You’ll be able to walk or Apparate into Switzerland from there.”
Tina struggles with her words, throat dry as sandpaper as she swallows past a sudden lump and sends him a tremulous, grateful smile. “Thank you, Theseus.”

“Don’t mention it,” Theseus says and makes to stand. “What time do you need to be there?”

“Sundown.”

“Evening it is, then.” Theseus lays a hand on her arm. “Meet me at Beachy Head at eight o’clock sharp and I’ll have it ready for you. Newt will take you.” Newt nods mutely, throat working as he swallows thickly.

Theseus claps his hands on his thighs and stands. “In that case, I should head back to the ministry immediately. Newt, I’ll see you tomorrow evening. Tina — thank you. For everything.”

She meets his eyes and they share a meaningful look before he leaves.

Tina turns to Newt the moment the door falls shut behind his brother, carefully watching his face. Her eyes fill with moisture as the seconds tick by and she takes one fortifying breath, set on telling him everything she’d meant to say, but didn’t find the courage to bring up during the past few days. *Tell him! It might be too late tomorrow!*

“Newt, I’m—“ Her gasp rings out in the stillness of the room as he reaches to cradle her jaw and leans in to press his lips to hers, gentle but firm, and effectively wipes the words from her mind. She blinks up at him in confusion as he pulls away. “Why’d you do that?”

Newt strokes a gentle finger along her cheekbone. “I know what you’re going to say, and I don’t need to hear it.” He smiles, voice dropping to a whisper close to her ear. “You’re already forgiven.”

“But I —“ She stammers, flabbergasted.

“You’ve apologised to me over and over with your eyes the past week, hearing it aloud would only use up precious minutes we don’t have.” He leans their foreheads together and sighs shakily. “We’ve wasted enough time, wouldn’t you agree?”

Tina bites back a sob, trembling fingers tangling in the front of his shirt as she tugs him in to seal them together once more. He sighs against her lips and spreads his palm across her lower back to gather her close. Tears prickle at the corners of her eyes as her arms snake around his neck, kissing him with desperate urgency, and he matches her press for press.

The golden clock on his mantelpiece chimes nine o’clock.

Newt breaks away with a groan, panting into her shoulder. “I didn’t think it possible to hate something as much as I’ve come to despise that clock in the past few days,” he whispers against her neck, lips brushing her pulse point, grinning into her skin at the shiver it inspires.

“I should go,” she breathes, but her actions directly contradict her words as her fingers slide into his hair to tangle in his curls.

His lips skim her forehead. “Stay.”

One word is all it takes to unravel her, murmured quietly into her hair, shaking her to the core, and her eyes widen in shock as he pulls back to meet her gaze. *Did I hear this right, or did I imagine it? “You — you’re asking me to spend the night here — with you?”*
Newt stands and holds out his hand to her. “Yes, Tina. That’s exactly what I’m asking, if you’ll consider it.” His words ooze quiet confidence yet his face shines with true vulnerability, eyes honest and open as they stare into her own, unblinking. “I don’t want to part from you just yet.” Tina studies him, eyes flitting from his face to his outstretched hand and back until she realises, deep down, this is what she wants.

*He’s right. This might be your last chance. Make it count.*

She stands, wordlessly crossing the small distance between them and his breath stutters to a halt when she reaches for his hand, turning her palm to thread their fingers. “Yes,” she breathes, lifting their hands to her lips to kiss his knuckles. “Yes, I’ll stay here with you tonight.”

His answering smile is radiant as the sun as he beams at her in delight, and his free hand rises to cradle her jaw as she closes her eyes in anticipation. “Do you need anything?” he asks and his voice trembles with sudden nerves.

“Just you,” Tina says and she’s barely got enough time to finish before he *crushes* his mouth to hers, gently tugging her along as they stumble into his bedroom.
Chapter Notes

The coming chapters and the end scene in this one, in particular, are what I first imagined in this story waaaay back (Christmas 2016?). It's what made me want to write it so badly. I hope you'll enjoy it as much as I did!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The sea shines and glitters below like a mirror, its bright blue colour only rivalled by the soft azure of the sky above. Tina shields her eyes against the sun to watch where they become one on the horizon. The grass along the cliff top is short and weather-beaten, leaning away from the edge as it blows in the wind.

Newt walks ahead of her along the narrow, well-worn footpath, her hand clasped firmly in his. He looks over his shoulder to meet her eye, smiling crookedly as his thumb sweeps across her knuckles. Tina returns the smile as a memory flashes in front of her eye, there and gone again, an echo of gentle whispers and pleased sighs, of desperate heat and a thunderstorm breaking overhead.

She remembers the look on his face when he’d smiled up at her last night, skin flushed and hair wild, eyes bright and shining just for her as he touched her in sure, reverent brushes. He’d choked her name at the peak, eyes wide, and she’d silenced him with her lips, kissing him to swallow the words she wasn’t yet ready to hear.

They are in every look and every gesture, in every blink of his eye, and it delights and frightens her in equal measure. She feels exactly the same.

They hadn’t spent a moment apart since Tina received her orders, locking themselves away in their small cocoon of warmth until it was time to leave. Theseus’ dark silhouette appears off in the distance, his greatcoat billowing in the wind, and Tina fights the sadness clawing at her heart, pushing it away in favour of focusing on the warmth of Newt’s fingers, tightening her grip on his hand.

“Hello,” Newt greets his brother, face solemn and tense, and refuses to let go of her hand.

Theseus smiles as he takes them in, eyes flashing with obvious joy despite the grave occasion. Tina inclines her head in greeting, distrusting her own voice. “Here you are.” Theseus holds out a rusty, old handlebar. “This’ll take you as far as the French-Swiss border. You’re on your own from there.”

“Thank you, Theseus,” she says and accepts the portkey, attempting a small smile as she reaches to squeeze his arm.

“Good luck, Tina,” he says, mouth twisting into a sad grimace. “It’ll activate at thirteen past eight o’clock, so you’ll still have five minutes to say your goodbyes.”

Theseus bows his head and steps away to give them some privacy. Newt reaches for her to pull her close, wrapping her in his coat as she twines herself around him, careful to angle the portkey away from him. His lips are on her cheek, her eyes, her nose, skimming her forehead before
settling on her mouth, and he kisses her with feeling until her knees turn to water. “Swear you’ll be careful,” he whispers into her hair.

“Yes.” Tina nods, tears pricking at the corners of her eyes, knowing it’s a vow she might not be able to keep. “I promise.”

Newt exhales shakily. “Tina, how — how’d you feel if you came to stay with me for a while when this is all over?”

Tina doesn’t have the heart to tell him this might never be, pressing her lips into a thin line to keep herself from crying. “I’d like that.” A sob escapes her resolve. “Very much.”

The portkey glows bright blue.

Newt beams at her like he did the day at the docks, leaning in to place a final kiss at her hairline. “Tina, you’re my North Star.” He inhales deeply of her scent. “I need you to come back to me.”

What?

She opens her mouth to ask, meeting his eyes as the invisible hook pulls at her navel, whisking her away until she can no longer feel his hands cradling her face.

The echo of his fingers remains on her skin long after she’s reached her destination.

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Newt’s hands fall back against his sides, empty and cold. Tina is gone and she’s taken all the warmth with her. A gentle weight on his shoulder breaks him from his reverie and causes him to turn. “You two had a good talk last night, I gather?” Theseus grins, looking more than a little smug, and wiggles his eyebrows suggestively. “Buried your differences?”

Newt’s cheeks infuse with heat as he glares at his brother, simultaneously struggling to keep himself from smiling. “That’s enough, Thes.”

Theseus raises his hands in a placating gesture. “I’m proud of you, little brother. She’s a good woman.”

“She’s extraordinary,” Newt concedes and his eyes grow wide when his brother holds out a battered, old can. “What is this?”

“Why, a portkey, of course!” Theseus says and grins toothily. “Did you really think I’d let her leave on her own?”

“How are we going to find her? We don’t know where she’s going.”

Theseus taps himself just below the eye. “I got a good look at the postcard last night, and once we’re there I should be able to track her.”

“Theseus, I —” Newt gapes at him, struggling to express his gratitude as he contemplates each possibility and, finding them lacking, sends him a beatific smile. “Thank you.”

Theseus returns the gesture, eyes suspiciously shiny, and claps Newt on the shoulder. “Come on! Let’s go get your girl!”

They grasp the can between them, holding eye contact until it turns blue and sends them tumbling after her.
Queenie lifts her eyes to the horizon for what feels like the hundredth time. The white fortress is sitting proudly atop the rocks in the far-off distance, impossible to overlook, mocking them. It’s clear now that the local governments must have been compromised, for a fortress of its size is impossible to ignore.

A lock of hair falls into her face and she brushes it away with a careless hand. She narrows her eyes as she focuses inwards, revisiting the memory, and compares it to what lies before her. The lake’s black waters are quiet, perfectly still, reflecting the sky like a mirror surface. Fog creeps across the nearby mountains like fingers of white smoke, steadily creeping closer to shore.

They’re standing within a small graveyard that borders the lake, walking between the tombstones, looking for the crypt in her memory. Dumbledore stays by her side, closely watching her face as her eyes sweep the ground. It’s the second to last crypt they check when her breath hitches in her throat and her heartbeat becomes frantic. She strokes a trembling finger across the nameplate at its front before turning to Dumbledore. “This is it.”

He raises his eyebrows in anticipation. “Are you certain?”

“Yes, I’m sure,” she breathes. “This is the crypt I saw in his mind.”

Dumbledore lays a hand against the stone and his expression is impossible to read when he meets her eyes. “It’s heavily warded. I can feel the magic pulsing through the stone.” A pause. “You’re right. We found it.”

Queenie wants to smile but her lips pull into a tremulous frown instead, finding no joy in their success as her gaze falls upon the castle in the distance.

Am I sending them to their doom?

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Tina’s feet barely touch the ground when she’s buried beneath a wave of violent nausea and dizziness, forcing her to her knees as she leans forward to breathe. She shivers through recovery until she no longer tastes bile in her mouth and rises on shaky legs to take a quick look around. Don’t stay idle for too long, moving swiftly is of the essence, she thinks as she struggles to gather her wits.

North Star? Newt, what on earth did you mean?

The surrounding landscape is lush and green, with soft rolling hills fading into the horizon as a river glitters merrily below, calm and inviting, but she knows she mustn’t linger. She removes her wand from its hidden compartment and concentrates on the gnarly, old willow tree in the photograph before turning on the spot. The air is colder and wetter when she arrives at her final destination, with the mountains looming darkly in the distance, their white-capped silhouette like the rugged spine of a dragon.

She is one of the last to arrive, looking around until she spots Frida among the crowd. The older woman’s eyes light up in recognition when they fall on Tina’s face. “Goldstein! Good, you’re here.” She holds out a hand. “May I see your wand arm, please?”

Tina complies, dutifully rolling back her sleeves to expose her forearm. Frida presses a finger to the red ink adorning the skin and gives a thoughtful hum. Her eyes are serious when they cut back to Tina’s. “Prepare yourself. You’re ready.” She drops Tina’s arm. “Dumbledore will instruct you.”
She makes to leave but Tina’s hand wraps around her wrist to stop her. “You know what’s going to happen, don’t you?”

“Dumbledore will give you the particulars,” Frida repeats, shoulders slumping in defeat as Tina glowers at her. “We’ll be sending in a team to retrieve the stone. We don’t know if this is the correct location, but the place is heavily guarded. It’s our best shot.” Frida’s mouth twists into a sad bow, her eyes expressing what she doesn’t say, and Tina drops her fingers. *It’s likely some of you won’t return.*

“I’m sorry, Tina,” Frida says, genuinely apologetic. “I will see you at the briefing.” Tina watches her back as she disappears into the crowd.

“Hey, Goldstein!”

Tina turns and sighs with relief when she recognises her partner. “Q!” She throws her arms around his neck without thinking and he reciprocates after a short moment of surprise, squeezing her tight. Neither of them is naïve enough to overlook the nature of their mission.

“How’ve you been?” Kyuho asks eventually, clasping her shoulder. He searches her eyes and smiles at what he finds there, reading her like an open book.

“I’m good,” she says with a secret smile and leaves it at that. Kyuho nods and doesn’t press her to elaborate. It’s one of the things she appreciates in him. She doesn’t have to pretend.

“I need to show you something.” Tina smiles at his enthusiasm despite the ball of sadness in the pit of her stomach, watching him pull a small photograph from his jacket. “See this? My wife just had our daughter three days ago. Isn’t she the most beautiful thing?”

“She’s precious, Q,” Tina breathes, examining the tiny baby wiggling in her mother’s arms. “I’m so happy for you.”

Kyuho beams at her and pockets the photograph, stashing it in the pocket above his heart. “She’s my sun and stars.” A pause. “I decided to retire. This is my last mission. I promised my wife to return as soon as I can.”

Tina’s smile wavers minutely, her mind going back to the man she’s just left behind, and a slow ache spreads through her chest, pulsing in time with her heart, filling her with longing. A longing for what might never be.

*I’ll fight to return to you, Newt. I promise.*

The sun dips behind the mountains until it’s memory is but a strip of orange on the horizon and a chill descends as day turns into night. Kyuho shifts his gaze skywards. “We’ll be going as soon as Polaris appears.”

Tina jolts out of her reverie. “Polaris?”

“Yeah, you know, the North Star?”

“Oh.” Tina has to suppress the urge to slap her forehead. *Of course! Oh, Newt!* A sudden commotion distracts her from her thoughts and pulls her back into reality. “I can’t believe you! I don’t have to tell you that you and your brother are breaking more than a dozen international laws by being here, Mr Scamander!” Frida’s angry voice carries across the distance and Tina whips around at the sound of his name.

Newt’s hair looks auburn in the diminishing light as he stands tall and lean next to his broad-
shouldered brother. Tina is equally relieved and mortified to see him, fighting the urge to kiss and throttle him at the same time. “Newt!” She hisses as she hurries over. “Why in the name of Deliverance Dane did you follow me?”

“Tina…” He comes to stand a few feet in front of her, hands raised as if to touch her.

“Because the man’s mad for you, and I couldn’t bear to see him brooding until you return,” Theseus says before Newt has a chance to form a reply, earning himself two matching glares.

“This isn’t a joke,” Tina bristles, crossing her arms in front of her chest. Theseus nods, face serious. “We’re here for support, Tina. They’ll be happy for every wand they can get.”

Tina’s lips pull into an unhappy frown at his words and she’s on the brink of telling them to leave when Jacob and Queenie enter her line of sight, standing detached from the crowd and suddenly her heart is in her throat. “Queenie,” she breathes as their eyes lock across the grounds.

She hadn’t expected her sister to be here — for any of them to be here — and the pain in her chest claws at her ribcage.

Queenie’s eyes widen in recognition before she leaps to cross the distance, barrelling into Tina at full speed. Tina closes her eyes as her sister’s arms go around her neck, pressing her nose into Queenie’s hair to inhale her familiar scent. “Newt, Theseus!” Queenie’s jaw drops when she spots them beside her. “How did you find — oh. Teenie!”

Queenie turns to her, smiling brightly. “You’ve been to London?”

There’s no time for Tina to elaborate as Guzman steps forward to commence. “Later,” Tina whispers and goes to take her place among the rank of aurors. Her heart feels like it’s about to jump out of her chest, beating much too fast, and she’s glad Queenie is still not able to read her thoughts.

You’ll know soon enough. I’m so sorry.

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Guzman stands sandwiched between Frida and Dumbledore, looking uncomfortable as he clears his throat before he begins. “We will divide into groups. The first group will enter the fortress while the second secures the entrance from above.” He brandished his wand and slashes it through the air, directing a set of glowing lines to form a familiar pattern and Nurmengard’s blueprint glimmers in front of their eyes.

“I will be leading the team into the tunnel,” Frida continues, pointing at the largest corridor leading towards the central sphere. “We will make our way to the central chamber to retrieve the stone and whatever else that could be of use to us.”

Dumbledore steps forward. “We’re expecting the corridor to be heavily guarded. Spells, curses, beasts. This won’t be an easy feat, but we’re confident you’ve been adequately prepared. Lastly —” He pauses for effect — “You will destroy the chamber.”

“How do you expect us to do that?” Kyuho asks, dark eyebrows knitting together.

“You’ve not been taught explosive techniques for nothing in the past few months,” Guzman answers without missing a beat. “Utilise all your skills. I don’t care how just get it done!”
“Isn’t the central chamber located right below the fortress?” Theseus meets Dumbledore’s eyes as he says this, unafraid.

Dumbledore raises both eyebrows, unfazed. “That is correct, yes.”

Theseus laughs, humourless and cold. “You aren’t just planning to destroy the chamber — you want to lay waste to the whole of Nurmengard.” He steps closer, voice rising in anger. “Have you considered you might be sending these aurors to their death? Even if they manage to escape the fire and smoke, the tunnel will most certainly collapse and they’ll drown once it fills with water.”

“Restrain yourself, Mr Scamander,” Guzman warns. “They’re capable witches and wizards. A flooded tunnel won’t hinder them.”

*If a creature or the fire don’t get to them first,* Tina thinks bitterly.

Theseus clenches his fingers. “You *have* considered it, yet you’re still going through with it!” He turns on Dumbledore. “Are you going to be satisfied once you’ve sent these people to their death? I don’t know what sort of personal vendetta you’re pursuing, but I’m done watching you play us like fiddles!”

“Enough! I won’t hear any more of it!” Frida bellows, eyes blazing. “You are no longer part of this organisation, and I can have you forcibly removed if you hinder further procedures. I’ll tolerate your presence, but you’ll be under our command. Are we clear, Auror Scamander?” Theseus stares at her in defiance, blinking once, twice before giving in and lowering his gaze, nodding his compliance. Frida seems satisfied. “Very well. We can’t waste any more time.” She takes a calming breath. “You can feel the wards from here, they’re of exceptional strength, so it’ll take extraordinary measures to overcome them.”

“You’ve all been given the incantations and we’ve practiced multi-versed spells before. I expect you won’t have any problems,” Guzman says, meeting their eyes one by one. “Check your ink marks and step forward if you see movement, please.”

Tina sucks in a deep breath. She doesn’t have to look, yet she does anyway, pulling down her sleeve to expose her wrist. The crimson petals are swaying softly, innocently staring up at her, mocking her, and she balls her fingers into a fist, holding it against her chest. She closes her eyes and takes a fortifying breath before consciously lowering all of her mental shields.

Queenie is there in an instant and Tina has to suppress a sob of relief as her sister’s familiar presence fills her mind. Tina feels Queenie’s heart shatter the moment she comes upon the memory of the swaying poppies inked onto Tina’s wrist.

*I’m sorry, I’m so sorry,* Tina repeats, over and over.

***

Queenie howls like a wounded animal. It’s a horrific, painful sound, and it shakes Newt to his core. His head whips around to where Queenie’s standing, watching Jacob puts his arm around her, but she seems inconsolable. “*No! No, no, no, no, no!***” She repeats like a litany, breathing rapidly, and Tina’s by her side in an instant.

Jacob steps back to give the sisters some space as Queenie clings to Tina, mumbling unintelligibly into her sister’s coat. Tina closes her eyes, squeezing them shut as if in pain, and kisses Queenie’s hair, over and over.

“Jacob,” Tina says and Newt’s insides turn to ice at the urgency in her voice, pleading with Jacob as she meets his eyes while gently disentangling herself from her sister. Jacob takes over from
Tina, wrapping Queenie in his arms and Newt watches as her shoulders shake, sobbing uncontrollably.

Tina clamps a hand over her mouth to stop herself from crying and Newt’s heart gives a painful lurch when he meets her tearful gaze. His eyes go wide with fear.

“Aurors, please step forward!”

No!

She holds eye contact as she reaches into her sleeve and time stands still as his world grinds to a screeching halt, pressing the air from his lungs, making it near impossible to breathe. A lone tear trickles down her left cheek as her lips move, mouthing the words she’d skirted around the previous night. His lower lip trembles as he returns them and he doesn’t attempt to hide the tears sliding down his cheeks. The tip of her wand ignites as the first star appears in the sky above, just over her head.

Tina steps forward with her hand held high, breaking their eye contact as she joins the four aurors lined up in front of the crypt, their faces illuminated by the light of their wands.

“Junctura Sanguis.”

Their lips move in perfect sync as the air thickens and crackles with energy.

“Concilio Auxilium.”

A magical storm builds around them as it swirls and churns, rising higher and higher above their heads, encompassing them whole.

“Misceo Sensus.”

Their voices don’t waver as they move through the incantation line by line, hands shaking and eyes wide. Tina’s cheeks shimmer with moisture, but she pays it no mind.

“Unum Corpus.”

The spell shivers and pulses as it breaks above them in a ball of brilliant light as they utter the final line before it vanishes into nothingness.

“Unisco Totalum.”

The graveyard is still once more.

***

Tina’s skin prickles ominously as the light fades around them and a shiver travels the length of her spine. She doesn’t dare to turn and look at Newt or Queenie lest she lose the last of her resolve. Frida steps up, wand raised. “On my mark. Three, two, one.”

They turn on the spot in a show of perfect unison, and the wards shimmer and waver, but their magic isn’t a match for the aurors’ unified powers, shivering one last time before conceding to defeat.

The sound of apparition echoes off the tombstones as they disappear, leaving nothing behind but tears and hearts heavy with uncertainty.
Chapter End Notes

My writing soundtrack is almost exclusively comprised of soundtracks, and the song to the scene at the lake is "Chinstrap Penguins" from the Planet Earth II soundtrack (co-written by Hans Zimmer). Give it a listen if you're interested, I highly recommend it!
Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

We journey deep into Nurmengard. Will they make it out alive?

The ground is wet and slippery when they pop into existence on the other side of the crypt. The smell of wet earth and stone is not unlike the New York sewers she spent hours staking for illegal proceedings, but there’s no time for nostalgia. An ear-splitting shriek announces their arrival, loud enough for the walls to vibrate with the sound, and Tina clasps her hands over her ears to drown it out. It’s near pitch black and she blinks against the darkness, but her eyes don’t adjust and her throat constricts as naked panic rises from her chest.

“Merlin, what is this?” someone shouts.

“Caterwauling charm! There goes our element of surprise,” Frida’s voice sounds over the clamour. “I don’t know how much time we have. We need to move!”

She raises her wand and her voice only wavers minutely as she enunciates each syllable of the incantation. “*Lumos Maxima.*”

The spell illuminates the corridor a few feet ahead of them, throwing ominous shadows in her wand’s frigid blue light. It’s empty as far as they can see, and Frida deems it safe for them to move, leading them onwards as they ignite their own wands. “This way!”

The first enemy spell misses Kyuho’s head by mere inches, hitting the stone behind him with a deafening sound. They flatten themselves against the wall to take on a defensive position as a barrage of spells rain down over their heads.

“How many are there?” Kyuho asks from behind her, casting a shield to ward off a curse.

“Hard to tell. Ten, maybe?” Tina gasps, heart racing, and sends a furious stunner towards the closest guard, making him stumble into a wall. “We can’t just stay here and wait for more of them to catch up!”

They’re at the front of the group, and a gap in the enemy ranks poses an opportunity for them to slip away. Tina searches for Frida across the corridor, briefly making eye contact before giving a decisive nod. “Right.” Kyuho meets Tina’s eye, nodding sharply once. “I’ve got your back. Let’s go!”

They move as one, dodging spells and blocking curses while returning fire, pressing further down the corridor. Neither of them has time to check whether anyone is following as adrenaline and their sense of purpose propel them forward. Kyuho manages to deflect another attack while Tina takes out the caster with one smooth flick of her wrist and they share a quick, elated smile before pressing on. Tina can’t believe their luck when the corridor ahead is empty and they break into a run.

The battle noise fades as they put more distance between them and the fighting, and the sound of their breathing mingles with the echo of their footsteps as it reflects off the walls, intensifying it tenfold. “How much further?” Kyuho shouts, breathing heavily, but keeping his pace.
“I don’t know, we should be close —” An earth-shattering growl interrupts her mid-sentence, drowning out her words as they come to a screeching halt, struggling to keep their footing on the slippery rock.

A large, cat-like beast obstructs the corridor in front of them, raising its scorpion tail above its head while its lion body coils in on itself like a spring, flashing its sabre teeth, ready to pounce. “Get down!” Kyuho shouts, pushing her out of the way in time to avoid the creature’s razor-sharp claws.

“Q!” She yell in blind desperation and his echoes off the cavernous walls, magnifying the terror in her voice when the manticore sinks its claws and teeth into him instead.

Her first spell bounces off its armoured tail and Kyuho screams in agony as it penetrates his shoulder. Tina raises her wand again on instinct and aims it at the creature’s head without hesitation. It howls in pain as the spell hits the side of its neck, throwing it off its prey, head smashing into the wall by the sheer force of Tina’s magic. It crumples to the floor and remains there, unmoving. She’s by Kyuho’s side in an instant, kneeling next to his mangled body. “You idiot, why did you do that?”

“I— I just couldn’t watch,” Kyuho rasps, grimacing in pain. “Just patch me up with some dittany and I’ll be alright.”

Tina complies with a skeptical brow and shaking fingers, knowing they don’t have much time before the venom is going to spread. “There. Let’s finish and get out of here.”

She slides his arm over her shoulder for support and Kyuho’s rattling breath sounds much too loud in her ear as they struggle down the corridor. They're forced to walk slower, stopping occasionally to listen, and Tina’s heart beats frantically in her chest as she strains her ears for any sound of impending danger. The minutes tick by, yet it feels like hours, like the tunnel’s never going to end, and Tina’s heart sinks with every step they take, every step that takes them deeper into the fortress.

“Are we still going the right way?” Kyuho’s voice sounds thin and weak, and his face looks pale in the blue light of their wands. Tina narrows her eyes, squinting against the darkness, but there’s no mistaking it.

There’s light at the end of the tunnel.

She doesn’t answer and pulls him forward, determined to see this through. The light shines brighter the closer they get, and Tina is forced to shield her eyes against the glare until they’ve adjusted. “That’s the central chamber,” Kyuho whispers and she jumps at the sound.

Tina performs a series of revealing charms, uncovering a magical barrier ahead of them. The shield shimmers as it reflects her spell and they share a look before raising their wands in unison. “Confringo!”

It takes their combined efforts for the shield to break and crumble, and it gives with a soft popping sound. They stand on either side of the corridor, backs flat against the wall, wands at the ready. She seeks his gaze and Kyuho gives a short nod before pushing forward.

Tina doesn’t have time to ponder the fate of the rest of their group once they step into the light. Her heart is in her throat when her eyes fall on the dark figure at the centre of the cavernous hall. His dark hair is cropped shorter than the last time she’s seen him, eyes dull and hollow, skin pulling tight over angular cheekbones, making him look more dead than alive. The hall is lined with torches along the wall, their blue flames emitting an ominous glow that does nothing to dispel the haunting look on his face.
“Credence,” she breathes and he lowers his eyes in an echo of his former self.

“I want you to have this,” he says, voice quiet and even, yet weighed down with incredible sadness as he comes to stand a few feet from her and his shoulders slump with defeat. “Give it to Dumbledore, he’ll have more use for it than they ever will.” His fingers uncurl to reveal a gleaming black stone nestled into his palm. Tina’s eyes grow wide in recognition, flitting back and forth between his face and his hand.

“Why don’t you give it to him yourself?” Tina’s eyes fill with tears, making it difficult to swallow past the lump in her throat. “Come with us.”

“I can’t,” he says, mumbling to his feet. “If there’s one thing I’ve learned, is that there are no second chances, at least not for monsters like me.”

“You’re not a monster.”

“But I am!” he bursts out, his dark eyes blazing, jet black pearls of fury. “Stop lying to me! I’ve killed people, I’ve done terrible things! There’s no way for me to redeem myself, and honestly? I don’t want to. They ordered me killed before, why would this change their mind?”

“They’re the monsters, Credence. Not you,” she disagrees and reaches out a hand to gently, carefully touch his arm. He jolts at the contact but doesn’t move away and she chances a tiny smile. “They shaped you into who you are, but you don’t have to fit into their mould.”

“I—I can’t. Please, take it,” he says and thrusts the stone at her. “That’s the only thing I can do. I’m tired of fighting, but you can still make a change. Please leave.”

“I’m not leaving without you!”

“Go!” he yells and she’s taken aback by his vehemence. “Go before it’s too late —”

“Tina Goldstein. It seems Gellert was right — you’re persistent like a pesky, little insect.” Silenus Rosier enters the light and Tina whips around as her stomach drops. “No matter how much I swat at you, you never go away.”

“Leave her alone,” Credence growls from behind her.

Silenus laughs, a near manic cackle that makes the hair on the back of Tina’s neck stand on end. “What, you as well, mongrel? Don’t tell me you care for her?”

“Leave her alone,” Credence repeats through gritted teeth, enunciating each syllable slowly and clearly in an obvious threat.

“Don’t worry, mongrel, I won’t harm your precious saviour. I’ll take him instead, then,” Silenus says and points his wand at Kyuho. “Crucio!”

“No!” Tina cries out, throwing herself over her partner as he crumbles to the floor with a cry, writhing in pain. “Stop! Don’t do this. Please!”

“Fine, since you asked so nicely,” Silenus says with a sneer as Tina bends over Kyuho, unwittingly exposing her back to her enemy. The ebony of his wand shines in the dark as it’s tip points at her spine.

“No!” Credence bellows, extending his hand to send a cloud of black smoke towards the ceiling and Tina meets his fearful gaze as it hits the stone a with a resounding crash. A crack forms upon
impact, splitting it open like the root system of a tree.

Things move quickly after that.

Credence loses his human form and dives at her as a swirling, black mass of magical force, penetrating her chest at the same time as Silenus’ spell hits her left shoulder in a flash of brilliant green. The air is sucked from her lungs by the sheer force of the impact, and her whole body burns as their magic fights for supremacy.

*I’m so sorry,* the cloud whispers as it disappears. *Now we’re even.*

She falls to her knees with an unearthly cry, eyes going wide, stunned, blinking dazedly until she realises *she* made this sound. “Tina!” Kyuho gasps in terror and meets her frightened gaze as she struggles for words, but no sound comes out.

The ceiling gives a warning twinge, groaning ominously; a dark, sinister sound and the stone splits apart above where Silenus is standing, small hairline fractures expanding into large, gaping canyons as the floor vibrates below. Silenus’ pays it no mind, eyes glowing with manic determination. “Stupid mongrel, always getting in the way —”

Any further words are drowned out by the deafening crash when the stones fail overhead, burying him in a cloud of rock and debris as the chamber collapses in on itself.

***

Above ground, the earth vibrates with an ominous sound, and the previously quiet waters come alive to resemble the sea as wave after wave washes ashore. “What was that?” someone shouts and they all jump to their feet.

“I — I think they must have succeeded in blowing the thing to smithereens,” Guzman says, but he sounds unconvinced.

Queenie gasps, breaking the vigil of silence she’d taken up the moment Tina had disapperated. “I’ve lost the connection,” she shrieks and her voice rings with naked terror. “I can’t hear her anymore. *Tina!*”

“We need to go in!” another auror shouts, but Guzman shakes his head.

“If the mission fails I’m not risking any more lives. Sit your ass down, Novak!”

“I have an idea,” Dumbledore says, and they watch as he walks to the water’s edge and wades into the lake until he’s hip-deep.

The language he shouts is vaguely familiar, yet Newt doesn’t know the particulars and it’s difficult for him to understand from a distance. Newt gasps when the bearded head of a merman emerges, followed by a well-built torso and arms until he stands at the same height as Dumbledore, staring right into his eyes. “What’s he doing?” Theseus gasps and his question is echoed by some of their companions.

Newt squints his eyes as the merman nods in understanding and does a sudden backward flip, disappearing in the black depths of the lake as his tail narrowly misses Dumbledore’s head. “He said part of the tunnel collapsed,” Dumbledore says once he’s back on dry land. “I asked for help — to see if there are any survivors. The merfolk don’t take kindly to Grindelwald’s invasion, so he agreed to help.”
Newt’s mouth goes dry and his hands feel clammy and cold with fear as he considers the meaning of his words. “Thes,” he murmurs and reaches for his brother’s arm. “We need to do something. If there’s a chance she’s still in there... I can’t — I can’t just let her go.”

Theseus looks towards the horizon where Nurmengard’s shape is barely visible in the dark. “We need to go in.”

Newt meets his gaze. “Just the two of us? Will we be strong enough to break the wards?”

“If we perform the unification spell it’ll be twice as effective,” Theseus explains. “We’re brothers, we share the same blood, the same magic runs through our veins. There’s no conflicting powers, which will make the bond far stronger.”

“Let’s do it,” Newt says without hesitation.

They turn to make their way towards the entrance when Queenie’s voice stops them in their tracks. “Newt!” She takes a hold of his arm when she catches up with them. Her eyes shine with tears when she meets his gaze, her mind gently prodding his until she smiles, happy with what she finds there. “She’s still out there, I can feel it.” Her voice drops to a whisper. “Bring her back to us.”

He nods mutely, not trusting his voice, and she squeezes his arm before letting him go. Newt and Theseus take their position and repeat the lines Tina and the others had performed earlier. Queenie has to stop Guzman from interrupting them. “Don’t! It’s too dangerous,” she hisses.

“You fools! What are you planning to do?” Guzman bristles.

“We’re going after them. All of us,” Theseus explains once they finish, rolling his shoulders before turning to Newt. “What do you think, little brother?”

“They already know we’re here, there’s no need for courtesy,” Newt says, raising his wand.

“Your views on polite behaviour have always been questionable, but I’ll agree with you here.” Theseus sends him an encouraging smile. “Let’s kick in their front door.”

Newt returns his with a fleeting smile of his own, and their bodies work in perfect harmony as they raise their arms skywards before slamming their magic into the ground. “Confringo Maxima!”

Nurmengard doesn’t concede defeat easily, and the magic interwoven into its foundation fights back tooth and nail. A furious wind rises from the hole in the ground to attack them like a swarm of angry bees and Newt and Theseus raise their wands to brace themselves, casting a shield charm to counter its attack. “What is this?” Theseus grinds out between gritted teeth as his grip tightens around his wand.

The rest of the aurors step up, combining their strength to fight the fortress in a magical tug of war. It groans and wavers before retreating back into the ground, leaving behind a large, gaping hole for them to climb through. The brothers naturally take the lead with Theseus at the front and Newt right behind him as they lower themselves into the ground. “We’ve got to be careful. After this we’ve got no idea what we’ll find,” Theseus says as he ignites his wand.

The water is shin deep where their feet hit solid ground and rises steadily as they make their way deeper into the tunnel. There’s no sign of life and Newt’s heart sinks further with every step they take. They’re halfway through the tunnel when they encounter Frida and one of the other aurors carrying a lifeless form between them. Newt’s chest fills with shame at the relief he feels when he recognises the body as one of the French aurors. Theseus’ footsteps quicken as he rushes to their
side. “What happened?” Frida opens her mouth to reply, but he cuts her off. “Where’s the rest of the team?”

*Where is Tina?*

Frida’s face contorted with pain. “We were separated when they ambushed us. Chun and Goldstein were able to free themselves and fought their way further down the tunnel. We went after them as soon as we could, but most of the tunnel has collapsed and the water keeps rising. There’s no way to get through.”

“We need to get out of here!” someone shouts and Theseus meets Newt’s eye.

Theseus’ gaze is heavy with sadness, and Newt thinks he’s never seen his brother slump in defeat, yet he doesn’t have a moment to dwell on it when his chest constricts and he feels his heart break, every fibre of his being aching with the painful reality that Tina might be lost forever.

“Breathe,” Theseus’ gentle voice sounds in his ear and Newt feels his brother’s steadying hand press into his shoulder.

“Thes,” Newt rasps painfully, fighting back tears as he reaches for his brother’s hand.

“I know,” Theseus says and squeezes Newt’s fingers. “Let’s get out of here.”

Newt didn’t think it possible for a heart to break twice, yet his shatters into a million pieces the moment he meets Queenie’s fearful gaze up on the surface. Her eyes fill with tears and she rushes forward to embrace him, clinging to him as her body shakes with desperate sobs, and his fingers bury into the fabric at her back as he holds on for dear life, closing his eyes as his vision blurs with hot, burning tears and he welcomes the pain.

The sky overhead begins to lighten as velvety blue turns to silvery grey and frigid pink.

A new day is dawning.
Chapter 32

“Tina!” Kyuho’s voice sounds far away and muffled like something is covering her ears. She blinks through the darkness, struggling to regain her senses. “Tina, are you there?”

“I’m here,” she hisses through the searing pain in her shoulder and presses a hand to the wound. Her skin is hot to the touch and she winces at the slightest pressure. Her eyes go wide when she regains her senses. “Kyuho, are you alright? Where’s Credence?” Tina gropes for her wand and blinks in surprise when her hand hits water.

“I’m fine, I don’t know what happened to the kid. Rosier is dead,” he says with grim satisfaction and winces as he shifts. “What’s that sound?”

The fear in Kyuho’s voice is the last push she needs for her auror senses to kick in. Tina raises her eyes to the ceiling and suppresses a gasp when her gaze lands on the large crack in the ceiling and the gushing water that’s slowly filling the chamber. “What’s happening?” Kyuho asks. “It’s so dark in here.”

Tina’s head whips around and she watches him turning his head, blinking rapidly and her heart sinks when the truth sinks in. He cannot see. The venom is making its way through his system and his body is starting to shut down. “We need to get out of here,” she says as she surveys the damage. The tunnel they’d come from has collapsed with large boulders obstructing their way, blocking their escape. They’re trapped. “Come on, let’s go.”

Tina has to think fast. The venom is likely to kill him, yet she doesn’t want to spend their last moments waiting for death to take them. They need to keep moving. She pulls him to his feet and slides an arm under his shoulder for support, breathing through the pain as his weight presses on her injured shoulder. They stumble into one of the tunnels which hasn’t collapsed, blindly pressing on as the water rises around them.

Soon it’s up to their waist and it becomes difficult to move. Tina bites her lower lip as she considers their options. “Can you swim?”

“I might be able to float?” His voice sounds weaker than before, laced with doubt. “You should leave me here and find a way out. I’m just going to slow you down.”

“No way,” she declares, eyes blazing with fierce determination. “I’m not leaving you here. Your wife needs you, and your daughter needs you. I’m not letting another little girl grow up without her father.” Tina fights her fear and exhaustion, keeping their heads above water as they continue down the tunnel. Her hand hits the ceiling above and she knows they’re out of time. “Kyuho, you need to stay with me,” she says, waiting for his reply, and stifles a sob when there is none.

Newt… Queenie… Jacob. I’m so sorry.

***

Newt sits on the pebbled beach and pulls his knees up to his chin, watching the colours in the sky change from pink to powder blue, seeing yet not really seeing it as he stares out across the water. He rubs his wet cheeks on his knee and takes a shuddering breath while his fingers dig into his shins hard enough to bruise. Theseus plops down next to him and they sit in silence until Theseus noisily clears his throat. “Newt, you don’t know how sorry I am,” Theseus says, laying a gentle hand on his shoulder, “but waiting isn’t going to bring her back. We should return to London.”
Newt shrugs it off. “I’m not leaving, Thes.”

“She’s gone, Newt.” A pause “You were there. You saw the water. Queenie can’t hear her thoughts anymore. We can’t stay here forever.”

“Watch me,” Newt grinds out, turning his head away as fresh tears roll down his cheeks.

Theseus utters a heavy sigh as his gaze travels out over the lake, heart heavy and hurting along with his brother. “We’ll stay as long as you need.” Newt turns to meets his eye, sending him a fleeting smile, immensely grateful to have Theseus by his side.

***

Tina swallows her despair as the water leaves barely enough space to keep her head afloat as she pulls Kyuho’s lifeless body along. She screams in terror when a head emerges from the water mere inches ahead, loud enough for Kyuho to regain consciousness. “What’s happening?” he slurs.

The head has the shape of a human man, yet his scaly skin resembles a fish, and his nose is absent in favour of two large sets of gills either side of his neck. Tina gasps when she recognises the creature and braces herself for the inevitable attack. The merman gestures to her, speaking in a tongue she doesn’t understand and she jolts when his webbed fingers wrap around her arm and pull. “I don’t know what you want from me!”

He tugs again, gesturing wildly, inclining his head to the left and she narrows her eyes at him. “You… you want me to follow you?”

“How are you talking to?” Kyuho asks at her side.

“There’s a merman,” Tina says, voice shaking badly. “I— I think he wants us to follow him.”

“Go,” Kyuho says without hesitation. “What do we have to lose?”

“Alright.” Tina nods her assent, meeting the merman’s fishy eyes. He turns, tail splattering, and disappears below the surface only to re-emerge a few feet ahead to check whether they’re following. Tina kicks her legs, propelling them to follow him down the tunnel. The minutes tick by as the water rises, making it difficult to breathe and forcing them to tilt their heads to keep their noses above the surface. Tina collides with the merman’s back when he stops unexpectedly, turning to her once more. He pointedly meets her eyes and gestures downward, into the water. Tina blanches and vehemently shakes her head. The merman reaches for her arm again and tugs, insistently pointing downwards.

Tina thinks of Newt and his kindness, and the trust he shows every creature under the sun. He’d follow. “Alright, alright,” she says and turns to her partner. “Kyuho, we’re going to dive. I need you to take a deep breath.” He nods against her shoulder. “On three. One, two, three!”

She takes a large gulp of air to fill her lungs and dips below the water.

The merman pulls her down to the floor as the water presses on her ear. She swallows her panic as they pass through a hidden opening in the stone and out into the lake. We’re much too far down, we’ll never make it up, she thinks as fear rises from the pit of her stomach. He drags them upwards, beating his muscular tail, and a small glimmer of hope ignites in her chest when her eyes rise skyward to where light penetrates the darkness. She feels light-headed as her lungs burn, pleading for oxygen. They rise, higher and higher, on and on, and she closes her eyes against the pressure.
I’m so sorry, I tried.

Tina’s about to lose consciousness when her head breaks through the surface and she takes a large, liberating breath of cold mountain air.

***

Queenie leans on Jacob as they sit by the water’s edge, exhausted and too weak to cry anymore. She stares at the back of Newt’s head, cataloguing the tense line of his shoulder and wishing for nothing more than to drown out his thoughts and all the hurt and suffering he projects, his mind a mirror image of her own.

People are easiest to read when they’re hurting.

There’s movement to her left and she watches Guzman stalk across to where Newt and Theseus are sitting. The wind carries their voices across, yet Queenie doesn’t have to listen to know what they’re talking about. “Guzman wants us to leave,” she says and her fingers dig into Jacob’s jacket.

“Sweetheart, I — I don’t think she’s coming back,” he says gently, carefully stroking her cheek as she squeezes her eyes shut. “Queenie, I’m so sorry.”

He drops kisses into her hair, gentle and featherlight, soothingly stroking her back as her whole body trembles in his arms. Queenie closes her eyes and gives into her pain when a warm, familiar presence fills her mind. It’s like seeing the light after months of darkness. She gasps and sits up, displacing his hand as another, familiar presence fills her mind and Queenie’s eyes search the horizon. “Queenie, what —” Jacob begins, but she doesn’t wait for the rest of his words as she jumps to her feet in one fluid movement and flies across the pebbled shore and into the water.

“Tina!”

***

“We’re withdrawing. The sun is almost up and I have no desire to risk any more lives in case they called in reinforcements,” Guzman says and crosses his arms in front of his chest. “We’ve already lost three of our best aurors and the other two aren’t in great shape at the Aerie. You’re welcome to stay at your own risk, but we—“ Newt senses movement from the corner of his eye and turns his head to watch Queenie streaking across the beach. She dives into the lake and the water sprays magnificently, glittering like diamonds as the sun crests above the mountains. Three dark shapes bob across the silver waves and Newt’s breath catches in his throat at the sight.

Tina!

He jumps to his feet and Apparates to Queenie’s side in a flash, near delirious with relief when he sees her cradling Tina’s body. Tina is sobbing into her sister’s neck and her agony is palpable as her body shakes with pain and grief. Queenie murmurs for her to release her grip on Kyuho but she refuses, near delirious with exhaustion. Newt steps up without hesitation, gently prying her fingers from Kyuho’s shirtsleeve and lifting her into his arms, pressing his lips to her forehead as she clings to him.

“I’m so sorry,” she stammers between sobs, “It’s too late. I’m too late.”

He makes a soothing sound. “You’re alright, you’re right on time. I’ve got you, darling.”

Theseus and Jacob join them in their efforts, and together they pull Kyuho out of the water and onto the beach. Guzman takes one look at Tina and turns to Queenie with urgent eyes. “Goldstein,
take your sister to the medi wing immediately!” Newt shifts Tina impossibly closer in his arms and closes his eyes as Queenie brandishes her wand to spirit them away.

***

Tina is writhing in his arms as they make it to the medi wing. Hot tears stain his cheeks as he holds her down while they cut her soaking shirt off, biting his lips hard enough to taste blood to keep himself from crying out. Her back arches off the table as the head healer leans over her to examine the wound. “Everyone out!” he bellows, yet nobody moves. “Out, I said! I need room!”

“I ain't leavin’ her!” Queenie says, standing her ground, looking fierce and powerful despite her blotchy cheeks and puffy eyes. “I’m staying right here.”

The healer throws his hands up when nobody budges. “Fine! But keep back, don’t get in my way!”

He performs a series of diagnostic spells over Tina’s chest and she cries out in agony when his fingers touch her skin, pulling away from him, and Queenie steps closer. “Can’t you do anything against the pain?”

“I need to know what’s wrong with her first!” he bites back, pointing at the dark fissures crisscrossing Tina’s left shoulder and chest like her skin is cracking, fine lines seeping from the wound like the root web of a tree. “This — these look like the marks of an obscurus, yet it hasn’t killed her. This can’t be.”

He leans close, watching Tina’s face as he lays a finger on one of the lines and she yanks away from his touch. The healer raises his wand, waving it in an intricate, complicated pattern above her heart as he murmurs a spell under his breath. Tina’s eyes go wide in shock as her entire body glows blue and freezes before going limp, head lolling to the side as the light leaves her eyes and they stare into nothingness.

“Tina!” Queenie cries out and reaches for her sister, pulling her hand back as if burned. “She’s ice cold!”

Newt’s heart hammers in his chest as he turns to the healer, grabbing him by the collar, “What— what did you do to her?”

Queenie beats him to it, face as white as the walls behind her. “You—you froze her heart?”

The healer clears his throat and straightens his robe. “Yes. I had to freeze her heart to keep the curse from spreading. I can’t be entirely sure what it is, this is beyond my capabilities. She needs a specialist.”

Newt’s eyes travel the entirety of Tina’s body, widening in shock when he notices the puddle of blood forming on the sheets beneath her, bright scarlet on ivory. “What — where’s this coming from?”

The healer follows his gaze and gives a sad, tired smile. “I’m so sorry. I’m not sure if Miss Goldstein was aware she was with child. Unfortunately, I had to sacrifice the life she was carrying to keep her alive — her beating heart sustained it.”

“Oh, Teenie!” Queenie murmurs and Newt’s fingers tremble as he strokes Tina’s silky strands, riddled with grief for her and the life lost. I had no idea. Oh, Tina!

“Is she stable enough for transport?” Theseus pipes in.
“She’s stable enough for now, yes, but she’ll need medical intervention, and soon. Otherwise…” the healer trails off and Newt swallows thickly.

“We'll take her to St. Mungo’s, I know some of the best curse-breakers there,” Theseus says with conviction.

The healer nods his agreement. “I suggest you make haste. I have no idea how much time she’s got left.”

They share a quick look and Queenie helps Newt clean Tina up, putting her clothes to rights before he wraps her in his arms once more. Theseus meets Newt’s eye as he produces the rusty old can from his coat pocket and points his wand at it. “Here, transport permits be damned. _Portus._”

Newt meets Theseus’ eye across the examination table when he accepts the portkey, wearing his heart on his sleeve as he clasps his brother’s hand and they’re whisked away into nothingness.
Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Tina remains in her frozen state for more than two days while the healers puzzle over her condition. She’s put in a private room, away from prying eyes, and Newt is grateful for the privacy. Theseus’ old school friend, Horace Slughorn is the first to examine her. His face is grim when he joins them in the waiting area and silently takes Theseus aside to speak in private. Theseus’ expression is equally subdued when they return.

“I’m sorry I can’t tell you more,” Slughorn says with an apologetic frown. “I have a few suspicions, but I’ll need a second opinion before I can make a definite diagnosis. However, if I am correct in my assumptions… you will need to prepare yourselves.”

Newt closes his eyes against the overwhelming feeling of grief. It’s a constant companion of late; a dull ache in his chest one day, then a raging storm the next. A powerful vortex dragging him down, down, down until he can go no further. His eyes are raw and he’s got no tears left to cry, feeling entirely numb. He expects Queenie to break down and crumble and is surprised when she does neither. She meets his gaze from across the room, eyes red-rimmed and tired yet entirely dry, and he notes how tired she looks. Defeated. It’s like looking into a mirror.

A team of curse breakers works over her the next day, and Newt’s heart grows heavier by the minute. **This is why you don’t worry, old chap. You suffer tenfold.** Newt, Queenie, and Jacob hold a constant vigil while Leta and Theseus join them in the evenings.

Dumbledore makes an appearance on the third day, standing in a faraway corner as he twiddles his hat in his hands, and his gaze is full of guilt and sorrow when Newt meets his eyes. “Have you any news?” Dumbledore asks eventually, and Newt finds he’s neither pleased nor offended to see his former mentor. He understands Dumbledore’s motivations, understands his reasoning behind it, yet he cannot find it in himself to forgive him. Sacrificing life, whether human or creature, isn’t something he’ll ever support.

“No. Her condition is unchanged,” Queenie answers for him and Newt sends her a grateful smile. “They ain’t telling us nothing.”

They’re slumped in a couple of uncomfortable timber chairs in front of Tina’s room while Newt stands to lean against the wall, unable to sit any longer. Leta’s head has dropped on Theseus’ shoulder, half asleep. Dumbledore nods and lowers his gaze to his shoes, yet he remains, joining them in their waiting.

Someone noisily clears their throat, startling them into wakefulness and they turn as one to find Horace Slughorn standing before them with a short, dark-haired witch by his side. “This is Dr Chikitsa. She’s the head curse-breaker at St.Mungo’s.”

The woman nods and gives a tight smile before addressing them. “It seems we have found the cause for Miss Goldstein’s ailment.” Newt and Queenie share a hopeful look. “I must warn you, it’s no simple diagnosis.”

“Come on, Omisha,” Theseus growls and Leta sends him a look. “Out with it. I want an honest answer, not the usual rubbish you give everybody else.”

The skin around her mouth tightens, but she complies. “Miss Goldstein was hit with the killing
“curse,” there’s a collective gasp of horror, “yet it hasn’t killed her, because it seems — and this was the puzzling part — something is fighting it. We can’t be entirely sure, but it looks like an obscurus is protecting her from the dark curse.”

“Credence,” Newt whispers, eyes wide.

“How’s that possible?” Theseus asks.

Dr Chikitsa shrugs. “We don’t know. I was able to break the curse, but I have not been able to extract the obscurus. It’s refusing to leave her body, yet it doesn’t seem to do her any harm.”

“What’s your proposed treatment, Dr. Chikitsa?” asks Slughorn.

“Since we were successful in breaking the curse, and the obscurus doesn’t appear to be malicious, there isn’t much we can do at this point. We need to give Miss Goldstein time to heal.”

“You mean—?” Theseus begins and Slughorn smiles at him, sensing his question.

“Yes, they have decided to go ahead and begin unfreezing her heart,” he says and Newt feels a glimmer of hope ignite in his chest. Could it be?

“Will she be alright?” Queenie breathes with tears welling in her eyes. “When can we see her?”

“I cannot tell you when — or if — Miss Goldstein will be waking up, or what state she will be in,” Dr Chikitsa says with a smile, “but she’s young and strong. She’s got the potential. We’re doing all we can.”

Dumbledore remained quiet during the entire exchange, growing paler by the second until he quietly detaches himself from the wall and turns without as much as a backward glance. Newt furrows his brow in confusion when sudden anger rises from within and he goes after him, following him down the corridor and around the corner to one of the storage rooms. He hesitates with his hand on the door handle, eyebrows disappearing beneath his fringe when a loud crash sounds from within. He pushes open the door and his jaw drops at the sight. Dumbledore has flipped the small table on the floor and cleared the shelves off the books and potion ingredients with one angry strike. He’s standing in the far-off corner, supporting himself on trembling arms as he leans his forehead against the wall.

“Professor?” Newt asks, anger momentarily forgotten.

Dumbledore raises his head and Newt notices a wet sheen coating his cheek. “Ah, Newt, my boy. I am sorry.”

“What on earth for?”

He averts his gaze with a pained sound. “I didn’t mean for any of this to happen. I know how much you care for Miss Goldstein — Merlin, Newt, I am so sorry.”

White hot fury burns at the back of his neck as Newt takes a step into the room and points a finger at Dumbledore’s chest. “Get a grip on yourself! Seems my brother was right when he said you’re playing with people’s lives like we’re chess pieces. How many innocent souls had to lose theirs in this fight — and for what? You’re in here feeling sorry for yourself when Tina —” his voice breaks, “— when she’s out there still fighting.”

Dumbledore makes to open his mouth, but Newt isn’t finished. “The least you can do is come out and face the misery you’ve brought on to everyone else.” Newt’s fingers curl into fists at his sides, chest heaving as he fights for control. He makes direct eye contact to drive his point home before
turning on his heel, wordlessly leaving the room. The door falls shut behind him with a decisive bang and he leans against a nearby wall as his body shakes with anger.

“Bugger it all!” Anger and fury overflow and Newt punches the wall, hard enough for his knuckles to split, leaning his forehead against the dent as tears prick his eyes.

“Newt?” He turns to find Leta staring at him with mournful eyes, raising her eyebrows in a silent question.

“I’m fine,” he says to her shoulder.

“It’s okay to admit you’re out of your depth,” she says, ducking her head to catch his eye. “You don’t have to hide from me.”

“I’m not hiding. I’m just—“

“I know, and I understand. I’m sorry, Newt, I truly am,” she says. “I like Tina; she’s brave and honest and you’re good together.”

“She’s brilliant, and she’s got her heart in the right place,” he agrees, swallowing past the lump in his throat.

“Come on,” Leta says, gently reaching for his hand. “They’re allowing friends and family into her room. I figured you’d want to see her.”

Newt nods. “Yes. Yes, of course.”

The room is dark when they enter, curtains drawn, blocking out the sunlight from without. Tina looks pale and lifeless against the crisp white of her bedsheets, yet Newt’s spirits are lifted when he watches the gentle rise and fall of her chest, and her skin no longer feels cold to the touch as he lays his hand on her forearm. Dr. Chikitsa stands at the end of Tina’s bed, consulting her clipboard before turning to the room. “We have decided not to remove the dreamless charm immediately and let her wake on her own. It’s the only way for us to know if her body has recovered enough.”

“How long will that be?” Queenie asks from where she’s sitting by Tina’s side.

Dr Chikita’s features are carefully neutral when she answers. “There’s no way to tell. Could be days or weeks.” Queenie’s face falls and the healer smiles at her in sympathy before continuing. “We suggest she be moved elsewhere to recuperate, away from the city. She’ll need fresh air and daylight. I believe it’ll significantly improve her chances.”

“We’ll take her to Brownsea,” Theseus says without missing a beat, and Newt meets his brother’s gaze, eyebrows rising in surprise. “It’s our family estate in Dorset. Plenty of fresh air. It’d be ideal.”

“We ain’t gonna ask that of you—“ Queenie begins, but Theseus cuts her off.

“Nonsense. I’ve told your sister before; you’re family. Mother and father would be more than willing to welcome you. In fact, they suggested it. I was barely able to stop Mother from coming here the minute she found out.” Theseus turns to the healer. “Is she stable enough to be moved?”

He nods. “Certainly.”

Theseus nods. “It’s decided then.”

A knock at the door interrupts them. Dumbledore enters the room, looking contrite, nervously
fingering his hat in front of him once more. Queenie stands from her chair and they all stare in bewilderment as she walks up to him to pull him closer to the bed. “She’s been askin’ to see you the moment she came out of that lake, mumblin’ your name and sayin’ she’s got something to give you.” She points at Tina’s closed fist.

He meets Queenie’s eyes before reaching for Tina’s hand. It’s still curled into a fist and Dumbledore frowns as he strokes her knuckles and gently pries her fingers open to reveal a dark stone hidden in her grasp. Dumbledore lifts it with trembling fingers, and his tremor extends to his voice as he addressed her with tears in his eyes. “My dear, darling girl! You strong, brave, wonderful woman. You’ve done it, you’ve really done it.” He gives a watery laugh and lifts the stone for all to see. “It’s the resurrection stone. I can feel its magic. I’m not sure how she managed it, but she did.”

Theseus steps closer. “You’re certain?”

“I’m sure of it.” Dumbledore turns back to Tina and gently squeezes her hand. “I daresay, had you been to Hogwarts, Miss Goldstein, you would have made my house proud.”

“She’s certainly reckless enough for a Gryffindor,” Leta remarks drily, lips pulling into a smile.

Dumbledore smiles and pats Tina’s hand. “Well, I don’t want to make any predictions, but it seems to me she’s got some strength left in her yet.” He meets Newt’s eye from across the room. “She’ll be just fine.”

***

Tina is moved to Brownsea Island two days later, a small piece of land off Dorset’s rugged coastline. Scamander castle occupies it’s western tip and allows for spectacular views across the bay and out towards the sea. Tina’s complexion brightens as the colour returns to her lips and skin while her scar fades to a dull grey, yet she still doesn’t wake. Her corner room is bright and airy with large south-facing windows overlooking the harbour. Newt and Queenie take turns watching over her despite their own exhaustion, tired from over-exertion and constant worry.

He stubbornly ignores the renewed tremble in his hand and the large shadows under his eyes until Queenie puts her foot down and orders him to bed. Jacob is a godsend as he busies himself in the kitchen, helping in the way only he can, and making sure they don’t forget about themselves.

Newt tries not to despair when he sits by Tina’s side, concentrating on the rise and fall of her chest to remind himself of her vitality and delights in the warmth on her skin, proof her heart is beating. She’s still fighting, trying to come back to him as she promised.

She’s alive.

He never lets go of her hand.

***

Three days later

Tina gradually regains consciousness, skirting the state between sleep and wakefulness until she comes awake all at once. An elderly woman is sitting at the end of her bed, gently stroking Tina’s hair. A long, silver braid hangs over her shoulder, yet there’s something about the way she smiles that makes Tina ache with longing.

Newt!
The memories assault her without warning, flashing across her inner eye at lightning speed and her chest contracts as panic rises from the pit of her stomach. The last thing she remembers is black water, Kyuho’s lifeless body and Newt’s fearful eyes. Tina clutches the blanket as tears burn at the corners of her eyes and she makes to sit up.

The woman makes a gentle shushing sound, reminding Tina of her mother. “Don’t worry, love. You’re safe. All is well,” she says, gently touching Tina’s knee as her eyes smile at her out of a nest of friendly wrinkles. She puts a hand to her chest. “I’m Delia Scamander, Newt and Theseus’ mother. You’re on Brownsea Island, our family estate. You gave us quite the fright. My Newt and your sister will be elated to hear you’re up.”

Tina coughs and tries to swallow the gravel clogging her throat, willing her voice to work, but no sound is coming out. Mrs Scamander holds a glass of water to her lips and Tina takes a few grateful sips before closing her eyes with renewed exhaustion. “Thank you.”

“Go back to sleep, lass,” Mrs Scamander says, stroking the hair off Tina’s forehead. “They’ll be sure to find you in the morning.”

Tina does as she’s told, surrendering to the pull of sleep once more.

***

It’s still dark outside when she wakes again, groaning quietly as she attempts to shift her unused muscles and finds she’s unable to move. Queenie has slipped into bed with her, curling around her sister and holding her close like they’d done as children. Queenie stirs and her arm tightens around Tina’s waist, burying her head in the crook of her neck.

“Teenie.” Queenie’s voice shakes along with her shoulders as she sobs her elation, and Tina makes a gentle soothing sound.

She lifts a gentle hand to stroke Queenie’s curls, tears pricking her eyes as she drops a kiss to her sister’s golden head. “I’m so glad you’re here.” Tina’s voice sounds rough around the edges from lack of use, and Queenie could have easily picked it out of her head, but she wants to give her sister all the reassurance she can by saying it aloud.

“I’m here, I’m alright, I’m not going anywhere.”

“I know you won’t,” Queenie murmurs into Tina’s shoulder “I could hear you, once they — oh, I’m sorry, I can’t.”

Tina tightens her hold on her, breathing in the familiar scent. “We’ll have plenty of time to talk,” she says and Queenie nods her assent before exhaling shakily.

“I had to pry Newt from your bedside, he refused to leave you,” Queenie answers the question on Tina’s mind. “He’s a sweetheart and a good man.”

“So’s Jacob,” Tina says, grimacing as she moves her aching leg.

“Oh yes, my Jacob, he’s —” Queenie hesitates and lifts her head, seeking Tina’s eyes in the dark. “He asked me to marry him.”

Tina smiles in elation, both at her sister’s impending happiness and her obvious eagerness to tell her. “When?”

“That day on the beach.” Queenie picks up on her sister’s thoughts and gives a watery laugh. “Oh Teenie, I wasn’t sure whether I’d get to tell you. Or if you’d be here for my wedding, or—”
Tina puts a finger to Queenie’s lips. “Hush, silly. I wouldn’t miss my little sister’s wedding for anything in the world. I am here, and I’m not going anywhere. I mean it.”

“I love you,” Queenie chokes.

“I love you too,” Tina echoes her, seeking and finding Queenie’s hand under the covers to give it a gentle squeeze.

There are no more words between them that night and they fall asleep wrapped around each other, sure of their everlasting bond, and a bright future looming on in the horizon.

Chapter End Notes

Brownsea Island, which I have chosen for the Scamander estate, is a tiny island located in Poole harbour, close to Bournemouth. As far as I know, it belongs to Dorset.
I was lucky enough to visit the island with a couple of friends who worked at the castle there. Incidentally, it's one of the few places that still boasts a healthy red squirrel population (and they’re super cute!). It's beautiful and makes for a perfect, remote place to raise a herd of hippogriffs.

End Notes

The biggest thank you goes to Katie Havok and nJckle for the stellar alpha and beta reading, for your endless patience, cheerleading and encouragement. And thank you to my discord girls and NaNoWriMo campers, you’ve been the greatest support! <3

This story is fully written and beta'd and will be posted regularly every Tuesday and Friday from now until November.

Questions? Want to come say hi? Find me on Tumblr, I'm always down for a chat: @annjushkasophia

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