How else could they conquer you?

by mearchuimhne

Summary

AUish. The British wizarding world's laws that require the head of a household to arrange marriages of their younger family members to ensure the continuation of pureblood lines. Younger family members have no legal say in who they marry (although they will be granted a divorce in cases of abuse or infidelity).

Newt is married and divorced twice before Theseus becomes head of the Scamander Household. Theseus thinks he knows just who to ask, but Newt isn't having it until his so-called fiance proves himself. After New York, it may be quite a while before that happens.

Filled for the kink meme prompt here: http://fantasticbeasts-kinkmeme.dreamwidth.org/459.html?thread=837067#cmt837067

Notes
Since the prompt states that it's the head of household's responsibility to marry the younger family members, I have decided that the Wizarding World has similar attitudes as their Muggle counterparts towards things like marriage, but the concern is about keeping pureblood families strong instead of keeping grand houses and/or money.
Chapter 1

The first time Newton Scamander is married it is 1914, the muggles have started a war, and he is two months shy of his 18th birthday.

Newt is quite young to be married, even by the standards of the day, but the muggles’s so-called ‘war to end all wars’ has already been raging on for a scant few months and already more lives have been lost than anybody thought possible. His parents mean well when they make the arrangements. Despite a ban on wizarding participation at the onset of the war, wizards influenced by Dark magic and figures like Grindelwald eventually forced the Ministry to reconsider.

To Newt’s parents, he is the son who is just barely too young to be conscripted for the war effort now, but who will undoubtedly be dragged away from them as soon as his birthday passes, and neither can bear for that to happen. They have already lost Newt’s older brother Theseus, the pride of the Scamander family, to the front lines- he’d joined the war effort two days after it was made official, ban be damned. They have given up trying to make Theseus return (he’s already made such a name for himself as Newt could never hope to, even if he ended the war on his own), but they will not lose their second, sweeter, more fragile son the same way.

Newt is resigned to working at the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures and has been for a year. He is a junior clerk for the Office of House-Elf Relocation. He makes very little and has even less hope of promotion to a different department. Never mind the war, nobody wants to hire a wizard who nearly killed a first-year student with a magical creature as a sixth-year (even if he didn’t). Newt found early on that he doesn’t mind so much. He stays because it gives him ample time to observe the house-elves and take notes about their natures and habits and because it’s the only place where he isn’t scoffed at for his interest in magical creatures (openly, at least).

When he is called to receive the Ministry owl sent with the notification of agreement for his impending nuptials, he almost thinks it’s a joke. Who worries about arranging marriages for second sons in the middle of a war? But when he gets home that night he’s ushered into the study to find his father is standing there with a parchment containing the marriage contract. All that’s needed is Newt’s signature and seal. His mother sits by the desk, wringing her hands and looking somehow both mutinous and relieved at the same time.

“Father?” he asks.

“You’ve heard, I’m sure,” his father starts. He is standing straight and his hands are held behind his back. He takes a breath, “The muggle government has passed a new conscription bill. They’re desperate for new soldiers. Given how many of us are already in Germany, and considering the gathering of dark wizards, the Ministry has decided to formally withdraw the emergency decree and implement conscription of our own. This war can’t be ignored any longer.”

This much, at least, Newt and his father are in agreement on.

“Yes,” Newt says carefully. “Theseus has written as much.”

“Yes, well,” his father clears his throat, brows drawing down- he is still angry that Theseus went without permission and refused to return. “We will not have both our sons lost to this war, and the Prewetts need to marry their eldest before she reaches spinsterhood. So we’ve agreed with the Prewetts.”

“I- I’m sorry?”
“The Prewetts and we have reached an agreement. You are to marry their eldest daughter.”

Newt’s ears ring. His hands clutch so tightly around his knees that he has red prints on his skin hours later. “Marry?”

His father starts talking again: The Prewetts are recently married into the House of Black, but they are still far enough away from the main house that the main Blacks would accept someone like Newt. The Scamanders need an old, respectable name to be attached to if Theseus is going to make it in the Ministry once the war is over, and the House of Black needs the cash the Scamander hippogriffs bring. It is an unspoken fact that the oldest Houses of wizard families will never be expected to join a war for Muggles, even if they’d be fighting parallel to them and not with them.

Newt hears his father, but can’t comprehend. He wants to protest, to threaten to sign up for the war anyway, but he sees the seal of the House of Black on the contract, stark and ominous next to his father’s signature and seal. The contract is legal and accepted; Newt has no place to protest under the law.

He signs his name to the marriage agreement without seeing the paper under his quill.

Three months later he marries the Prewett daughter, a woman whose name he will later have Obliviated from his mind.

Newt remembers the wedding. It happens on a clear, beautiful day that nobody can pretend to be enjoying. He remembers counting the guests, so few for a wedding between pureblood families. He remembers receiving politely restrained congratulations that border on disdain, and impersonal gifts. He doesn’t remember the bride’s face but knows she was about as interested in marrying him as he was in marrying a woman, though he hadn’t dared to say it at the time. It was still a nice enough wedding, and when it is over, they are safe from conscription.

Once the ceremony is over, the bride wants little to do with him. They never actually consummate their marriage. Newt is okay with this, though he attempts to be cordial in the hope they’ll have an understanding at least and maybe, eventually, a friendship. But she is not inclined to tolerate his preferences, he learns through the brief, forced conversations they have over meals with her parents in the cold dining room, though he knows she goes to seek her pleasure elsewhere. (Even so, Newt doesn’t think it fair to try and stop her. He would have done the same had there been anyone to seek pleasure with.)

His blind eye does not endear him to her, his birthday goes forgotten, and their interactions remain tense and hostile until the end of their short marriage. In the end, it is her brother who takes her freedom from her when he stumbles across her and her lover out in public in the Muggle world, retreating to a hotel after attending a play. Had their tryst reached even the rumor-mongering tabloids of the wizarding community, it would have been grounds for divorce and even distant Blacks Did Not Divorce.

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Newt is given news of the annulment of his marriage when he wakes up in St. Mungo’s burn ward. He has his mind Obliviated two days later. He was married for four months- he loses almost all of them.

As soon as he is proclaimed fit to be released from the hospital, he demands that Theseus give him a commission to join the army. Theseus has ever been weak to his little brother, and Newt is sent to the Eastern front, where Ukrainian Ironbellies are known to live, for the remainder of the war. There is talk that Grindelwald and his followers are trying to create an army of dragons, and at
first it is suggested Newt should join, if not lead, a division of soldiers whose task it will be to uncover dragon lairs and exterminate the creatures inside so they can’t be used by the enemy.

Theseus is smart enough to laugh in the face of the man who suggests this. It quickly becomes Newt’s job to make the Allied Wizards an experimental unit: a cavalry of dragon riders.

Newt is a quick study when it comes to animals, but dragons do not make themselves known easily. It takes months for Newt to observe the Ironbellies, learning their social structure and habits and how they conduct themselves in a matter of weeks. He works out how to gain their trust, and once he has it, how wizard and dragon can work together. There are very few volunteers when Newt is ready to prove to Theseus and the other generals that rider pairs can be created, but those few who do show up keep the Eastern front free of dark wizards until what becomes known as World War I finally ends.

Newt returns to the Scamander home September of 1919- three months after the various muggle governments finish something they later call the Treaty of Versailles. In part, the delay is to keep their presence stable. If they were all to Apparate back to their homes, surely the muggles would find their absence conspicuous, and nobody wants to deal with that fallout. So the wizards are sent back in several waves, and Newt holds out until the very end, staying with Theseus and his core of commanders and strategists, and trying to go unnoticed. They use the time to discuss a treaty, as it were, between allied wizards, and to decide what to do about the rise of Grindelwald and his fanatic followers. The fact that Grindelwald and some kid called Newton are the only men to successfully create dragon training regimes is on quite a lot of lips. (Newt gets very good at changing his hair and eye color with charms.)

He turns 22 just a few days after he returns home.

Things are strained at home. His father is succumbing to a long, slow illness that developed while Newt was away and there is lingering guilt over the debacle of Newt’s first marriage on both sides. Theseus is offered and throws himself into his job in security at the Ministry, mostly to have the long hours to keep him away from the tense atmosphere that chokes the family home.

Newt likewise dutifully returns to the Ministry. He is granted a promotion to the Beast Division thanks to his work with dragons (a promotion according to Newt, anyway, because he gets to continue his work with dragons and expand it to other magical creatures- he even receives actual Ministry funding). He is approached by the top officials in the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures to write a pamphlet that details his time with dragons and provides a guide for other wizards who come upon them.

His parents are pleased with the change, but his salary is still meagre and his position still looked down on by the wizarding community at large. They want Newt to have someone who is able to support him when Newt’s father passes, even after the carnage that has left a generation in ruins. And so it’s less than a year after Newt’s return to England that his mother arranges his second marriage with his father’s permission- his father is too sick to negotiate a contract himself. This time there is no war to fight, so Theseus is able to act as an advocate for Newt. Newt is comforted by this, but only slightly.

When Newt is summoned for his formal notification of marriage, he tries to hide in house visits for some of his last house-elf allocations before the war and then under the pretence of checking in on some diricrawls he has just rescued from a disreputable breeder in Scotland.

Unfortunately, it is hard to run from one’s mother.
“Love, please,” his mother says, “You were too young in 1914, and we know we acted too hastily. You’re certainly old enough now. Do you expect Theseus to take care of you for the rest of your days once your father and I are gone?”

“I’ve been doing fine on my own so far. If my pamphlet comes through I’ll be doing even better.”

“But you can’t know that it will. Even if you do come to write it, what are the chances of it making much money?”

Newt bites his lip to keep from frowning. He knows wizards don't put much stock in magical creatures, but a guide to dragons will surely be worth a little. Even if only to the Ministry employees. Of the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures. Of the Beast Division.

His mother smiles softly. “You see? I'm sure it won't be a reflection of your talent; you've always been such a good writer, your school essays proved that. It's just that there's very little interest in beasts, on the whole. It may be that in time you’ll change that, but for now…”

She reaches her hands out to him, the way she always has when trying to convince him to see things her way. Newt can't help but take them.

“Your father is not well, love,” she continues, her voice sad, “It isn't going to be long now. The Scamanders have always been just on the periphery of the big wizarding families, despite our money. Your brother will need good connections when your father dies-”

“Both for his position in the Ministry and to marry well, himself,” Newt finishes. He almost feels more grief that his mother will be left alone than that he won’t have a father much longer. He grins crookedly at his mother. “I know. I've heard it often enough.”

His mother squeezes his hands gently, “And the Greengrasses have those connections and more. I want you to be taken care of.”

For the first time, Newt wishes he still had the war to run to. At least this time, thanks to Theseus, his mother knows of Newt’s preferences. She has taken care to look for a suitable match, and even Newt has to admit his intended is perfect on paper.

Julius Greengrass is 28, tall, handsome, charming, witty and wealthy. In his photographs, he gives a crooked smile that is both roguish and charming and Newt acknowledges that it makes his heart flutter. Julius also keeps a well-known stable of hippogriffs (several of which are from the Scamander breeding herd) for racing and security, and the family has an extensive owlery. Newt hopes the animals will mean that they will have an interest to bond over that is not simply their mutual duties in fulfilling a contract.

So Newt resigns himself to a marriage for the good of his brother.

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Newt and Julius are married in summer of 1921, just before Newt’s 24th birthday at the Greengrass estate in Wales, after the Greengrass’s have observed an appropriate six months for Julius to ‘court’ Newt. Mostly Newt is introduced to the house elves and the hippogriffs and made familiar with the various pockets and nooks of the vast estate and its tenants. When it is time for the wedding, Theseus joins the wedding party as Newt’s guardian, to witness the vows and the sealing of the contract in their father’s place, though his father is well enough to attend the ceremony that follows.

The Welsh hills that make up the Greengrass estate are far from the Scamander townhouse on the
outskirts of Godric’s Hollow. Newt is beyond nervous that he is now expected to live so far away from his family, but with Theseus there to observe and approve it doesn’t seem so bad. The estate is beautiful. Newt can imagine hours spent with the hippogriffs on the hills, training them for racing, maybe helping to breed new generations like his mother. Julius agreed to Newt keeping his job at the Ministry as part of the marriage negotiations, so Newt will be able to see Theseus at work.

He has hopes that this marriage might turn out okay.

Julius Greengrass is a patient husband, and Newt is thankful for it.

Julius knows that Newt and his former bride never consummated their sham of a marriage and that Newt has not been with anyone sexually beyond some hurried and sloppy kisses at school. He teaches Newt how to give him pleasure with his hands first, then with his mouth. Since Julius is teaching Newt so patiently, it is only right that Newt is not pleasured himself. They have been married two months when Julius decides that Newt is ready to be taken to bed so he can learn how to be a real and proper husband. It is painful, but Newt does not complain. He owes Julius to take it without complaint until he learns properly.

It does get better over the next few weeks, and eventually, Newt allows that there is pleasure in fornication. He just also thinks it’s a bit much that they must have sex every day.

He writes to Theseus about it at one point, mostly curious to know if his brother thinks Newt is overreacting because sometimes it is so hard to understand people. Sexual intimacy is one of those things that he knows is just normal in other relationships (if the gossip rags are anything to go by) but despite finding some pleasure from it Newt isn’t sure he’s doing it right. But Newt has never been comfortable with people, not like his brother is.

Julius comes storming into his room that evening, while Newt is working on notes and ordering them into sections for his pamphlet. He bursts through the closed doors so hard that one door actually slams shut behind him.

Newt tenses at his desk, startled. He looks up unsurely and half stands. “Julius?”

Julius’s face is red with fury. “How dare you?!”

His husband slams his hands down on the desk and shoves his face in Newt’s. There is a piece of parchment crumpled in one fist. “How dare you write such slanderous things about me to your brother?”

“What do you mean? I haven't- I wrote but haven't even gotten a-” Newt looks down at the hand with the parchment. Indignation wells up. “Did... did you read my letter?”

“I am the master of this house and I will read anything I wish- your mail, be it written by you or sent to you included.” Julius snarls. He grips Newt’s wrist in his free hand and pulls, nearly causing Newt to fall face-first onto the desktop. When he doesn’t hit the wood, Julius pushes his head down, hand squeezing around Newt’s neck. He leans down close, breath hot on Newt’s skin, “Just as you will be available to me for anything, anytime I wish. You are the lesser partner, here. Understand that, or I will have to make you understand it.”

Newt feels the blood drain from his face and his legs start to tremble. “I- I’m sorry, I just. I thought-”

“You aren’t here to think!” Julius snaps. Then he sighs, and his body loosens from its tense rage,
and his voice is soft when he looks up at Newt. “I allow you to work. I allow you the freedom to come and go. I haven’t even asked that you learn how to be a proper pureblood.”

“Am I not?” Newt asks, both earnestly confused and wary.

“Oh, Newton,” Julius shakes his head.

The smile that spreads across his face is not comforting.

Newt learns. He learns that Julius has expectations. He learns that Julius is a good husband who will do well by Newt, if only Newt would listen to him. He learns that it’s best to leave work early so he can direct the house elves and ensure dinner is ready for Julius’s return, no matter how late it might be, and he is expected to sit by the table and keep the food warm with charms if needed.

He learns his husband’s tastes in private. He learns how to act in public- because the Scamanders have no idea how proper wizarding society works and it shows in everything Newt does, to Julius’s endless embarrassment. (It almost doesn’t matter because Julius doesn’t want them to go out very much. He prefers to keep Newt’s pretty face private because Newt uses that pretty face to lead on other men and make Julius angry, and Julius doesn’t like to be angry but Newt clearly can’t help himself.)

Julius simply wants Newt to be good for him, and Newt is just not trying hard enough, so Newt must be punished.

Newt may not see his family, not while he is such a disgrace; they’d think Julius wasn't teaching Newt anything and the Greengrass reputation would be tarnished. Newt must not talk back because it shows his lack of manners. His notes for the pamphlet on the Ironbellies and the Great War are burned when he forgets his place in public and argues with Julius about the meal Julius has chosen for him. Newt ought not to have been so stubborn, he knows, and he has copies of his notes, so it’s not really so bad.

He knows it should be enough that he’s allowed to keep his job and go about in public without a house elf to chaperone. He just can’t seem to remember to be thankful.

Newt learns to hide the bruises that come when he fails to uphold his duty to his husband. He learns to put people off with his awkwardness so they don’t ask too many questions. He learns to be silent until spoken to and to keep his eyes down so he doesn’t entice the wrong attention.

He never quite learns to be good enough.

Two years after the wedding, Theseus appears unexpectedly with news of Newt of their father’s death and the intent to take the skin off Newt’s hide for refusing to answer any of their mother’s letters. He comes to the estate because Newt hasn’t been to work in three days and all of the owls Theseus has sent have been returned without delivering his letters.

Because he neglects to announce his visit, he is not greeted by anyone other than a house elf who squeaks in fright and disappears- probably to warn either Newt or Julius. Even so, nobody comes out to stop Theseus as he tears through the rooms he only vaguely remembers from two years previous. He finds Newt in the bedroom, bleeding down his back and thighs. There are open wounds on his right hip and one eye is nearly swollen shut. His breath comes in stuttering waves. Julius stands over him, half-dressed.
Julius is served with the divorce notice via Howler from his own mother. The Howler is delivered to his hospital room by two junior Aurors with a warrant of arrest.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

In which Newt runs away

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

A week after Theseus finalizes his second divorce, Newt speaks for the first time in the hospital in order to give his consent to breaking the marriage as formal proceedings. Newt doesn't have memories of Julius Obliviated because he doesn't want to look at the scars on his hip and have to wonder where they came from. Instead, he withdraws into himself and refuses to speak. He can barely bring himself to make eye contact with his own mother and brother - and when he can, he must look away seconds later. It's a month before he’s able to keep down more than broth and water.

After six months of recovery at home, Newt once again returns to work. He locks himself up in his office and only leaves to go home or to supervise any creatures brought in after an Auror sting on shady breeders- and on one memorable occasion, a smuggling ring. His colleagues don’t press him to come out, and even the removed, professional interactions that used to be stilted and awkward are now tinged with a ring of sympathy.

A year after his second divorce, Newt still sees a Mind Healer twice a week.

He’s relearned how to initiate a conversation without expecting a slap, and how to ask for things without flinching away preemptively to ward off a fist. Even so, a touch that he doesn’t see coming, even if it’s just a brush of arms when someone passes him in the halls of the Ministry, sends him into a panic attack. He still can’t look most people in the eye without his skin crawling. He only feels truly safe when he’s in the stables at home with the hippogriffs who have known him all his life to protect him.

Luckily there are very few people who work in the Beast Division.

His work starts to bring him a modest acclaim in his own right, instead of standing on his brother’s position as Head of the Auror Office (the Ministry is abuzz with rumors of Theseus’s pending promotion to the Director of Magical Law Enforcement). The studies he’s done have unlocked potential uses of magical creatures nobody has thought of before, and there are now a few wand-makers who have begun to include diricrawl and fwooper feathers as cores.

It takes longer than he would like, but he manages to pull together that pamphlet on training Ukrainian Ironbellies (inasmuch as they are trainable). His pamphlet catalogues the feeding and socializing habits of the dragons; how to be aware of their body language to gauge their moods and levels of danger a wizard might be in at any given moment. The printing house doesn't demand anything more than a thank you when the first printing run is finished and the Beast Division employees actually put together a party for him to celebrate it.

After its publication, the head of the Beast Division tells Newt that the Ministry intends to expand the Division to include a dragon-specific department, using his pamphlet for a guide, (it's a week before Newt realizes that he's not expected to compensate for the inconvenience). Partially based
on the pamphlet’s use and success, Augustus Worme commissions a book just before Newt’s 28th birthday when the Ministry is celebrating Theseus’s promotion to the Director of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement.

There are too many creatures in the world wizards don’t know about, and even is Augustus is the only one who cares, he’s willing to pay Newt to catalogue all of them for his own satisfaction. Newt accepts the offer before he remembers he has to ask his brother for permission. Travel is still tightly controlled by the Ministry after the mess left by the Great War. He’s lucky Augustus finds his awkward ways charming.

Theseus is, understandably, hesitant when Newt brings up the travel at dinner one night, but he’s never been the sort who is capable of denying Newt the things he really wants. Newt tries to hold Theseus’s gaze, hoping to convey how much he wants to do this. He watches emotions flit across Theseus’s face— he knows what it takes for Newt to look someone in the eyes now.

“A book?”

Newt nods and takes a breath. “I’d have to travel for it. It would require time—there are so many countries to visit to make sure I have as complete a list as possible, assuming I won’t be able to find some of the shyer species. I’ll have starting points of course. I plan to make a list of all currently recorded species and what is known about them to see if I can track and corroborate the accounts first.”

He’s rather pleased with himself for having thought of a solid baseline to start from, so Theseus knows he’s not going into this as a waste of everyone’s time. Well. Probably not. Augustus did say that he was commissioning it for himself, so...

His mother doesn’t look happy, but Theseus watches him steadily before sighing and trying to hide a little smile that twitches at the corner of his lips. “You’ve thought about this quite a lot, haven’t you?”

Newt nods slowly and dares to hope.

“Very well,” Theseus says at last, smiling fully. “This could be the best scientific opportunity of our age, so go. I’ll get visas, safe conduct, and letters of introduction sorted for you. You’ll have to fill in the wand permits yourself.”

Newt Apparates out of his seat to Theseus’s side and grabs him in a hug.

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Theseus presents Newt with a suitcase for his trip just a few days after agreeing to it. The suitcase is a small thing, barely big enough for a couple shirts, a jacket, some underwear and a couple pairs of trousers. If he packs carefully there’s enough room for a scarf and a book. For a moment Newt wonders why Theseus has even bothered—then he spots the little latch on the front and turns off the muggle-worthy charm.

When he reopens the case, he finds that there is now a ladder descending into what Newt thinks looks like a shack. “An Undetectable Expansion charm? In the suitcase? But—”

“Heard of the DMLE, remember?” Theseus says, chuckling. “I took care of the permits and registration. Ministry doesn’t really know what it’s for, but you’re going to need a place to keep things if you’re going to be in a new country every week for a year.”

Newt hadn’t really thought of that. He’d assumed he’d just be doing rather a lot of cleaning charms on his clothes. That Theseus would do this for him instead is enough to make his throat get
tight with emotion.

Theseus squeezes his shoulder. “Make it your own.”

Newt grins slightly and looks into Theseus’s face rather than at his chin. “Thank you.”

As soon as Theseus agrees to send Newt on his book commission and Newt has his list of known Magical creatures and their places of origin, their mother starts hinting that such travel would only be proper if Newt has a husband. Who knows what the wizard communities are like in such far-flung places? For weeks, Theseus refuses to even broach the subject, despite her many attempts at getting him to do so. It takes a lot of willpower not to snap at her.

Sometimes Theseus wonders how much their parents knew about Newt’s first marriage. (Newt is as silent about it now as he was when he’d shown up at Theseus’s tent in Germany, hunching his tall frame and diminishing his presence so much that a third person entering the tent didn’t even notice him.) He knows she doesn’t know much about the second marriage, save that Julius is an abuser. Theseus will never give her the details because he will never forget seeing his baby brother bloody and bruised at the hand of his ex-husband and he doesn’t think she can live if she knows. (As it happened, it was almost two full days before he could convince her to leave Newt’s bedside while he was in hospital.)

She means well in wanting to see Newt married again, but as far as Theseus is concerned a new marriage is still too tender a subject to broach. He tells her this. It doesn’t stop her trying again two weeks before Newt is scheduled to leave for his first country.

“It’s dangerous enough to allow your brother to be on his own for this book, but without the protection of a contract? We have no idea how long he’ll be gone for; he’ll be in who knows what country with what kinds of creatures.”

“Mother…” Theseus sighs. He pinches the bridge of his nose. “We know his itinerary. Barring emergencies we know exactly what country he’ll be in and for roughly how long. He’s estimated a year for introductory field work and he’ll be able to use the spelled parchment in an emergency.”

“But Theseus, what if something happens? What if there’s trouble- you know how he attracts trouble. And you can’t just up and leave England anymore. You lead the DMLE now and you don’t know what the year will bring. Newt won’t have anyone to take care of him. It’s been over a year since the divorce- tongues are already wagging.”

“They were already wagging when we brought Newt to St. Mungo’s for a second martial-related visit, and the wagging only sped up when we announced the divorce,” Theseus grinds out. He relents some when he sees his mother’s wounded look. “Mother, I really don’t think he’d take well to another marriage right now. He can still hardly hold eye contact with me- how could forcing a new husband on him help?”

“There must be someone who would just take care of him,” their mother insists. “You know how society will treat him if he isn’t married by 30- the law won’t recognize him on his own if something should happen to you. If we can’t find someone suitable and trustworthy here among the old families here, isn’t there anyone you know?”

Personally, Theseus thinks society can take a long walk off a short pier. But he knows exactly how little value the law places on unmarried younger sons and daughters and he finds himself considering his colleagues in spite of his own reservations. He does have Auror contacts all over the world, and many live in places where pureblood and mixed-blood don’t matter in the same
way they do at home. Some come from cultures where the wizards are more indulgent of their magical creatures- Newt would probably enjoy that. He must know someone who would be a steady influence with enough pull to keep Newt safe- someone who would be careful with a partner who has been abused, and who would also take looking after him very seriously.

Oh. Of course!

“Theseus?” his mother asks.

“Hm?” Theseus blinks. He realizes he’s been sitting in silence and flushes. “Ah, sorry mother.”

She smiles fondly. “What were you thinking?”

“I might know someone,” Theseus says slowly, “I’ll need to speak to him, but... it might just work.”

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My dear Percival,

Tales of your exploits continue to reach the shores of England, and the ministry employees in my office are grudgingly impressed. Naturally, I tell them that you’ve learned everything from your correspondence with me. (You’re welcome.)

It has been too long since we last spoke. I know I could just call you, but I wanted to put this request down in a letter so you will take the time to consider it in full. You remember my brother, Newton- I know I’ve spoken of him to you. Have I sent you his photograph before? I include one here, if not.

I will not draw this out: I am looking to make a third marriage for him. (When you call I will explain our laws, assuming that they are different from yours.) I have not told you of his previous marriages. Suffice it to say they did not end well. Even now he carries... well, I don’t know the details and Newt has made great strides in Not Talking About It, but trauma is the only word I can think of.

Newt is getting ready to begin a year of travel- he leaves in a week. He will be doing field research for a book, commissioned by one of our esteemed book-sellers. My mother is most anxious that he should have a new marriage contracted so that there is the promise of someone to take care of him. I know that neither you are not available to go to him at the drop of a hat, but she will not if I fudge the details, and I think you may be the only man my brother would not be afraid of. (When you call, Perce, promise.)

If you are still lacking a partner, please think on this. I’m available all day the next few days barring an emergency. I will be in my office study at the Ministry.

Yours sincerely,

Theseus

(PS: Please let Antigone rest with you before sending her back with your reply. She’s quite friendly and will respond well to a carrot or two if you have some.)

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Theseus is reading the Daily Prophet at his office desk when his secretary knocks on the door, an envelope held out to him as she approaches.
“Sir, you’ve received a message. Looks like it’s from the DMLE at MACUSA.”

Theseus raises his eyebrows and smiles a little. Must be Percival’s reply. He reaches out to take the envelope from her. “Thank you, Helene. Please let it be known that barring an emergency from Himself, my office is closed to visitors until further notice. Is Antigone safe and resting?”

“Yes, sir. She's in the stable.”

“Excellent. That's all for now.” Theseus goes into his study and glances at the parchment.

The short parchment sits in the envelope in front of a photo. Percival looks out at him from the photo, tired but smiling faintly. He keeps looking from the camera to his little sister, who holds one of Percival’s hands in her left hand and a medal in the other. Theseus recognizes the photo from a story in the papers about two years ago- Percival had been awarded something for his part in finding and stopping a kidnapping operation.

The parchment says only: *Only you would send a letter with a thestral. We have seagull post for international comm. you know. Photo here, in case you need it. Best I had. Call me.*

Theseus prepares to do just that. Somewhat ironically, considering the Americans view of muggles, Percival had been the one to convince Theseus to invest in a telephone. Theseus admits freely that Percival was right about the contraptions. The Floo network never works particularly well for fire-calls across oceans and though there is a special branch of the wizarding post set up to take advantage of muggle ships, it’s slow. The telephone gives Percival and Theseus a direct line to each other that neither is willing to tell others about. There’s something in place that keeps their line separate from the muggle lines, though crossed wires have been known to happen. (Luckily muggles are very good at telling themselves they’ve just misheard something.)

Theseus picks up the receiver and spells his office with a silencing charm. He gives the operator the number for Percival’s home in New York. The phone picks up after one ring.

“Oneus,” says Percival.

“Percival! Good to hear your voice.”

“What's this about your brother?”

“Such a greeting. What? You don't want to hear about what I've been up to?” Theseus teases.

“I'm pretty sure I know how your job works,” Percival says dryly. His voice is deep and fond. “Assuming you do half the work I wind up doing. So. Why do you need me to marry your brother?”

“It is the responsibility of the head of the house to arrange marriages for their children,” Theseus starts, shaking his head, “or younger siblings if the father is not available. The Ministry has an interest in keeping the population up in general, but there is a particular interest in making it as pureblooded as they can. Once a wizard is married, they are expected to stay married. A divorce is allowed for abuse or infidelity, but it’s never to be left as a permanent state. I have full say in who Newt marries until he turns 30. Then the law could get involved, and he’d have no say in what happens to him.”

“And he’s inclined towards men, I assume, if you’re speaking to me. But he’s afraid, you said.”

Theseus tells Percival everything he knows: the first marriage and how it ended, the war, the second marriage and how it ended, how Newt is still suffering from both of them and how that suffering manifests. He’s pleased to hear Percival making one or two angry exclamations as he
relates the story.

"Why me, after all that he’s been through?"

"I think you’d be good for him, as a companion. Newt’s not been focused save when he’s writing, and when he’s writing it takes all his focus. I’ve seen you with hurt children."

"Your brother isn’t a child," Percival points out mildly.

"He needs that same gentle treatment. He’s scared to speak before he’s spoken to and often doesn’t remember to eat. He panics when touched. And I need someone who I can trust and who has good, reliable people. Newt’s going to be in places that we don’t have a lot of contact with, where their muggles aren’t friendly towards our muggles. We can compensate for any lack of physical relations, if you agree to this match, of course. It will be a proper contract."

"All right."

"... Sorry?"

"I’ll marry your brother. Write the contract and I’ll sign it, just give him a couple years before it needs to take effect so he can write this book without me hanging over him. I don’t need anything except a place to stay near you. I’m not going to keep him away from you year-round. Oh... maybe one of your mother’s best breeds? I hear that hippogriffs make for excellent guards."

And Newt will know them. Theseus closes his eyes and breathes out a deep sigh of relief. “Thank you, Percival.”

“I hope your brother is okay with it,” Percival says softly, “Do let him know that I won’t require anything of him he’s not willing to give.”

“I will. I’ll send Antigone back to you with the contract as soon as it’s ready.”

Percival chuckles, “How you got permission for a thestral as a personal messenger I will never know.”

“Benefits of running my department after a war- nobody was really around to say no. We’ll talk soon?""

“Of course."

Theseus hangs up the phone and un-spells the room. He pulls out the copies of Newt’s previous marriage contracts to get to work. Generally, wizards are left to draw up such contracts between themselves unless a barrister is demanded by one side or the other. He trusts Percival to make changes as he deems fit that will not negatively impact Newt.

Now he just has to tell Newt.

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Theseus has the contract laid out on his desk, as his father would have done because he doesn’t know what else to do. Their mother sits on the settee, hands clenched tight in her lap, betraying her nerves. As soon as Newt comes into the study and sees the parchment his eyes grow wide and betrayed.

Theseus swears silently. This is not the best way to start. “Newt, please, listen to me,” he says quickly.
“Theseus, how could...” Newt’s voice is strangled. He closes his eyes tightly. “No. I will not... I will not!”

Theseus has to grab for Newt’s wrist before his brother can run from the room. Newt shakes under his grip. He looks at his mother, throat closing up on him. He’s never not been able to talk before- getting people to do what he says is part of his job but this is his brother. He’s never terrified his brother.

“Darling-” their mother says, standing. She comes to Newt from the side and waits until his eyes are open before she takes him by the shoulders and makes soothing little noises as she hugs him. “Darling, listen to your brother. Please. You need a fiancé, if not a husband if you want to travel freely for your book. You know the law- ”

Newt chokes on a breath and tries to turn away. She doesn’t allow him to.

“Percival doesn’t want anything from you that you don’t want to give, Newt. I promise you that he will abide by that,” Theseus says, “He’ll only be there to support you, and make sure you’re safe on your travels. He’s my counterpart in America. Bringing up his name to any wizarding law enforcement will-”

“Do I not have your name- my own name- any more?” Newt snaps.

“His name as your fiancé will be stronger than mine,” Theseus says. He tries to keep his voice neutral but firm, and he pulls Newt gently towards the contract on his desk. “Please, read the contract. Percival really is a good sort. You don’t even have to get married right away- we’ve agreed to a two-year engagement so you can write your book in peace. He just wants to help.”

“Because you threw me at him!” Newt shouts. Immediately he bites his lip and looks away from Theseus, curling in on himself. There is quiet until he shakes his head firmly. “No. I will not do this. I don’t much care if you think it’s for my own good or not. People can talk all they like- they always have before. I’ve had quite enough of matches and spouses. You- I can’t believe you’d-”

Theseus wraps his arm around Newt’s shoulders and moves so Newt is bracketed between him and their mother. “I know you don’t want another marriage now, but I do think you’d get on well with Percival and I think he could help you-”

Newt pulls away aggressively enough that he actually shakes their arms from him. He wraps his arms tightly around himself and glares. “I don’t need him, or his help. I don’t need you shunting me off to some unsuspecting American. And if you think-”

“Newt, don’t blame your brother,” their mother interrupts softly, “He’s only doing his duty under our laws, and at my insistence.”

“Our laws don’t seem much to care that they affect the lives of people,” Newt says bitterly.

At least he isn’t turning his anger on their mother. Theseus decides that’s a hopeful sign. She wouldn’t be able to take Newt’s anger. Newt might not be the firstborn or the star of the Scamander family, but he’s always been her favorite.

“Think about it,” he says, “I’ll leave the contract here for you to sign before you leave, okay?”

“I’ve thought about it,” is the brusque reply. “You marry him if you like him so bloody much.”

“Newt!” Their mother’s voice is admonishing but Newt has gone still with mulish stubbornness. “I can sign it for you as head of your family,” Theseus says, his voice low, “You know how that
will make you seem in the eyes of others. I don't want to do that, but this is negotiated and agreed. I will not allow the law to settle your future for you if I can help it. Don't make me, Newt. Please.”

Newt looks up at his brother, horrified and hurt. His eyes lock with Theseus, pale green studying dark gray in hope of finding an out. He finds only the calm certainty that Theseus will sign the contract if Newt does not because the laws say he must. Newt swallows back a series of swears. He storms to the desk and scrawls his name in the sloppiest, most bitter handwriting he can coax from the quill.

“There. You may commence selling off my effects whenever it pleases you.”

His mother and brother are silent as he pushes past to go to his room and Newt already feels guilty.

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That night, Newt shoves the guilt he feels deep down, burying it under hurt, anger, and panic. He runs. Let them try to find him. Newt has always been very good at going unnoticed.

Chapter End Notes

In case anybody out there is wondering why British Wizarding Society is weird enough to care so much about marriages, I'm working on the premise that they have a very Victorian/Edwardian attitude: You make a good match that preserves your reputation in society. They're just more interested in keeping marriages pureblooded rather than combining fortunes.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

In which Newt finds his creatures

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Since Newt’s travels and itinerary were already approved, his visas, safe-conducts, and passport are all valid, albeit shoved by the fistful into his various coat pockets. Still, nobody tries to stop him when he boards the ferry from Dover to Calais. Newt watches Dover recede into the distance with his shoulders hunched against the cold. When he can no longer make out the shore he heads into the cabin and presses his back against a wall in the darkest corner the ferry has to offer.

He’s unable to relax throughout the three-hour trip and spends his time forging new dates on his documents to throw off anyone who knew his schedule. He rushes off the ferry in Calais, going directly to muggle transport.

Newt takes a train from Calais to Paris, then the Orient Express from Paris to Bucharest. Though he has the money to purchase passage in a private cabin, he takes a shared one in third class. He spells the suitcase with a *Confundo* charm to make sure the muggles in the cabin don’t notice it and descends into the shack to take in what he has to work with: A bed, a dresser, a chest, a desk, two chairs and two lamps. Basics. He’ll probably have to change things as he travels.

He takes everything out of his coat pockets and drops them onto the desk, sifting through to get them all organized. A photograph of a man he’s never seen is among the items. Frowning, he flips the photo and finds an inscription in his brother’s handwriting.

Percival Graves (with sister Dorothy, taken about 2 years ago). Stay safe.


He can’t quite make himself throw the photograph away, but he chucks it carelessly into a desk drawer and turns to the door at the far end of the shack. It opens into nothing, but Newt’s worked the Undetectable Expansion charm to respond to his magic since receiving the suitcase. He calms himself by making a garden that he can open the door into.

In Bucharest, he waits a day in case there is some kind of a tracking spell on his suitcase. When nobody appears to drag him back to England, Newt allows himself to relax. He gets his bearings and finds the local wizarding Ministry. The elderly witches and wizards staffing service desks are at least as chatty as any back home- all it takes is the right question to get them talking about legends and local stories, and to point him in the right direction to start his hunt for magical creatures.

Before he heads off to his first destination, he writes a quick note home to say he’s made it safely to his first destination and that the food is fine- which he hadn’t been expecting, but he now knows because the grandmothers he’s met have a strange obsession with feeding people. He sends it from the Rumanian* ministry owlery and only after the owl is gone does he remember he didn’t say where he’s going next.
Newt’s work technically starts en route from Bucharest to Constantinople—mostly by accident. The train is paused at a rest stop when a woman from a second-class car shrieks that her necklace has been stolen and police are called.

Newt spots the niffler right away, just as he spots a rather shady character trying to catch it. Further down the platform, there is a cage with the door hanging open. After a moment Newt realizes that the shady character also has a wand and he watches as the man jabs the wand angrily in the niffler’s direction several times. Each time nothing happens to the niffler and the man swears soundly. It can’t mean anything good for the creature, and Newt readies himself to pounce almost before he realizes he’s decided to take action.

He drops a sickle to the ground at his feet. The clang of the coin on the platform makes the niffler stop in its tracks. Newt bends his knees slightly. He waits, dead still, tracking the other wizard with his eyes. The niffler approaches. Newt snatches it up as soon as it grabs the coin. It struggles, whining, holding the coin tightly in its paws. Newt wraps his coat around it and hushes at it, moving slowly to get somewhere out of the way, where the muggle police won’t realize what’s happened.

“I’m not going to hurt you,” he murmurs, petting the niffler’s soft tummy. He notes with a pang how its skin feels loose, like it’s not getting enough food. “How did you come to be so far from home, hm?”

The niffler stops squirming and locks eyes with Newt. It looks suspicious, clutching the coin tightly.

Newt chuckles softly. “You can keep that coin, I promise. I just need the necklace. If you don’t give it back there’s going to be trouble and I don’t want you to be hurt.”

“That’s mine!” snaps a gravelly voice. It’s the wizard, and he grabs for the niffler. “Give it back.”

“I assure you, the coin came from my pocket,” Newt says neutrally, dodging the grab, holding the niffler close.

“That niffler, you berk,” the wizard grumbles, “The niffler's mine. I’ll have you arrested for theft.”

Newt smiles pleasantly, holding up his Ministry ID so the wizard can see ‘Scamander’ and ‘Beasts Division’ written there. “Are you quite sure? Do you have a permit to be moving a niffler across borders? Where is his habitat?”

Newt finds himself in possession of the niffler in surprisingly short order.

Theseus is not looking forward to his phone call with Percival. He’s got his office and study doors readied with a Muffliato on each, so it should be a private call. He doesn’t like to think how Percival is going to take the news. He grimaces and is silent as he tries to figure out how to explain what happened without telling Percival that his fiance is so afraid to be married that he signed the contract and ran away, and now they don’t know where he is. Theseus knows his brother well enough to know that he’s changed his itinerary. The only way they’ll find him now is official search party.
He’s been silent too long. Percival’s voice is low and demanding when he speaks again. “You
fucked up.”

“I fucked up,” Theseus agrees, sighing heavily.

“What did you do?”

Theseus leans back in his chair and shifts the telephone receiver to his other ear. “I had the
marriage contract out on the desk behind me. He saw it before I got to talk to him about you. It
threw off the whole meeting. I should have known better- that must have been how father
presented his other marriages.”

“And?”

“And...” He scrubs at his face, “I made him sign it. On pain of I would do it for him if he didn’t.”

“Mercy Lewis, Theseus, you said he’d been hurt by his other matches- what did you
think forcing him to sign a new contract of marriage would accomplish?”

“I know, I know,” Theseus says quickly, grimacing again, “But, Perce, if the issue of him
marrying again winds up in the Ministry’s hands, he will be hurt again, possibly worse than
before, because the Ministry doesn’t care. I don’t dare think what might happen to him if that
should happen.”

“You explained that to him.”

“Yes, I told him. He heard, but he was so angry. I only just got your photo into his coat before he
left.”

“Left?”

“He was scheduled to start his book travels at the end of this week, but he disappeared last night,”
Theseus murmurs, “His first stop was Calais, but from there he was supposed to go to Germany
and I haven’t heard of his visa being processed there. He could be anywhere by now.”

He can almost hear Percival frown on the other end of the phone. “Will he be safe?”

“He’s worked with dragons,” Theseus says, mouth twisting up, “but I don’t know.”

In the mountains between India and Tibet, Newt finds a demiguise. (Or maybe it’s that a
demiguise finds him.) It takes him a while to realize what it is- even though he can hear and see it
from the corner of his eye, the creature disappears every time he tries to look at it head-on. The old
accounts and his research confirm that it must be a demiguise, which turns invisible when
frightened, and he starts to leave food out for it. He takes his own notes as the food is either eaten
or left to rot but otherwise leaves it alone.

Three days later the demiguise comes to Newt while he’s working on a sketch of the niffler (now
named Hobbs) and climbs onto Newt’s back, snuffling at his hair. Newt stays very still but he
smiles and his insides buzz with excitement.

“Hello, there.”

The demiguise chirps, running fingers through Newt’s curls. He peers down from over the top of
Newt’s head and blinks at him. Newt chuckles. The demiguise almost flips and falls into Newt’s
lap at the sound- Newt reaches instinctively to steady the creature.

“Hey now, steady.” he murmurs.

The demiguise blinks big eyes up at him, then nods. Nods? Newt tilts his head, wondering if he’s just projected onto the animal, but then the demiguise nods again and this time hugs Newt around his neck. Newt puts his arms gingerly around the creature. Its fur is matted with dried blood and there are extensive bald patches down its back.

“Poor thing,” he says softly, “You need a place to heal. thought you were supposed to be from much farther north than down here- closer to China. Do you need to go back? Would you like to come with me? I have plenty of food. Or I can find it.”

The demiguise cups Newt's cheek and makes another chirp. Newt takes that as a yes. That night he goes foraging for more of the berries and fruits that the demiguise seems to favor, collecting them in a tub Transfigured from some bark, and extends the Undetectable Expansion charm in his suitcase to include a bamboo forest, just to the right of Hobb’s nest.

+ Theseus has the pages of the Daily Prophet’s international section spread out over the floor of the living room as he studies them. Sometimes it’s easier for Theseus to pick information out of a paper when he can see everything at once and read it all three times, and short of sending out every Auror in the Ministry to find Newt, the papers are his only hope. Mother stopped asking him not to clutter the living room three weeks ago.

She stands next to him, her face tired and drawn. “Still no word?” she asks.

Theseus shakes his head. He banishes the paper to the bin.

+ Newt hikes through the Urals and a taiga forest and winds up in a place called Novgorod. Without meaning to, he finds the few wizards and witches who live there. They are suspicious of him until Newt presents his letter of introduction and safe conduct. Once it’s established that he’s not there to upend Russian wizarding politics they take him in and ply him with strong tea in a glass and hot beet soup.

Between everyone, there's enough broken English and Newt’s horrid Russian to tell Newt of a branch of bowtruckles (there's no official way to describe a group of bowtruckles, yet, so Newt decides this is plenty appropriate) that live in a tree in what used to be a courtyard. The buildings that once surrounded the courtyard were staffed by muggle soldiers and the local wizarding community can't Obliviate them owing to something happening in the muggle government***. They're afraid the muggles will burn the tree and that they may have to let it happen.

Newt sits up straight and before he can stop himself says: “No.”

The elder wizard- Newt thinks his name is Dmitri- stares at him. Newt goes cold all over and looks down.

“Then what?” Dmitri asks gruffly, “We can do nothing.”

Newt swallows thickly. “Let me try. Please. I'm a scientist.” Nobody looks particularly impressed and Newt’s stomach churns with nerves. To distract himself he digs around his coat pockets for his Ministry credentials. He holds them up, emphasizing the ‘Beast Division’ text with a tap of his finger. “See? I'm- you could call me a magizoologist. I can help; it's my job.”
There is soft discussion and head shaking. Newt knows an argument when he sees one. He shrinks back in his seat, holding his tea glass tightly in his hands. They’re going to let the bowtruckles die. He’s going to have to find them on his own.

As if sensing his distress, Dougal pokes his head out of the suitcase and clambers onto his lap. Newt wraps one arm around Dougal, keeping his hot tea safely away from wandering hands. “What have I told you about toying with those clasps?”

Dougal chirps his unrepentance. Newt realizes the room has gone silent and Dimitri has leaned forward. “That is demiguise.”

“Yes. I found him on my way through Tibet. I believe he’d escaped from someone harvesting his fur. He wouldn’t let me leave without him once I was finished with my work in China,” Newt unsheathes his wand and points the tip to his temple. “I will show you if you like.”

“No need. Demiguise stays, and not invisible. Good. You try with bowtruckles- save them and tree.”

Newt goes to the courtyard. Dmitri’s daughter keeps watch while Newt wonders how best to convince the bowtruckles that they should join him. Their tree is a skinny thing that is about as tall as Newt. He would think it was a sick tree if he hadn’t just been through a forest full of them. It’s probably a moor birch, though he will have to check his books to be sure. Newt stands in front of the tree and considers it, a bowl of woodlice in hand. Unfortunately, he doesn’t have quite the same time with which to bribe them that he had with Dougal, and Bowtruckles aren’t dumb enough to simply follow a trail into his suitcase.

Uproot and shrink the tree, maybe?

It could work, but only if he can get the bowtruckles down- and from the angry-sounding chattering they’re doing in the branches overhead he’s not sure that’s an option. Although... one bowtruckle is much farther down than the rest and its head is tilted as though it’s curious.

Newt holds out the bowl of woodlice to that bowtruckle. He moves very slowly.

“Hello, up there. I’m sorry to disturb you, but the Muggles don’t seem to like this building much, and they want to burn your tree down.” The bowtruckles go silent. Newt bites his lip, unsure what the silence means, but he takes a breath and persists. “I’d rather not see your tree burned, or you. I’m here to help if you’ll let me. I’ve got a place for you to live, with Hobbs and Dougal. I do a lot of traveling but I don’t think you’ll notice- I can take your tree with me.”

The curious bowtruckle climbs down further and leans forward, peering into the bowl. Newt brings it slowly closer to himself. Apparently, this one is an adventurous sort, as it ignores the slightly panicked sounding chatter and crawls onto Newt’s arm. It reaches in and plucks several woodlice to eat.

Once the curious bowtruckle is content, the rest seem to decide that Newt is a viable food source. Another comes down, sounding and looking like he’s chiding the one that is sitting contently on Newt’s hand. Newt stands as still as he can, suitcase open at his feet. Soon the whole family is crowding around the branch by his hand, trying to get to the woodlice. Newt takes a step back and puts one foot into the suitcase. The remaining bowtruckles launch themselves at him, and Newt suddenly has 6 crawling over his shoulders or clinging to his arms.

“Easy, please. We don’t want you falling off,” Newt mutters, descending, “Or me falling down
this ladder.”

When only his head is left visible, he pulls out his wand and shrinks the birch tree, bringing it down with them. He plants it just to the other side of the Hobbs’s nest and lets it take it’s height back. The bowtruckles grab for the woodlice and start climbing back up the tree branches. All but one, which stays sitting on his shoulder and occasionally cheeps until Newt lifts the woodlice bowl so it can reach.

Newt hums at them and watches as they make themselves comfortable again. “There, that’s much better, isn’t it? Now, I’m going to need names for you lot. Who’s first?”

+ “Any luck?” Percival asks.

“To an extent,” Theseus says, “Contacts in Constantinople and Shanghai say they’ve seen him.”

“That’s... quite a distance.”

“I know. It’s been 3 weeks since Zogby’s letter; Yuèzhèng’s just came a couple days ago. Apparently, a massive black market trade in Occamy eggs in Shanghai collapsed.”

“You think that was Newton?” Percival is, unable to completely contain the surprise in his voice.

“Oh, yes,” Theseus says, shaking his head, “He’s quite good with dragons and their kin. At any rate, both letters agree that he was in one piece and seemed well.”

“Reassuring,” Percival remarks. His voice is light, but the lightness sounds forced. “I’ll reach out to my people, see if we can’t come up with a better timeline of his movements between us.”

Theseus chuckles, but it comes out as little more than a strained noise. “I’ve asked everyone I’ve contacted to stay back unless he’s visibly hurt or sick. I don’t want to... I don’t want to frighten him again. He’s got very good at hiding since he turned 18.”

“Understood. I’ll direct the same.”

“Thank you, Perce.”

+ In Abyssinia****, Newt runs into a nundu. Somewhat literally, as it happens. He's been following the trail of a smuggling ring he first heard mentioned in Constantinople, and later in Medina, Hejaz, and again in Aden. Rumors of the power the group has in Abyssinia due to the weird creatures it keeps finding has Newt changing all his plans.

They have a compound set up in the middle of nowhere, in the mountains of Abyssinia. Newt’s seen some similar setups by muggle scientists in his travels, but here the outer buildings are empty shells. Newt leaves his suitcase in one of these and sets wards around it. He commences reconnaissance to find the heart of the compound, sneaking around under a Disillusionment charm.

He finds a warehouse guarded by muggles with guns, but with no other wards or alarm spells that he can detect. Newt moves carefully to peers through a window. The inside is crammed with cages containing animals.

“Not scientists, then,” he mutters.
He looks around to make sure the area is empty, then casts *Alohomora* on the lock and slips inside. There is stirring among the cages but it sounds lazy to Newt’s ears. He creeps from cage to cage, peering in and frowning. The animals are non-magical, which is a relief, but very lethargic, like they’re under a ridiculous amount of sedation.

And then Newt comes across the cage towards the back.

“Oh, bugger.”

The nundu is very young—Newt guesses maybe a year shy of its adulthood, give or take a couple months. There’s some sort of binder around its neck that keeps it from inflating. It’s so drugged, it can hardly move a paw. It’s probably too young to do much damage yet, but inevitably the cub’s parents, if they’re alive, will track down the camp and it will not end well for anybody.

He hears footsteps outside and ducks down, pressing himself against the nundu’s cage. Once it is silent again, Newt creeps back out of the warehouse and locks the doors behind him. He retreats to his suitcase and writes to the Aurors of the East African Alliance to tell them of Muggles trafficking nundus. He sends the letter with a quick spell (it flies off—Newt hopes the Disillusionment charm to keep muggles from noticing it holds) and turns to his research notes. He reads everything he has on nundus or anything that seems tangentially related to one. His sources seem to agree that at such a young age the cub probably can’t kill with its breath. Newt hopes they’re right.

He gathers raw meat from storage and starts up a batch of potion that should remove the sedative from the cub’s bloodstream if they get to that point. He sneaks back into the warehouse and sits by the cage, casting *Silencio* on the nundu—several times to make sure it sticks—before putting bits of raw meat on his spare scarf and pushing it through the bars.

The nundu growls softly and tries to inflate its neck, but Newt stays stock still. He mimics the nundu’s vocalizations back at the creature, hoping it’s a soothing gesture. Soon enough the nundu gives in to its needs and noses into the meat. Newt holds his breath as the cub takes a careful lick, then a mouthful, then another.

“That’s better, isn’t it?” Newt whispers as the cub eats.

When the scarf is empty of meat, the nundu paws at it and chuffs softly. It blinks large eyes at Newt as though it’s only just noticed him. Newt takes another handful of the meat he’s brought with him and places some of it on the scarf. The rest he holds in his palm.

The nundu sniffs at both scarf and human hand, and whines.

“Shhhh, shhhh, I'm only here to help,” Newt says. He pitches his voice low and puts a smile into it, gentle as he can manage, “Here, now, you need more food, don't you? Come on, eat up. We’ll have you feeling better.”

By the time dawn breaks, he’s fed the nundu all the meat he’d brought with him, mostly from his hand, and the nundu has allowed him to touch a shoulder. Newt brushes the cub’s fur gently as he murmurs good-bye. He sneaks back to his suitcase in the outer building and sets an alarm for a two-hour nap.

When he wakes up, the sedative-removal potion is done. Dougal has joined Newt, curled up at his side and holding Newt’s hand tight. He looks worried and Newt bites his lip. Dougal only gets that look when he foresees something about to go wrong. Well, worrying means you suffer twice, so Newt doesn’t try to suss it out as he normally would.
In hindsight, he is perhaps a little too brazen when he casts *Bombarda Maxima* to destroy the shells that make up the buildings on the outermost ring of the camp. Several of the buildings on the first inner circle also catch fire, because the shells were so flimsy that they buckled inward and debris blew inward.

It’s hardly any time before the patrol notices the fire, and then muggles are shouting all across the compound.

One of their guards is pointing one of those long, rounded muggle weapons into a cage at the far end of the warehouse when Newt runs in. Newt stuns the guard perfunctorily and levitates him carelessly through a window. The nundu cub is roaring in distress. Newt runs to the cage and opens it. He throws his suitcase inside. The confused shouting outside the warehouse is getting closer.

“Please come. I’ll help you,” he says breathlessly, “I promise.”

The entrance to the warehouse crashes and crumbles in a haze of burning pieces. Newt waves his wand in a frantic, messy circle to put up a shield around him and the creature and then shoves his wand desperately forward and chokes out the unlocking spell. The normal animal cages open all at once and any animals still conscious pour out of them in a cacophony of frightening sounds. Newt blows back the confused muggles coming to investigate- Statute of Secrecy be damned. The animals flood through the opening in the flames, shoving poachers to the side and trampling them.

The fire spreads quickly.

Newt winces as flaming debris falls on his shield; he’s never been able to hold this spell for long periods and he can feel the heat through his boots. Flames lick at the bars of the cage. Newt belatedly points his wand at the binder on the nundu and it snaps apart, releasing the cub’s neck. The neck inflates instantly. Newt absently hopes he’s not about to die.

He hears shots from those muggle weapons- they’re firing wildly at anything that moves.

The fire blazes against Newt’s shield. It’s starting to falter; he’s kept it up too long. Smoke starts to filter through. When Newt coughs, the shield splinters. The nundu lowers its front to the ground, looking like a cat ready to pounce. Newt knows he can’t let it. The Muggles are firing towards them in the cage now.

The nundu jumps.

Newt grabs the cub mid-air and Apparates into his suitcase shack. When they appear the cub buries its teeth in his shoulder. Rather than scream and frighten the cub further, Newt bites down so hard on his lip that he bites through it. He wrestles the shaking cub to the ground and clambers back up the ladder, ignoring the pain burning in his left shoulder. In a hail of weapons firing, Newt throws himself out of the suitcase and slams the lid shut.

He’s never Apparated with his suitcase. He’s always been good at Apparating, and he’s gotten even better since embarking on his field work, but to bring the suitcase and put all his creatures in danger... He doesn’t really have a choice. Newt grabs the handle.

He pulls all his magic desperately, and Apparates once more.

It’s dark and Newt is freezing.

His suitcase is clutched tightly to his chest, and at first, Newt isn’t sure why he’s holding it so
tightly. Then he registers someone trying to pull it away from him. He can’t see who the person is, but he won’t let them. Never. There’s a babbling sound, which is probably meant to be soothing, but Newt isn’t fooled. He’s going to save these animals. They won’t be used and caged again.

The hands stop and the babbling sounds pause and there’s shuffling. Newt feels himself dip as a weight is deposited on the bed. He hears muffled words and feels a gentle hand on his forehead. Newt stills. He tries to open his eyes but they won’t cooperate, so he concentrates on the words instead, allowing them to become more distinct as he relaxes. The voice is accented but sounds a little like his mother.

“You’re safe,” says the voice, “Your creatures are here. They will remain. The suitcase will not be touched. Sleep now.”

He sleeps.

Newt wakes and finds that everything is hot and blurry. He hears noises rather than words and he can’t tell if that’s because nobody is speaking or if he just can’t hear. He can also see this time, but not very well. It’s as though a haze has settled over the room, muting colors and blurring the edges of everything. He sees that there are wizards in the room with him- nobody wears robes like that in the Muggle world- and some of them look grim. Authoritative. They don’t have uniforms like Healers at home.

Aurors.

They’ve found him. Newt struggles to sit up despite the fact that he feels like his body is going to shake apart. He grasps blindly for his suitcase. The wizards come in closer, pressing around him. Some have their arms out. They’re going to take him to America.

Newt tries to throw his legs over the side of the bed but he can hardly move. He tries to Apparate but nothing happens. He thinks someone might be talking to him but he can’t understand it. There are hands on him. He struggles, tries to get away, but he’s so tired. His body feels so heavy.

He slides back into the dark.

Newt wakes once more, this time to bright lights and purring vibrating deep in his bones. His vision is clear and the room is very quiet. Pickett the Bowtruckle is curled up on his chest. There’s a Healer- an elderly African woman with graceful hands- patting his forehead with a damp cloth. Newt blinks, turning to get a better look at the woman.

She smiles and leaves the back of her hand against his forehead. “You’re back.”

“I am?” Newt croaks, “Where?”

“Harar. We didn’t want to move you too far. We followed your coordinates from the letter you wrote to the Alliance,” she says, “We found a burnt out poacher’s camp. We thought you’d gone until your niffler friend stumbled into us and then we looked for you- almost a day in the bush. That was a week ago. It’s been four days since you last woke.”

Newt furrows his brow. The rest of him feels too numb to do anything else. The Healer smooths the furrows with her thumb.

“We weren’t entirely sure we’d be able to help you. Your nundu may not be completely deadly yet, but her teeth did quite a number on your shoulder and she still has enough toxins that she gave you several diseases. Some we can cure with potions, others,” the Healer shrugs gracefully and Newt knows exactly what she means.
He grimaces his apology— it would have been messy—even as he wonders idly if he’s gained an immunity to any of the diseases that potions couldn’t help cure.

She dips the cloth into a bowl and sets it back on his forehead— Newt feels the headache behind his eyes dissipate. Her voice is gently chiding when she continues, “When you woke last you were very agitated. You nearly made yourself relapse.”

Newt reaches a hand slowly for the shoulder he can’t feel very well and finds that it is bandaged. His fingers brush fur. He cranes his neck. The nundu from the camp is curled up, its head is resting on top of Newt, nose pushed into Newt’s hair.

Newt licks his lips. “The camp—” he tries around his dry throat.

“Is quite— hm— incinerated,” the woman says, bringing a glass of water close and helping him drink. Newt could swear there’s a smile tugging at her lips. “Though we were surprised to see that there were no fatalities and only a few injuries, considering. We had quite a lot of Obliviating to do, but if the muggle authorities could know, they’d thank you.”

A knock on the door of his room interrupts her. She stands and smiles, patting his hand. “Rest, yes?”

Newt sits up slowly and reaches for the envelope. The Healer turns and opens the door to leave. There are Aurors are standing outside, grim-faced. Even once the door is shut Newt can hear their voice and see their silhouettes gesturing and he knows they’re talking about him.

He hears a voice that carries an American accent and goes cold. They know who he is— they must know who he's engaged to. They must be here to bring him to America. Newt gathers his belongings, gets Pickett into his coat, gets the nundu back into his suitcase.

He has slipped out by the back steps by the time the Healer returns.

Chapter End Notes

*Now spelled Romania
**Constantinople was used somewhat interchangeably with Istanbul at the time; I figure Europeans probably used it more, ’cause prejudice!
***That whole Communist Revolution thing, ’cause history!
****Now known as Ethiopia
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

In which there is a firebird, and Theseus has suspicions

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Newt flees all the way to Cairo because Cairo is the only word he can force out of his lips between lingering fever, dull but constant pain in his shoulder and panic. He makes the trip in a record two and half days, traveling through the night on the road from Harar to Addis Ababa. There he finds a muggle with a boat kept on a branch of the Blue Nile* who is willing to take him to Khartum** (a handful of muggle notes and a sympathetic wife buys a trip without many questions). In Khartum he makes it to the train to Cairo- all to keep anybody from picking up on his magic.

It is only once he reaches Cairo that Newt concedes he may not have needed to flee at all.

“I fear I may have been a bit hasty,” he muses aloud, working on the habitat for Martha (the nundu shows no interest in leaving and Newt can’t just throw her out), “The Healer would have mentioned my name if she’d been through my things and found my ID, or if there was some sort of search order for me, don’t you think?”

Pickett chirps an agreement. The bowtruckle is sitting on his shoulder, where he has been almost constantly since Newt woke up in the hospice in Harar. Newt has tried getting Pickett to return to his tree and his tree-mates, but Pickett has refused each time, so desperately that Newt gives in each time.

“I suppose I should have considered that those Aurors were not looking for me as the wayward finance of some wizard called Graves. They would have been there to ascertain the specifics of what happened at that poacher’s camp.”

Pickett nods and chirps again. He seems to be taking pleasure in watching Newt shape the Undetectable Expansion charm, which Newt makes a mental note of for his book. Newt coaxes grass and trees to grow and plateaus to form without even using his wand- at this point, he’s done so much work in the suitcase that he doesn’t need it.

“I’m glad you think so,” Newt tells Pickett dryly. He runs the hand attached to his good shoulder through his hair. “Now. Do you think Martha would prefer a more mountainous enclosure? Or more of a rock outcropping?”

“He was in Abyssinia less than five days ago,” Percival’s voice says into Theseus's ear. “In Harar.”

“Source?”

“Healer Ibsituu of the East African Alliance.”
Theseus immediately spells a pin into the city on the map, much like he has pins in every city any of his informants have mentioned. Shanghai, Constantinople, Calcutta, a possible sighting in Yekaterinburg that was long ago enough that his contact couldn’t be sure, Budapest, Sofia, now Harar. Not counting all the places Newt had undoubtedly been without detection. No logical path of where he’d been; no way to tell where he might be going to.

“I’ve heard of her. Not one of my personal contacts. How does she know?”

“She’s one of mine,” Percival says. He goes silent. Theseus knows that sort of silence.

“Perce. How does she know it was Newt?”

“She, ah. Well. Apparently, he was in her care for nine days. There were poachers—”

“What happened?” Theseus barks.

“The poachers snagged a nundu,” Percival says in a long breath, “Very young, not toxic yet. She says Newt wrote into the Alliance when he realized what the poachers had. They acted as soon as they got the letter but found a smouldering pile of wood and Newt in the mountain scrub nearby. He’s brought down a muggle poaching ring which had been gaining power like the muggle mafia around Abyssinia and Somaliland.”

“And what happened to him?”

“He rescued the nundu, and the nundu bit him during the rescue. He’s not dead because it was so young. And if she’s to be believed, the nundu has... er... It has adopted him.”

“By Hecate,” Theseus says slowly, but with deep passion, “I’m going to kill him when he comes home.”

Newt stays in Cairo nearly two weeks in order to allow his shoulder to heal and get to know Martha better. (He actually books himself into the Shepheard Hotel on the Nile- given the abuse his shoulder took, Newt decides it’s worth the expense.) He’s quite pleased with the progress she’s making; she’s taken to her new habitat quite well and she’s been very careful with her teeth. It’s been very exciting watching her growing out of her emaciated state- getting the right kind of raw meat is costing him a little more, but it shouldn’t be a problem for a while yet- and gaining confidence in herself.

Now that he can lift his arm over his head without wincing, it’s time to move on.

Newt hums idly as he looks at his maps and his calendar. He finds it hard to believe, but in just a month and a half he’ll have been in the field working on this book for a year and he’s not yet gotten over to the Americas. All of his personal notes cover creatures from Asia, Russia, Eastern Europe, and Africa, working from his old sources. He found about a smidge more than nothing on creatures from the “New World”, so it’s time to look to South America.

Before he leaves he’ll send Augustus Worme the notes he’s taken on all the creatures he’s come across for proof that he’s working on his commission. He supposes he should send a note to Theseus. It has been a year since they’ve spoken.

The railways that exist are less reliable than a steamship between Egypt and the west of Africa, but there are enough of those railways plus roads to get him to Rio Muni*** if he walks and hitches rides between them. On the outside he’ll probably need a week to make the trip, but considering he hasn’t been through the west of Africa that it’ll be a good opportunity. He can then
books passage for himself on a steamship to Brazil. If he does that, he can send his note from Cairo and still keep Theseus in the dark as to his whereabouts.

Dougal grabs Newt’s hand.

Newt leaves his finger on a rail timetable and looks down at the Demiguise. “What is it?”

The demiguise chirps and climbs into Newt’s lap. He reaches for one of Newt’s research notebooks.

“Have you seen a creature nearby, is that it?” Newt asks. He opens a desk drawer to put his maps and timetables away and give Dougal easier access to his notebook. As he puts the maps away, his eyes land on the photograph of Percival Graves as he does. He bites his lip and reaches into the drawer slowly, taking the photo gingerly between his fingers. “I forgot about this.”

Dougal makes a grasping motion. Newt places the photograph in Dougal’s hand as he puts everything away and closes the drawer again. The demiguise is studying the photo thoughtfully and looks somewhat sad.

“What?” Newt asks again, rubbing his fingers across Dougal’s head.

The demiguise sets the photograph on the desktop and shakes his head.

Newt hoists Dougal into his arms so he can stand, smiling softly. “Come on, then. The hatched occamies need to be fed and I’m worried about those last two eggs. I need to think of some sort of new way to incubate them. Then you’ll have to show me what and where the creature you’ve seen is.”

+ Dearest Percival,

You missed our call. I tried ringing you the other day, but it didn’t seem like it went through- I’ve never heard that sound before. Are you upgrading your equipment without telling me? Hardly seems fair.

Assuming you’ve been kidnapped on an enforced vacation, I’ll try again in a week or so.

I remain yours,
Theseus

+

Dougal takes Newt to a place in the vicinity of the Citadel at the edge of Cairo. He’s surrounded by sprawling muggle cemeteries on one side and neglected hovels on the other. Newt thinks the neighborhood must have once been a fairly prosperous area, but the few elderly Egyptian men Newt sees in the streets glare side-eyed at him and walk to the other side of the street when he passes.

Newt almost misses the building Dougal wants him to stop at, it’s so crammed in among other dilapidated buildings and hovels. It’s lucky that he has Dougal, invisible and clinging to his back, to insist on stopping; otherwise, he’d have simply walked by.

On a hunch, Newt checks for a Disillusionment charm. Sure enough, the whole building is under one.
He checks the streets on either side to be sure that nobody is paying him much attention— he finds them all but deserted— and then moves into the alley alongside the building to check for alarms or the presence of other wizards inside. Either the wizards who operate out of this place are confident in their Disillusionment skills, since the alarms are only on the backdoor and upper windows, or nobody is home.

Newt casts a Disillusionment on himself before going back around to the front of the building. He casts *Alohamora* on the front door and creeps in just far enough to close it behind him. It seems quiet, which is not necessarily an indication of nobody being home, but there’s a stillness to the air that Newt has come to associate with emptiness. He hopes he’s right, as he doesn’t fancy another altercation. There are various Anti-Apparition wards set in the attic and upper floors.

“Dougal, stay with the others, please,” Newt murmurs.

Dougal obligingly hops into the suitcase. Newt closes and latches it before continuing into the building. The wards are strongest leading to the basement, so that is where Newt decides to check first. It takes him about 60 very intense minutes of hoping nobody comes in and surprises him before he’s able to co-opt the spell work and release the wards to go downstairs.

There are massive storage containers of all sorts in the basement. Some are stacked in piles to the ceiling. Newt spells one open and immediately recognizes all kinds of feed—much like he keeps for his creatures. Checking through several cabinet and cadenzas turns up caches of creature parts: Ashwinder eggs, erumpent horns, piles of fwooper feathers, vials labeled *Phoenix Tears*, and other horns and tails and hairs that most apothecaries wouldn’t dare carry without very special licenses and in very limited quantities.

He’s standing in a major source of black market materials.

Newt frowns to himself, sifting through the stores of materials more thoroughly, making mental notes of everything he comes across. Proper authorities should be alerted, but will this place even be here by the time he does? Though, now that he’s looking closer, there is a fine layer of dust on everything that isn’t enclosed in some way. Perhaps this place has been abandoned. Newt vaguely knows that there’s trouble between the British muggle government and Egyptian muggles, but how much trouble it causes the Egyptian Ministry is hard to say.

In the back of one of the cadenzas, Newt comes across a clear jar of red-gold feathers; feathers like Newt’s never seen before. He pulls one out and runs it through his fingers. It’s the softest thing he’s felt in months.

He slips it into his pocket, considering his options. An operation like this, so well stocked, usually starts up because someone has their hands on the creatures they get the most money from. Newt wavers just a second, then sends all the cached material into his suitcase so nobody else gets their hands on it and turns back to the rest of the basement.

The storage is all spelled to keep food fresh, and the spells haven’t worn off, so if this place has been abandoned, it’s fairly recent. There could still be creatures trapped down here. It’s that thought that has Newt searching for more alarms and wards. He finds a closet door which all but lights up.

“Mmmhm,” Newt murmurs, “What have we here?”

He gets started picking at the warding.
Dear Percival,

Antigone returned without a reply to my last letter. I have decided this was not due to rudeness on your part but because she waited three days and you were not there to reply. I thus send this by regular international post to make sure you receive it.

Your telephone still appears to be off the hook (that is the phrase, yes?). Have you been discovered and made to get rid of the thing? I don’t hold it against you if so- you’ve had much less of a chance to make the office your own since your country lost so few wizards in the war, I know.

News has reached us of an upset in your politics. Anything I should know about?

What are your thoughts on which of mother’s herd you’d like?

Oh, and by the by- have you heard from Ms Pearl White lately?

You could do me the courtesy of sparing a few words this time. We are colleagues and counterparts, after all.

I remain yours,
Theseus

+

A thunderbird. There’s a thunderbird in the closet. It looks exactly as the only book of North American creatures Newt was able to find says it should, but sickly. Its feathers- which clearly populate the jar he found- are dull, and it looks weak both in legs and wings. The closet has been expanded with magic to fit the creature’s size, but there is no access to sunlight or fresh air.

Newt suspects it’s not been allowed to fly or move very much, either, judging by the heavy iron chain around its neck. He steps cautiously into the closet, taking long, slow breaths, “Hello.”

The thunderbird reacts immediately, stretching its wings out as wide as they’ll go, calling at such a volume that Newt flinches. He grips his trousers to keep from making sudden movements.

“Easy now,” he murmurs, “I’m not here to hurt you. I promise.”

The thunderbird calls again and stares at Newt suspiciously. It lowers its head lowered threateningly.

Newt doesn’t move from the doorway. “You don’t belong down here. I know they were bad to you, but I promise they’re gone now. Oh, but you must have guessed that. Nobody has been around to feed you, have they?”

The thunderbird cocks its head, lifting it slowly. Newt wonders if it likes the sound of Newt’s voice.

Newt watches it calmly. “May I come over to you? Can I see if you need medical treatment?”

He’s not sure if the thunderbird understands him, but there’s a part of him that’s already wondering if thunderbirds and hippogriffs may be distantly related because the thunderbird inclines its head. Newt takes a breath and a cautious step forward. The thunderbird stays very still as Newt crosses the distance between them.

Newt watches the thunderbird cautiously, reaching for a leg that shows evidence of infected sores.
“You seem to have some bruising and old wounds here. I imagine your wings aren’t in much better shape- your muscles must be atrophied somewhat from a lack of flying. What would you say to coming with me? I can make you a sky.”

The thunderbird stares imperiously at Newt.

“Shall I bring you some salve? Or, no, food and water. Let me bring you some food and water,” Newt says encouragingly. “We’ll take the rest from there.”

The thunderbird looks sceptical and rears just slightly, letting Newt know he isn’t trusted. Fair enough. Newt slides his wand out from his sleeve- he’s gotten so used to the motion that he hardly needs to move his arm anymore, especially when facing down skittish creatures. The thunderbird tugs his head away at the sight of the wand and Newt holds it up so the creature can see exactly what he’s doing, his other hand held palm up.

“Shhh, shhh. This will never be used in anger to you,” he says softly, “I’m just going to bring you some food. That's all.”

Newt summons raw meat from the cold storage and two bowls. The thunderbird appears to be part bird and part large cat, and Newt wonders if he would prefer to eat after hunting, but he doesn’t dare let him out of the chains just yet. Those wings could probably still send Newt hurtling into a wall.

He places the meat in one bowl, casts Aguamenti into the other, and steps back. “There we go.”

He watches the thunderbird lower his beak towards the bowls. He has one eye on Newt, who stays very still, but after a brief standoff, he can no longer stay away from the food. Newt makes a soft, encouraging noise and settles in to wait. He doesn’t want to overfeed the thunderbird, not knowing enough about the proper eating habits, so when the bird empties his dishes, Newt banishes the food bowl and refills the water. The thunderbird squawks and stamps a paw.

“No more just yet,” Newt says, softly but firmly, keeping his tone neutral, “I don’t know how long it’s been since you last ate, and giving you too much at once will only make you sick. May I see to your wounds? That should give you enough time to digest and then I’ll feel better about giving you more.”

The thunderbird cranes his neck. His wings spread out to their fullest extent and then sweep back. Newt takes that as assent. He opens his suitcase slowly, keeping his movements deliberate. The salve is something he’s been working on since he began his trip, using plants from the places he’s been and that his creatures use. He finds it works quite well on himself, and he’s used it on Martha to great effect.

The thunderbird almost shoves his beak into the jar once Newt has it in range and Newt laughs, startled, “That’s not food, my friend.”

The thunderbird blinks and removes his beak from the jar, shaking it in a way that reminds Newt of a cat. Newt scoops a fingerful of salve out of the jar and tentatively reaches out a hand. He places it softly on an open sore, watching as the thunderbird shudders. For a moment Newt worries that he’s lost whatever goodwill has been built, but when the thunderbird doesn’t pull away or try to scratch Newt’s face off, he decides to keep going and spreads the salve slowly.

“There we go,” he murmurs, “That’s much better, isn’t it?”

He uses his wand to clean out partially open wounds and covers them and any sores he can find in the salve. When he is done, and the thunderbird hasn’t moved once, Newt decides he is calm.
enough to release him from the chain around his neck. He moves out of the way and unlocks the ring. The thunderbird’s wings spread and flex, and he tests out all his legs, but he doesn’t immediately lunge for Newt’s throat, watching Newt with his head cocked to the side.

Newt smiles softly. “Well, how’s that, then? Better?” He reaches carefully to brush his hand along the soft feathers and the thunderbird actually leans into it. “Well then, how would you like to go home?”

+ 

Dear Theseus -(stop)- Am well in Cairo -(stop)- Plan to leave for Americas soon -(stop)- Tell mother work goes well -(stop)- Found many animals -(stop)- Your brother -(stop)-

+ 

“Can’t you mount a search and make your brother come home?”

“I could if you wanted to be sure he’d never trust either of us again.”

“Theseus! Be serious. He’s been gone a year.”

Theseus rubs his face with his hands, leaning back in his chair and setting aside a stack of matchmaking proposals. (It is finally his turn to marry. He was not expecting such an embarrassment of riches when it came to choosing a bride, but there will always be a generation of young men lost to the War, and with Newt engaged and no longer seen as a drain on resources, fathers who never would have thought twice about having Theseus for their daughters are now desperate enough to abase themselves.)

“The contract says two years before they must marry, and Percival will be more than willing to rewrite if we ask. Newt’s only been gone eleven months, anyway. There’s still work to be done for his book.”

“He doesn’t write.”

“My contacts are looking out for him. And he has.”

Their mother throws her arms in the air, exasperated. “A three-sentence message sent through a muggle telegram office from his last known place of existing doesn’t count!” she looks pointedly at Theseus, “And Merlin only knows who gave him the idea to do that.”

“It worked, didn’t it? Muggles have useful technology, I see no reason not to use it,” Theseus shrugs. “At least we had that telegram. He could have given us nothing. We at least know that he’s on the mend, if not fully healed after the incident in Abyssinia, and he’s going to America.”

“Incident,” their mother snorts, “And the Americas take up an awful lot of territory.”

Theseus watches their mother pace the study floor in silence. Sometimes it can be hard to tell if she's looking to him as head of the family or just worrying about her baby son. After a long moment, he leans on his elbows on his desk.

“I’m sure he's fine, Mother. He’s tamed a nundu, for Merlin’s sake.”

“He only nearly got himself killed to do it.”

“But he did it,” Theseus says gently, “He took the initiative to save a creature most would have run from at first sight. He doesn’t trust himself around people like that. Never has and his
marriages didn’t help.”

Theseus immediately regrets his words- he tries not to bring up Newt’s marriages, knowing that she blames herself for them. Sure enough, her face crumples. She stops pacing abruptly and holds herself very carefully, head high. She goes to the window behind Theseus’s desk, staring out of it in silence, watching over her grazing herd of hippogriffs.

Theseus rises and moves to stand behind her, gripping her shoulders gently. “Mother, I’m sorry.”

“We only wanted him to be safe and provided for,” she murmurs, reaching up and putting her hand over one of Theseus’s. “We didn’t know what the Great War would bring. Your father knew Caesius Prewett for so many years and they were good friends, and Hastia seemed like our best hope...”

“Nobody could have known what Mettius would do to keep them from divorcing once she was found out.”

“And then we threw him to Greengrass right after the war.”

“We all thought the best of Julius, but that was the point. He knew exactly how to manipulate and charm. Nobody would have suspected his depravity- not even Newt. He’s never blamed you for that,” Theseus says and he squeezes their mother’s shoulders. “Don’t be so distressed. He’s going to have to come back to turn his notes into a book and give it to Augustus.”

Their mother smiles faintly and pats Theseus’s hand. “Yes, you’re right. Of course, you’re right.”

“You don’t sound terribly convinced.” That gets a soft laugh and Theseus counts it a win. “If he doesn’t show up in the next three months, I’ll get Percival and we’ll go looking for him ourselves. Promise.”

+ 

Theseus is reading through his reports (two wizards who have just been brought into the Ministry for trial, charged with breaking the Statute of Secrecy by hexing a hapless Muggle) and considering whether or not he should write to Percival again, or simply show up in Percival’s office to berate him for a month and a half of no-contact. He is reaching for a Howler when he comes across the envelope in Percival’s handwriting at the bottom of his letter basket.

My dear Theseus,

I am terribly sorry to have been so derelict in not replying to your messages before now. I was appointed to an urgent case for MACUSA that took much more time to crack than I expected. Uncooperative suspects can be so hard to get through to sometimes. I’m sure you understand.

Things largely fine here. There’s a new group called Second Salem that’s trying to gain traction to reveal the magical community, but so far not much to report.

You will keep insisting on giving away one of the herd, won’t you, old friend? You know how beasts are received here. Breeding remains banned, anyway.

As to Pearl White- she is doing well, last I heard, but I’ve not been in recent contact. Too busy, you know how it is.

As ever yours,
Percival
Theseus crushes the parchment between his hands, frowning darkly. There is no way this message comes from Percival’s hand. “Helene!”

Theseus’s secretary appears in his office so fast she might as well have Apparated. “Sir?”

“Have you had any recent contact with any of our counterparts in MACUSA, the DMLE notwithstanding?”

“I’ve heard there’s been some restructuring around the congressional offices, but that’s the only gossip as far as I can tell. Should I have heard anything in particular.”

“What do you think of this?” Theseus says instead. He pushes forward the crumpled letter.

Helene summons it from his desk and carefully works it mostly flat again so she can read it. Her brow furrows as she gets to the end of the letter. “Who in the name of Morrigan is Pearl White?”

Theseus chuckles grimly, “American Muggle actress. Percival has mentioned he’s a fan of her stage work; she did some of those silent films in Europe once she quit the stage. Quite the businesswoman now, I hear.”

“And Percival got in touch with her?” Helene asks, eyebrows only slightly raised.

Theseus leans his elbows on his desk. “Pearl White wouldn’t know Percival from a kneazle, which means MACUSA has a problem.”

Chapter End Notes

*The Blue Nile is one of the branches that make up the Nile
**Or Khartoum
***Because Equatorial Guinea doesn’t actually exist in 1926
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

In which Newt makes a decision, and MACUSA has problems

Chapter Notes

My apologies to anybody who's been following this and waiting for an update- I completely fell off the grid there. I started having trouble actually getting my ideas into writing, went on vacation in June, and then I just sort of gave up on this entirely for a bit. I think I've gotten it back on track, at least for this and the next chapter (Newt actually makes it to New York in the next one!). I can't promise super regular updates but I am going to get this thing done.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Hobbs, don’t think I don’t see you trying to steal those shells,” Newt says mildly.

He doesn’t since he’s not looking at the occamy nest, but he knows Hobbs well enough to know what that rustling means. The noise behind him stops suddenly. Newt smiles crookedly and then looks over his shoulder with his eyebrows raised. Hobbs looks back at him. One paw hovers over a broken piece of occamy shell.

“Really?”

The occamies are still asleep in a pile, curled around the last unhatched egg; the only reason Hobbs even thought he could get away with the theft. His paw shifts a centimeter closer to the shell.

Newt stares at him, “Go on, leave it. I won’t stop them from exacting revenge if you don’t.”

Hobbs pouts and scampers back to his nest. Newt sighs fondly and returns to his work, giving a last stir before pulling the kettle off the fire to cool so he can store the new batch of salve in jars. It’s a recipe he’s come up with himself, thanks to months of observing his murtlap, Alice, and experimenting with her spikes when she sheds. It’s been doing wonders on Frank’s still-healing injuries, not to mention Newt’s own, and he wants to have plenty in stock for the future.

Setting the kettle on a trivet, he turns to the enclosures. He finds himself trailing over to Frank's new desert habitat, pausing to pick up a small bucket of raw meat from the icebox. The thunderbird is far and away better than he had been just a week ago. He still has some trouble flying, but his body seems to be at full strength, or very near it.

Newt peers into the habitat, looking up. He’s had less time to work on this one than some of the others, and he’s hoping Frank’s stay will be a short one, so it’s not quite as vast as it could be. He did manage a cactus of fairly impressive height for Frank to rest on when he wants to try flying. Frank is up there now.
“Frank?”

He knows the thunderbird has heard him when the sky darkens and draws in foggy clouds. Newt holds his wand up and produces an umbrella before it can start raining, smiling. Frank’s figure appears from the clouds. There is some wobbling mid-flight, but he settles on a large, flat rock formation without trouble. The storm clears shortly after and Newt puts his wand away.

“Well, good morning to you,” Newt says, reaching out slowly.

Frank pushes his face forward, into Newt’s hand, and gives a soft caw. Newt strokes his feathers gently. He tries to ignore the unease that takes over every time he thinks about what must happen. He can no longer put off his trip to North America- not even for time spent in South America. He does not relish the prospect, but Frank deserves to go home. The only reason he’s allowed it to take so long is that Frank really does need the time to heal. The last thing Newt wants to do is set Frank free before he is able to defend himself or to re-acclimate to his home properly.

“We’re going to Rio Muni* next,” he says, “I have a few more things to check there, and then we’ll be off to North America, to get you home to Arizona. What do you think of that?”

Frank coos and nudges closer to Newt, looking for scratching behind his tufted ears. Newt obliges happily. “Yes, you seem very happy indeed,” he murmurs, “We’ll have to go through New York to get the train out west, unfortunately. We’ll try to make that quick. New York is really quite a small landmass for so many people.”

Frank cocks his head and makes a questioning noise.

Newt switches his scratching from left to right ear. “Don’t look so worried. I’m just keen to avoid... well, the magical folk of New York, let’s say. At any rate, you’ll be home inside of a month. How does that sound?”

The thunderbird pushes against Newt and nearly nudges Newt off his feet.

Newt balances himself and chuckles softly. “Alright, alright, enough of that, now. Catch!”

Frank rears slightly and thrusts himself into the air to snap up the meat that Newt throws for him. Newt watches him fly up into the heights of the Undetectable Expansion charm, stretching his magnificent wings as he does, and then turns back to the rest of the habitats.

Dougal is watching over the occamy nest- a duty he takes very seriously- from his own perch. He’s adopted the occamies as surely as Newt has, and Newt is content for him to exercise his parental instincts.

“And how are we doing?” he asks softly, peering in.

The occamies are awake and chirping, fluttering tiny wings, and they swarm him immediately; the most cuddly of the babies slides up his arms and drapes around his shoulders. The others look like they could almost be baby birds, reaching their mouths up, and Newt is becoming more comfortable with his hypothesis that they’ve imprinted on him. It does make him perhaps more peculiarly attached to them.

Newt has left the broken shells in the nest- the occamies don’t seem to need to eat them for nutrients, but he wants them to be completely comfortable with him before he removes them. There’s one last whole egg which still shows no signs of hatching and he rests one hand on it. It’s still somewhat stunning to him that the other babies trust him enough that they don’t panic when he does.
Dougal watches with sharp eyes. Newt smiles in his most reassuring manner.

“I think she’ll be okay,” he says and shifts the occamy on his shoulders into a more comfortable position. “We’re nearly to Rio Muni. If we get off the trail when the caravan stops and start moving west on foot I’d say we’ll make it to Bata by the end of the week. Should be easy enough to book passage to America within a few days of that.”

Dougal chirps and watches the occamy slither down from Newt’s shoulders back into the nest. Newt summons the storage container he keeps their food in and spreads a handful among them. They dive in a chaotic frenzy of scales and wing for it. Newt picks up the unhatched egg while they’re busy and holds it close to his chest.

“Mummy’s going to carry this one for a while,” Newt murmurs to the babies and strokes the egg gently. Dougal tilts his head and makes a soft sound that sounds like a question. “It looks like the last egg did just before it hatched, so it should still be viable. I think if it’s near my body the extra warmth will help.”

Newt leaves the nest to return to his shack. He spells a Hufflepuff scarf which he hasn’t worn in ages to become wrap around the egg and secure it to his chest like he’s seen the women of Africa do for their children, and tucks the egg in. He’s due to leave the warm climate behind for the winter season that, if he recalls, should be very much closer to England. He jots down a note to charm a pocket of his coat to fit the egg snuggly, with extra padding for heat, once he’s on the ship to North America.

Dougal follows Newt back into the shack and watches all this. When Newt is settled, he climbs up on Newt’s desk and palms at the world map. His hand lies over North America.

“Yes, I know,” Newt says. “Of course I’ve been putting it off. If I’m found by... Well. I don’t know who’s waiting there... if anyone is waiting. I know I haven’t crossed the contracted date. I suppose if he’s gotten impatient... but we are on our way- ” Dougal looks skeptical but Newt ignores him. “Still if we left for the Americas without seeing the west of Africa I might have missed a great opportunity to complete my research. Though I’m not entirely sure the wizarding schools will want an Obscurus in their textbooks of magical creatures. There aren’t supposed to be any.”

Dougal turns sad eyes on Newt. Newt just shakes his head and forcibly turns his thoughts away from the Sudanese desert. If he never has to think of it again, it will be far too soon.

The six-day trip has taken Newt from Cairo, into Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, and the southern territory of French Equatorial Africa (he thinks it might be called Chad). The caravan that Newt’s chucked his lot in with for this part of the trip (he’s been on 4 different trains and had to hitch rides with six caravans just to get here) is currently on its way through Cameroon.

The travel has been equal parts beautiful, delightful, and disturbing.

Newt has found a growing unrest and tensions have run deep under the surface of every interaction he’s had since leaving Cairo both among muggles and wizards (it has something to do with the aftermath of the Great War and colonies and European Wizards in West Africa seem to be following the lead of their muggle governments), but he has tried his best to be out of the suitcase and exploring as much as he can at every stopping point. He spends enough time far enough away from people that it’s always just a little shocking when he winds up experiencing the uncomfortable tension himself. But even spending so much time keeping to himself, he’s taken to keeping his wand easily accessible.

Newt’s alert spell sounds in the shack. He reaches for a spelled mirror which acts sort of like a
muggle film- it shows him the scenery directly in front of the suitcase. Currently, it seems to be showing a sort of a rest stop. The spelled map of Africa shows Newt on the border between Cameroon and Rio Muni.

“Excellent. Give it a minute and then we’ll slip out.”

+ Theseus has his hand on the telephone receiver before he realizes what he’s doing. It’s the third time today he’s readied himself to call MACUSA to ask after Percival. Every time he has to remind himself that they shun muggle inventions like the plague and will probably just be angry at Percival for having one, to begin with.

“Bloody American wizards and their bloody aversion to all things muggle,” Theseus mutters. He rubs at his eyes. It’s become such habit over the last year to simply call Percival so they can coordinate information about Newt sightings, or, more disturbingly, reports of Grindelwald and his followers and their progression from attacking to torturing. Now he can’t even be sure that Percival is really Percival.

It’s driving him slowly mad not to know what’s going on over there. Are Percival’s contacts still sending Percival information about Newt? Newt’s telegram mentioned his intention to go to the Americas, but didn’t specify North or South. What if Percival really isn’t Percival? Would they know what Newt’s relation to Percival was? Would they act on it if they did? Without knowing anything for certain, however, he can hardly make an intimation that something is wrong with Percival to the Magical Congress of the United States of America.

He stands abruptly and leans on his desk, “Helene!”

Helene pokes her head in from the open study door, “Sir?”

“I need to speak to the Minister,” Theseus says.

“Which one?”

“Himself,” Theseus replies, coming out from behind the desk to slip into his robes, “What’s his schedule like today?”

“Empty as he can afford for it to be,” Helene says. She lifts her eyebrows into her hairline, “You hate Himself.”

“Not much to like, what with his eager support for Evermonde’s cowardice in keeping us out of the War. He won’t even treat with me on the threat of Grindelwald’s dark wizards,” Theseus says, baring his teeth, “It’s rather like he doesn’t take them seriously. But between Grindelwald’s surge in prominence and popularity, lately, and this sudden change in my American counterpart’s behavior, I’m sure he’ll want to discuss proactive countermeasures for our community’s security. Maybe even send an operative over to New York to have eyes on the scene.”

“An operative?” Helene asks. Her eyes light up.

Theseus chuckles, “Let’s see what Himself has to say about it, first.”

“I’ll start packing,” Helene says dryly, “I’ll just fire-call his offi-”

“Scamander!” shouts a voice from Theseus’s office fireplace.
It’s the one in his private study. Theseus and Helene look at each other with wide eyes. Theseus leaves his study door open so Helene can take notes and nods at her. She casts *Muffliato* on his outer office door. Only then does Theseus approach the fireplace. The Minister of Magic stares up at him from the coals.

“Minister Fawley,” Theseus says, “How can I help?”

“Grindelwald has disappeared from our sights in Europe,” Fawley says, “And I’ve just had a report from the President of MACUSA. Seems they’re being terrorized by some sort of creature over there, causing explosions all over the place. So far they’ve been unable to figure out what it might be.”

Theseus keeps his face carefully neutral. “What did our Beast Division have to say?”

“The report from America is too vague for a conclusion, apparently, but it doesn’t sound like any creature they’re familiar with,” Fawley says, grumpily. He then peeks up at Theseus intently, and his voice is hopeful, “Isn’t your brother over there- married to someone or other in MACUSA? He was expelled from Hogwarts for his dealings with dangerous creatures, I recall.”

“He’s engaged, Minister, and still in Africa,” Theseus says tightly, “He’s still working on his field research for his book.” Fawley sighs. Theseus can almost see him deflating in disappointment, and he jumps on it. “I’m sure I can send a delegation of ours to MACUSA to offer our help if the proper diplomatic channels are open.”

Fawley nods slowly, “Yes, yes, they’ve extended a request for all nations to come together for a convention on the problem, which means the ICW is threatening their own inquiry. Seems the Americans are sure a breach of the Statute of Secrecy is imminent; something about witch hunters. The report is on its way down. Put together your best and I’ll inform the president that our delegation will be on its way.”

Theseus does his best not to roll his eyes: Americans are always sure that the Statute of Secrecy is about to be breached. He gives a brief salute. “I’m on it, Minister.”

+ 

When Newt finally reaches Bata, he finds shelter in the form of a British customs house and books his passage on the next steamship heading for New York through them. He’ll have to wait a week for the next passenger ship out- but frankly, any delay is appreciated.

He trudges up the narrow, creaking stairs to the room provided. He sets his suitcase on the bedside table, wards the door to the room, and falls onto a thin, cheap mattress covered with a thin bedspread. It’s warm enough that Newt can’t imagine needing it. He allows the locks to pop on his suitcase and only opens one eye lazily as Dougal pokes his head out.

“How are the others?”

Dougal chirps happily, nodding- the other creatures are settled and content. He climbs out of the suitcase and goes to the window, shimmering in and out of visibility. Newt watches Dougal at the window for a moment. The trek from the border of Cameroon to Bata was one of the more trying hikes he’s ever had to take.

“What do you think, Dougal?” Newt asks softly, “In theory, I’ve still got several months before I must marry again. Will the Americans let me through?”

Dougal climbs onto the bed beside Newt and starts combing nimble fingers through Newt’s hair. Newt smiles softly and pulls the cocoon of the Swooping Evil (he’s taken to calling it Hannah)
from his pocket, holding it up to study it in the afternoon light. A tribe just inside the border of Rio Muni were having problems with the creature, which had a tendency to eat human brains.

“Must find a better, new diet for you that we can keep consistent,” Newt murmurs to the cocoon.

He sits up, dislodging Dougal’s fingers from his hair. He’s not entirely sure he’d call the week through Rio Muni a success research-wise. Outside of Hannah, he’s only learned that there are several non-magical insects and creatures who simply look like they might be magical creatures. It’s a disappointing but not entirely surprising; some of the older bestiaries he’s been working with were written from second or third-hand accounts.

“No time like the present,” he says, looking down at Dougal, “It looked like Hanna produced some sort of venom, didn’t you think?”

Dougal nods.

Newt nods back, “Well, then. Let’s see what we can figure out in a week.”

Seraphina Picquery is a picture of serenity while she watches her cabinet members file into the meeting room and take their place at the table. (Hers is a serenity perfected out of necessity- an African American woman has very little choice if she wants to make it through an average week among the non-magical.) There are briefing papers at each cabinet member’s place, plus one for the addition of Percival Graves. The middle of the table is almost entirely covered by a map.

Seraphina sits as far back in her chair as she is able. Her elbow rests on the arm of her chair and one long-fingered hand frames her cheek and chin. “Good morning,” she says, “Mr. Graves will be joining us today as we will be discussing several points concerning his department. Secretary Harmal, your report.”

Secretary of War Juanita Harmal is a former Auror and curse-breaker of 40 years experience who is an imposing woman even with her short stature and soft, graying hair. Though there have been some calls to remove the position from her cabinet as America is no longer at war, Seraphina has resisted. She doesn’t yet believe that the peace achieved after the Great War will last- certainly not among the non-magical. She doesn’t want to be caught off guard again.

“Madam President,” Juanita starts, turning to the others, “In two weeks’ time, on December 7th, MACUSA will host our international allies to discuss the threat posed by Grindelwald and his followers to wizarding kind. Reports have been coming fast and freely, and we are unprepared to meet such a threat if the numbers, in fact, are true.”

“Who is confirmed to attend so far?” asks Randall Suess, Secretary of Domestic Affairs.

“France and the British Empire have confirmed delegates from their countries and all major colonies. It has not been confirmed, but we believe the British have recently lost secure contact with their embassies in China- the Chinese ministry has confirmed at least two names whom the British have not sanctioned. We will also have delegates from Russia and the East African Alliance, and all representatives of the American states will be present,” Juanita says, looking over her dossier, “We have not received a reply from the Germanic states or Italy.”

Seraphina turns back to her map. The surface of it is marked by colored points, which correspond with their collected information on Grindelwald’s last known whereabouts, and the new cabals of wizards aligning themselves with Grindelwald and his ideology. Red points represent verified incidents of dark magic used against the non-magical. They are dwarfed by green points, which
are unconfirmed incidents. Six black points stand out amongst the others: there is 1 pin in France, 4 across the USSR, and 3 in Germany- the only confirmed sightings of Grindelwald since the end of the Great War.

“Secretary Elkhair, if you please,” Seraphina murmurs, “Where do we stand on activity abroad?”

The Secretary of the Magical State, Thomas Elkhair, looks up at her with a graveness in his dark eyes that belies his studied calm tone. “We have received several new but single-source reports of wizards attacking the non-magical. If all reports are true the uprisings are believed to be directly related to the workings of Grindelwald's followers.”

Seraphina waves her free hand at the map on her desk. “Show us.”

Elkhair waves his wand at the map and a swath of new, green points spring up across it, covering parts of Africa and several Asian countries, and crowding into Germany, Austria, and Poland. They all cover places of violence related to current non-magical struggles between governments and empires and the people.

“These locations are aggregated from new reports,” Elkhair says, “Unfortunately, these reports come from contentious regions. We could be seeing Grindelwald's supporters torturing non-magical people. However, we know that the non-magical created new inventions of death during the Great War- the likes of which we have never seen. It could be continuing fallout of that. We have not yet received confirmations or denials from our fellow governments. If these are indeed incidents of dark wizards it could be that they are too embarrassed to confirm them.”

Seraphina does not let herself frown. Embarrassed, perhaps, or they are simply unwilling to speak to America. There is almost too much information when it comes to the rise of Grindelwald's influence and the new prevalence of dark magic. So much of it can’t be corroborated by MACUSA’s Auror operatives overseas. If previously friendly and trusted international contacts holding their hands back, there is something else behind this.

“Luckily none of these have yet reached our shores,” Seraphina says, “More disturbing is a lack of veracity. Graves- why are we not receiving verified information from our own international operatives? I know what you’ve been out of action since the raid- was that cause enough for a breakdown in your department?”

Graves sits back in his chair and tents his fingers in front of his face. It draws her eyes briefly to his hair. Weeks ago he’d been badly burned during a raid on a black market of cursed objects that they’d hoped was a lead to Grindelwald. He has a new hairstyle to show for it- the first thing he did after being released from observation at the Healing Ward. His hair is now closely shaved around the sides and the back, showing off the gray hair making itself known around his temples, but retains its previous length on top. It suits him, she supposes, though she’s not quite sure she’s in favor of it.

“Of course not, Madam President,” he says steadily.

Seraphina drops her hand from her face and taps her fingers on the arm of her chair. “Then you should have no problems in rectifying this. Two weeks of this silence without explanation is too long. You have a month to fix this, or I will appoint a separate commission.” Did Graves just narrow his eyes at her? It’s such a quick movement that Seraphina can’t be sure. She chooses to ignore it. “Where do we stand with the investigation into the attacks on New York?”

“We have no solid leads, but it must be some sort of creature,” Graves says, sitting upright. “Unfortunately, that means we have very little reference at our disposal. The creature is attacking what seem to be random points. We have found nothing to link the attacks, so for the moment we
are comfortable in ruling out the idea that a wizard is directing them personally.”

Seraphina nods slowly. Graves hit upon this pet theory of a magical beast about a week ago. She agrees that a creature does seem to fit the bill, if only because she now has a special place on her desk reserved for reports on the damage caused. Nobody is any closer to giving her a viable solution- or even a different general theory- about what is actually attacking New York that she feels comfortable accepting. But Graves’s negative evidence is not proof of a positive.

“Madam President?”

She looks over and raises an eyebrow. Randall Suess, Secretary of Domestic Affairs, leans forward and rests his forearms on the table, hands clasped loosely.

“I believe we need to talk to the press. The non-magical citizens are worried for their safety. The magical community is doubly worried because of that Second Salem group. News coming out of the south and out west is that tensions are rising- some are convinced that these attacks are the result of experiments in dark magic gone wrong. They’re creating bunkers in the event that these attacks reach them.”

Seraphina frowns. Trust rumor to take hold and conspiracy theories to flourish. “Speak to the next Ghost reporter to calls. Talking points: We are following up on the attacks and whether they might not be caused by faulty non-magical inventions- exploding gas pipes, that sort of thing. It’s common enough. There have been no deaths, magical or non-magical, so we feel comfortable taking our time to ascertain all facts. We have full confidence that the best Aurors in MACUSA will be able to present a solution.”

“And the international meeting?”

Seraphina nods, “We have called on our allies to share their intelligence on Grindelwald and his followers so we can formulate a plan of defense should their influence reach our shores, as well as ensure that our secrecy is preserved. I will be addressing the people following the meeting to keep them informed.”

The Secretary’s quill scribbles her words on a piece of parchment as she speaks them. Seraphina looks at her cabinet; Elkhair, Graves, Suess, and Secretary of the Treasury Gladys Tierney. She stands from her chair and places her hands flatly on the table, leaning forward.

“Let us not bring a magical creature to the public attention just yet. Not until we know what we’re truly facing. The investigations into the attacks must take priority over any other domestic cases.”

+ 

After so many months of constant travel in cramped trains, caravans, and cars, going by steamship is something of a luxury. (Muggles have indeed come up with some ingenious things to compensate for their lack of magic.) No matter how luxurious, even as Newt steps aboard the steamship from Bata to New York, he’s thinking of ways he can hide himself to keep his contracted fiancée from finding him. At least when he goes through muggle customs he ought to have an easy time passing. The ‘muggle worthy’ setting hasn’t failed him yet.

Newt takes his cabin in second class. He’s scrimped and saved, done odd jobs, bartered and negotiated for a year with all the various muggle monies he’s had to change at borders and keep safe from pickpockets. If he’s going to potentially face the man he’s supposed to marry, Newt figures he owes himself space to himself.

He opens the cabin window, then sets his suitcase on the little dresser and pokes his head in,
angling in the direction of the open shack door. Dougal is rooting around the feed bins, putting together the morning feed for the occamies.

“Dougal, we’re aboard and the coast is clear. I’m going to have a look around.”

The demiguise waves a hand up at Newt and trundles out to the occamy nest. Newt closes the lid of the suitcase, then goes back to the window and breathes in the sea air. There’s a bit of time yet before the ship is set to sail, but when Newt is traveling by sea, he likes to get acclimated to the ship's layout before they leave the harbor. Newt locks the cabin door behind him and wards it against nifflers escaping, curious Muggles, and attempts at clairvoyance. With his wand tucked up in his sleeve, he heads out onto the ship decks.

“Good morning, sir,” says a cheerful crewman as Newt emerges into the daylight.

Newt jumps and clutches his heart. “Oh. Yes. Good, ah, good morning.”

“Terribly sorry, sir,” he says, “I’m the ship’s purser. The crew is just making sure everyone knows there will be a safety demonstration in about ten minutes’ time.”

“Yes, of course,” Newt murmurs, “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome, sir.”

Newt leaves the purser and meanders slowly along the deck, nodding absently at other passengers who are clearly exploring their new, if temporary, accommodations. His head swirls with conflicting thoughts. He’s made up a cover story for his being in New York should he require it— he hopes that nobody will notice him or care enough to ask for his story, but if he is asked to explain his visit, Newt figures that looking for an Appaloosa Puffskein is harmless enough.

Newt takes a seat on an empty bench and looks off into the skyline of Bata.

Even in the winter months, Africa has been warm and full of brilliant color and Newt breathes in deeply as though he can capture that color in himself. He doesn’t know much about New York save that it looks cold and grey in every photograph he’s ever seen, regardless of the season.

“Newspaper, sir?” a male voice asks from behind.

Newt’s entire body tenses so tightly his shoulders are almost to his ears and his hands claw at his sides. It takes all his will to breathe evenly when he turns to see who’s come up behind him. It’s an African man, probably a porter, holding a stack of newspapers. Then Newt realizes that on the top rests a copy of the Daily Prophet International. Newt stays frozen, eyes darting up to and away from the man’s face and he immediately makes to turn himself away.

The porter merely smiles pleasantly. “Sir? A newspaper?”

“Ah. Yes,” Newt says slowly, “Well. I don’t have- that is- I haven’t any currency with me at the moment.”

“No matter, sir. It’s prepaid service for year-long travelers.”

Theseus. Newt tries to keep his face neutral, “And how are year-long travelers kept track of?”

“Sometimes worried brothers have an office in the right place,” says the porter, shrugging apologetically.

Newt forces himself to unfold and a faint smile crosses his face, unbidden. He reaches to take the
paper from the wizard. “Well, then, ah, thank you, I suppose... How much are you required to report back?”

“Just receipt, sir,” the wizard touches the brim of his hat. “If that’s all.”

Newt is already looking at the paper as the wizard Apparates away with a pop. The main story headline decries violence done by Grindelwald's supporters. Smaller headlines speak of a sudden lack of confirmed sightings of Grindelwald after a final rally he’d held in Germany.

There’s a letter wrapped in the folds of the newspaper. Newt hurries back to his cabin.

Chapter End Notes

*Rio Muni/Equatorial Guinea: I don't know how exact it is, but Wiki would have me believe that Rio Muni and Bioko were united into Spanish Guinea between 1926 and the 1950s, and didn't actually become known as Equatorial Guinea until like the 1960s. So, Rio Muni it is.
As soon as Newt slips inside his cabin he locks the door behind him and casts Muffliato on the door and tiny window. He pulls the equally tiny table and single chair into the middle of his small berth, to keep as far away from both door and window as possible. Only then does he realize that his suitcase is open on the dresser. Hobbs is curled up in a depressed ball in the middle of the bed. Newt chuckles and lifts his eyebrows at the niffler, though he takes a moment to congratulate himself on creating that locking spell that Hobbs can’t (yet) slip through.

“We’re on a ship. I don’t know what you thought you’d find in the cabin.”

Hobbs lifts his head, eyes narrowed in annoyance, and makes a decidedly rude noise.

“You don’t have to be rude about it. Not everywhere is open to thieving nifflers,” Newt says lightly, “And especially not on an enclosed space where it won’t be difficult to track you. You may not like it, but it’s the best way to travel right now.”

Hobbs gives him the evil eye, which Newt ignores in favor of unfolding the Daily Prophet International. He drops the letter out of the folds and considers it. There’s nothing on the envelope to prove that the letter is from Theseus, whose handwriting is impeccably neat but also quite easy to forge (their mother once did quite a lot of paperwork for Theseus during his adjustment period after his promotion to Director of Magical Law Enforcement). It was presented by A Random Wizard, which wouldn’t normally inspire confidence. Then again, even if Theseus is indisposed, Newt can’t actually imagine anybody other than Theseus sending out letters to all corners of the wizarding world in hopes of reaching a wayward brother. Given his lowly job in the Ministry, his failed marriages, his disappearance, unmarried, rather than accepting Theseus’s decision, he’s a wizarding scandal. He wouldn’t be much use as leverage.

Newt drops the newspaper to the floor. Theseus wrapped his letter in this paper for a reason, probably for background, but he’ll read it later. More important is making sure this letter is legitimate. When Theseus decided to train as an Auror, he insisted Newt learn every security spell known to wizardkind- and a few that weren’t, and Newt uses them all on this letter. No traps are triggered. Nothing incinerates itself. No alarms or stunning spells. Once Newt is satisfied he slowly, gingerly, uses his wand to slice under the wax seal.

There is an immediate surge of magic. Newt allows a tiny grin to cross his lips. He knows that
spell, which means that copies of the letter have just gone up in flames - likely in the hands of some very surprised witches and wizards, and in a tray Theseus’s office. It’s a spell Theseus started using during the Great War - in fact it was a spell he created as part of the underground effort. It’s used by all Aurors in the Ministry, now. Newt knows because everyone talks about it, even twelve years later.

It’s only as he’s unfolding the parchment that he spares a thought to be grateful that this is just a letter, rather than a howler. (Of course, to be fair, a howler would be much more difficult to make secure.)

Newton, dear brother,

I’ve sent one of these to every Auror office I was able to get a hold of. I hope you’re reading this before you’ve reached the Americas because it will mean that 1. you’ve not gone and died since your three sentence telegram (Mother’s still cross about that, by the way, and really, you could have left a message for her) and 2. this warning isn’t moot. No sense in not trying.

I won’t digress further. I write because I have reason to believe that there is a danger, and it may be for you if you’re not careful. What it is exactly, I am unable to say yet. I fear something is amiss in the United States - most of all that the Magical Congress itself may be compromised. I only know with any certainty that Percival is not right. I dare not give too many details of my suspicions, even with precautions taken on this letter. The newspaper may give you a hint of them; if we still think alike as we used to, I’ve no doubt you’ll figure it out.

Look, Newton, if you are planning on going through North America as part of your travels for any reason, I know you will have to go through New York, and I ask you to please be careful this time. Try to avoid law enforcement; if my suspicions are correct, the whole office of the DMLE may well be a danger. Kindly try to avoid more escapades like the time with the nundu (I did mention mother is still cross, yes?).

(And I know, I know. Yes, I’ve had people looking out for Newt sightings since you disappeared. I worry. Mother worries.)

Your brother,
Theseus

PS- Oh, yes. I ought perhaps confirm to you that Percival also had some of his contacts looking for you in collusion with me. (As you are not, in fact, married at this time, before you decide to give the Americas a miss altogether kindly note that this was to make sure you were still alive and whole.) What he told them about you or why he’d want to be looking for you, I didn’t ask, but some that I’ve managed to get a hold of tell me they’ve not heard from him in weeks. I believe that he did his best to keep knowledge of you hidden, and he is very good at that, but I must also consider he may not have been able to. So, for that reason, be extra careful if you have any reason to be in New York.

Newt reads the letter three times. In the middle of his second read through, the ship shudders and lurches and Newt scrambles to his feet, so fast that even Hobbs stands at attention, squeaking anxiously. But then all is calm and only the slow rumbling of the ship’s engines as they are stoked to full heat somewhere far below breaks the silence. Newt slowly sinks back into his chair and breathes out a sigh of relief. Hobbs curls up on the bed again.

After reading the letter the last time, Newt looks out the cabin window. The harbor is shrinking. It finally hits him that he is really moving away from Bata and towards North America. A brief panic flutters into his throat as he thinks of New York, and something wrong with his contracted fiancé, and what does that even mean - Theseus may have a flair for the dramatic when it comes to
the everyday mundane, but he’s not given to exaggeration when it comes to danger.

Newt swallows and turns back to his small table. He picks up the paper and spreads it out as much as he can. The headlines shout Grindelwald’s name, his rumored deeds, and his followers’ cruelty in the name of the greater good. The last known photograph of Grindelwald stares up at him. His lips are twisted in a snarl and his gaze is soulless. Newt shivers.

He skims through the articles, trying to remember what it is to think like Theseus.

If Theseus is worried that something is wrong in MACUSA, enough to write to Newt about it, there’s nothing trivial about it. Something is not right with Mr. Graves, and he’s stopped talking to his international contacts, but he is still operating in his office as the Head of Magical Security. So Theseus thinks he has been compromised, but can’t be sure whether Mr. Graves has been abducted, *Impirius’d*, or if he’s a simple turncoat (Newt’s chest tightens even as he wildly wonders if Theseus would allow the contract to be broken now). Theseus, in essence, also wants him to be wary of the whole government. If the head of the office has gone wrong, someone Theseus spoke so highly of (Merlin was that really just a year ago?) the whole of the Magical Congress is compromised and it’s just a matter of how deep the corruption is embedded.

Newt considers Apparating off the ship immediately. It’s tricky to Apparate on a moving object- and worse with his suitcase- but so long as Newt can see the shore he’ll be able to make it- he’s always been incredibly proficient at it.

He could rebook passage to South America as he considered doing before finding Frank. He could still take Frank home from South America; it would just require more time. But... did Bata have any ships that traveled between Africa and Brazil? The one he’s on is the only one bound for North America all week.

A knock sounds on the cabin door and Newt’s heart leaps to his throat. His wand is in his hand before he even realizes it. He quickly slips it up his sleeve. Another knock comes and Newt swallows to wet his suddenly dry mouth.

“Y-Yes?” It's barely a whisper. He clears his throat and licks his bottom lip quickly, “Yes? Can I help you?”

“Mr. Scamander? The safety demonstration is in five minutes. Please report to the second class lounge.”

Newt breathes out a long sigh and stands up straighter. “Yes, of course. A moment, please.”

He burns the letter with a tap of his wand and banishes the pile of ash out to sea. He’s on the ship and he’s made his plans. Not much sense worrying now- worrying means you suffer twice. He might as well stick with the plans he has.

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Ten days after the firecall in Mr. Scamander’s office with Minister Fawley, Helene stands in the waiting room of the international Floo fireplace.

Minister Fawley, his Undersecretary Alberic Abbott, the Undersecretary’s secretary, the head of the Department of International Magical Cooperation Basil Carter, and Gerald Warren from Carter’s department all wait with her. She keeps herself carefully still so she doesn’t self-consciously reach up to check that her hair is still in place under her hat as they wait for the signal from the Americans that the Floo is rest on the other side of the pond. (The Floo network is not the most reliable when crossing oceans, so the trips are always is very carefully scheduled). Though it
will be her first time off the island of Britain, Helene tries not to look too excited since nobody else does. She supposes international travel is old hat when you’re in a position like theirs.

The last time there was a need for this fireplace the muggles’s Great War was still raging and the American President of the Magical Congress of the United States has gone to an emergency meeting with then Minister of Magic Evermonde to discuss banning wizarding participation. This use of the Floo network being so soon since the last use probably makes the trip somewhat historic- though not enough to make it into a history book.

“Helene, good, you’ve not left yet,” says Mr. Scamander’s voice.

Helene turns on her heel. Mr. Scamander approaches hurriedly. He pulls up to her and pauses to give a half bow of greeting to the others. It’s very perfunctory, his face is pinched, and there is an envelope in his hand.

“Minister Fawley, Undersecretary Abbott,” he says, “Basil, ready for New York?”

“Always,” says Carter. He checks his watch. “If they’d open the bloody fireplace.”

Undersecretary Abbott is checking his itinerary and papers and going over some last few points with Fawley. They absently nod in Mr. Scamander’s direction- Helene thinks the mumbles are meant to be a greeting- before forgetting to pay him any attention. The Undersecretary’s secretary checks her nails before putting on her gloves.

Mr. Scamander shoves the envelope in his hand at Helene with an attempt at a smile. He’s worried and Helene can’t blame him- he hasn’t told her much, but she knows he’s worried about his wayward brother, of whom Helene knows very little about other than that he holds a position in the Magical Creatures department (and the gossip), and that Mr. Scamander is incredibly fond of him (in spite of that gossip). She puts her hand out to receive the letter and immediately realizes that a second envelope, much smaller than the first, has been firmly pressed into her palm so that it can’t be seen.

“Helene,” Mr. Scamander starts, and his tone is falsely light, “I figured as long as I can’t join you for the forum I’d write you some quick letters of introduction to some of my favorite people. There’s also a sheet with some information on New York you might find helpful.”

Helene slips the envelopes into her inner coat pocket smoothly and casts a quick spell to keep it securely closed until she’s ready to open it. “Thank you, sir. That’ll be a great help.”

“Quite welcome. And if you see Percival Graves, please give him my regards. Tell him I’m sorry that I’ve not managed a reply to him yet and am terribly sorry I wasn’t able to get away.”

“Yes, of course,” Helene says. She pauses to search Mr. Scamander’s face. The look on his face is one she can’t place exactly, but she thinks she understands. She keeps her voice carefully light and teasing. “Didn’t realize you needed a messenger, sir?”

Mr. Scamander darts a glance over at everyone else. Helene follows his gaze out of the corner of her eye. Nobody else is paying them much attention and Mr. Scamander relaxes.

“Well, you know how it is. My reply would get there long after you left if I posted it now and would probably be meaningless once it arrived; it’s mostly just to tell him to treat you as my second. Anyway, check my recommendations as soon as you can. And remember to maximize your time to yourself, if you’re allowed any. New York is quite a city.”

These letters are something to do with his suspicions about Percival Graves, then, and probably contain instructions. Helene nods earnestly. “I will, Mr. Scamander.”
Mr. Scamander smiles and steps back, nodding to her. “Good girl. Don’t enjoy yourself too much-I hear you can’t get a decent cup of tea for all the money in the world.”

“I’m sure I’ll survive somehow.”

The fireplace flares to life behind her. Theseus steps back and smiles crookedly. “Do make sure to come back. I’d hate to have to find a new secretary.”

Helene laughs, shaking her head fondly. “Of course, sir.”

She steps in line behind the others with a final wave before Theseus turns and disappears back down the hall. Once the Undersecretary disappears they wait the requisite 30 seconds. No alarm comes. The secretary and Basil Carter step into the fire one after the other, and finally it’s Helene’s turn.

“MACUSA!” she barks, and steps through.

Newt spends most of his time on the ship to New York trying to avoid thinking about Theseus’s letter. Worrying about it won’t do him any good- forewarned is forearmed but no amount of thinking about it will change the circumstances he’ll find in America. Despite having banished the ashes of it into the ocean, however, Newt keeps coming back to it and going over the text in his memory.

The letter stays with him as he works with Hannah, training her to listen to his whistling commands and to eat a diet that doesn’t consist of human brains but keeps her nourished. It stays with him when he watches Frank flying, confident and strong in the air once again. It stays with him, in part, because a day into their voyage, Dougal begins to continuously open the drawer which houses Mr. Graves’s photograph and he’s getting tired of having to put it back.

“Oh, Dougal, again?” Newt asks when he finds Dougal with the photograph the tenth time in two hours.

He starts to reach for it, but there’s something in Dougal’s face that makes him pause. About three weeks- an embarrassingly long time, all things considered- after he and Dougal met in the mountains, Newt learned definitively that the stories of a demiguise’s precognition were not just stories. Dougal is selective about what he imparts and when, so Newt’s never been able to test exactly how far into the future it is that Dougal can see. But he knows that look by now.

Newt kneels before Dougal and holds his arms out. “What did you see?”

Dougal looks mournfully at Newt as he climbs into Newt’s arms, pressing the photograph to his chest. Newt wraps his arms around the demiguise and tries not to shudder. He’s never exactly been able to forget its existence; he’s been holding onto his anger at Theseus over it for so long that having the photo in his possession is always burning in the back of his mind. He tries not to think about why he’s never made himself throw it away.

“Your vision... it wasn’t good, was it?”

Dougal shakes his head and burrows closer.

Newt blows out a long breath and closes his eyes. He strokes Dougal’s Head. “Was it... was it to do with Mr. Graves?”
Dougal nods. Figures. Newt ignores the cold that stabs down his spine and gives a full-body jump when Dougal presses his free hand to Newt’s cheek.

“Wha- oh. Me?” Newt asks, blinking rapidly, “It was also to do with me?”

Dougal nods again. Newt combs his fingers through Dougal’s fur. He looks at the far wall but sees nothing.

“Okay, then,” he murmurs, “Does he try to hurt me?”

Dougal nods. Newt stops himself from asking if it has to do with their engagement- or his refusal of it. It’s unlikely that Dougal saw something quite that specific, and he’s not entirely sure Dougal would understand what an engagement is, anyway. (He really doesn’t want to find out if he’ll acquiesce to actually marrying.)

Worrying means you suffer twice, he reminds himself. Between Dougal’s vision and Theseus’s letter, well. Some warning is better than none.

After that Newt decides to leave the photograph with the copy of the Daily Prophet International, side by side on his desk in the suitcase shack. It’s still hard to look at Mr. Graves’s face, with kind eyes and a fond smile for his younger sister. It’s just that now it’s less because of his anger that he’d been sold to the newest bidder and more because all he knows is that Mr. Graves is a danger to him now, exactly as Newt feared he would be. But Dougal’s only going to keep grabbing the photo out of the drawer, so he concentrates on memorizing Mr. Graves’s features, trying to learn his fear in order to face it.

With the faces of Mr. Graves and Grindelwald staring at him from where they’re pinned, Newt attempts to start a letter to Theseus repeatedly during the crossing to New York. Each time guilt starts to weigh his hand and he banishes the ink before he’s gotten past three words.

Theseus’s letter means that his brother and mother haven’t yet given up on him, even though he stormed away in the dead of night and has since given them very little reason to. In theory, he still has five months before the contract stipulates his next wedding must happen. Theseus’s letter gave him proof that his family is apparently not inclined to rush his new marriage, and apparently, Mr. Graves was willing to wait, but no matter what Theseus says, Newt can't be sure how Mr. Graves will deal with an unfit husband.

Worse, if he pushes too far, he’s likely to learn sooner rather than later exactly what the American laws are regarding unfit husbands (he knows the Ministry can make the lives of those younger sons and daughters who do not obey in England very unpleasant and he has no desire to find out if America does indeed to everything bigger).

Newt starts his letter a fourth time. This time he’s gotten as far as Dear Theseus before he stops writing and drops his head into his hands. The sound Pickett makes is rather irritated and Newt almost laughs. He turns to glance at the bowtruckle from one squinted eye.

“Yes, I know, I know. I'm rather a mess at writing on a good day, let alone now.”

Pickett stomps on the letter, right on top of Theseus’s name.

“Well I can't just not write to him- not after this. He's my brother; like your tree-mates. If he turns out to be right and New York is ablaze because of some sort of take over at MACUSA...” Newt shrugs a shoulder, “And, well, he clearly could have had me brought back, but he didn’t. I should at least give him the courtesy of a reply.”

Pickett pauses in the middle of another stomp. He sets his leg down and folds his arms,
considering the parchment. Then he nods, sneezes, and wanders up onto Newt’s shoulder. He settles down and points at the pen almost impatiently when Newt doesn’t do anything.

Newt realizes that Pickett has decided to watch him write a letter. “Did... did you actually understand all that?”

Newt and all his creatures communicate in some fashion or other. Mostly Newt talks at them and assumes they’re agreeing or disagreeing based on their reactions. Body language tells him when they’re hurt or ill.

His branch of bowtruckles have always given the impression that they understand a bit more than the rest- much like Dougal. (It helps that he’s never really had to worry about whether or not they agree with a proposal because the raspberries they blow are loud and plentiful if they don’t like something.) Even so, it’s not like they talk back to him.

Pickett pinches Newt’s cheek and chitters the clearest “yes” a bowtruckle can manage without speaking English. In fact, Newt has the distinct impression that he’s being chastised for not noticing sooner.

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Seraphina Picquery does not normally greet delegations coming into MACUSA at the network fireplace. Protocols of international meetings dictate that meetings should occur between counterparts in lower positions first and she has a staff to take care of greetings directly after travel. For this particular conference, she doesn’t much give a damn for protocol, particularly when it comes to the party from the British Empire. If there is anybody she should be able to whisk away for an immediate talk, it should be America’s closest wizarding community ally.

“Undersecretary Abbott,” she says as soon as the man steps through, “It’s good to see you.”

“Thank you for having us to this international forum, Madam President,” says Abbott, removing his gloves and reaching to shake her hand when she offers it. Seraphina allows her face to warm a degree: This is someone she might be able to work with. “The Minister sends his regrets but has several very high priority meetings and situations to attend to.”

“Yes, I’m sure,” Seraphina says graciously.

They step out of the way of the fireplace so the rest of the delegation can come through unimpeded; first, a white woman whom she assumes is one of the two secretaries listed and then another white man.

“We’ve been hearing about attacks on New York the last few days,” the Undersecretary says slowly, watching her face, as though he’s unsure that he’s allowed to bring up the subject. “But so far no deaths?”

“So far,” Seraphina agrees, “And few injuries. We count ourselves lucky.”

“And the muggles?”

“Muggles’... oh, yes, yes, of course. The non-magical are startled, but we’ve had our Aurors on the case from the shadows. They’ve kept damage to a minimum and worked overtime to make sure they stay Obliviated. The head of our DMLE is personally involved.”

Undersecretary Abbott nods, “Yes, we’ve often heard great things about your Mr. Graves. Mr. Scamander has spoken very highly of their collaborative efforts in the past.” The fireplace roars again and he claps his hands once, “Ah, here we are, this makes all of us.”
The last man through is, in fact, a woman of dark skin. Her hair has been carefully styled into the short rolls favored by younger women, but Seraphina notes with interest that it doesn’t appear to have been smoothed. The woman pats down her hair and brushes her skirt off, and Seraphina doesn’t miss how her eyes dart around to observe her surroundings. She bobs the sort of tiny, automatic curtsy that a person would give to a figure of royalty when she catches Seraphina’s eyes on her. Seraphina bites back a smile— it’s always good to know that she exudes the sort of authority her position should.

“May I please present my secretary, Ms. Warbeck,” Abbott says, gesturing to the other woman in the party, and then to everyone else in turn. “This is Basil Carter, who heads the Department of International Magical Cooperation and his associate Gerald Warren... and this is Ms. Helene Carteret, secretary to Theseus Scamander.”

Seraphina eyes the small, dark-skinned woman once more, careful to keep her surprise off her face. The Minister of Magic of the British Empire ought to have found a way to attend, but even so, having the secretary to the head of British DMLE says at least Scamander thinks it’s important. If this Helene operates at all like Seraphina’s own cabinet, she has the British DMLE’s direct authority.

Seraphina nods her greetings at the group. “A pleasure, of course. Thank you for attending. You may not have met Randall Seuss, my Secretary of Domestic Affairs,” Seraphina says, gesturing the man forward. He obliges her. “He’s taken care of the details of your accommodations and setting up the forum.”

“Are we the last to arrive?” Abbott asks.

Seraphina looks to Seuss and crooks her eyebrow just so.

“No, no,” Seuss says, looking through his papers, “We’re still waiting on a few more delegations to join us. We’ve received ambassadors from the Soviet Union and our Western European allies for the most part- we are still hoping Italy, Germany and Austria-Hungary will send ambassadors to join us but so far they have declined. Our representatives from across the country have mostly arrived. We are still waiting on some from the western states- they should be arriving within the hour. The East African Alliance’s delegation is scheduled to arrive this evening.”

The Undersecretary opens his mouth to make a reply, but he is interrupted by rapid footsteps down the hall and a brusque voice. “Madam President!”

Seraphina looks over and watches Percival Graves striding purposefully towards them.

“Mr. Graves,” she says. She looks back to the Undersecretary. “May I introduce Percival Graves, Head of Magical Security and the director of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement.”

Abbott nods in greeting. “A pleasure, Mr. Graves.”

“Undersecretary Abbott,” Graves says, returning the nod.

Seraphina blinks— she was unaware of Graves having dealings with the Undersecretary before. But then Graves reaches her and leans in. His voice is low and steady, but she can see the anxiety on his face.

“Madam President, we’ve just had reports. There’s been another incident. No injuries that we know of, but it’s the first time an attack has happened in daylight. The creature may be getting desperate.”
Seraphina frowns deeply, turning just slightly away from the British delegates so they don’t see it. Graves follows her movement. “Instructions, ma’am?”

“Go investigate. Find out what was seen before Obliviations are performed. Return to report your findings as soon as you can.”

Graves nods shortly and disappears back down the hall. Seraphina turns back to her company. The British delegates look appropriately solemn, but not surprised, which means the reports she ordered sent out have at least been disseminated appropriately.

Seraphina keeps her head high and smiles as graciously as she can. “I’ll leave you to get settled before tomorrow’s forum. If you’ll excuse me.”

“Of course, Madam President.”

As Seraphina turns away, Seuss steps forward and gestures. “If you’ll follow me, I’ll show you to the Apparating point where you can sidealong to the delegate accommodations.”

Chapter End Notes

Look! He's on a boat! Going to America! I actually got him on the boat!
Newt stands in an arctic enclosure, kept well away from the other creatures. It’s the farthest he’s dared to push the Undetectable Extension Charm in his suitcase. He doesn’t want to be standing here- normally he tries not to think about this enclosure. The charm’s magic trembles at the edges here. Newt isn’t entirely sure if it’s because the charm has been pushed too far, or if...

His breath curls around his cheeks as he watches the Obscurus.

It’s agitated. (Or Newt has assigned agitation to it. He’s not sure if it still has emotions.) It thrashes in its magic preservative, swirling and collapsing in on itself. Newt almost feels like its reaching for something. He just can’t say what.

Newt leaves the enclosure, chewing on his lip, and moves on to feed the Mooncalves.

Helene isn’t quite sure where she is Apparated to- for security, according to Seuss. MACUSA and its various adjunct buildings were located on Manhattan, but the Americans didn’t want to risk foreign witches and wizards (with differing opinions about how much they care about and how strictly they adhere to the Statutes of Secrecy) alerting Muggles to magic by accident.

The witch who Apparates Helene to the lobby of the delegate accommodations Disapparates with barely a pause. Secretary Seuss arrives a moment later and checks that they’ve all made it in one piece. He doesn’t speak much, which is somewhat at odds with Helène’s expectations of America and Americans, but of course, they are here for what is, apparently, a near state of emergency. She is the last to be shown to her rooms, which are at the far end of the hallway on the floor reserved for the American delegation.

Seuss gives a tiny bow as he opens the door for her. “Your quarters for your stay. The service button to summon your delegation’s serving-witch is just here,” he says, gesturing to the wall to her right.

“Thank you,” Helene murmurs, stepping through. She still finds it incredibly odd that each delegation is assigned a witch or wizard because Americans don’t do house elves. They dislike creatures just that much.

Seuss touches his hat brim respectfully. “I’ll take my leave.”

“Thank you again,” she says and closes the door behind Seuss's retreating form.

Her rooms look almost exactly like what she’d seen while peeking through the open doors of the other assigned rooms. They’re surprisingly comfortable, if nowhere as ostentatious as she
expected them to be. The way her fellow witches and wizards talk about America, and Americans, she’d expected quite a bit more gilt and entirely too much plaster detailing on the walls and furniture. Instead, the rooms provided to her are almost bare and it doesn’t take long to explore them.

She starts in the small entrance foyer which turns into a parlour in about three steps. The parlour is appointed with layered rugs, an overstuffed chair, a low table, and a mahogany desk and chair under a window. A silver tea set and a silver coffee pot gleam in the light from the single window. Several paintings of landscapes adorn the walls. The walls aren’t even papered- they’re painted a pink so soft it’s almost white.

There’s nothing resembling a kitchen, but there is a small kettle on a trivet for boiling water and a little cupboard with the coffee and tea canisters. The door to the right leads to a washroom with a bathtub and a water closet, and the bedroom is off to the left.

She moves into the bedroom. The window there faces the same direction as the one in the parlour, down onto the streets of New York below. A large oriental rug that runs under the wardrobe and the massive four-poster bed. Helene hasn’t ever seen a bed so big in her life. She sits gingerly on the hugely fluffy mattress and takes off her gloves, leaving them on the bedside table, and runs her hands across the soft, luxurious green silk bedspread. After a moment she sinks down into it, sighing happily and remains splayed there while she spells her effects into the wardrobe.

That done, Helene considers the massive skyscraper outside her window from her upside down perspective and wonders where she is in relation to the island of Manhattan and the wizarding community therein. The building utilizes electricity, despite American wizards shunning muggle inventions as much as possible. Perhaps they make an exception for international visitors?

Helene finally, somewhat reluctantly, sits up, leaving the bedroom and spelling the water in her kettle to boil. She levitates the tea leaves into the teapot and pours the boiling water over them. While the tea brews, she casts Muffliato on the room, just in case, and undoes the security seal on her coat pocket and removes Mr. Scamander’s letters. Even though he put them in her hand himself, she checks for security spells. There are none.

She opens the envelope Mr. Scamander allowed to be seen and scans the text. Her eyebrows creep slowly up her forehead.

“Secretary Juanita Harmal, please let me introd- Isn’t she in the president’s cabinet?” she mutters to herself, flipping to the next page, “Mr. Schniderman, please let me introduce...” to the next page, “Downtown Manhattan to Central Park... Brooklyn?”

Helene sighs and spells her teacup to her hand. She sips and casts a spell to reveal hidden text. Nothing. She levitates the letters to the desk, frowning a little. Mr. Scamander had apparently not been joking when he said he’d written her letters of introduction and a sightseeing tip sheet on New York. She contemplates the envelope Mr. Scamander had made sure to hide against her palm. There’s nothing written on this one, but it is sealed with wax that will not peel but melts away only she presses her thumb to it. She spreads them out and uses her wand to iron out the folds.

Ms. Carteret,

I must extend to you my apologies first. I fear I may be involving you in affairs that are largely personal. Please believe me when I say I’d like to be taking care of them myself.

I have two quandaries, you see, and both involve America and my brother.
Helene almost incinerates the letter in frustration. She’d been so sure Mr. Scamander had a real purpose for her to serve here— a purpose that wasn’t playing minder to some runaway, scandal-mongering social oddity. She satisfies herself with sipping her tea angrily. The hot tea on her tongue refocuses her.

**First:** My brother is likely on his way to the Americas. He was commissioned to write a textbook, and for the past year he has been abroad doing his research for it. At last contact, Newton was in Egypt, but that was months ago and I can’t be sure he won’t turn up in North America next. He does know something of American magical law, but he also has, at the very least, a nundu in his company.

“A what?!” Helene yelps in spite of herself. Everybody knows that a nundu is one of the most deadly—!

Yes, I know the look on your face.

Helen schools her face, which has locked up in a mild disgust, to neutrality. A beat later she feels guilt well up uncomfortably in her chest.

I’m sure you’ve heard the gossip. I know my brother has acquired a reputation, however undeserved it truly is, since his expulsion. Most take care not to talk about him directly in front of me now, but I am well aware of their supposedly private opinions. We are not such an old family that society doesn’t see it as their responsibility to make sure I don’t seek airs and graces above myself. It is not for me to write out the details, so I will tell you only that his marriages were ended by inappropriate actions against his person.

Abuse. Helene can read that code well enough. Her face pinches in horror and sympathy. Abuse that caused a divorce with no trial, if she remembers rightly. It certainly explains why Newton would prefer to work in the most understaffed department in the Ministry, regardless of his strange ideas about creatures.

More importantly, you should know that Newton is currently engaged to be married to Percival Graves of the American Department of Magical Law Enforcement in a year’s time.

Helene choking on her tea. She valiantly keeps from spitting it all over the parchment. Mr. Scamander has never spoken of this marriage to anyone— gossip circulating the Ministry for months has been variations on the theme that Newton intends to remain a spinster after two failed attempts at marriage. Helene has tried to ignore it, in deference to her boss, but it’s persisted at every tea counter and snack trolley. Mr. Graves certainly hadn’t made an announcement in the American papers that Mr. Scamander insists on subscribing to.

Based on his reputation, Helene can’t imagine someone like Mr. Graves agreeing to marry someone like Mr. Scamander’s brother. It must be a testament to his and Mr. Scamander’s relationship that they even reached an agreement.

Second, as you already know, I believe Percival Graves has been compromised. Percival is my friend as much as my counterpart in magical security— we’ve traded information and tips for years. He has always been vigilant and careful, but if he has been captured, or put under the Imperius curse, or worse, we must consider the whole of the American DMLE compromised. Without being there myself, I can’t confirm my suspicions either way, but Percival has done nothing recently to allay them.

I’ve tried to reach Newton in order to warn him, but as of writing this, I don’t know if he’s received my letter. Worse, I don’t know what he’ll do if he does receive it. We did not part under the best terms.
Helene wonders idly if the engagement to Mr. Graves had caused the row.

You must watch Percival carefully, Ms. Carteret. Make every excuse you can to be professionally in his company- attend all the meetings I would and let nobody stop you. Tell me who he speaks to, and if his requests seem unusual to his staff or if they are taking his word as law. Find out if he has anything to do with these reports of a magical creature attacking New York.

I don't know anybody else in MACUSA nearly as well or whom I would have trusted the way I did Percival, but I have referenced you to Secretary Harmal of the President's cabinet. We worked together briefly, long ago. If you can reach her, she may be our best chance of inside help. I trust she has too high a profile to have been targeted the way Percival was but be wary.

And if Newton does reach New York, please try to get him through the city and far, far away. I don’t want MACUSA getting their hands on him and I don’t want him meeting Percival while so much is so uncertain.

Burn this as soon as you can, hm?

Yours sincerely,
Theseus Scamander

Helene stands and places the letter into the coffee pot, pointing her wand down into it. She whispers a brief, fierce “Incendio”.

The parchment catches fire. Helene watches it burn to ash and waits for the flames to sputter out. Just to be certain, she banishes the ash into the water closet and flushes it away. Once she is certain it’s gone, she settles at her desk to write a quick request for an audience with Secretary Harmal.

+ 

During the two weeks to New York aboard the Fort Elizabeth, Newt almost manages to forget that he’s going to the same city where his fiancé, who might well be under the influence of Grindelwald, exists. For most of it. Mostly. At the very least, Newt manages to not think about from dawn to dusk.

In fact, Dougal has only woken Newt from nightmares about a fiancé who isn’t under any influence at all but believes in Grindelwald’s truth, four times. (Because what if Theseus was wrong about Mr. Graves? What if Mr. Graves simply believes that mixed Muggle and magical blood is lesser than pure magical blood, or that creatures only exist for bits that can be used by wizards? What if, what if, what if?) Newt almost believes he’s gotten over it entirely.

And then the ship’s imminent arrival in New York harbor is announced with a long blast of the foghorn, and Newt’s whole body seizes.

The crewmen begin shouting instructions, indistinct and muffled and echoing through the ship’s corridors. An announcement system starts up, but Newt can hardly understand the words. His fingers go numb and he drops his teacup. He doesn’t feel the still hot liquid splash over his knees or hear the cup shatter over the sound of his heart pounding in his ears. He must look a sight, because Hobbs, whose hobby on the boat is scratching at the cabin door and trying to get out around Newt’s charms, actually stops occupying himself and wiggles into Newt’s lap.

The niffler’s low rumbling sound (Newt tries not to think of it as a purr since the niffler is very much not a feline, but it’s quite hard to describe otherwise) brings Newt out of his stupor. He forces himself to relax; concentrates on his own breathing as he scratches behind Hobbs’s ear.
When his hands stop trembling, a couple quick spells put the teacup back together and dry the spilled tea from the floor and his trousers.

“Sorry,” he murmurs to Hobbs, “I didn’t mean to startle you. I know you worry.”

Hobbs looks indignant and snorts what he thinks of that but otherwise doesn’t move.

“Oh, yes.” Newt chuckles, “That’s right, of course, you don’t.”

He and Hobbs may be comfortable with each other now, but it’s not often that Hobbs allows himself to be touched like this- Hobbs is not exactly a cuddler- so Newt sits there several moments longer to indulge in scratching him behind the ears.

There is another series of announcements that run into each other (why can’t Americans enunciate, anyway?). Newt eventually picks out the requests for passengers to ready for a final cabin inspection, as they will be docking at the harbor in fifteen minutes.

He stands and starts the process of trying to persuade Hobbs to get in, and stay in, the suitcase. After weeks of relative freedom in the cabin, Hobbs is not amused. It doesn’t help that Pickett has taken to living in the breast pocket of Newt’s winter coat. (He’s so small and he has a cold, and more importantly, he doesn’t spend his free time stealing from all and sundry, so Newt hasn’t bothered to remove him.) It takes Newt a bribe of three galleons and his favorite watch to get Hobbs into the suitcase at all, and when he does, Dougal is perched on the stairs, ready to climb out. Newt pushes Hobbs into Dougal’s arms.

“Dougal, no, we’re about to dock,” Newt says, “You can’t come out now. You’ll have to wait until we reach the train.”

Dougal looks mutinous as they hold a staring contest, though he doesn’t persist in trying to climb out. He slinks down the stairs into the shack, Hobbs in his arms, shoulders hunched. He looks distinctly like a sulky child who’s just been told off.

Newt bites on his inner cheek and frowns slightly. “I’m sorry, Dougal, but- ”

A knock on his cabin door cuts him off.

“Good morning, Mr. Scamander. Final inspections.”

Newt latches the suitcase shut behind Hobbs. His hands are trembling when he lifts it from the bed, though not as much as he’d half thought they might be. Dougal hasn’t come to him with any new visions, so perhaps he’s just gotten used to knowing that whatever happens, it won’t be good, which is not so different from most of his experience with fiancées and spouses.

“Yes, of course,” he says. He opens the door to allow the crewman in.

The man smiles and touches the brim of his cap as he steps inside. “Thank you, sir,” he says. His accent is broad and jarring after a year of rolling eastern accents. “The date is December 6th, 1926. We expect we should have the ship ready to debark at 9:30 this morning, precisely.”

“Thank you,” Newt mumbles, glancing at the uniform tag on the man’s breast, “Hugh.”

“It’s a good time to be in New York, sir,” Hugh says, pulling on white gloves and nodding his appreciation.

Newt watches him begin to pat down the bed, the dresser, opening the desk drawers and chest at the foot of the bed. “What is it that gets taken most?”
“Nowadays, alcohol,” Hugh says. He grimaces somewhat regretfully at the idea. “If you can keep it in your personals, well, we can’t go through those, and it was at least purchased legally. But with the amendment and the new law…” he shrugs as though he expects Newt to know what they are.

Newt nods along, even though he’s not entirely sure what required amending. He did hear vague complaints about an alcohol ban from American tourists drinking far too much in hotel bars while Egypt, but he’d not stopped to ask for specifics.

“You’d be surprised how many people try to smuggle so much in they need to hide it around the cabins,” Hugh continues, “and then we have to take it unless the Captain has orders.”

The way he says ‘orders’ tells Newt that he means ‘bribes’.

Hugh keeps talking as he does his inspection of Newt’s cabin. Newt puts on his coat and scarf and makes sure Pickett is comfortable when Hugh isn’t looking. When he gets the all-clear, Newt extricates himself from the cabin and climbs to the deck to watch the ship pull into New York’s harbor.

It’s been quite a while since he was last in cold weather- with a start he realizes he’s forgotten what winter felt like. He takes a seat on a bench and breathes in wintry air. It’s the Christmas season; he wonders if the city will feel like it. From the ship, it just looks gray, dirty, and mean. His heart starts to hammer in his chest as the New York skyline grows and grows until it seems to loom above him. There is something glorious about it, despite its intimidating and gray quality.

His suitcase squeaks as the latch flips open.

“Dougal,” Newt mutters- only Dougal has ever managed to mess with the charms on his suitcase. He bends down over the case and props his chin on his hands. They’re still trembling. It’s not the most comfortable, but he can at least keep his voice down enough that the Muggle passengers don’t hear him. “You settle down, please. It won’t be long- we need to get through to the train station before I can let everyone out again.”

He closes the latch again and worries at the suitcase, absently reminding himself to take it to a repair shop. When he gets home he should also have someone in magical repairs take a look- maybe between himself and someone who specializes in repairs a solution to keep Dougal from messing with the latch will present itself.

By the time the ship is docked and debarking can begin, Newt gets his hands under control. He nonetheless keeps his head down as he walks down the gang rail and proceeds to the port customs tables, passport clutched tightly inside his pocket.

“British, huh?” says the customs agent when he passes over the little book.

“Yes,” Newt agrees.

“First visit to New York?”

“Yes,” he repeats.

He glances quickly from side to side. There aren’t any obvious signs of Aurors. Relief almost behinds to well up in his throat- they must really not know of his travel. Then he recalls that American wizards try to segregate themselves, so it’s just as likely that they’re either invisible or hiding, and the relief disappears. There’s a sudden, sharper edge to the customs officer’s voice and Newt blinks. He follows the line of the pen in the officer’s hand down to his suitcase.
“Oh. No,” he says, realizing he’s been asked if there is anything edible in his suitcase.

Pickett stirs in his pocket, perhaps indignant over the idea of being edible—Newt’s still not sure how much exactly he understands. Newt puts a hand over the pocket soothingly and has to turn it into an awkward rearranging of his pocket square when the officer looks at him again. He bites down on the inside of his cheek and tells himself to pay attention and stop looking for signs of his fiancé.

Just because Newt has been worrying over this for a year, doesn’t mean he’s going to be whisked off as soon as he gets through customs. Even if Percival had had informants looking for him, he can’t have been warned of Newt’s arrival here today. Theseus will have stopped regular correspondence with Percival the second he sensed wrongness. And anyway, Newt still has a letter of reply to his brother in the inside pocket of his coat. Theseus can’t be sure Newt is even in New York yet.

“Livestock?” asks the agent.

His suitcase latch pops again and Newt winces. The agent zeroes in on the latch immediately.

“Must get that fixed,” Newt murmurs, closing the latch quickly, trying to smile and hoping the agent will think it’s just the malfunctions of an old piece of equipment. “Ah, no, no.”

“Let me take a look.”

Not a request. The customs agent looks fairly suspicious now.

Newt forces his hands to be steady as he puts the case on the table and flicks the Muggle-worthy switch. With any luck, his creatures will behave themselves long enough to get out of this. He opens the suitcase and turns it to face the agent. There’s a long silence while the meager contents—his clothing, his house scarf, a series of maps, his notebooks—are poked through with the tip of the agent’s pen.

The agent nods his satisfaction at last and stamps the passport with more force than Newt thinks is strictly necessary. “Welcome to New York.”

“Thank you,” Newt sighs out. He takes back his passport and hears the agent shouting for the next person in line.

One obstacle down, just the whole of New York until Pennsylvania Station to go. He could look for public transportation, perhaps, magical or Muggle. But he’s been on a boat for so long, and he’s never been to New York. If he has his way he’ll never come back. He should see at least a little of the city.

But first, the letter to Theseus, if only because his brother should at least have some idea that Newt has taken his warnings seriously.

Somewhat oddly for a community so small, there are establishments catering to the magical community everywhere—you just have to know where to look (Newt has gotten very good at looking in order to avoid them over the last year). Travel over oceans is as difficult for magical folk he finds a messenger service specializing in international seagull messengers fairly quickly.

“British, huh?” asks the wizard.

Newt looks at him blankly. Is everybody going to ask that?

It takes him a moment to find the right amount of wizarding money—there aren’t nearly so many
variations in wizard currency as there are in Muggle currencies, but they do exist. When he and the shopkeeper figure it out, he pays to have his letter sent to Theseus at the Ministry. (The clerk doesn’t seem unduly interested in the recipient, which is a relief.)

Once he’s seen the seagull off at the pier, Newt steps into the streets of downtown Manhattan. Tentatively, he lets himself hope that maybe this will all work out after all.

Chapter End Notes

Guys. Guys guys guys. Next chapter. Literally, in the next chapter, I will get to the part of the prompt where it says "the events of the movie happen". It only took SEVEN chapters to get there, but it's finally gotten there. orz
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

In which Newt can catch no breaks.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

(It doesn’t work out.)

It starts with a crowd that blocks quite a lot of the sidewalk. (There are very few things Newt likes less than large groups of people. Large groups of people in his path is definitely up there.) He only realizes even the crowd is there as he’s about to take his first step through it- he’s been looking up at the skyscrapers, marveling at the audacity of building so high and had just figured the noise was simply normal in an American city- and he has to pull himself to an abrupt stop before he bumps into a muggle at the edge of the crowd. A dark-haired woman in plain, almost drab, clothes stands several steps up, speaking to the crowd like a general rallying the troops.

Newt takes a quick look around, seeking the best path through. He could walk into the streets to get around it- but there are plenty of angry muggles in funny driving contraptions, honking loud horns, and he doesn’t fancy making them angrier. So he takes a deep breath, prepares himself, and moves slowly along the edge of the crowd, towards the front. There is a sort of semi-circle of people around the woman on the steps there. The signs behind the woman flutter and catch his eye, and he stops to make sure he is reading the signs correctly.

'New Salem Philanthropic Society'? Well, really. That hysteria again?

“But where there is light there is shadow, friends,” the woman is saying, lifting an emphatic fist into the air, “Something is stalking our city, wreaking destruction and disappearing without a trace.”

Newt takes another step, but his eyes are still on the sign and he doesn’t notice a woman in a gray coat, its collar popped up around her face, steps back into his path. He jumps almost more than she does when they bump into each other.

“Oh. Ah, so sorry,” he murmurs, looking down the second the woman turns in his direction.

He moves back quickly, listening with half an ear to the end of the woman’s speech. She calls her group the “Second Salemers”. (Do they actually know what they’re asking for? Honestly.) Despite the fervor in her speech, her voice itself is smooth- Newt imagines she sounds quite calm and sweet when not raising her voice to be heard over traffic.

“What drew you to our meeting today, friend?”

There is silence. Newt looks into the crowd and realizes many are now staring back at him. The speaker is pointing a finger directly at him. His hackles raise and he hunches, realizing she’s waiting eagerly for an answer to the question left hanging. All he can do is thank the graces that there is space enough between them that she isn’t attempting to touch him.
“Sorry?” he manages to squeak, “Oh, um. I was... I was just passing through.”

“Are you a seeker?” she asks, “A seeker after the truth?”

“I’m... I’m more of a chaser, really,” Newt offers, attempting a smile.

She doesn’t understand his joke, but he didn’t expect her to. He starts patting his coat as though he needs to find something in a pocket, though really he’s just looking for Pickett. The bowtruckle is currently curled up in his occamy egg pocket, wrapped around the egg Newt’s been keeping there for days and staying very still. Newt wonders if Pickett understands the severity of the situation by the tension in Newt’s body.

A leaflet presents itself under his nose. Newt looks up slowly, eyes trailing from the print to the pale hand holding the paper, and up a dark jacket. He comes face to face with a young man with short, dark hair that is mostly hidden under a flat black hat- it does his features no favors- and near-black eyes. Newt flicks his eyes briefly over the man’s face. The young man stares at a point just at Newt’s ear; keeping his eyes close enough that he could be making eye contact but without actually having to.

Newt knows because that’s what he does.

The woman says something grand behind him that Newt only half hears. He reaches up to take the leaflet but doesn’t pull it from the young man’s hand, using the moment to study him further from under lowered lashes. There’s something in his eyes that’s so familiar... Newt doesn’t even realize that he and the young man have locked gazes until the boy drops his hand from the leaflet like the paper had been burning his fingers.

“...if you dare: witches live among us!” the woman cries.

The young man disappears into the crowd, offering more leaflets to the puzzled muggles. Newt watches him go. From the tense set of his shoulders, the young man knows it.

The woman continues: “Yes, witches live among us! What do you think of that?”

In the corner of his eye, Newt sees a blur of fur rush up the steps. Newt looks at his suitcase automatically. It looks like it’s still closed tightly. A rat, perhaps? He turns to get a better look and finds Hobbs staring back at him, a coin in hand. The coin disappears into Hobbs’s pouch and he drags a beggar’s hat behind a column. Newt swears to himself- Hobbs must have worked the suitcase open at a weak point.

“Excuse me,” he says to nobody in particular. Then, emphatically: “Merlin save me from thieving nifflers.”

He dashes up the steps to chase after Hobbs. Newt pushes the doors of the building open, following Hobbs in, and immediately feels his stomach turn to knotted lead as he stumbles to a halt. The atrium of the building is a massive, echoing cavern of marble. A long, low wall- topped by a shining cage of brass bars that make up service windows at regular intervals- arcs out in a U in the center of the massive room. Muggles in very smart clothes, shining belt buckles, and silver pocket watches dripping from almost every foot and waistcoat pocket, stand at every open service window. They exchange coins, count coins, move coins from one place to another.

Newt’s lead-filled stomach tries to turn over. A bank.

Hobbs will be thrilled. A thrilled Hobbs cares very little for the laws of Wizards. He will use his innate magic if he feels the need, and the Statutes of Secrecy can go hang themselves. If Hobbs does something that gets them noticed, if they’re found because of it… Newt swallows back
panic. No time for that. He needs to find the niffler and get out.

“Okay, there, pal? You look lost.”

A hand lands on his arm. yells, feeling fire under his skin, even through three layers of cloth, where the foreign touch rests. He throws himself back against the walls behind him to get away from it. The sudden, violent movement jostles both himself and the owner of the hand. He is released immediately, and he would stay frozen against the wall except that he drops his suitcase. scrambles to grab it off the floor, clutching it to his chest, and only then does he allow himself to catch his breath.

Cold shame cuts through his spine- he’s been on his own for so long he’d almost convinced himself that he was better.

A small, broad man peers at him worriedly. “You with me?”

Newt’s cheeks turn red and hot- he’s made such a spectacle of himself that other muggles have turned to stare. He forces himself to look at whoever it was that touched him, ready to attempt to apologize, but his tongue feels thick in his mouth. He can’t stop himself from darting looks at those who are staring- it draws the stranger’s attention to the crowd. He waves them away, saying something genial. Newt concentrates on breathing rather than trying to understand him. When he’s gotten the other muggles to go back to their business, the small man turns back to Newt. His hands come up in front of his chest, showing his palms, but remain far away. Something like understanding flits across his face. An apologetic smile stretches across his lips.

“Listen, I’m sorry about that,’ the man says, “I should have made sure you knew I was there.”

Lowers the suitcase to rest against his leg, its weight a reassuring comfort, and straightens as best he can. He manages only a pathetic imitation of standing upright, but the man doesn’t seem to care. He also doesn’t extend his hand towards Newt for the social nicety of a handshake. Newt is about to try and say something, anything, but he is waylaid by a new voice.

“Can I help you, sir?” asks an employee in an pressed suit with not a single thread out of place.

He comes entirely too close for Newt’s liking and stares down his nose suspiciously. Newt wildly tries to remember how to speak- his throat works and lips start to form words and stop short of being able to do so. It’s entirely too much at once. His hand goes into his pocket to touch the occamy egg and he feels immediately begin to climb up his coat sleeve. The slide of the bowtruckle’s legs is calming, taking away the lingering sensation of the muggle’s hand on his skin.

“Thank you. We’re just waiting,” the small man says over Newt’s silence. He smiles easily. “I’ve got an appointment with Mr. Bingley.”

“And he is?” the employee asks, eyeing Newt.

“Moral support. I just startled him- the war, you know- and crowding him now isn’t helping.”

The bank employee narrows his eyes but nods once and motions to a bench. “We have benches for your comfort while waiting.”

“Well, thanks,” the muggle says, “We’ll just go take a seat.”

Newt automatically follows the stranger to the bench and sits down. He presses himself right up against the arm on the other end from the muggle and sets his suitcase on the floor. The muggle puts a briefcase on the bench between them. It’s almost like he’s giving Newt a barrier. Newt
breathes slowly, trying to remember why he’s even here. Then he catches sight of Hobbs grabbing for coins in a man’s pocket and his body jerks with the need to chase after the niffler. He forces himself to keep still— he doesn’t want to bring the attention of the bank employees back to himself after his display.

“You were in the war, huh?” the small man asks.

“Hm?” Newt blinks rapidly, brow furrowing, trying to place why this would be important— why this man should even think that Newt would have been there. “Right. Yes. Eastern front,” he manages on an exhale.

“Thought so. American expeditionary forces,” the man says. He makes a motion with his hands that Newt recognizes as digging with a shovel. “I know how it can be. Jacob Kowalski.”

“Newton Scamander,” Newt mutters, as his heart stops rabbiting in his chest.

He slides his hand into his pocket and smooths his fingers over the occamy egg again. For a moment he thinks he feels a tremor but he doesn’t let himself get too excited. It’s probably just that his hand is shaking again. Silence stretches between them until Mr. Kowalski awkwardly clears his throat.

“Newton- your parents like science, huh?”

Newt stares blankly at him. Then he slowly tilts his head. “I’m sorry?”

Kowalski laughs and waves a hand, “No, no, sorry. You must get that a lot. So what are you doing here, anyway?”

“Oh, um... I was just, ah, waiting...” Newt trails off. He’s long since lost sight of Hobbs, and trying to make himself look around the bank with the meandering gaze of a bored man who’s being kept waiting for too long is tiring.

“I’m applying for a loan,” Kowalski says like Newt hasn’t just abruptly stopped talking in the middle of his sentence. “I just got back- well, I say ‘just’ but it was in ‘24. I got lucky that the cannery was hiring, but my heart’s always been in baking. My grandmother used to bake with me, you know, she taught me. Her paczki, it’s just-”

Kowalski makes a little sound of contentment and Newt makes an appropriate noise of understanding. The niffler briefly appears in the corner of his eye. Hobbs can’t turn invisible, but if you don’t know what you’re looking for he might as well be able to. Newt stands slowly.

“Mr. Kowalski!” A dry, brittle voice echoes from the office across the bank atrium, “Mr. Bingley will see you now.”

“That’s me,” Kowalski says, standing, “Wish me luck.”

“Good luck,” Newt says obligingly over his shoulder.

He places one foot slowly in front of the other, trying to move closer to Hobbs without looking like he’s creeping up. He tries to do as much of his moving while Hobbs is busy with his thieving, but that’s not an easy task. The niffler moves almost as though gravity doesn’t exist.

Newt’s not sure how long he spends on the hunt— several times he comes close but each time Hobbs gets away just by the skin of his teeth (Newt’s breath catches in his chest so many times that not breathing would be easier). He edges himself around the customers of the bank, following the clicking and scraping as the niffler pilfers from everyone in sight.
There’s a brief, tense moment when Hobbs almost gets into an altercation with a dog with a carefully polished tag. Hobbs is smart enough to run away when the dog barks, scuttling under the bench he and Jacob had been waiting on. Newt dives for the bench and hopes he will have surprise on his side. He misses the niffler by a hair.

Hobbs scurries over the bank counter, through the bars, and disappears. Newt bites back a swear.

“Still lost what you were lookin’ for?”

Newt misses banging his head on the bench seat by a centimeter. He slips out from under it and looks up into Mr. Kowalski’s bemused face. The egg in his pocket thumps against his leg and Newt hears a distinct cracking noise. He pulls it out in alarm, relieved when he realizes it hasn’t broken into pieces. It’s just the hairline fractures of an egg about to hatch.

*Of all the times.* “Yes, unfortunately.”

The muggle nods, looking down at Newt’s hands. “Is that an egg?”

Newt glances at him and decided to ignore the question as rhetorical. “Did you get your loan?”

“Oh. Uh. No.”

“I’m sorry.”

Mr. Kowalski does his best to give a valiant shrug of nonchalance, but Newt can see the numbed pain on his face. He thinks he should say something more comforting. As he opens his mouth to do so, a trolley cart being rolled along by an employee on the wrong side of the security gate catches his eye. Hobbs sits on the lower shelf.

Newt shoves the egg at Mr. Kowalski. “Hold this please.”

Mr. Kowalski holds it in both hands like it might be a bomb in disguise. Newt scurries across the bank to a gate that separates the main interior from what must be offices and the bank vault. The employee wheels the trolley into a lift, blissfully unaware of Hobbs dumping the contents of a coin bag. Newt wonders idly what the chances are that someone will see him if he Apparates himself to the wrong side of the gate.

Fortunately, nobody is really paying attention to Newt now- not even the bank employees or the guards are looking in his direction. Unfortunately the cart, the employee rolling it, and Hobbs, disappear behind closing lift doors before Newt can get there to stop it.

“Hey!” Kowalski’s voice. Newt looks over his shoulder. Kowalski has one arm outstretched and waves the other. “Hey, Mr. Scamander! I think your egg is hatching!”

Newt spins on his heel. Mr. Kowalski seems torn between watching the egg crack and looking to Newt for help. Newt makes a decision without realizing it and he points his wand, muttering *Accio* for the muggle’s coat. Mr. Kowalski is dragged across the atrium, the egg still held out in his hand. Newt grabs his arm and Disapparates them.

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Behind them, an American witch watches with incredulous eyes.

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Newt and Mr. Kowalski Apparate into a stairwell going down from the main floor, just on the
other side of the gate— it’s only dumb luck that no employees are using it as they do. Newt hopes it leads to the bank vault.

Still in Mr. Kowalski’s hand, a hole appears in the occamy egg. The man makes a little noise of alarm. Newt shoves his wand between his teeth and carefully takes it back from Mr. Kowalski. The occamy chick’s little head peeks out and pushes through and she chirps her hunger. Newt can feel the smile stretching across his lips. Mr. Kowalski’s face is a picture of awe and shock and confusion when Newt looks at him.

But of course the moment can’t last because Newt needs to get into the vault to get Hobbs, and so he turns on his heel and starts down the stairs. When he reaches the basement, he sets the suitcase down and opens it, carefully lowering the occamy past the opening.

“In you hop.” Dougal stands at the bottom of the ladder. He looks fit to riot, even as he accepts the occamy chick and cradles it. “No. Everyone settle down. Dougal, don’t make me come in there. It’s bad enough you helped Hobbs breech the seal.”

Pickett pokes his head out from Newt’s breast pocket— he never misses a chance to see Newt chastise the other creatures. Newt is only partially aware that Pickett’s attention is soon grabbed by something else— something that has Pickett climbing onto Newt’s shoulder to see better— because Dougal looks about to argue with him.

“No— don’t make me come down there,” Newt warns again.

“Mr. Scamander?” Kowalski’s voice asks, “Hello?”

Newt jerks his head up. Mr. Kowalski stands in the stairway, peeking out tentatively. Newt furrows his brow a little. He’d have thought the man would leave. (Then again, they are on the wrong side of what is supposed to be a secure area.) He doesn’t have much more time to think about it. A dark flash darts out of a side hallway and squeezes through the seam of a massive central vault door.

“Absolutely not,” Newt mutters. He points his wand at the door. “Alohomora!”

The door obliges the spell; bolts and cogs unlock and spin themselves. The heavy door slides open slowly. The noise of it mostly masks footsteps coming down the long hallway.

“So you’re going to steal the money, huh?”

An alarm blares before either Newt or Mr. Kowalski can do anything. Newt doesn’t stop to worry. This has gone on too long. He points his wand at the man from his waist: “Petrificus totalus!”

He hears the thump of someone falling to the floor like a log. Newt enters the vault. Hobbs is sitting on a giant pile of pilfered vault lock-boxes and he stares defiantly at Newt. He tries to stuff a gold bar into a stomach pouch that is clearly too full to handle it.

“Oh, no,” Mr. Kowalski’s voice sounds thready with panic behind Newt. “No, don’t shoot, don’t shoot!”
When Newt is satisfied that as much of the treasure has fallen as he can get out (it’s nearly impossible to get everything back from a niffler in the best of circumstances), he spins around. Armed guards troop down the stairs, guns at the ready. Kowalski looks a bit queasy as he stands there, hands in the air by his shoulders.

Newt lunges for him, and they Disapparate.

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Newt Apparates them to the street just off the massive bank stairs, sheltered from the confusion of police arriving and the crowds forming to watch. The alarm is still blaring. Mr. Kowalski shakes, his back pressed into the brick and marble exterior of the bank. Newt gets his suitcase open with one hand and he wrestles Hobbs into it. Not even Dougal tries to get out this time.

“For the last time, you pilfering pest- paws off what doesn’t belong to you!” he says sternly and shuts the case. He looks over his shoulder at Mr. Kowalski. “I’m terribly sorry about that.”

“What the hell was that?” the muggle demands.

“Nothing that needs concern you,” Newt murmurs.

He pats down his coat- where had he put his wand? He can’t Obliviate the bank employee or the guards, but he thinks it unlikely anybody will believe them when they’re questioned. If he just Obliviates Mr. Kowalski they should both be able to move along without any more chaos.

“Unfortunately you’ve seen far too much, especially for an American, so if you’ll just stand there- if you wouldn’t mind- this will be over in a jiffy.”

He doesn’t even see Jacob lean down to grab his briefcase until it makes direct and violent contact with the side of his head. Grunting in pain, Newt doubles over from the force and stumbles back a few steps. There’s a choked “sorry!”. Then he’s alone.

“Bugger,” he sighs.

He puts a hand to the blossoming soreness in his head, blinking rapidly to get the stars out of his eyes. He waits until his vision is totally clear and starts to collect himself.

A woman in a long grey coat (didn’t he see her earlier?), her hat pulled down snuggly over her hair, blocks the only way out as she moves with purpose towards him. He watches warily. She must know. Percival must have had someone looking for him. He pulls his suitcase close to his chest and wonders, wildly, if he’d be able to defend petrifying her as well.

“I’m not going,” he says before he can stop himself.

The woman ignores him. She grabs his wrist and Disapparates them without so much as a by-your-leave.

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They Apparate into an alley that isn’t far from the bank if the shouting and alarms are anything to go by. Newt keeps his back against a wall. His head throbs and he winces, reaching to prod the area as he looks around. He half expects Percival to be standing there, but the alley is totally empty save for himself and the witch.

The witch rounds on him angrily. “Who are you?”
“I... I’m sorry?” Newt asks, smiling weakly.

“Who are you? What’s that thing in your case?”

Newt stares at her, blankly. Does she really not know? Was she not sent for him? She makes an impatient gesture at him and he clears his throat.

“Just my niffler. He’s harmless, really.” His eyes lock onto the yellow sauce on the witch’s lip, and he reaches out towards it. “Er- you’ve got something on your-”

“Why in the name of Deliverance Day did you let that thing loose?”

“I didn’t- didn’t mean to. He’s incorrigible, you see, anything shiny and he’s all over the place. He’s been worrying at the spells that keep him in for weeks and just managed to get out-” Newt stops, swallows.

The witch is staring at him like she stopped listening to him ages ago. “You didn’t mean to?”

Ages ago. “No,” Newt says. He doesn’t bother repeating his explanation.

“You could not have chosen a worse time to let that creature loose! We’re in the middle of a situation here!” She throws her arms up and shakes her head. “I’m taking you in.”

“You are not!” Newt snaps.

“Yes, I am.”

She pulls out a very official looking badge that flops out of a flat wallet for several folds. Her picture moves next to the very impressive seal of the Magical Congress of the United States of America. Newt’s whole body goes numb. He only just manages to catch the witch’s name from the ID: Porpentina Goldstein.

“MACUSA? What, are you an investigator of some kind?” Newt asks.

Goldstein hesitates- her eyes dart up to the left- and Newt straightens as he realizes that she’s not. Or she was but isn’t any longer. He should be able to challenge her authority to take him anywhere. If she takes him against his will and outside of the purview of her office then nobody can hold him.

“I work for the Department of Magical Law Enforcement,” Goldstein says flatly. The confirmation knocks the breath out of him and suddenly he can’t remember what he’d been about to say. “At least tell me you took care of him.”

“Who?”

“The no-maj.” She pauses at his blank look, growing frustrated. “The no-maj! No magic? The non-wizard!”

“Oh, sorry. We call them muggles.”

“Whatever,” Goldstein snaps, “you wiped his memory, right? Tell me you did.”

Newt swallows. His head throbs again as he thinks about Mr. Kowalski swinging the briefcase at his head, and he presses a hand to the tender spot. “I. Well, I tried. He got away, see-”

“That’s a Section 3A,” she interrupts, “I’m taking you in.”
Look! It's the events of the movie (kinda)! And it didn't take another 7 chapters to get to them! And also I managed to post it before 5 years went by!
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

In which there are many meetings, and Newt really wants no part of them.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

At 8:00 in the morning of December 6th Helene waits for Secretary Juanita Harmal to see her. It is entirely the wrong side of 9:00 am to be awake for her taste, but if the Secretary of War wants to see Helene at 8:00 am, the Secretary of War will see her at 8:00 am. She worries Mr. Scamander’s letter of introduction in her hands to occupy them and wonders what the chances of a proper cup of tea are before she has to remember how to speak eloquently.

The secretary’s office is three floors down from the lobby of MACUSA- all members of the cabinet seem to have their offices here- but even so, Helene had to pass through three security checkpoints to reach it. At least the light from the lobby reaches this open hallway in full. She’s still a little surprised that her request for an audience was granted, especially this quickly, and she has a distinct feeling that she would not be here were it not for Mr. Scamander’s letter and her position as his proxy. An office door opens to her left and Helene stands automatically. A woman watches her from the open doorway- she’s quite short, and there is gray in her dark hair, but Helene knows immediately who this woman is.

She gives a respectful nod. “Secretary Harmal.”

“Ms. Carteret,” says the small woman, smiling, “Come in, please.”

Helene follows the secretary in. Harmal’s office shows quite a lot in the way it shows nothing. Her desk is massive and sits in direct sight of the open office door. It is bare except for stacks of official papers, an ink pot, and quill stand. Helene starts to hope that Mr. Scamander was right- this is a woman from whom the slightest idiosyncratic behavior would stand out. Harmal probably has protocols in place to be followed if she so much as sneezes the wrong way.

“Come, we’ll sit here,” Harmal says. She walks over to two chairs that face each other over a coffee table set up in the far right corner of the room and sits with her back to the wall. She motions for Helene to the couch opposite. “Better for a meeting of colleagues than across a desk.”

“That’s very kind of you,” Helene says, sitting down. She smoothes out Theseus’s letter of introduction nervously, unnecessarily, ruefully aware that by doing so she’s betraying her nerves. “I’m really just acting for my superior since he can’t be away from the Ministry. There’s too much uncertainty around the spread of dark magic in Europe. Grindelwald’s campaign has resorted to murders that the muggles are beside themselves trying to explain. Mr. Scamander is worried it could mean another war.”

“Understandable and wise of him not to leave,” Harmal agrees. She smiles as she takes the letter from Helene. “I worked with Mr. Scamander, you know, during the war. We have kept up a sparing correspondence since. He did not appoint deputies in his name lightly then and I presume this has not changed.”
“You fought in the Great War?” Helene asks before she can stop herself.

American wizards getting involved in a European war where the risk of exposure to muggles was so high just doesn’t seem like a possibility.

“Yes. It was not sanctioned,” Harmal says as she scans the contents of Theseus’s letter. “I was a curse-breaker at the time, not working for the government officially. The administration could not say no. There were enough of us that eventually exceptions were made for those who wished to fight.”

Helene watches Harmal’s face as the older woman reads the letter. She taps her wand to the parchment once she’s finished reading. The parchment flares a bright purple and Harmal nods her satisfaction.

“Mr. Scamander keeps good security. He remembered my spell.” She smiles fondly, if sharply, “Though it is somewhat more dramatic than it was when I taught it to him. The exuberance of youth.”

Helene wonders absently what would have happened had the parchment not flared. The smile on Harmal’s face and the glint in Harmal's eyes tell Helene she’d rather not know.

“Now, Ms. Carteret,” says Harmal, “What can I help you with?”

Goldstein Apparates them into an abandoned storefront and pulls Newt out onto Broadway. The avenue bustles with so many people that Newt thinks it’s almost a good thing Goldstein is there: he can focus on her hand burning his elbow through his coat rather than the lack of air in the crowd.

Newt is fairly sure that American wizards can’t go dragging foreign nationals around without warrants, but he hasn’t exactly versed himself in the details of American wizarding law. He considers trying his Ministry badge on her but dismisses that idea almost as soon as it comes. His position doesn’t mean anything to other British wizards; what could it possibly mean to her? He considers Theseus but drops that like a hot coal as well. If he starts demanding things under the authority of Theseus’s position, and Goldstein really does work under Percival or did work under Percival or whatever, she’ll know who he is. So he stays silent as she ushers him along towards the Woolworth Building.

“I do have things to do, you know,” he tells Goldstein mildly. “My schedule is fairly tight.”

“Well, you’ll have to rearrange it. What are you doing in New York anyway?”

“My ship docked in the harbor,” Newt offers patiently.

His eyes dart from the muggles lined up in front of the Woolworth Building to the intricately detailed arch that the stained glass peeks out of, to the hand on his coat. He doesn’t even think about how condescending he might sound until he catches Goldstein’s unimpressed look.

“Oh. Right. I was heading to-” What was that story he’d decided on? A birthday gift- right. “I was looking for an Appal- a puff.” Oh, never mind. “I was going to Pennsylvania Station. I’m going to miss my train, now.”

“You’ll get another. There are trains leaving New York about every five minutes from there.”

She takes Newt to a uniformed guard who stands by a side door of the Woolworth Building.
None of the muggles waiting to get in appears to notice him- Newt thinks he feels a Concealment Charm once he steps within about three feet of the door.

“I’ve got a Section 3A,” Goldstein says.

The guard opens the door without a word and Newt is ushered in. The muggle office building through the revolving door melts away as soon as he’s on the other side of the glass, and then he’s standing in the one place he never wanted to see.

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“You’re quiet, Credence,” Modesty says.

Ma is leading the way back to the Second Salemers church on Pike street. It means she’s not paying much attention to them, so Credence risks a smile.

“I’m always quiet, according to you,” he says.

Modesty grins. “This is a par-TIC-u-lar quiet.”

She’s just learned the word- her face glows with the assurance of a child who’s just been taught something that sounds very smart and she's been using it all day to make sure she doesn’t forget it. Credence huffs a soft chuckle.

“What’s so particular about it?” he asks.

Modesty has to think about that one as she and Credence turn the corner onto Pike. He takes the pause to try and come up with a reason for his quiet that she’ll accept. The truth is that he’s still thinking about the man in the blue coat from the rally, and he doesn’t know why. He just keeps thinking about green eyes with a corona of gold. There was something about those eyes...

“Are you thinking of someone?” Modesty asks.

Credence sucks in a sharp breath. “What makes you say that?”

“Just your face,” she says, shrugging.

They step through the church doors and she pulls away from him to hang up her coat next to Chastity’s. Credence deposits the leaflets in the usual shallow box by the door- when the street children come for their daily soup, they’ll take what’s left- and makes a note to put in another order from the printers. Ma is happy with the crowd from her speech today, because she allows them to go off and play while she slips on an apron and begins to set up plates and bowls herself.

They run for their dolls- witches on stakes and priests with which to conduct ‘witch trials’. Credence watches them for a moment, fear gnawing cold in the pit of his stomach.

“Credence.”

Her voice is calm to the point of cold. It always is when it comes to him. He’s never really understood why.

“Yes, Ma?”

“The soup,” she says, “The children will expect it to be warm. Get to it.”

“Yes, Ma.”
Goldstein leads Newt through a short hallway and up a set of black and red marble steps suspended over the empty air- MACUSA was built down, much like the Ministry, except that it is an oversized, deep peristyle.

From the entrance, the lobby opens under an impossibly high ceiling and light floods the space. Floors and floors of silver columns and gilt arches disappear beyond Newt’s sight on either side. Over the stairs, hanging from nothing Newt can see, is a four-faced dial under quite large alarms. It counts Obliviations, Witch Hunts, and Exposures. The hands of each face are pointed to Severe: Unexplained Activity written over bright orange. The portrait of the president, Seraphina Picquery— a regal-looking woman who does not smile— is impossible to miss as they crest the stairs, hanging just beyond a magnificent stone canopy covering a three-step dias and a series of mournful-looking statues. Newt takes in the gilded phoenixes on the canopy columns, their wings outstretched as if to take flight, with appreciation. Some sort of memorial, no doubt.

He cranes his head up farther and realizes the ceiling has been charmed to show the sky, much like the Great Hall in Hogwarts. Owls and pigeons swoop back and forth, landing by wizards working at desks in open cubicles. (Newt assumes the work up here is the mundane bureaucratic like complaints or lost and found.) Goldstein pulls him to the left and rounds the corner, past witches and wizards going about their work.

A house-elf operates a wand-shining machine in front of two long, wooden benches. There are several employees waiting for their turn. A few of them are reading newspapers and Newt looks for glimpses of the headlines. Grindelwald’s name sticks out on a few and Newt takes a step closer, wanting to know more, but Goldstein yanks him back by his elbow.

“I just- the newspaper-” he starts.

She interrupts him with a sharp, “No time. We’re going to Major Investigations.”

“What for?” he asks.

“To talk to my boss,” Goldstein says as she stops Newt in front of the single lift. The grillwork door- more like a gate than a door, really- opens at the behest of the goblin attendant inside. “Hey, Red.”

“Tina,” says the goblin, pulling out a stick with a sturdy, clawed end to reach the top buttons. “Where to?”

“Major Investigation department.”

The goblin hesitates. Newt watches their interaction silently. Theseus made sure Newt knows enough to pick out deception, even from interactions with trained Aurors. Goldstein’s face gives away very little, but Red is just a lift attendant. Red’s body language tells him that Goldstein is definitely misrepresenting herself to Newt. Newt just can’t figure out why.

“I thought you was-” Red starts.

“Major investigation department!” Goldstein says, cutting him off. She manages to sound strained and subdued at the same time, which is a very odd combination indeed. “Come on, Red, I got a Section 3A. You know what’s going on.”

The goblin shrugs and uses his stick to choose the appropriate floor button. “On your head.”

The lift door closes. The peristyle is wide and the lift is open-work allowing light to pour in. Even
so, Newt swallows as the lobby disappears above them, feeling like the walls are going to close in and smother him. He stares out of the grillwork and tries to distract himself with observing what he can. It’s not much. Some floors are laid out in open plans, and there is very little variation in color or form of the furniture. Others clearly use the peristyle as a hallway, with offices or other rooms closed off from view. It’s hard to determine what they are, so Newt decides to assign them purposes to pass the time. He assigns supply closets, water closets, offices, meeting rooms to random doors that catch his eye as they descend.

He absolutely does not think about who they must be going to see.

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“You’re quite sure?” Seraphina asks.

The morning edition of *The New York Ghost* is spread over the table. Graves leans over it, hands splayed as his dark eyes dart across the text. The headline tells its reader that *Magical Disturbances Risk Wizarding Exposure*. The reporting follows Graves’s investigation from the day before.

“I was there when the second wave happened. It was a beast,” Graves says. His face is bruised and his voice brooks no argument. “No human could do the damage it’s capable of. Whatever creature it is that’s doing this, it must have been smuggled into the country.”

Several senior Aurors stand around the table with them. All of them are smart enough not to offer their opinion on the idea of a creature. Seraphina will admit to herself that she is coming around more and more to Graves’s theory.

“It took down a whole townhouse,” Seraphina says, only half-questioning.

“Plus the back half of the tenement next door,” O’Brien adds, checking his notes.

Graves nods his agreement. “It left a trail like a tunnel collapsing in on itself. I’ve never seen anything like it- the power it must have. It was amazing.”

There’s a tinge of excitement to his voice when he speaks of it, but Graves has been relegated to routine work in the offices for the last few weeks, and was only just cleared back into the field. Seraphina is willing to allow him his morbid excitement as a side effect of his inaction- it hasn’t interfered yet.

“How long has it been?” she asks.

Graves looks over his shoulder at Fontaine, raising an expectant eyebrow.

“Since the first explosion? We’re almost into the third full month of reports,” Fontaine says.

“And the non-magical government has been trotting out the gas explosion explanation from the start?”

Graves nods. Seraphina crosses her arms to stop herself from rubbing at her temple, where a headache has been slowly building. Too long. The no-maj’s might have been willing to believe that all this has been the work of gas explosions at first, but three months later… They’ll riot if something isn’t done soon.

Those Second Salemers aren’t helping matters, stirring up the rest of the population with their insistence on attempting to expose the magical community. Seraphina curses Goldstein’s inexperience and bleeding heart for the umpteenth time- even their best Obliviator hadn’t been
able to remove all memories or that Barebone woman should have gone away.

She uncrosses her arms and blows out a long breath. She looks at Graves and leans in— they can’t afford to continue their policy of non-action. “Whatever it is, one thing’s clear. It must be stopped.”

When Helene finishes explaining Mr. Scamander’s worries and the admittedly little bit of evidence he has to support it, Harmal sits back. Helene has the distinct impression she’s being studied. A decanter of whiskey, two glasses, and a bucket of ice swoop obediently to the coffee table. A display of her wandless magic? Mr. Scamander sometimes does that if he’s trying to get the measure of someone.

“Ice?” Harmal asks, as though she were pouring tea rather than alcohol.

“Yes, please,” Helene says.

She only just keeps herself from asking if Harmal is aware of how early it is. Honestly, she’s not entirely sure how Harmal has alcohol when there’s a ban on it in the country. Harmal prepares the drinks, passes Helene’s across the table, and sips. She closes her eyes.

Helene allows the silence to continue and sips carefully from her own glass. Then a bigger sip— it’s good whiskey.

“I would not normally give credence to a theory like this,” Harmal says at last. “Not even from Theseus Scamander. We prize our security, and our dedication to vigilantly guarding it. The idea that any of our Aurors could be commandeered by the fanaticism of Grindelwald, let alone Graves— one of our best and most well regarded— well…”

She trails off and shrugs meaningfully. Helene holds her tongue. There’s something inward-looking about Harmal’s face that suggests she’s cataloguing or remembering. Helene wonders what it might be that the secretary is thinking of— if there’s anything else she could possibly say to sway the older woman.

“I will allow,” Harmal says at last, slowly, “a very conditional credence.”

That doesn’t sound terribly promising. “Conditional?” Helene ventures.

“Conditional upon further evidence. Theseus says that Graves is acting oddly, but he bases this on a single letter and the lack of a swift response to others. Graves led a mission around then and was in the Healing Ward for some time after. It is entirely possible that he was distracted upon writing it.”

“But if he is as careful as you intimate, would he not have taken greater care before crafting a reply with something so obviously wrong? Especially to an old friend who knows better?”

Harmal nods. “That is why I will not dismiss it outright. I have not noticed odd behavior, but Graves and I are not friends. We do not work together often. I’m sure there will be many meetings between now and the forum— Graves will attend all of them. I will give you security clearance to attend in your capacity as DMLE proxy. If I become convinced, I will approach the president with it.”

Harmal stands, signalling the end of their meeting. Helene finishes her drink and places her glass on the table in front of her, standing quickly. She is spared the worry about whether or not she should reach out for a handshake by the secretary, who reaches out first.
“Thank you for agreeing to meet with me, Secretary.”

“Think nothing of it. I look forward to our meeting again soon.”

Red opens the lift door. “Major Investigations.”

“Thanks, Red.”

“Don’t actually mention it,” Red says, “I’m on my break, I didn’t bring you here.”

The lift door closes with finality.

When Goldstein resumes frog-marching him across the hallway, Newt almost trips. She doesn’t pause but does slow her step a little. Newt swallows thickly and looks around constantly from under his lashes to seek the exits. There don’t seem to be any other than the lift. They pass through a doorway into a large, ornate room that is almost Gothic in its appearance with its low ceiling and low, golden columns creating a warren of archways. Rows of wooden cabinets, just tall enough to see over, provide the illusion of walls. It’s more deserted than Newt would have expected.

“Is it always so empty here?” he asks.

“Major Investigations is need-to-know,” Goldstein says tightly, “Only Aurors with the highest security clearances are allowed.”

Newt can hear voices speaking lowly just ahead of them. Goldstein’s previous confident marching stride slows suddenly, though her grip on his elbow never changes. In fact, it gets even a little tighter as they approach. She’s nervous. Newt was already nervous himself—now he just feels queasy. Newt forces himself to straighten up as they approach, hoping not to give himself away. He can’t let Percival see his weakness.

He wonders if he’ll be allowed to contact Theseus directly.

“... could mean exposure. It could mean war,” says a female voice—wearily and resigned.

At first, all Newt can see is the back of a woman wearing a neat, black pinstriped jacket and a plain black turban. She is hidden from view from the shoulders down and stands with several other figures in dark hats and leathers (Aurors, his brain unhelpfully supplies). In the general quiet, their footsteps are loud as Goldstein brings Newt to a stop on the other side of the cabinet row. Everyone turns to face them—Newt immediately recognizes the woman in the turban from her portrait: Seraphina Picquery.

He and Goldstein have clearly interrupted some sort of conference. Newt’s eyes dart across three unfamiliar faces and allows himself a wild second of hope. Then he sees and his blood roars in his ears.

Percival.

Newt stares dumbly at Percival, who is as handsome in person as he is in the photograph that has been the bane of Newt’s existence for a year. The man’s suit is immaculate; white pinstripe on black fabric with burgundy piping. His black tie is wrapped neatly under his starched white shirt collar, held down by little collar pins. The collar of his black waistcoat is trimmed with a wide swath of white.
It invites the eye to take in his broad shoulders, to draw up to his proud face. Newt’s breath catches in his throat and his chest clenches so tightly his vision whites out for a split second. Percival traces Newt’s face briefly with dark eyes.

There is a glimmer of curiosity as that unfathomable gaze flicks up and down him, then nothing but dismissal in Percival’s face. Newt finds none of the kindness or subdued humor that he knows so well from that stupid photograph.

“I made your position here quite clear, Miss Goldstein,” the president says, weariness replaced by careful, controlled smoothness.

She comes out from behind the wall of file cabinets with a practiced languid step, hands in the pockets of her jacket. Her pinstriped suit skirt swirls gently. Percival is perhaps two steps behind her. One elbow rests on the cabinet top as he stands, relaxed but with a careful eye on Goldstein’s face. Newt has no doubt his other hand is on the handle of his wand.

“Yes, Madam President,” says Goldstein, “But I- ”

“You are no longer an Auror.”

Newt forces himself to breathe again. Theseus was wrong about Percival. Theseus was wrong and Newt was right and this is it. He’s going to be removed from Goldstein and remanded into Percival’s custody. He’s going to- Why doesn’t it look like Percival recognizes him?

“No, Madam President, but- there’s been a minor incident and-”

Surely Theseus would have sent Percival a photo of Newt before making a contract of marriage? Who would marry Newt sight unseen? Or perhaps Percival is doing this on purpose- keeping it a secret. Newt hardly dares hope that Percival might want to break the engagement himself, in private, with minimal fuss, but the whole sordid thing was a favor to Theseus after all. Perhaps he’s come to the conclusion that having Theseus in his debt wouldn’t be worth it.

“Well this office is currently concerned with very major incidents,” Picquery says over Goldstein’s attempt at explaining herself, “Incidents subject to security clearances you no longer enjoy. Get out.”

Goldstein actually wilts. “Yes, ma’am.”

She sounds completely humiliated. A small, vicious part of Newt is glad about it. He feels ashamed of that part of himself a second later. So he lets her lead him away, taking a sharp right and moving just a hair too quickly for a normal stride. Newt glances back over his shoulder as they leave.

Percival is watching them even as he disappears from Newt’s line of sight. They lock gazes and it makes a shiver run down Newt’s spine, turning his nerves to ice. Then Percival is gone. Goldstein is looking at Newt curiously, perhaps suspiciously, when he turns back, but Newt ignores her. He worries his lip.

He should be happy.

He’s met Percival and gotten away without so much as a hint at their marriage. Now he can slip away from New York- Percival won’t even realize it until he’s well out of reach. Then Newt can write to Theseus and present the case that the marriage should be called off.

He should be happy, but he’s just confused.
Chapter End Notes

This is the point where writing and posting are probably going to slow to a glacial
crawl again as I attempt to re-envision the movie instead of writing it down with
slightly fancier descriptions. Sorry in advance? orz
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

In which there are many more meetings, and this time they're not so bad.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Goldstein is silent as she calls for the lift. Red is in the chair still- he takes one look at Goldstein and smiles a not terribly nice smile, but doesn’t say anything. Red is about to close the door when Percival appears on silent feet, putting a hand out to stop him. Newt keeps himself perfectly still but Percival doesn’t even acknowledge him except to roll his eyes meaningfully in Newt’s direction. Then he holds Goldstein’s gaze.

“The minor incident, I take it?” he asks.

His voice is low and intimate, almost teasing, like he and Goldstein are sharing a joke at Newt’s expense. (Newt presses his lips together and pushes down a sudden well of disappointment. This is the man that Theseus spoke so highly of?) Goldstein looks like she wants to say something but she just presses her lips together and nods.

“Alright, Tina. Check out his wand permit, and I’ll be down shortly,” Percival murmurs, “And don’t take it to heart. Madam President is under a lot of stress.”

This time Goldstein smiles a thin, thankful smile.

“This Tina,” Percival says suddenly, his voice a soft command. He crooks a finger at her and she leans forward to obey. He dabs at her lip with a monogrammed handkerchief, lingering longer than is strictly necessary. “Mustard.”

Newt watches the exchange with wide eyes and an indignation he doesn’t care to examine too closely. His experience may be limited but he knows what seduction looks like. Perhaps Percival enjoys the company of men and women? (He doesn’t think he’d mind that but he doesn’t have time to consider it.) Why would Percival agree to marry a man if he wanted a relationship with this woman, though, however inappropriate it might be given their positions in MACUSA.

Percival disappears and Red closes the door. The lift descends.

When they stop, Newt follows Goldstein out and onto a windowless, dark, cramped bottom floor that looks more like a basement than part of an actual office. Goldstein doesn’t look at him as she slouches into the darkest corner of the dark floor. Rows and rows of typewriters at empty desks clack away as they write memos on themselves. The memos disappear up a series of glass pipes. (Apparently, not even pigeons come down to carry notes here.)

Goldstein removes her coat and hat and hangs them on a coat stand. Newt clears his throat as he ducks under a sign for the Wand Permit Office. Goldstein’s desk is buried under piles of unopened envelopes and half scribbled-on forms that she moves around imperiously.

“You got your wand permit?” Her voice is firm and official - it’s like she’s trying to regain lost
authority. “All foreigners have to register their wands in New York. It’s a little different in other states. Mr., ah, what was your name again?”

She reaches for a clipboard and shuffles through various blank forms. When she looks back up at him, Newt cocks his head and makes himself look mildly affronted.

“I sent my Ministry credentials ahead weeks ago,” he says. He feels exactly no guilt for lying through his teeth. “I assumed Ministry officials would have some sort of arrangement. I wasn’t planning on staying, you know. I’d have made an application by post from Africa otherwise. I’m supposed to be on a train right now.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Goldstein says dismissively. She continues to root around in the paper piles. “I told you, you’ll get another train. We’ll just have to get you a permit now- Ministry credentials don’t apply in New York.” She comes up with what Newt assumes is a blank wand permit and sits precariously on the edge of her desk, giving him a vaguely questioning look. “You came in from Africa?”

“Yes. From Rio Muni.” He sets his suitcase down on an empty desk and fiddles with the handle absently, looking around his bleak surroundings. “Nearish to French Congo. I’ve been in the field for the last year doing research for my book on magical creatures.”

“What, like an extermination guide?” Goldstein asks. She frowns as she flips through the papers on her clipboard, then sets it aside and reaches for a new pile of papers.

“No,” Newt says around a sigh, “A guide to help people understand why we should be protecting these creatures instead of killing them willy-nilly for their parts. Now, if that’s everything, I should be on my way.”

“Not so fast- you’re in New York, now, whether you like it or not. You still need a wand permit,” the witch says, scrambling to grab him, “Anyway, Mr. Graves will be down soon and I want him to-“

“Goldstein!”

Newt jumps, startled by the intrusion of a new voice- not Percival. Goldstein immediately ducks under her desk as though it could help her disappear. Newt’s breath comes only a little more quickly than it should, but frankly, by now he’s quite tired of people barging in on his day. The voice belongs to a young man in a carefully pressed and fully buttoned three-piece suit that only serves to make him look like a trussed up turkey.

“Goldstein! Morrigan’s knickers, where are you?” He walks briskly past Newt to Goldstein’s desk and raps on the top of it. “Goldstein!”

Goldstein peeks out from under the desk and offers a strained smile. “Oh, hi, Abernathy.”

“Did you just barge in on the investigations team again?” Abernathy asks through clenched teeth. His accent is broad and thick. Goldstein is silent as she stands, and that apparently says all he needs to know. His jaw twitches. “Have you been tracking them Second Salemers again?”

“Of course not, sir,” Goldstein says.

Abernathy looks over his shoulder at Newt. “Where’d she pick you up, anyway?”

Newt blinks, gambling on a look at the witch, “What, me?”

Behind Abernathy’s head, Goldstein shakes her head as vigorously as she can without actually
“Oh, well I, um, I needed my permit. For my wand.”

Abernathy doesn’t look convinced. He turns back to glare at Goldstein. “Get his permit settled and let the man go. And stop barging in on the investigations team- I do not need any more memos from the President because of you, Goldstein.”

“Of course, sir. I’m sorry, sir.”

Goldstein’s eyes dart over Newt’s shoulder. Both Abernathy and Newt follow her gaze. Abernathy stands up straighter and plucks at his suit jacket to make sure it’s laying straight; Newt immediately looks away and busies himself with imaginary lint on his lapel, assuring himself that Pickett is out of sight. There’s something in the way Percival carries himself that fills the room. It’s so oppressive that Newt feels like he could choke on it. He tries to bring up Theseus’s letter in his memory, tries to recall its exact wording. Percival is not right. He wonders what ‘right’ is supposed to be like. How is he meant to know?

“Good afternoon, Mr. Graves, sir,” says Abernathy. His voice takes on a new primness that it hadn’t had a second ago; it’s very pointed in its politeness.

“Afternoon, ah- Abernathy.”

Newt shivers. Percival’s voice is rough as though he hasn’t slept much recently. It would almost be pleasant if he wasn’t entirely dismissive of a young man who is clearly just trying to impress him.

“Mr. Graves, sir, I am sorry about earlier,” Goldstein starts in immediately, “I shouldn’t have interrupted, but I really think that this should be taken into account.”

“Perhaps you want to tell me what ‘this’ is?”

There’s an amusement in Percival’s tone that is condescending at best.

“He’s got a crazy creature in that suitcase, sir,” Goldstein says, not missing a beat. Newt swivels around, heedless of whether or not it means Percival pays attention to him, and reaches for his suitcase, only to find that the witch already has it. “He let it loose in a bank and it caused mayhem. I thought you know since all the unexplained activity started…”

“Let’s see the little guy,” Percival murmurs, eyeing Newt briefly. There is still no recognition.

Newt opens his mouth automatically to explain, but Percival holds up a hand in a clear order to remain silent. His face softens when he looks at Goldstein and he nods at her: The benevolent authority who is willing to listen where the President shut her down. Emboldened, Goldstein grabs Newt’s suitcase and places it on a desk in the next section over, one that actually has a direct light over it. She waits for Percival to come next to her before throwing open the lid in a swift, theatrical motion.

Her back blocks Newt’s view of his case, but he can tell immediately that something is wrong- for one thing, none of his creatures rush to get out. Percival looks into the case for a long second and then turns back to Newt. The smirk that twitches across his lips makes Newt shiver. Even if the expression itself is benign, there’s something dark in his eyes.

“Tina,” Percival says, with a mocking a click of his tongue as he walks away.
Newt watches him go. He can almost hear Percival thinking that this has been a waste of his time.
Goldstein paws desperately at the contents of the suitcase, drawing Newt over to see what’s
wrong. His heart drops into his stomach.

The case is full of pastries.

Helene finds that she’s going to have a second meeting with Secretary Harmal far sooner than
she’d been expecting when she receives a memo- in the form of a rat (there must be enough rats in
Manhattan that they won’t be too out of place if a Muggle should happen to run across one)- in
her accommodations. The memo, on official stationery with Harmal’s office and title under the
seal of MACUSA, unfolds itself when it reaches the desk in the parlor and Helene leans over to
read it.

*The President has called a meeting. 3:30 pm. I will meet you at the Apparating point of
MACUSA.*

-J.H.

Helene leaves this note unburned.

Should someone come to snoop through her things, even if it’s just the serving witch assigned to
their delegation, she rather hopes it will lend her an air of authority. She checks the time- 10
minutes to 12:00 pm- then collects her hat and coat. She should have just enough time to explore
the city a little. Maybe she’ll even check the docks to see if Newton Scamander comes into port.

“I need my suitcase,” Newt mutters.

He gnaws at his lip and shifts restlessly while he and Goldstein wait for the lift to descend to
MACUSA’s bottom floor. He doesn’t have a proper wand permit, given that they’d been stalled
in the middle of completing it, but getting his suitcase back is just a little bit more important to him
than that technicality.

“This is the third time you’ve said that,” Goldstein snaps. She’s taken charge of the pastry-filled
briefcase. “I heard you both times before. Don’t you have location wards? Why didn’t you check
them?”

Newt’s fingers play and twirl his wand miserably in the holster ring on his belt. How long has it
been since Goldstein grabbed him at the bank? What are the chances that his suitcase has been
opened? No alarms have sounded that Newt is aware of. Does that mean they’re all still safe? The
farther away from Newt the suitcase goes, the weaker the disinclination charms on the habitats
will become.

He knows his voice is bitter when he speaks again, but he doesn’t much care. “I didn’t think. I’d
just been knocked in the head with the corner of my own suitcase and then you were there and
yelling at me about *Section 3A’s* and *taking me in’s.*”

He thinks he spots a flicker of worry, or maybe an apology, flash over the witch’s face. If he does,
it’s gone before he can take advantage of it. Goldstein’s face hardens as the lift door opens and she
follows Newt inside.

“Apparating, Red,” she says.
The goblin attendant pushes a button and the lift ascends.

“You know where it is now?”

Newt holds up his wand and murmurs the location spell he uses to keep track of his suitcase. A little bubble swirls out of the tip of his wand. In it, Newts sees a flash of cramped buildings on cobbled streets. The image focuses just for a moment on street signs for Rivington and Orchard streets before swooping up into an apartment. It’s one of his brother’s modified spells- a version of the Trace used on underage wizards back home. Theseus’s way with spell modification has always been second to none. (Theseus can pick out an object within a few miles. Newt has only been able to use the spell to Trace his suitcase.)

“That... That is not a normal location spell,” Goldstein says stiffly.

“Of course not,” Newt says. He can’t quite hold back the fond scoff. “My brother taught me. He doesn’t do any magic normally.” He holsters his wand and resettles his coat, trying not to think about how empty his hand feels without his case. Even Jacob’s case had at least been a reassuring weight.

“Who’s your brother to know that spell? They don’t teach it in schools.” Her face is set in suspicion when Newt glances at her. “Director Graves uses that spell. He’s only ever taught it to his most trusted Aurors- and you are not that. So why’s he gonna teach your brother?”

“Mr. Graves fought in the War?” Newt asks, blinking, “Oh. I wouldn’t have expected that.”

Goldstein and Red both stare at him. Her stare tells him to get on with it. Newt shrugs again.

“It’s unlikely Mr. Graves taught it to my brother because my brother came up with this modification. He wanted a way to keep track of me during the war once I went off to the Eastern front. He’s terribly proud of it. I’m sure it’s possible that Mr. Graves came up with his own twist, but if he was in Europe for the war, Theseus probably taught it to him.”

“Theseus?” Goldstein sounds incredulous. She blinks. “Not- not Theseus Scamander?”

Newt nods. He watches the color drain almost completely from her face as realization comes with a vague pleasure. Generally speaking, when Theseus’s reputation precedes Newt to a place, the inevitable comparison finds Newt lacking. In this case, he’ll take that comparison- it’s worth seeing the look on Miss Goldstein’s face.

She swallows thickly. “Your brother is Theseus Scamander. Auror, war hero, and Director of the British DMLE, Theseus Scamander?”

“Yes,” Newt agrees, “That one. Not that there’s another, I wouldn’t think. That would be odd.”

“If your brother’s Theseus, what name did you get stuck with?” Red asks.

“Newton. You can call me Newt if you like.” Newt makes his step prim and dignified as they approach the Apparating point, relishing his minute victory. He’ll feel properly embarrassed to have done so later. “Miss Goldstein, do you know a good place to Apparate to near Rivington street?”

Goldstein blinks. She looks blankly at the Apparating point like she’s forgotten why they’re here, but to her credit, she snaps back to herself quickly. “It’s a busy area. There’s an elevated station at Grand pretty close by. There are several secure alleys- they have Disillusionments on them.”

Newt nods and steps onto the Apparating point, holding his elbow out to her. “Lead the way,
Chastity rings the supper bell and the street children come in droves. They cluster as they come into the church, finding their friends, attempting to keep as orderly a line as they can while clamoring for soup. For some, it’s the only hot meal they’ll have in a day. For Ma, it’s a chance to win converts to her cause. Her philosophy is that if they learn to believe what is right when they’re young, they’ll believe it more fervently when they’re older.

Credence looks into all of their faces as they present themselves to him, taking note of features, hair color, eye color. He wishes he knew more- anything at all that might make him more effective in helping. But how do you determine if a child really is a witch? How does he know which child will be the correct one? Will he see their magic?

“Collect your leaflets before you get your soup, children,” Ma says.

She comes to stand next to him, smiling approvingly as the children turn obediently to Chastity. Chastity takes her leaflet duties very seriously- she pushes the leaflets into impatient hands with a dignity that the leaflets don’t really deserve.

Credence doesn’t pause in his ladling of soup until a young boy steps up, one they’ve never seen before, fearfully holding his soup bowl. He has a large mark on his face.

“Is it a witch’s mark, ma’am?” he asks.

Ma talks about witch’s marks a lot, but Credence knows that witches don’t all have those- they don’t even actually look all that different from normal people. He’d been taught they were supposed to look evil, but Mr. Graves looks like any other man.

“No,” she says, “He’s all right.”

She smiles her kindest smile. Credence wonders where she pulls that warmth from. She never seems to have it for her own children.

Helene breathes in the East River air and turns away. She walks up Grand street, under the elevated tracks, which rattle loudly with every train that passes overhead. It’s 12:54 pm. She casts several, discreet location spells and learns that Grand street will take her back to the Bowery, the street she’d first stepped out onto from the lobby of her accommodations. She spares a passing thought to wonder what used to be here that the street was called ‘Grand’.

All in all, it’s been a good day for information.

The harbor didn’t have much by way of international ships docked for a Monday, but she found enough wizarding services in the harbor area to figure that a fair amount of magical traffic must go through. She’d asked the harbormasters, wide-eyed, breathless and respectful like any good colored tourist, about ships coming in from exotic Africa and when might they have docked?

9:30 that morning, apparently.

The Fort Elizabeth came safely to port from Rio Muni and debarked in record time. The clerk at the wizard post office also noted that a British wizard had been in at 10ish that morning. No, they’d not asked for his name and they hadn’t recorded the intended recipient, but he’d had a fair bit of international currency on him. Helene doesn’t believe in making determinations from only 3
pieces of evidence, but she hopes, if the wizard who’d sent the seagull really was Mr. Scamander’s brother, that he’s long gone.

“I can’t believe you didn’t Obliviate that man. If there’s an inquiry into any of this, I’m finished!” says a very loud, very New York voice, “Never mind getting my job back- Mr. Graves will just kill me if the President doesn’t get to me first.”

Helene doesn’t normally pay attention to other people’s conversations, but Mr. Graves and Obliviate are part of this one. She immediately seeks the source of it. She finds a woman wearing a long gray coat and hat who carries a leather briefcase. The woman is talking to a tall man with a shock of copper curls in a long blue coat. They’re walking in the opposite direction. Helene’s breath catches in her chest. Surely not.

“I can’t see why you’d be in trouble. I was the one who used magic in the first place,” the man says.

British accent. Oh, Merlin, it must be.

“I’m not supposed to be near the Second Salemers!” says the woman.

Helene checks the time again: 1:05 pm. Still plenty of time, which means she’s got to try. She turns sharply to follow them off Grand and up Orchard. Newt has a long stride and the woman has the very fast pace of someone who needs to be somewhere twenty minutes ago. It’s all Helene can do to keep up a pace after them. She stalks them until she sees Newt run up the steps of a tenement building. The woman, caught in a crowd of muggles talking to a police officer, is distracted for a moment. Then she moves hard on Newt’s heels.

Helene huffs a sigh of annoyance. She checks to be sure nobody is paying her much attention- she casts a Disillusionment charm on herself and Apparates into the stairwell of the building.

Jacob is a miserable wreck who will never amount to anything.

He wallows in that knowledge as he sits at his tiny table, in his tiny bedroom, in his tiny apartment, in a cramped tenement building. He keeps his back to the portrait of his grandmother. Her face smiles serenely in that photo, as though to encourage him from beyond the grave. He knows he’s failed. There’s no money for a loan. There never will be- the cannery will kill him first.

He jumps up, suddenly, knocking back the chair. What was that bang?

Nothing happens. He laughs half-heartedly.

He’s been twitchy since the bank, jumping at every creaking floorboard and noise. It’s because of that weird English guy; the one who had a mole that got into bank vaults, and a… a dragon-snake. In an egg. Which had hatched in his hand. Jacob’s just being stupid. Clearly, he’s not as well after years abroad as he thought he was. Maybe he should look into one of those help circles at the church. He’s heard good things about it-

Why is my briefcase growling?

It’s full of pastries. Nothing should be banging, or growling, or moving- but the case moves before his eyes. Jacob shuts them quickly. Blinks very rapidly. Maybe he should lie down… As he watches, the briefcase jumps on the bed again. The right latch flips open, then the left, as though an invisible hand is unlocking it.
Jacob leans down, peering closely at the case. He reaches out slowly towards it.

“Don’t touch that!”

Jacob jumps back like the case is on fire. He turns to see the tall British guy from the bank taking up the doorway, and opens his mouth to speak—why not? and how’d you even get here? on the tip of his tongue. Then something that looks a bit like a giant rat comes hurtling out at him, growling. Jacob sees spikes just before the thing is on him and biting his neck. Hard. He yelps and falls off the bed, grappling with the animal. The bitten area of his neck flushes with heat. He’s vaguely aware of the bank man darting to the bed and opening the lid of the suitcase.

“You!?” Jacob finally demands, trying to glare at the man.

“No, no, no,” says the man, peering into the case, “Where’s Hobbs? Dougal, so help me, if you’ve helped him agitate Myrtle or Frank into leaving their enclosures—”

The teeth in Jacob’s neck bite down harder, as though the rat knows the man isn’t paying attention to it, and Jacob grunts. “Hey! A little help here?”

Englishman whirls around. One hand stays over the open case as though to ward off... well, other things, probably. “Alice, leave him!” he barks, “Come on now, let him go! Everyone else, stay! I am very disappointed in you all.”

Jacob thinks for a wild second that the Englishman—Salamander?—is talking to him. At any rate, the spikey rat thing removes its teeth from where they’re lodged in his neck and the man yanks it off his face. Jacob groans and reaches a shaking hand to the bite wound.

“Mercy Lewis! What is that?!” shouts a female voice.

“Alice. She’s a murtlap,” Salamander says.

For a man struggling to get the spikey rat into the suitcase, his voice is very steady and nonplussed. When the creature is safely inside, he takes another long look into the case. Then he closes the lid calmly and presses the latches in. He turns a guileless look at the woman standing in the doorway - her face seems drained of blood.

Jacob stares at them. His neck is starting to sweat.

“It was open?” The woman asks, voice now hushed like that might change the situation and dark eyes staring murder at Englishman. “Is that crazy niffler thing on the loose again?”

Heat flashes through Jacob and he moans. The woman rounds on him.

“Oh, Merlin, his neck is bleeding. He’s hurt!” She pitches her voice low and soothing, like she doesn’t still have panic written all over her face, and brings herself down to his height. Tentatively, she reaches out her hand, “I’m Tina Goldstein. Easy there, Mr...”

“Jacob Kowalski,” he says, shaking her hand automatically. His eyes drift back to English-Scamander, that’s it! “You! I left you at the bank- how the hell’d you find me?”

Scamander smiles but doesn’t hold Jacob’s gaze as he fumbles for his wand. “Hello, again. Terribly sorry for the inconvenience. Alice is a bit jumpy around strangers, especially if she’s excited. So. Um. If you’ll just hold still this time...”

Jacob clutches the woman with his free hand in alarm; she covers him with her body, arms
outstretched. “You can’t Obliviate him now! We need him as a witness.”

“I’m sorry, but you have just yelled at me the length of New York for not doing it in the first place,” Scamander says, looking faintly put out.

“He’s hurt! He looks ill! And it’s because of some illegal beast you’ve gone and smuggled into the city. He’s going to need to give a statement before he’s Obliviated.”

“I have permits. Anyway, he’ll be fine,” Scamander says, “Murtlap bites are hardly serious.”

“Who’s been bitten by a murtlap?”

Jacob jumps, then groans because doing so has jostled his hand against his neck. Miss Goldstein whips around with a stick in her hand. She points the stick at the doorway as though to threaten the dark-skinned woman who’s come in. Scamander seems unbothered by either the newcomer or the fact that Miss Goldstein thinks a stick is a weapon.

“Oh! Ms. Carteret, isn’t it?” he asks.

“Newton,” she replies, nodding at him, “Why do you have a murtlap and why is it attacking a muggle?”

“I saved her from a trap ages ago and she hasn’t wanted to leave. She wouldn’t have attacked if she didn’t feel that she had to defend her territory,” Scamander- Newton, right, science, Jacob thinks muzzily- starts.

“Okay, everybody stop,” says Miss Goldstein, stabbing her stick at the newcomer. “Who are you?”

“Helene Carteret. I’m Theseus Scamander’s secretary and proxy to the forum of international wizarding communities to be held this coming Friday.”

Jacob has no idea who or what that’s supposed to be, but it makes Goldstein look accusingly at Scamander. He shrugs. Jacob doesn’t have much time to wonder about it because his vision goes blurry. He doubles over, retching dryly. Ms. Carteret takes several steps closer; Goldstein and Scamander hover over him worriedly.

“Oh, dear,” says Scamander. “This is... a slightly more severe reaction than I’ve seen before.”

“This is balled-up!” Miss Goldstein snaps.

“It’ll last forty-eight hours at most! If you like I can keep him-”

“We don’t keep them!” Miss Goldstein says, throwing her hands into the air, “Scamander, do you know anything about the American wizarding community?”

“A few things, actually. I know that you have rather backward views and laws about relations with non-magic humans. That you can’t befriend them, that you can’t marry them, which seems mildly absurd to me. I mean, what do you do if you’re born into a non-magic family? Or if there’s a squib born?”

“This is not the time or place for the accounting of cultural differences,” Ms. Carteret cuts in, voice firm. “He needs help and I need to meet Secretary Harmal at 3:30. I’d rather not be late. Before that I’d like to speak to you, Newton. Where can we take him?”

“Secretary Harmal doesn’t just meet people,” Miss Goldstein says.
“She is nonetheless meeting me,” Ms. Carteret says placidly, “A second time.”

“I’ll take him—” Scamander starts.

“We can use my apartment,” Miss Goldstein cuts in immediately. She throws one of Jacob’s arms over her shoulder. “I’m not supposed to have men on the premises, but I don’t much trust you not to disappear with the no-maj. Help me!”

Scamander makes a face at the demand. He looks at Jacob again and his face softens. He sighs softly and places his free arm around Jacob’s waist, shifting some of the burden of Jacob’s weight off Jacob’s own legs. It makes his head feel light. Ms. Carteret comes up and suddenly all four of them are standing in a weird group hug.

“I’m... I’m dreaming, right?” Jacob asks, feeling faint, “I’m just tired. Yeah. I’m tired. I never went to the bank. This is all just some nightmare, right?”

“For the both of us, Mr. Kowalski,” says the New York woman, sounding like the Lord is testing her, “Apparating three people- Morrigan’s knickers I hope nobody splinches.”

The next thing he knows, the world is going pinched and dark around him.

Chapter End Notes

Probably the last one for a couple months. Re-writing a movie in a way that’s semi-compliant with everything I've already written is hard l-lol orz
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

In which there is yet more disturbing news and nobody is happy.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When the world becomes bright again, Jacob stumbles. He’d be on his face if not for Scamander and Miss Goldstein holding him up and propelling him forward. For a moment he thinks he’s going to lose what little remains of his breakfast. The something soothing ripples over him and his stomach settles despite feeling like he’s burning slowly through his clothes. At least he’s still in New York if the noise is anything to go by.

“Ain’t you, you know, concerned?” Jacob asks Ms. Carteret.

At least, he means to ask Ms. Carteret. In reality, he winds up asking the ground under her shoes. It’s hard enough to keep his head up and stop himself from retching, let alone ask coherent questions. Jacob himself doesn’t care, but it’s bright out, they’re all in public on the street, and she’s walking, equal as you please, with a bunch of whites. A New York tenement block this might be, but prejudices remain. She seems to understand him, anyway.

“Not particularly,” she replies.

“Should she be?” Newt asks. He sounds frowny, and a little indignant, but mostly confused. His voice is directed over Jacob’s head. “Should you be?”

“Muggles, Newton,” she replies, “Have ideas about skin colors and further ideas about mixing skin colors in public.”

“Well, that’s ridiculous,” Scamander sniffs. “Even more so than American wizards and their ideas about mixing with muggles.”

Miss Goldstein grunts something under her breath- Jacob is willing to bet it’s unflattering, whatever it is. Ms. Carteret makes a sound low in her throat that causes Jacob to roll his head up. He catches the side of her expression- fondly amused- and wonders for the first time how well she actually knows Scamander. She did say she worked for someone with the same last name, he’s pretty sure.

“Turn here,” says Miss Goldstein.

They climb the stairs up to the entrance of an apartment building much like Jacob’s. Miss Goldstein waves her hand for quiet before she carefully eases the front door open and waves them inside. She puts a finger to her lips as she starts to herd them up the main stairs.

Ms. Carteret rolls her eyes and points her stick- Oh, wand, right, has to be, Jacob decides- at the floor. The sounds in the building muffle around them.

Jacob stares at the sti- wand- in Ms. Carteret’s hand. Miss Goldstein looks surprised; then makes a
face like she’s about to say something. Ms. Carteret offers Miss Goldstein a single raised eyebrow—her face remains otherwise impassive. Eventually, Miss Goldstein settles for nodding once. She leads them up to an apartment and throws the door open, ushering them inside. Ms. Carteret enters after a silent set of looks with Mr. Scamander.

Then Scamander helps Jacob step in and everything changes. Jacob stops so suddenly that he falls back into Scamander’s arms (the man may be a skinny, fragile-looking thing but he holds Jacob with ease) as he tries to comprehend what he’s seeing.

Immediately across from the entrance there’s a clotheshorse turning itself, and the laundry draped over it, in front of the fireplace. There’s a fire screen that moves in front of the fire as though to protect the more delicate items, and magazines are strewn over most flat surfaces. Jacob takes a longer look at one of the covers—it winks at him. Somewhere in the back, he hears an iron working. In one window there’s a nine-pronged candelabra with seven unlit candles stuck in it (Jacob squints at it for a moment—*Oh, it’s a hanukiah! Wait, they have Hanukkah?*).

And then there’s a beautiful blonde standing in the back room of the apartment in nothing but a pink slip while a blue dress on a dress form mends itself. She seems unconcerned that she’s in her smalls before strangers. Jacob can’t take her eyes off her.

“’Teenie,’” she says, voice light as air; gaze directed behind Jacob, “you brought home men and a director’s secretary?”

“Gentlemen, Ms. Carteret,” Tina says, voice dry, but full of exasperation, “my sister Queenie. Wanna put something on, Queenie?”

“Oh, yeah, sure,” Queenie agrees. She waves a wand and the dress lifts itself off the form, holding itself ready for her to step into it.

“Kindly remove yourself from my mind, Miss Goldstein,” Helene says, “Newton, can we speak?”

Scamander nods. He moves with her into a corner behind the sofa and settles his suitcase at his feet. A flick of the woman’s wrist, and suddenly there’s a harsh buzzing in Jacob’s ears as he tries to listen to what they’re saying. He lifts his hands to his ears in alarm.

“Oh, don’t worry about that, honey,” Queenie says, smiling gently at him. “Your ears are workin’ just fine. Just focus on something else; you won’t even notice it.”

Jacob smiles faintly and attempts to do so.

Newt hunches while he waits for his brother’s secretary to say something, studying her from under his lashes. Ms. Carteret has been working for his brother for years now; he’s had some contact with her through memos back at the Ministry, but they’ve never actually met face to face before now. He wonders what she thinks of him—if she thinks anything.

“How’s your Occlumency?” Helene asks.

Her voice is professional—Newt feels a little like he’s being interviewed for a case. He nods, hunching down further into himself. Surely she’s not here to force him to marry immediately or drag him back to London by the ear; that would be the ultimate waste of her time. Still...

“It’s, ah, well. It’s fine,” Newt says, “Not up to Auror standards, but... Theseus is my brother.”

“He would have expected it,” Helene agrees, “Very good. Do whatever you can. This needs to be
as private a conversation as possible.”

Newt grimaces. Occlumency is not his strong suit- the effort of keeping his mind blank is painful, and it’s only slightly better when he tries to fill his brain with surface thoughts. He does his best hopes it holds.

“Did Theseus- um,” he clears his throat, “I know he sent you here, but- did he, ah... send you-?”

“Only because of the unexplained activity,” Helene says, “MACUSA has been putting about rumors of some sort of beast. The Minister is sure that the ICW is dangling the threat of sending their own delegation to investigate. Mr. Scamander couldn’t leave- too much happening across Europe that could start a war again.”

Newt tilts his head slightly. “What about his other suspicions?”

“You did get his letter. Good. Yes, I’m also here to find concrete proof for him, if possible. At least something more for him to work with. He also asked me to help you get away from here if we met.”

Newt smiles apologetically. “I can’t now. If my murtlap got out in Mr. Kowalski’s apartment, it’s likely that some of my other creatures did as well- Alice wouldn’t normally be so close to the cabin if the others weren’t goading her. And Hobbs is particularly slippery. I have to make sure they’re all home.”

“What even happened to get you here?”

“Hobbs- my niffler- got out at a bank on 6th avenue,” Newt says, “He got into a secure area and I Apparated in to get him back. I’m afraid Mr. Kowalski got caught up in it; Miss Goldstein was there when it happened. She took it upon herself to bring me to MACUSA. Something about a Section 3A.”

Helene motions to the suitcase at Newt’s feet. “What’s in there, besides the murtlap?”

“You probably don’t have time for me to list them all,” Newt offers blandly. He pats one of his coat pockets. “I have a wallet of permits here, somewhere. I’m not entirely sure America recognizes some of them unless there’s some sort of reciprocal agreement.”

“You’re right,” Helene says, holding up a hand, “I don’t have time.”

Newt smiles slightly, ducking to hide it. “Anyway, the most likely escapees are Hobbs and Dougal- my demiguise. Neither are prone to destruction of the scale that would attract the ICW. They know better.”

“The timing doesn’t work out, anyway, if you’ve been on a boat until this morning.” Helene purses her lips gently and studies him. “The Auror didn’t get into the case, did she? Or let anyone else in? She didn’t force contact with the Director, did she?”

“No, no, nobody has. I had Mr. Kowalski’s suitcase, they got switched, you see, so when they tried to look...” he shrugs expressively.

Helene nods, but she studies his face. Newt swallows. “Oh. Um... you know my status, then.”

“I do. No details, just that there’s a contract with the Director. Did Goldstein take you to him?”

“Yes,” Newt says, nodding, “Well, sort of. She brought me to Major Investigations. Mr. Graves was there with the President. She was none too happy we interrupted. But... well, he didn’t
recognize me. Hardly acknowledged my existence. And he was very condescending to his subordinates.”

“But that was it?”

“He had Miss Goldstein bring me to Wand Permits- she works there now since she’s been suspended from the Aurors. I think it’s to do with Second Salem. Anyway, she didn’t introduce me either time, but I’m quite sure Theseus sent Mr. Graves my photo. And he just seemed... wrong. I can’t imagine Theseus having respect for a man like that.”

Helene frowns. “Mr. Scamander has been suspicious since his correspondence with Graves took a turn for the odd some months ago. I met with Secretary Harma this morning, at Mr. Scamander’s suggestion- a potential ally. The secretary believes that nothing is…” she waves a hand, “Off. She admits they’re not close, but...”

“But Mr. Graves might really be Mr. Graves.”

She nods, looking almost apologetic. “They haven’t met in person since the war ended. It might be the case that Mr. Scamander is... overestimating him.” Helene’s watch chimes- she checks it. “I have to refresh myself before I meet with the president’s cabinet. You’ll remain here?”

“Oh. Um. Yes, I suppose. I would look for some other place to stay, but...” he turns his chin ever so slightly in the direction of the sisters. “Miss Goldstein’s been rather adamant that I shouldn’t leave her sight. I rather think she’s decided that one of my creatures, and me by extension, are responsible for the trouble in New York.”

Helene raises an eyebrow at him. “What, the murtlap? Or a niffler? Causing the sort of damage MACUSA feels the need to hold a forum of international allies over? That’s an interesting theory.”

Newt beams, pleased. “That’s what I said!” He soberes quickly, “Will you... at the meeting... will you try to determine if Mr. Graves is-”

“I’ll do what I can,” Helene promises.

Tina watches Jacob while she tidies the apartment- gathering up magazines by hand while the laundry floats away with a flick of her wand and folds itself into chests and drawers. She is deeply uncomfortable- just the fact that there is a no-maj in her apartment is enough to make the hair on the back of her neck stand up. (They’ve done so much magic in front of him. There’s no way this will end well.)

In spite of Queenie’s advice to focus on things other than the conversation behind him (and he really does look like he’s trying not to), the no-maj is drawn back to Ms. Carteret and Scamander again and again. Even the flushing heat in his neck can’t keep his attention away trying to hear them for long.

“So who are they?” Queenie asks softly.

Tina pauses her spelled duster over the fireplace mantle. “The one in the blue coat is Newton Scamander, brother of Theseus Scamander. He’s got at least one illegal beast in that suitcase, and I’m sure there’s more. He used it to try robbing a bank but when that went sideways he committed a serious infraction against the National Statutes of Secrecy by using magic in plain sight of anyone!”
“He’s a criminal?” Queenie asks.

“Don’t sound so impressed maybe?” Tina asks, put out.

Her sister only smiles and looks pointedly at Mr. Kowalski.

“That,” Tina gestures at Jacob, “is Jacob Kowalski. He was bitten by one of Mr. Scamander’s beasts and now he’s sick.” She lowers her voice, eyes darting around as though someone could overhear her. “He’s a no-maj.”

“A no-maj?” Queenie bites her lip. “What’s going on, Teen? This isn’t like you.”

“I know, motek. It’s temporary- just until we can get a statement, get him well, and Obliviate him.”

Behind them, Jacob bends away from the sofa, retching loudly. Queenie rushes over and puts her hands are on his forehead. He leans into them, moaning in relief.

“Oh, you poor thing,” she murmurs, “You haven’t eaten all day. And the money from the bank- I’m sorry, honey, you didn’t get it, huh? That’s rough, but you bake?” Her face splits into a smile, “I love to cook. Maybe we could bake together sometime- I’d love to try your grandmother’s paczki.”

“You’re a Legilimens?” Scamander’s voice asks.

Tina jumps and her gaze darts from Scamander to the empty window. She swears at herself. If she’s going to get her old job back she has to be aware enough to notice something like Ms. Carteret and Scamander finishing their talk. Not seeing Ms. Carteret Apparating away is worse. (She’s allowed so many broken laws today, how could she even think about being an Auror again?)

“Yeah, but I always have a problem with your kind,” Queenie says. “Brits. I think it’s the accent.”

“You picked out Ms. Carteret’s position,” Scamander says.

“Oh, nah, I got that from Teenie.”

“Where’d she...?” Jacob starts, pointing to the empty corner.

“Ms. Carteret left to make an appointment with Secretary Harmal,” Scamander says, “The same way we got out of your apartment. Apparating.”

“Oh,” Jacob says faintly, nodding like that means anything to him. His eyes go guilty and wide and his voice turns somewhat panicked. “You know how to read minds?”

Queenie turns her brilliant, blinding grin on him. “Aw, don’t worry, honey. Most guys think what you was thinking the first time they see me.”

Helene arrives in her assigned rooms at 2:20 pm. She breathes out a sigh as she removes her coat. She spells it over to the coat hook; then spells her quill for diction.

“Report: For Mr. Scamander’s attention. Made contact with Secretary Harmal. She is not impressed with theory re: Director. Admits a certain ignorance of behavior and character, but suggests nothing noticed among MACUSA. She has given me clearance to attend meetings. First,
emergency, to happen 3:30 pm of today the 6th. Presumably, related to unexplained activity.

Newton here. Met Director twice; apparently unrecognizable to him. Meetings were brief, and Director is likely distracted, so possible it hasn’t registered yet. Newton intended to move on quickly. Unfortunately, he may have lost some rescued charges due to unforeseen circumstances, which has changed plans for the moment. I will help if possible.”

She checks her hair and makeup, straightens her hat, and signs off her report. She slides it into an envelope. Her seal stamps into the special wax and her quill marks it DMLE URGENT. She tucks it into her clutch to send from MACUSA’s foreign outbox and rushes out the door.

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At 2:45 pm, Helene arrives in the lobby to be Apparated to MACUSA. The same witch who has already Apparated her several times now is waiting. If the woman is surprised that Helene is early, she doesn’t show it but continues to boredly study her nails. She Side-Along’s Helene to the MACUSA lobby without fanfare. Helene is thankful for the lack of small talk.

It doesn’t take very long to find the foreign diplomatic outgoing mail center: The whole of the second level down is dedicated to mailing operations. The mail clerk performs the spell and Helene watches the letter disappear. She waits 10 minutes for the acknowledgment of receipt at the Ministry, thanks the clerk, and returns to the Apparating point to wait for Harmal.

When Harmal comes to collect her, she is holding some sort of pass in a flat book in one hand. “Helene, excellent. Come, we’ll Apparate.”

“Apparating is allowed here?” Helene asks, surprised.

Harmal smiles. “No.”

Helene takes Harmal’s arm with a grin. She endures the familiar squeezing, taking a deep breath to steady herself when the world appears again and resolves itself into an imposing set of double doors. It’s either the office where the President’s cabinet meets, or else some sort of secure room for intelligence briefings, and Helene realizes she has no idea where it’s actually located. She takes the pass that Harmal holds out: Temporary security clearance, by order of President Picquery, in the name of continuing cooperation between allies. Not to the highest levels, but enough.

Harmal nods politely to the Aurors standing to either side of the doors. “My guest.”

The doors open immediately. (The Aurors apparently don’t dare to question the Secretary of War.) The room beyond them is grand, with gilt on the ceilings and a large, round, dark wood table polished to a mirror-like shine. There are six chairs around it; one is large and ornate and is clearly for the President. President Picquery is already within, standing to the side with Secretary Seuss and a man Helene is not familiar with. Seuss and Helene each recognize each other with a nod.

“Good evening, Juanita, Ms. Carteret,” Picquery says, “I see you have your security clearance. My apologies for calling you in so suddenly. I hope it won’t be too difficult- I’m sure you must still be feeling the effects of our differing time zones.”

Helene bobs a little curtsy on autopilot. “It’s quite alright, Madam President.” (If her body is insistent that it’s dinner time back home, that she’s been awake for too long and must sleep, it’s nothing compared to what must have happened in order for an emergency meeting to have been called.)

“I nonetheless appreciate you joining us today. You may not know Secretary Thomas Elkhair, yet,” the President says, motioning to the unfamiliar man, “Thomas, this is Ms. Helene Carteret.
She’s deputy to Mr. Scamander and acting second for him while here.”

“A pleasure,” Helene says, shaking the man’s hand.

“And how is it to be deputy to a war hero?” Elkhair asks with a smile.

“Oh, it has its ups and downs,” Helene replies, “It depends on which story he’s telling.”

Harmal takes a seat without waiting to be asked. “May we know what the meeting is about?”

“We are still waiting on Graves,” Picquery murmurs, eying the closed door as though to force Mr. Graves to appear. “This concerns him as much as anyone.”

“It’s not like him to be late so often,” Seuss murmurs.

Harmal snorts. “Twice is hardly often.”

“You have met Mr. Graves before, haven’t you?” President Picquery asks dryly. “He has certainly been extraordinarily busy lately, but he’s always found a way to make it to meetings on time before. Especially ones that touch on his investigations.”

“So it’s that,” is all Harmal says.

Picquery nods once. “It is the considered opinion of Graves and his top Aurors that a beast is behind this, likely directed by a wizard, and direct action must be taken to bring it under control.”

“Yes, indeed, Madam President.”

Helene turns a little to observe the man who must be Percival Graves as he enters the cabinet room. The doors close with finality behind them. Graves is holding his hands up in a conciliatory fashion, but a tiny, smug smile plays around his lips.

“Mr. Graves,” Picquery says, “Good of you to join us.”

“My apologies. I was following a lead from the events of this morning. I wanted to make sure O’Brien could handle it before I left.”

Picquery takes her seat in the large, ornate chair and nods once. Everybody else moves to take their seats around the table- Helene stands for a beat after everyone else, just long enough to be motioned into the final empty seat between Secretary Harmal and Percival Graves. The man hardly flutters an eyelash in acknowledgment when she sits down.

Perfect. Helene decides, lips pursed. This is whom Mr. Scamander has such great things to say?

“Secretary Tierney won’t be joining us as the treasury is not involved,” the President says. “Mr. Graves, would you like to begin?”

Helene conjures a notepad and a quill. Graves leans forward, setting his elbows on the table and tenting his hands in front of his face.

“Trusting that we are all aware of the situation, I will not reiterate what is known. The activity is becoming more obvious and more dangerous to the non-magical. It’s as though the beast responsible, or its owner, was testing its grounds and has grown more... confident, for lack of a better word. We can no longer hope that the non-magical government will be able to keep control. If we do nothing, that Second Salem bunch may harness the danger to push their cause.”

“If I could,” Helene asks into the pause, quill poised over the parchment, “Sorry, just, ‘Second
Salem’ sounds familiar but what is this group, exactly?”

She is sure that Graves startles and glares at her when she speaks. It’s as though he’s only just realized she’s there, or that she’s not American. The reaction strikes her as odd; she makes a note of that in Mr. Scamander’s favored shorthand. Graves doesn’t get a chance to respond as Elkhair speaks up.

“The New Salem Philanthropic Society was started by a woman by the name of Mary-Lou Barebone. They’ve created a soup kitchen out of a church- been in operation for the last year or so. Their sole aim is to spread the word of witches among the population, to gin up fear in the vein of the first Salem hysteria. Do you know much of American history?”

“I have heard of the Salem trials, of course, and we certainly had our own issues with similar trials, but...” Helene waves her hand.

Elkhair nods. “It was before the Statutes of Secrecy. Perhaps our ancestors had become too complacent. The Salem of the trials was a place so small it took its name from the nearby township. Accusations of witchcraft were leveled against over 200 men, women, and children. Most of the accused were not, as you might expect, magic-users. But there were some who turned in their own, and of the twenty who were killed during the height of the hysteria, several were indeed magical citizens.”

Helene hums thoughtfully. “And this society wants to drag it all back up.”

Graves nods. “At first it was easy enough to allow them to operate- we’ve kept ourselves secret and secure for so long that most of the non-magical population thinks the Barebone woman and her children are not altogether sane. Those who do believe in the cause of the Second Salemers were initially dismissed as conspiracy theorists.”

“But now?” Helene asks.

“The bursts of destruction- random, sudden, explosions of magic- it’s all been going on for too long,” Graves says softly. (Helene thinks there’s an intensity to his voice that borders on enjoyment, but nobody else seems to notice.) “We may be looking at a riot if we don’t do something soon.”

“And these Second Salemers will co-opt it as proof of the evil of witchcraft. Yes, I see,” Helene says.

“Yes,” Picquery breaks in. Her voice is steady but solemn. “And we have another problem. A much worse one.”

“What is it?” Harmal asks.

“We have just received a classified report from the Federal Council of Magic in Switzerland. It appears that, despite efforts to recapture him, Gellert Grindelwald escaped their custody.”

Chapter End Notes

Still crawlin' along. It's fine. This is fine.
A silence falls over the room following Seraphina’s announcement. She watches everyone carefully and decides they appear properly shocked. She knows better than to try to read Graves when he’s in the office (he’s never out of the office), but Elkhair and Harmal are incensed by this bombshell. She focuses on Ms. Carteret for a moment: A list of British allies flits across her thoughts, with some none-too-flattering descriptions of their diplomats and she is already half-composing a report to Scamand- oh, no, it’s an addendum to something previously written. Interesting.

Seraphina ends her Legilimens spell wordlessly. She is not content, but at the very least Ms. Carteret’s reaction most likely means that Switzerland did not share this information with the British Ministry of Magic nor their other allies.

Harmal raps her knuckles angrily on the table, breaking the silence. “When?” she demands. “Why were we not made aware of this?”

Seraphina levitates the official statement across the table. “Per Heinrich Eberstadt’s office. The FCM gained custody of Grindelwald outside Basel, after a raid on a known meeting place for his supporters. This was in early June. They held him for a week before losing him again. They claim that a special task force was created to attempt a recapture, but efforts failed.”

“The Ministry was never advised of any capture,” Ms. Carteret says quietly. Harmal passes the dispatch to Carteret. She pauses her frantic notes to read it.

“It would seem no other country was,” Seraphina agrees.

“There’s not much information about their so-called special task force,” Harmal grumbles, sniffing disdainfully, “Composition of, personnel involved, what they attempted and why it didn’t work-no details at all. Bad enough they didn’t alert the world, but to compound that with this wishy-washy nonsense?”

“Perhaps the FCM thought they’d gain a little fame for holding the unholdable and they’re too embarrassed to admit their mistakes,” Graves says.

Seraphina narrows her eyes- she’s not one to enjoy flippancy in the best of circumstances and it’s unlike him to test her patience. She sees Ms. Carteret darts a glance at Graves, then at Seraphina herself before she passes the statement to Elkhair and scribbles a few more notes.

“You’d think they’d have given up trying to save face at this point,” Carteret says.

Seraphina taps a finger on the table. “Whether or not they are trying to save face, I believe we should move the forum to tomorrow. We’ll make it one in the afternoon to be sure the delegates
are aware of the change. If Grindelwald is on the loose, we have no more time to worry about our problem- I want it dealt with yesterday.”

Newt looks out the window while Queenie and Mr. Kowalski talk over some magazines (when last he paid attention to them, Queenie was showing Mr. Kowalski sewing spells). He’s not looking for anything in particular, though a few times he thinks he sees a billywig darting around, but watching the city streets distracts him from the growing anxiety knotting in his chest (he needs to be away, he needs to check on his creatures, he can’t stop wondering what Helene is doing).

“What did Ms. Carteret need from you, anyway?” Goldstein asks.

Newt startles. She is standing in front of him, far too close. Her arms are crossed and her face is set in a hard expression. His adrenaline starts racing; he hadn’t heard her at all. He tries to focus but all he manages is to open his mouth slightly. His eyes fall to her crossed arms and wonders if she’s going to grab him again.

Come off it- there’s nowhere for her to take you.

Goldstein clears her throat. “Well, Mr. Scamander?”

“Right,” Newt blinks, trying to get words out of his mouth, “Um, right, sorry. She was catching me up on Ministry things, mostly. I haven’t had a chance to keep up with the local news and gossip since I’ve been in the field.”

It’s true if nothing else. Helene might have wanted more from Newt to report back to Theseus, but she hadn’t pressed too much. Newt’s brain tries to skitter back to thoughts of Helene and the meeting she’s likely in at this very moment, and who she’s in that meeting with, but he drags himself back to thoughts of a headache he can feel building behind his eyes.

“Ms. Carteret been your brother’s secretary for long?”

“Tina, don’t be like that,” Queenie says suddenly. She’s looking from Newt to her sister in a way that he can’t quite interpret. “Mr. Scamander looks tired. Leave ‘im be.”

“Don’t read my mind,” Goldstein replies automatically. She doesn’t look away from Newt. If anything she just looks sterner. “Well?”

Newt eyes her from under his lashes, trying to suss out what she’s really getting at. He darts a look at Queenie, but her gaze is unfathomable. “Yes, I suppose. Since after the war, certainly... late 1919, perhaps?”

“She always gets sent places on his behalf?”

“No,” Newt says, “She’ll travel with him. He’d have come for this forum himself, as Director, but from what I understand Grindelwald’s supporters are still trying to whip up anti-muggle sentiment all over Europe and he’s worried about another war. The Floo network being unstable internationally, he stayed home.”

Mostly true. Close enough, at least. She doesn’t need to know about that Theseus is trying to verify whether or not Percival can still be trusted as Director of Magical Security. She’d never believe him, anyway. Not after the day they’ve just had.

Goldstein hums noncommittally. “Even though you’re in the area?”
“I’m only here to catch a train so I can leave to complete my resea-” At least one explanation of what the witch might be trying to figure out dawns and he stops abruptly. “Oh.” he looks at her chin. “You- you think my brother used his authority to send a-a- minder to, what, clean up after me?”

“Didn’t he?” she snaps.

Newt jerks back and hunches on himself, feeling old resentments stir. He’d never had a minder. He’d have been laughed at if he ever asked for one, even when it might have saved him from- He touches his coat pocket absently and Pickett’s long branch-like limbs touch his fingertips. The gentle pressure is reassuring.

*Don’t think about it. That’s not her fault. She doesn’t know.* He breathes out a long sigh through his nose and says, tightly, “No. He didn’t.”

"Tina," Queenie says, reproachfully.

“It’s a valid line of questioning,” Goldstein says stiffly.

“Yes. Be that as it may, if you’re set with Mr. Kowalski, I should go. I can give a written account of today so you’ll have my statement but really, if there’s nothing else I can’t see why you need me here.”

“You can’t leave New York until you’ve been debriefed,” Goldstein says immediately. Defensively. “You turn up in the middle of all this chaos, case full of illegal creatures-”

“- and immediately set ‘em loose in a bank, in front of all the no-maj! That’s criminal activity, and even if the Department has their hands full with the unexplained activity, you can’t just swan off.”

Newt chews on the inside of his cheek and hunches in on himself as he considers. “Your boss-”

“Former,” Goldstein interrupts. “Former,” Newt amends with a sigh, “He didn’t seem much interested in me even before we realized the suitcase mixup. Which, I noticed, you didn’t press him on.”

“Not like he’d have believed me,” Goldstein mutters and presses her lips into a thin line.

“I’ve just been on a ship from Africa for the last 14 days,” Newt continues, “I traveled across the Sudanese desert before that. I was traveling through Russia and China before *that*. Even if I had released a creature for the purposes of exposing wizarding society in America, what assurances would I have that it would make its way to New York and stay here for the requisite months to cause disturbances among the muggles until I came through to pick it up?”

A grudging silence follows. It doesn’t break until Queenie interrupts it. “Teeneleh, come set the table and light the candles. We’ll feed ‘em dinner and let Mr. Scamander go.”

Goldstein frowns at Newt, but she doesn’t disagree with her sister. Finally, she backs away and goes to stand by Queenie at the kitchen- a sink, counter and stove that Newt doubts have ever been lit.

“Hot dog, *again*?” Queenie.

“Don’t read my mind!” Goldstein says, flicking her wand towards a cupboard.
Placemats, silverware, cups, and plates fly out and set the table. Mr. Kowalski watches with wide eyes. Goldstein opens the refrigerator; potatoes lift into the air over a bowl with an onion. Queenie spells a hand grater on them. A wooden spoon begins to stir apples, water, and sugar in a pot. Mr. Kowalski staggers to the table. His hand trembles slightly as he reaches for the back of a dining chair. There’s light chatter between the sisters as they cook.

Surely, Newt decides, this is his time to leave, while everyone is busy. He can mail back a statement and some currency as payment for a fine (Does MACUSA even have a set of legal ramifications for accidental release of a magical creature on the books? An across the board ban doesn’t leave much room for nuance.) Even if his innocence is proved against the unexplained activity, he’ll be made to hand over his suitcase, Aurors will frighten his creatures, and when they try to defend themselves they’ll be killed.

“Hey, Mr. Scamander,” Queenie asks. She’s smiling gently.

Newt freezes with his hand just about touching the doorknob. Over Queenie’s shoulder, Goldstein stares at him; it’s a hard look that he doesn’t particularly appreciate. He pulls his hand back and ducks his gaze down to the floor, swallowing. Queenie continues as though she hasn’t noticed (he doesn’t doubt she has, and he wonders if she can hear him panic).

“You prefer pie or strudel?”

“I don’t... I really don’t have a preference,” he murmurs, attempting to smile.

Mr. Kowalski is already, tucking his napkin into his collar in anticipation of eating. The smell of frying potato reaches Newt’s nose and he inhales deeply. It’s very inviting. Queenie turns a smile over her shoulder that lands squarely on Mr. Kowalski.

“You prefer strudel, don’t you, motek? Strudel it is.”

The potatoes and onions come together to form pancakes. They plate themselves next to a bowl of applesauce. Queenie waves her wand and pastry, raisins, and slices of apple come together to create what Newt supposes is a strudel. None of the food on the table is anything he’s had before.

Goldstein flicks her wand and the candles on the table light. Newt remains by the door and watches as the candelabra in the window is lit, one candle at a time from right to left. One place is left empty, and the single candle settles itself in a place that is taller than any of the others. Newt frowns and tips his head at it, wondering what in Merlin’s name it’s for and why one place is empty.

“Tomorrow night the last one goes in, it’s somethin’ our parents and grandparents did when we were growing up,” Queenie says with a smile in his direction, “They used to tell us a story, it’s some sorta holiday that our great-greats passed down. The dates change every year, and...” she giggles and lowers her voice to a gleeful, conspiratorial murmur, “No-maj’s do it, too.”

“Well, yeah, it’s Hanukkah,” Jacob says, “There was a miracle of light lasting 8 nights. Something like that. My neighbors could tell you the story better, they’re Jewish.”

“No thank you,” Goldstein says quickly.

“Oh, no, we’re orphans,” Queenie says to something she pulled out of Mr. Kowalski’s head, “Mama and papa died of dragon pox when we were kids.” She grins at her sister and then back at Kowalski. “Oh, you’re sweet. But Tina and me, we’ve got each other.”

Goldstein rests her arms on the back of a chair and smiles at her sister. It changes her entire face,
which has been pinched and stressed since she accosted Newt at the bank that morning. Newt feels suddenly like he’s intruding on something private. He lifts a hand to check on Pickett; the bowtruckle is smart enough not to reveal himself in unfamiliar territory, unlike his other creatures (Hobbs). Newt looks at the doorknob again. The lights are all turned low to allow the candlelight to take precedence and it’s all very intimate and friendly and he doesn’t belong and he’s really not sure if he wants to be called back or left to slip away.

“Well, sit down, Mr. Scamander,” Goldstein says suddenly, “We’re not going to poison you.”

Mr. Kowalski has a fork in one hand and a knife in the other. When he catches Newt’s eye, he glares and makes pointed gestures to the table with his chin. Newt takes a deep breath, spares a last thought for the idea of leaving and leaves the front door to take a seat.

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Credence has been outside in the December cold for hours since his family was turned out of that horrible newspaper man’s horrible office without a chance to explain the mission of the New Salem Philanthropic Society. He stands on the corner of Broadway and 39th street, holding out Ma’s leaflets. Diners and theaergoers stream by in glittering waves, decked in furs and silks. The few who can bother themselves to notice him wave him off, usually with a disdainful glance. He should say something; should try to get them to take his leaflets. Modesty and Chastity are so good at that. Credence is not.

He pushes a leaflet at a passing woman and her husband. The husband smacks his hand away. “Harold,” the woman hisses, but Credence hardly hears her.

The senator’s words (“Here you go, freak- why don’t you put that in the trash where you all belong?”), and the sound of the leaflet crumpling in the senator’s hand, still echo in his ears, but the senator has nothing on Ma.

She was so calm when she’d accepted their dismissal (“We hope you’ll reconsider, Mr. Shaw. We’re not difficult to find. Until then, thank you for your time.”) but she’d been furious and Credence feels her fury on his upper arms.

He gives up on 39th street and begins the long trudge down Broadway. He allows people to ignore him. He likes it better when they ignore him; it means he can breathe in New York.

New York never fails to enrapture him. The sun sinks over the western skyline and the wind bites colder in the fading light, but Credence likes to look at the lights as they illuminate theaters and restaurants. Ma only allows electricity in the kitchen. She keeps a single gas lamp in her bedroom, so she can spend as many hours as possible scouring the Bible and writing speeches. But out here, in these streets of excess and sin, the lights are everywhere. Electricity glows from every sign. It reflects in every window and glints off every polished shoe and bauble. It comes flying at him from motor cars as they navigate the crowded streets.

Sometimes Credence has trouble believing the dilapidated chapel he calls home exists in the midst of this city. The idea that New Salem is trying to gain a foothold in this city of worldly people, motorized cars, money, and extreme poverty is ludicrous if he thinks about it too much.

He pauses at 14th street to try his luck.

“Get moving, kid,” says a traffic policeman, waving him along.

Credence holds out a leaflet hopefully. The policeman heaves a sigh and takes it.
“Okay, kid. Now go home. It’s too cold for you to be standing around in nothing but your shirtsleeves. Too much weird stuff going on these days. Get home before dark, alright?”

Credence bites back a retort- he is wearing his suit jacket, after all. At least the man has taken a leaflet; he’s even put it in his jacket instead of tossing it in the nearest trash can. “Thank you, sir,” he says.

He continues down Broadway, slowing when he comes to Grace Church. He pauses and peers at it through the gate. Grace Church is bigger than their chapel and it’s ornate. It should feel ostentatious and he should be revolted, but he’s just curious. Does this church have a Ma? Do they feed children in exchange for distributing leaflets? Why don’t they join Ma’s work? Surely if these churches also do the work of the Lord they’d want a second Salem, too? Surely they wouldn’t think Credence’s family are a family of freaks.

Credence pushes that feeling down ruthlessly and shoves some of his leaflets into the collection box on the gate.

“Are you lost, dear?”

Credence blinks. He looks up into the face of an old woman, well-fed and smiling softly. He shakes his head. “No ma’am. I’m on my way home.”

“All right. Be safe, dear. These gas explosions seem to keep right on going.”

She goes past him into the churchyard, and he moves on. When he reaches the crossing of Canal street and Broadway, Credence stuffs the remaining leaflets into the grate of a closed newsstand. Ma just wants the leaflets gone- she won’t know. Anyway, people are sometimes more willing to take something when it’s just... there.

It’s wicked that he doesn’t persist in giving them out, but Credence knows he’s wicked. Ma reminds him all the time and she must be right because if Credence wasn’t wicked, he wouldn’t want to be taken away from the great mission that Ma has placed in front of him. He’d be passionate about it, like Chastity is when she hands out the flyers to the children at the chapel, or like Modesty when she plays hopscotch to her morbid rhymes listing punishments for witches. But Credence wants nothing more than to be taken away; wants Mr. Graves to take him into the wizarding world where he’d never have to see Ma again.

It’s not something he allows himself to dream about often. He keeps the hope tucked into his heart where it won’t tarnish from too much grasping. He can’t let himself believe he really is worthy. If he does, he’ll become sloppy, and Ma will find out that he’s letting himself be taken in by magic. Sometimes he thinks she already does.

There is only a last bit of cold winter light in the sky, now, and the City Hall Park looks desolate and bare. He’s not far from the New Salem Philanthropic Society chapel. Where the electric lights don’t shine, the lamplighters are busy turning on the gas powered street lamps. He should move faster to get home before dark. Ma will be mad if he doesn’t.

Credence drags his feet.

The Woolworth building looms, imposing and intimidating, in front of him. Mr. Graves told him months ago of how the witches keep their headquarters there and work their magic to hide in plain sight of all the non-magical people of New York. Ever since then, it seems like the building is taunting him.

The skin on the back of his neck prickles. Credence looks up and finds Mr. Graves staring back at
Mr. Graves stands tall, proud, and confident. It is as if he is willing Credence to see him because everybody else seems to drift around him without realizing that they’re moving out of his way. He is a witch among the normal people and the normal people don’t even know it. Credence finds himself moving to Mr. Graves’s side as though he can’t control his own feet. Mr. Graves leads him to an alley deep in the shadow of the Woolworth Building.

“You’re upset.” He crowds in close. “It’s your mother again? No. Somebody’s said something—what did they say? Tell me.”

Credence wonders how Mr. Graves knows what he’s thinking. “Do you think I’m a freak, Mr. Graves?”

“I think you’re a very special young man, or I wouldn’t have asked you to help me, now would I?” The smile in Mr. Graves’s voice is sweet and fond. Mr. Graves touches Credence’s right arm and he feels heat pierce to his core. “Have you any news?”

“I... I’m still looking. The children who come for soup all think they have witch’s marks now, even when it’s just a bruise from playing too rough. Mr. Graves, if I knew if it was a boy or a girl—”

“My vision showed me only the child’s great power.” Mr. Graves’s hand trails up to his shoulder. Credence can’t keep himself from looking at it, resting so gently there with no intention of striking him. “He or she can be no older than ten, of that I’m sure. I saw the child in close proximity to your mother. She I saw so plainly.”

There is no mistaking the disgust for his mother. It’s thrilling.

“It could be any one of hundreds. She feeds them in return for her leaflets.”

Mr. Graves puts his other hand on Credence’s left shoulder and rubs them gently. Credence shivers, a jolt that runs down his spine and pushes him forward, towards Mr. Graves’s warmth, without his meaning to. He isn’t pushed away.

“There’s something I haven’t yet told you. I wanted to be sure. Now I am. I saw you, in New York, standing beside me.” Mr. Graves leans in close, so close their foreheads are almost touching. His voice becomes a low, soothing promise. “You’re the one who gains this child’s trust. You’re the one who brings the child to me. You are the key. You want to join the wizarding world, and I want that for you, Credence. Find the child, and we’ll all be free.”

Helene rushes to the guest quarters as calmly as she can. She resists looking over her shoulder; she swears she can still feel Graves’s eyes on her back, even though she left him behind at the meeting room with President Picquery and Graves has no reason to be in the delegation housing. It’s only been minutes since she took her leave of the president’s cabinet.

Someone in MACUSA will be preparing the emergency dispatches for the international delegations by now and she needs to apprise Mr. Scamander before anybody else has a chance. She just hopes he’s awake.

Helene closes the door behind her, locks it, and casts Muffliato on it. Her pad of furiously scribbled notes from the meeting with the President is in hand. Since her rooms have no fireplace, and she’s not in the mood to test the security of the public fireplaces in MACUSA, she starts a small fire in the cast iron pan provided by her hosts and stabilizes it with a flick of her wand.
She throws a pinch of Floo powder into the pan and waits for the fire to turn green.

“Thisus Scamander,” Helene commands.

The heat waves make her vision blur briefly upon sticking her face into the fire. When it clears again, she sees legs walking quickly into what is probably a study. The legs are clothed in trousers, so at least she hasn’t disrupted some sort of private moment, but the room she sees beyond them is not the office study that she knows so well.

“M-Mr. Scamander?” she asks tentatively.

He drops down to be level with the fireplace. “Helene! It’s rather early- doesn’t that make it quite late for you?”

“It’s just gone 11 in the evening, sir. It’s still Monday. I am sorry to disturb you, but-“

“You wouldn’t unless it was an emergency,” Mr. Scamander says. A brief smile crosses his lips. It doesn’t chase away the worry in his eyes. “Tell me.”

“There are a few things, sir. I sent a dispatch through the usual channels this morning, but I’ve since received news needs to reach you first.”

“What is it?”

“I met with Secretary Harmal early this morning. We discussed your suspicions- she is not convinced, but she values your word enough to consider the possibility that there may be something amiss. And your brother is here.” Mr. Scamander sucks intakes a sudden, sharp breath, but Helene pushes on before he can speak. “We’ve made contact. He’s fine, physically.”

“Why the specification?”

Helene grimaces. “Ah, well... He looked... anxious. He’s been in the company of an Auror, or a former Auror. The latest determination is that a creature of some kind is causing the unexplained magical activity. I believe she thinks he is smuggling that creature or is otherwise responsible for it. I couldn’t say if he’s still there, but he was in her apartment when I left late this afternoon. She brought him into contact with Graves-“

“Who did?” Mr. Scamander snaps.

“Goldstein. Tina, I think. You remember I mentioned hearing about sudden restructuring? I’m wondering if Goldstein got caught up in it. It sounds to me like she’s a bit desperate to prove herself. And, well, some of Newton’s menagerie may have... gone walkabout?”

“Gone what? Merlin’s Beard please tell me he the nundu didn’t-“

“A nund-“ Helene’s eyes go wide and she tries to remember. “No, no. He didn’t mention a nundu.”

Mr. Scamander breathes out a long sigh.

“At any rate,” Helene says slowly. “He was still at the Goldstein apartment when I left and he said he’d be staying. Oh! I should tell you; Newton told me he got your letter. He sent a reply when he got off the ship by a gull. I imagine it should arrive within a day or so.”

“That’s... that’s good,” Mr. Scamander chuckles. “Thank you. But none of that is an emergency.
Not even his meeting Graves, though I was rather hoping he wouldn’t.”

“Yes, sir. Only Newton also said Graves didn’t recognize him when they met.”

Mr. Scamander’s eyes narrow. “Explain.”

“He and Graves were in the same room at MACUSA twice. He wasn’t introduced properly either time but reports no recognition whatsoever. I think that rather lends evidence to your theory. But the important news.”

“Yes?”

“Secretary Harmal granted me clearance to attend meetings under her authority as allied security agents. We had that first meeting this afternoon, and this is where the emergency comes in. The president is moving the international forum to Wednesday morning.”

Mr. Scamander frowns deeply. “Why ever for?”

“To discuss the capture and subsequent loss of Grindelwald by Switzerland.”

“What?” Mr. Scamander barks. He shoots to his feet and starts pacing the study furiously.

Helene clears her throat. “The FCM captured Grindelwald during a rally in June this year and held him for a week before supporters broke him out. Subsequent attempts to recapture him failed. The FCM has only just seen fit to put out a notice to allied intelligence.”

“So the Undersecretary will be learning about this soon.”

“Dispatches are going out to all the delegations as we speak.”

“What are the chances of getting my brother out of New York immediately?”

Helene winces, “Not… ah. Not high, sir. I don’t get the feeling the Auror is keen to let him go. I think he can handle himself, though, sir.”

“I’m sure he can. But, Helene? If it looks like he’s going to be caught in anything that would put him in over his head, I want to know.”

“I’ll do what I can, sir.”

Chapter End Notes

You can pry the Jewish!Goldsteins from my cold dead hands.

In other news: I still exist! And so does this thing!

(It’s... rather harder to rewrite a movie in a way that is still engaging (at least to me), is not a rehash of the movie itself (’cause you could just, you know, watch the movie) and yet fits in with all the other stuff I’ve added than I thought it would be going into this prompt. Also, I am the worst at going back over the things I’ve written 1200 times to tweak.)
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

In which Newt finally gets Jacob into the suitcase.

Chapter Notes

This is the second-to-last chapter that follows the movie events pretty closely.

TW: The same movie-implied abuse against Credence starts at the end of this chapter and continues a bit into the next chapter. There is no graphic description of it, however.

After dinner is over, Newt watches Mr. Kowalski through his lashes while pretending to contemplate the tablecloth. He’s in awe of the man; who seems completely at ease even though he’s in a stranger’s house, surrounded by strangers and unfamiliar everything, and sweating through his shirt collar. Meanwhile, today has been one of the longest days of Newt’s life and it doesn’t even have the courtesy of being over.

Queenie has her hand stuck under her chin as she leans in towards Mr. Kowalski. “The job ain’t that glamorous. I spend most days making coffee, unjinxing the john, that sort of thing. I mean, I never really wanted to, but we need all we can get to keep this place.”

Goldstein smiles for her sister, but the smile fades into nothing as soon as Queenie looks away.

“Tina’s the career girl,” Queenie continues. “She’s got ambitions to become a real good Auror.”

Mr. Kowalski smiles and nods, even though he clearly has no idea what an Auror is. Apparently, his thoughts say as much.

Queenie giggles. “Oh, you slay me!”

One of the latches on his suitcase pops open and Newt reaches down to close it on autopilot. (He’s half composing the speech he’s going to give his creatures— they’re in for such a talking to when everyone is back and settled.)

“Hey, listen, could you stop reading my mind for a second?” Mr. Kowalski asks, “I mean, don’t get me wrong, it’s amazing, right? I love it. And this meal- it’s insanely good. It’s maybe the greatest I’ve ever had in my life, and I’m a cook.”

“Oh, you’re sweet!”

Queenie doesn’t even bother to hide her preening as she grins delightedly. Newt catches Goldstein’s gaze and for a brief moment, they share a look of commiserating discomfort the face of such naked affection. Then they remember they’re antagonists and look quickly away. Queenie stops smiling and sits back in her chair, her back straight as a board.
“I am not flirting,” she says. Her voice is clipped and defensive.

“I’m just saying, don’t go getting attached,” Tina says plaintively, lifting her hands in half-surrender. “He’s going to have to be Obliviated.” She looks at Mr. Kowalski and grimaces apologetically at him. “No offense- it’s really nothing personal.”

Mr. Kowalski tries to wave the words off, but the sweating symptom of his condition is starting to make itself known again and his face turns an alarming shade of red.

“Aren’t you okay, motek?” Queenie asks worriedly.

Newt shoots to his feet. The scrape of his chair across the floor is exceedingly loud in his own ears, but nobody else seems to notice. He squares his shoulders. “I think perhaps Mr. Kowalski could do with an early night.”

“And we’ll be needing to get up and out early to look for that crazy niffler thing,” Goldstein agrees.

“What’s a niffler?” Queenie asks.

“Don’t ask,” Goldstein rolls her eyes and stands, eager to separate Queenie and Mr. Kowalski. She jerks her thumb over her shoulder; the doors to the bedroom (where Queenie had been doing her sewing) slide open. “You can bunk in the back. Queenie, help me clear the table.”

Newt moves Mr. Kowalski into the Goldstein’s bedroom. He gets the sweating muggle settled, lays down on the other bed without bothering to take off his coat or shoes. He pulls the blanket over himself and bunches it under his chin.

“Doesn’t look much different than any other bedroom...” Mr. Kowalski mutters to himself.

Newt doesn’t answer. There is still entirely too much movement going on in the apartment for his liking. Really, how long can it take to clear the table? Behind him, Mr. Kowalski becomes enraptured by a book (“Even the pictures are moving!”) and flips through the pages- the sound of paper rustling is so rapid that Newt can tell Mr. Kowalski’s not really reading anything.

There’s a knock and then the sound of the door sliding open. Newt resolutely closes his eyes and doesn’t look. Petty and petulant, yes, but he’s so tired and the sooner everybody goes away the sooner he can take care of Mr. Kowalski and his creatures. He hears a soft clink, like a metal spoon against a tea cup.

“I, um... I thought you might like a hot drink?” Goldstein’s voice asks.

There’s a pause of expectant silence. Newt forces himself to continue breathing evenly. Something is placed on the bedside table with a dull thud. He doesn’t flinch, but it’s a close thing.

“Hey, hey, Mr. Scamander,” Mr. Kowalski’s voice says. His tone is cajoling, “Look, cocoa!”

Well, that explains the clinking. Newt keeps himself still; Goldstein will get annoyed and go away soon, he just needs to wait her out. The silence drags.

Goldstein sounds irritated when she speaks again: “The toilet’s down the hall to the right.”

“Thanks...” Mr. Kowalski says, sounding distracted. The door clicks shut. “Very much.”

Newt breathes for one... two... three more heartbeats. No footsteps, no voices. Finally. He bursts out of the bed and ignores Mr. Kowalski’s startled noise. Halfway between grabbing his suitcase
and setting it on the floor, Newt looks up and gives the man what he hopes is a smile.

“You’ve been liking magic, right?” he asks.

Kowalski eyes him over the cover of the book. “Sure. Yeah, I think so.”

“Good, good. Then you’ll come down.”

“Down?” Mr. Kowalski echoes.

“Yes.”

He should probably have phrased it as a question, but he’s found that his requests tend to be ignored. He sets the suitcase flat on the floor and all but throws himself down the ladder. Mr. Kowalski makes a very disconcerting, high-pitched noise above him.

Newt winces. *Probably not good.*

Perhaps he should have made his intentions more clear?

He forces himself not to slam his suitcase closed and lock it from the inside- it wouldn’t do anything but provide an easy way to drag him back into MACUSA’s headquarters. Instead, he holds his breath and waits for the inevitable commotion. Nothing happens. Newt breathes again.

He sticks his hand out of the suitcase, gives a sharp whistle, and motions into the case. It’s quiet in the room after. Newt hopes that should be enough. Mr. Kowalski has displayed a curiosity and a liking to indulge it all night- surely a suitcase you can disappear into should pique it.

Only there’s a general lack of movement, so the man seems to still be abed.

Newt sighs and sticks his hand up once more, rolling his eyes to himself as he gestures into the suitcase again. “Look, come on. Quickly, please. My supplies are down here and it can get rather messy so I’d rather not bring them up.”

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Jacob is prepared to have a quiet night. His neck is hot and itchy, his head feels like it’s been stuffed with cotton, and honestly, after everything else that’s happened today, he feels that he’s *earned* a quiet night. Only rather than a quiet night, Jacob is sitting in a stranger’s bed, a book with moving pictures placed on the side table and a mug of warm cocoa in hand, having watched a man disappear into a suitcase.

His mouth hangs open as he tries to make himself believe what he’s just seen. *This is ridiculous.*

He’s wondering what he should do- applaud? check to see where Scamander has gone?- when Mr. Scamander’s hand appears from the opening and waves him forward. Jacob slowly puts the mug of cocoa on the bedside table. Is it part of a trick? The hand appears again. It’s more insistent this time,

“Look, come on. Quickly, please. My supplies are down here and it can get rather messy so I’d rather not bring them up,” says Mr. Scamander’s voice. He speaks in a hushed tone but Jacob can’t tell if that’s because Scamander is whispering or because he is, apparently, somewhere *inside a suitcase.*

Jacob pushes the covers back slowly and puts one foot on the floor at a time, warily ready for some sort of funhouse surprise to jump at him- surely everything that can go wrong hasn’t, yet.
But when nothing does happen to go wrong, he takes tentative steps towards the suitcase and peers down through the opening. A ladder leads down into a room with a bed and actual wood flooring.

“You know I’ve seen disappearing acts done better by Houdini,” he says.

Newt’s face appears at the bottom, casting a dismissive glance up, “Where and how do you think he learned to do them? Look, are you coming?”

Jacob sits back on his heels. “Wait... Houdini is one’a youse?” he asks.

“Should have thought that was obvious,” Newt says. He widens his eyes and looks pointedly at the ladder. Then he steps out of sight.

“This is ridiculous,” Jacob mutters to himself.

But he can’t stop himself. He puts a foot on the ladder and puts his weight on it when the ladder doesn’t immediately disappear from under him.


Jacob climbs down. It’s a tight squeeze- he may be climbing into the open air of a room with an 8-foot ceiling, but he’s doing so while trying to fit through a suitcase that’s barely 12 by 20 inches and Jacob has been languishing in a canning factory for two years. (Not much point in staying fit when all you do is slowly kill yourself in a factory by day and try to bake away your feelings at night.)

Scamander is shucking out of his jacket when Jacob makes it down- the blue coat is hanging neatly on a hook by a door. Jacob wonders idly if the door opens or if it’s just a part of the illusion to make this magic house feel more real.

“Hobbs has gotten out again,” Scamander says without turning around.

“Hobbs?”

“My niffler. You know. From the bank.”

“Oh.”

“I think Dougal has gone as well. Normally he’d be in here, though it can be slightly hard to tell if he’s just gone invisible and sulking,” Scamander says, as if to himself, then points off behind Jacob. “Will you sit down, please?”

Jacob looks around quickly; the cabin room is small, with hardly the room for the single bed and a writing desk. He wouldn’t have noticed the upturned bucket stuck into a corner if not for Scamander pointing it out. He sits slowly and is relieved that at least it holds his weight.

Scamander is over a moment later. He pulls at Jacob’s collar, peering at the bite on Jacob’s neck, and nods to himself. “Oh yes, that was definitely Alice. You must be particularly susceptible to murtlap bites. See, you’re a Muggle, so our physiologies are slightly different.”

Jacob nods absently, but doesn’t bother to give a reply; Scamander doesn’t seem to expect to receive an answer anyway. It’s like he assumes Jacob won’t care about anything he has to say but thinks maybe the talking will keep Jacob calm.
“Murtlaps are often hunted to be used in pain relief,” Scamander continues, “Bit funny, in its way. You might have noticed the sort of quill-like parts on her back?”

Jacob doesn’t remember much but being bitten, but he nods. “Yeah, sure. I think so.”

Scamander beams. Jacob watches the other man’s nimble fingers work to pluck leaves of some sort and deftly grind and mix them into a pulp. He adds some water to the pulp and continues to work the mix into a paste.

“Well, murtlap essence is harvested from those quills. It’s used to relieve pain; most families have their own recipe. But, of course, you have to kill the murtlap for it. I found Alice in a trap years ago. Murtlaps can live quite a long time if they’re allowed. I’ve been hoping to find a way to harvest without killing her.”

Jacob nods slowly, blinking. It’s funny because it’s not like Scamander is making no sense. People kill to harvest, but wizard family home recipes- none of it should be real and yet Scamander says it so casually. Like it’s completely normal. The man takes three steps to cross the cabin. Jacob pulls himself up straight on the bucket. Cool fingers covered in paste press against his neck and a wave of relief floods through him.

“That’s amazing,” Jacob moans appreciatively.

“Stay still now,” Scamander murmurs. He spreads more of the paste onto Jacob’s neck. “That should stop the sweating and take the heat away from your neck.”

For a moment Jacob sits with his eyes closed and savors the coolness on his skin. Scamander is smiling slightly when Jacob opens his eyes again; he reaches into the breast pocket of his shirt and produces two tiny pills.

“Take these. I’m quite sure one of them will sort the twitch.”

A glass of water floats itself in front of Jacob’s face. He blinks at it, then decides he has nothing to lose.

“This has happened before, I take it?” He downs the pills. He gets up to replace the glass... wherever it’s supposed to go. There doesn’t appear to be a sink. “What now? Um. That is. What should I do...?”

Scamander is hacking what appear to be meat-chunks into a bucket. He looks up briefly to point his wand at the water glass. It disappears. Jacob hardly has time to register that he is no longer holding a glass before Scamander shoves the bucket at Jacob.

“Take that.”

Jacob doesn’t bother to hide the face he makes but Scamander doesn’t notice because he’s busy again, squeezing something liquidy out of a pod. He collects it in a vial, then makes a note in a log book. Once the line is filled in, the book is shoved aside. The vial caps itself and for a moment Scamander stares at nothing. He strokes the pod thoughtfully with his thumb.

“What’s amazing” Jacob asks.

Scamander startles. “Hm? Oh! This is Hannah- the locals called her a ‘swooping evil’. Not the friendliest name, but I suppose I can’t blame them. The swooping evil is quite an agile species if she’s any reliable indicator.”

“You weren’t able to get others?”
“No,” Scamander murmurs. “The locals wanted her gone as soon as possible. She, ah. She eats human brains, you see.

Jacob blanches. “And you kept her?!”

“Well, she doesn’t now!” Scamander says quickly, “It took a bit but I came up with a new diet for her.” He flicks the pod and it dangles from its tail wrapped around his finger. “Since I wasn’t able to find a male I can’t make any judgments about the species as a whole, but I’ve determined that her venom could be quite useful if diluted properly. I’m working on that bit now.”

Jacob is nodding slowly as Scamander finishes. “So you’re a zoologist, huh? You pick that hobby up before the war, or after?”

There’s a moment of silence wherein Scamander just blinks at him. For an awful moment, Jacob thinks he’s offended the other man and he swears at himself. He’d been doing so well getting Scamander to open up to him these last few minutes!

Then the brightest smile Jacob has ever seen breaks across Scamander’s face. “Oh much before— it’s not a hobby, though. It’s my job. I’m a Magi-zoologist.”

Jacob makes a decision he hadn’t realized he’d been worrying over: He’s going to help this man. Maybe Scamander is a criminal like Tina said earlier, but the way he looks like a kid at Christmas now, Jacob thinks there’s something more that she just doesn’t know. He’s about to say as much when Scamander suddenly throws the swooping evil into the air. Jacob drops the bucket in surprise. He finds himself watching in awe as the cocoon unfurls into a sort of butterfly-bird with lilac and yellow coloring, and a screaming mouth of sharp teeth.

“Te-teeth?!” Jacob squeaks.

Scamander whistles sharply. Hannah moves her butterfly-like wings and does a flip in mid-air, twisting and wrapping herself back into a cocoon. She drops into Scamander’s hand. The calm and quiet is immediate and it’s jarring how much it’s like nothing happened.

“Birds... birds don’t have teeth,” Jacob says slowly.

“She’s not a bird, though. She’s a swooping evil,” Scamander says, offering Jacob a sheepish sort of smile.

He goes to the cabin door (it does open, Jacob notes muzzily) and walks out. Jacob remains behind for a beat, blinking at what appears to be a... a garden? A yard? Just how much stuff is there in this crazy place? Scamander pokes his head back in, eyebrows raised and a gleam that looks almost teasing in his eyes.

“Come on, then, you’ll like this. Bring the bucket.”

+ 

The night sky is completely dark when Credence turns onto Pike street. He feels wanted in a way he rarely does, but Mr. Graves always has that effect on him. The feeling of Mr. Graves’s warmth lingers on his skin. The mental pictures of the magical world, just out of Credence’s reach but waiting for Credence to join it, buoys his spirits.

That good feeling disappears when the small chapel that he and the girls call home comes into view and makes him shiver. A relic of the 1800s that had been out of use for years before Ma
found it, it normally looks dingy and rundown. In the shadows of the street lamps, it looks menacing.

He should have been back at least an hour ago, while there was still some light, but he was so hungry for Mr. Graves’s reassurance that he let himself linger too long. Ma is going to be very angry.

Fear creeps up the back of Credence’s neck.

He takes a deep breath. His footsteps are careful as he enters the dilapidated wooden chapel and shuts the double doors quietly behind himself, but they still echo. Without the street children clamoring for soup and musing over the leaflets, the silence in the chapel is oppressive. Modesty isn’t even playing; she stares at him, half-hidden in the coat rack, face urgent.

Her mouth moves. *Where have you been?*


He looks down the main hall- it sits in darkness, the benches up on the tables. He doesn’t see Ma, but he knows she’s here. Modesty wouldn’t be so worried if she weren’t. Maybe she’s upstairs.

In the very back of the hall, in the area that serves as their kitchen, Chastity stands in silence in the only source of light. He can tell she’s drying the last of the crockery by the way she moves. He takes a few steps in her direction- maybe if he finishes the dishes Ma won’t need to be so angry with him.

Credence pauses just as he’s about to pass the stairs. The hair stands on his arms. He darts his tongue out to lick dry lips and turns his face slowly to the right. Ma sits on the stairs. She doesn’t look at him.

“Credence,” Ma says. Her voice is soft, but it bites like ice. “Where have you been?”

Whatever little bit of good feelings and buoyed spirits he had left in him flee, leaving only fear sitting like a lump in his stomach.

“I was... ah. I was looking for a place for tomorrow’s meeting. After I finished with the leaflets. There’s a corner on thirty-second that could-” Credence moves to the bottom of the stairs, hoping to entreat Ma to kindness, but her face is stone and he stops talking. There is no mercy for him tonight. “I’m sorry, Ma. I didn’t realize it was so late.”

Ma stands and extends her hand. Credence’s hands work to remove his belt and hold it out to her without permission from his brain. Ma takes the belt. In silence, she turns and walks up the stairs. Credence follows. His hand grips the banister so tightly that it almost hurts to remove it as he moves up the steps. He hears little footsteps behind them, just under the sound of Ma’s, and he chances a glance under his arm. Modesty is at bottom of the stairs, watching them, a look of fear and upset on her face. She takes half a step when their eyes meet, as though she’s going to follow. Credence shakes his head at her.

He can at least protect her from this.

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