

Chapter 9

Stumbling out of the Floo, Harry brushed himself off. Glancing at the pile of paperwork sitting on his desk that had appeared overnight, he sighed and made his way to the door.

“Morning,” Penny said brightly.

She placed a cup of coffee in his hand and kissed him on the cheek.

“Thanks,” Harry smiled before he opened his mouth wide in a yawn.

“I’m afraid you have a busy morning,” Penny told him. “Amelia moved up the trials for Malfoy, Nott, Crabbe, Goyle, and McNair. They start in half an hour.”

“I know. I was up all night doing the paperwork,” Harry said tiredly. “Anything else?”

“After the trials, you have a meeting with the Heads of Department,” Penny told him with a sympathetic look. “But after that, you all caught up.”

“Yeah, except for the pile of paperwork sitting on my desk,” Harry sighed.

“Well, aren’t you just a bright little ray of sunshine today,” Penny smiled. “How about I help you after lunch?”

“That’d be great,” Harry grinned. “Could I talk you into helping me find the files I need for the trial?”

Smiling, They walked back into his office. Penny knew exactly where to look and found everything he needed in just a few minutes. As they got everything organized, Hermione stepped through the Floo.

“Morning,” she said brightly. “You left early.”

“Malfoy’s trial got moved up to this morning,” Harry told her.

“What!?! When did that happen?” Hermione asked.

“Amelia thought of it last night,” he replied.

“Why didn’t you tell me? I could’ve helped,” she complained.

“You were already asleep by the time I got home,” Harry said.

“What time did you go to bed?” Penny asked curiously.

“Um... a little after three, I think,” Harry said.

“No wonder you’re so cranky,” Penny smiled.

“I’m not cranky,” Harry grumbled.

Hermione giggled and took the papers from his hands. She quickly had everything organized and ready to go. Making their way to the elevator, they ran into Daphne and brought her along. Kim and Markus greeted them with a silent nod and summoned the elevator.

“How’s Tonks doing?” Kim asked as they stepped inside.

“She’ll be alright,” Harry told her. “She should be able to go home tomorrow, and she’ll be back to work in a couple of weeks.”

“Thank Merlin for that,” Kim sighed. “So, no permanent damage?”

“No,” Harry said. “It nicked the bone, but it missed anything vital. She kind of got lucky. That curse was one of Voldemort’s favorites during the last war. They only figured out a counter-curse in few years after he disappeared. From what the Healer said, it won’t even leave a scar.”

“Good,” Markus nodded. “She’s a gifted witch. I’d hate to see her career end before it’s even truly started.”

“Moody and Matilda aren’t happy, though,” Kim said. “You might want to warn her they plan to give her a bollocking when she gets back.”

“I’ll let her know,” Harry said, his lips twitching.

“Why are they upset with her?” Hermione asked with a frown. “It wasn’t her fault she got hurt.”

“She wasn’t clear enough with her orders,” Markus said. “They only give her a hard time because they like her. If they didn’t think she could handle the job, they’d park her at a desk.”

“Is that why they beat the snot out of Potter every time he goes to visit Moody?” Daphne asked with a smirk.

Harry rolled his eyes. He’d trained with Moody a couple of more times in the last week, and both times came back battered and bruised but happy.

“Pretty much,” Kim grinned.

The elevator came to a stop, and they stepped out into the dimly lit halls of the courtrooms. They walked deep into the bowels of the Ministry to courtroom ten. Most of the Wizengamot had already arrived and were talking quietly, including Amelia, who was talking to Arthur. Spotting Harry, she waved him over.

“Morning,” Harry said, taking his seat while Hermione and Penny laid out the paperwork.

“Good morning, Minister,” Amelia said.

“Morning, Harry,” Arthur smiled. “I really can’t thank you enough for the new office.”

“Don’t mention it,” Harry smiled. “It was ridiculous to have an entire department working out a closet. So, what brings you this far down?”

“Oh, I just needed a quick word with Amelia,” Arthur said. “We’ve seen a surge in Muggle baiting, I’m afraid.”

“Do you think it has anything to do with Voldemort?” Harry asked, stifling a sigh when Arthur winced at Voldemort’s name.

“Oh, no. Nothing that bad,” he replied quickly. “Just the usual fang toilet seats and biting teacups. Things calmed down after the Aurors started patrolling Knockturn Alley, but I suspect someone got in a new shipment.”

“We’re keeping an eye out, but the Aurors have been quite busy as of late,” Amelia said. “If you can give me an idea where to look, that would certainly help.”

“I understand. I just wanted to keep you updated,” Arthur said amicably.

They all turned at the sound of murmured voices and watched as visitors began entering. Some of the first to enter were Narcissa and Draco Malfoy. Narcissa looked quite subdued compared to what Harry remembered of the woman from the World Cup. Draco, on the other hand, looked as arrogant as ever. Glaring at Harry, he sneered before being pulled away by his mother.

“Well, it looks like it’s time for me to get going,” Arthur said. “Good luck.”

“Thanks, Mr. Weasley,” Harry said.

“Good morning, Minister, Director,” Judge Pennington said as he took the seat Dumbledore normally occupied.

“Good morning,” Amelia replied while Harry gave a respectful nod. “I take it you’ll be overseeing the trial today?”

“Indeed. The other judges and I thought it would be best since I’m already familiar with the latest charges,” Pennington said. “I trust everything is in order?”

“The Ministry is ready to present its case,” Amelia said formally.

Pennington banged his gavel three times, silencing the room as people shuffled to their seats.

“If everyone is here, then let us begin,” he said, his voice carrying around the room effortlessly. “Aurors, bring in the accused.”

A door on the left side of the room opened, and a dozen Aurors marched several men into the room. The chains connecting the manacles on their wrists and ankles clinked loudly in the silent room. Malfoy, wearing a plain, black robe, was the first to be forcibly pushed into one of the stone chairs in the center of the courtroom. Thick, iron chains sprouted from the back of the

chair and snaked around his chest. Malfoy sneered at the Wizengamot as they whispered quietly amongst themselves.

Nott, Crabbe, Goyle, McNair, Runcorn, and the Carrow twins were pushed into the seats next to him. They were the last Death Eaters captured during the raid to be prosecuted. Amelia had originally put their trials off for as long as possible to gather as much evidence as she could. However, after the escape attempt, she wasn't willing to take the risk of keeping in the Ministry any longer.

"Lucius Abraxas Malfoy," Judge Pennington said. "You've been accused of fourteen counts of kidnap and assault of Muggle women, thirty-two counts of murder, ten counts blackmail, and one hundred and twenty-two counts of bribery of Ministry officials."

The Wizengamot gasped, and had Harry not read the files beforehand, he would've been shocked as well. Many witches and wizards had been convinced, or convinced themselves, that even if people like Malfoy had joined the Des willingly, they surely stopped their crimes after being caught. Harry suspected it was how many justified letting him walk on the excuse of the Imperious Curse sixteen years ago. Now, the Wizengamot were being faced with reality, and it was far more horrific than any of them could've imagined in their worst nightmares.

Perhaps even more frighteningly, because of the rules for questioning suspects under Veritaserum, that, almost certainly, wasn't all he was guilty of. In order to ask a suspect a question under truth serum, you had to demonstrate some evidence they might have committed that crime. You couldn't just ask a person what crimes they committed, and you couldn't use someone else's word under Veritaserum as evidence. It made things difficult but not impossible. Between Connie Hammer and Matilda Bennet, the lead investigators, they uncovered some alarming evidence.

"Not guilty," Malfoy said once the murmurs died down.

Pennington continued down the line, reading off similar charges for Crabbe, Goyle, and Nott, though he had the added charges of use of an Unforgivable and murder of an Auror. Things got even worse when he read the charges for McNair. The former Head of the Department for the Control and Regulation of Magical Creatures and Ministry Executioner was easily the sickest of

the lot. Along with the charges of bribery and blackmail, he was charged with over two hundred counts of kidnap, assault, and murder of Muggle women. From the evidence they found and his confession under Veritaserum, they knew McNair hunting down Muggle women, assaulting them for days or weeks in his home, and then beheading them in his garden. Thanks to a little black book they found in his home, he was also charged with sending the notorious Werewolf, Greyback, after business rivals and political opponents.

The Ministry's reputation would take a hit from his conviction, but Harry didn't care. Frankly, he thought it deserved it after letting these witches and wizards escape justice for so long.

By the time Pennington finished reading all the charges, the entire Wizengamot was looking green. With the exception of Runcorn and the Carrows, these were wizards that freely wandered the halls of the Ministry and attended dinners and fundraisers in their own homes. To know someone you openly associated with and invited into your home was capable of such depravity was quite the shock.

"The defendants have pled not guilty," Pennington said to Hermione, who wrote it down for the record. "We'll start with the prosecution. Madam Bones, make the Ministry's case."

Amelia stood and smoothed out her robes. For the next quarter of an hour, she went over the basics of how Malfoy came to be arrested and what physical evidence she had gathered. After producing the warrant for the use of Veritaserum, a Pensieve was brought out.

"I'll now show you the recording of Mr. Malfoy's questioning under Veritaserum," she said, pouring the silver, smoky liquid into the floating basin.

With a tap of her wand, an image was projected above the Pensieve. It was of the inside of one of the smaller interrogation rooms. Amelia sat on one side of the table, Kingsley and Dawlish standing guard over her shoulders, while Malfoy sat chained on the other side.

"Lucius Malfoy, by order of Judge Colleen Abbot, we are hereby authorized to question you with the use of Veritaserum," Amelia said, holding up a scroll.

Malfoy tried to fight, but Kingsley and Dwlsh were both large men, well over six feet tall, and easily overpowered him. Moments after the Veritaserum touched his tongue, Malfoy's face went slack.

"Were you aware that it was Aurors at your residence on the night of July fourteenth?" Amelia asked.

"Yes," Malfoy replied in a dull monotone.

"Why did you attack them?" she asked.

"I knew they were there to arrest me," he admitted.

"Were you hoping to kill them?" Amelia asked, her face expressionless but her dark blue eyes blazing.

"Yes," Malfoy replied.

"Who were the other people at your home, and why were they there?" she asked.

"They were fellow Death Eaters," Malfoy answered. "We were discussing the situation with Potter and what to do with him."

"And what were you planning?" Amelia asked sharply.

"We discussed killing his supporters. You, Weasley, and Diggory were the most likely targets," Malfoy said emotionlessly. "We also talked about kidnapping his Mudblood and breaking her before sending her back. The difficult part would be getting a hold of the little bint. No one knows where she and Potter are staying."

Harry clenched his fist and glared at the real Malfoy furiously. The blonde kept his head down, his disheveled hair covering his face.

“Were you planning to assassinate the Minister?” Amelia asked, drawing his attention back to the memory.

“We wanted to, but the Dark Lord made it clear Potter is his to kill,” Malfoy replied.

Amelia pursed her lips and looked over the parchment in front of her.

“We discovered a book of transactions in your study,” she said after a brief pause. “What is that for?”

“It’s a list of the bribes I pay and the blackmail I collect,” Malfoy said.

“And the payment you made on July the eighth. Who was that to, and what was it for?” Amelia asked.

“That was a payment to Fudge, and it was to press charges on Potter in front of the Wizengamot,” Malfoy told her.

“What do the initials in that book mean?” Amelia asked.

For the next few minutes, she questioned him about the records he kept and how to read them. It was boring to watch, but it was one of their best pieces of evidence. Malfoy had records on every corrupt person in the Ministry, and that book was their ticket to rooting them out. It also showed the depths of Fudge’s corruption. The man had taken bribes for years for just about anything.

“Ma’am, it’s starting to wear off,” Kingsley told her.

“Give him another dose,” Amelia said.

Malfoy’s head was yanked back, and three more drops of Veritaserum were placed on his tongue.

“Now, tell me about the room hidden under the Drawing Room,” Amelia said. “What do you use it for?”

“Most to store Dark Artifacts I don’t want the Ministry to find, but I occasionally use it to hold Muggle woman we capture,” Malfoy answered.

“And what do you do with these women?” Amelia asked.

Malfoy described, in horrific detail, what he and his friends did to Muggles. One witch grabbed the wizard’s hat off the man next to her and was sick into it.

“What do you do with the bodies?” Amelia asked.

“I transfigure them into mulch and spread them throughout the garden,” Malfoy said. “It’s probably the most useful thing they’ve ever done.”

The questioning continued for a couple of more minutes until she asked about the various posions they found. The answer he gave to one of them surprised everyone.

“I’ve been thinking of using it on my wife,” he explained. “She’s getting a bit on in age, and I’m thinking about looking for someone younger.”

Harry glanced at Narcissa, who was staring wide-eyed and pale at her husband. Next to her, Draco looked like he’d been punched in the gut.

The memory faded before a second took its place. After the original questioning, they had enough evidence to question Malfoy about the crimes he'd been acquitted of in his first trial. By then, no one was shocked when he confessed to doing everything of his own free will. Often times happily.

"Mr. Malfoy, do you have anything to say in your defense?" Judge Pennington asked.

Lucius stayed silent, not even raising his eyes from the floor.

"This is your last chance to say anything before we vote," Pennington warned.

Again, silence greeted him.

"Very well, all those who believe he is guilty, raise your wands," he said.

For the first time in centuries, the Wizengamot voted unanimously to convict. They moved immediately to sentencing, where Lucius Malfoy was given life in Azkaban with no chance of parole. He would spend the rest of his life in the high-security wing with only his fellow Death Eaters and Dementors to keep him company.

"I almost wish we had the death penalty," Harry grumbled.

Penny nodded and gave his hand a squeeze. She looked pale and ready to be sick at any moment.

"Do you need to take a break?" he asked softly.

"No," she replied, her voice cracking before she cleared her throat. "I want to stay."

Harry nodded but decided to keep an eye on her. The next two hours were spent watching the interrogations of the other Death Eaters. McNair's was by far the worst. Even on Veritaserum, you could still sense his glee as he described assaulting, torturing, hunting, and killing young Muggle women. By the time he was sentenced, Penny and Hermione both looked so pale he was worried they might faint.

"Perhaps we should take a short recess," Harry suggested.

"Indeed," Judge Pennington said tiredly. "The court will take a fifteen-minute recess."

"Kingsley!" Amelia called as people began to file out.

The tall, broad shouldered Auror approached and leaned close.

"Get those four to Azkaban straight away," she said firmly.

"Yes, ma'am," Kingsley nodded.

Relaying the message to the other Aurors, Malfoy, Crabbe, Goyle, and McNair were swiftly ushered out of the room. The Carrow twins and Runcorn were left in their chairs, looking defeated.

Helping Penny out of her seat, Harry led her out of the courtroom and down the hall to the loo. She walked inside shakily, followed a moment later by the sound of heaving.

"Could you check on her for me?" Harry asked Kim.

Nodding, he disappeared into the bathroom while Harry sighed tiredly. A short way down the hall, he watched as Hermione clung to Daphne, tears rolling down her cheeks.

“It’s times like this that I really hate that you’re Minister.”

Harry turned and looked at Amelia questioningly.

“You and your friends should be enjoying your Summer, talking about the girls you fancy and playing Quidditch, not sitting in a courtroom listening to that,” she frowned.

“The Wizengamot should feel properly ashamed they allowed this to happen, and it took a seventeen year old to point it out to them,” Marcus nodded.

“Yeah, well, hopefully, this’ll be a wake up call,” Harry said.

“I sure as hell hope so,” Amelia said, glancing back over her shoulder at the members in the hall.

“I think we should push to make being a Death Eater illegal at the next meeting,” Harry said quietly.

Amelia turned to him sharply, her gaze hard as she nodded.

“If it’s ever likely to happen, then it’s now,” she agreed. “Dumbledore will be against it, though. His opinion carries a lot of weight.”

“I know,” Harry nodded. “It’s still worth a try. If just taking his mark will land in Azkaban, it might make people less likely to join him.”

Looking around, he pulled his wand and put up a discrete Silencing Charm. Amelia raised her eyebrow and looked at him curiously.

“We need to talk about Azkaban, too,” he said. “I’m worried it’s only a matter of time until he breaks them out. Given the choice, I think we both know the Dementors will join Voldemort over us. What the hell are we going to do if we can’t even keep the ones we catch in prison?”

Sighing, Harry ran a hand through his hair agitatedly.

“I have a couple ideas,” Amelia said. “The biggest problem is going to be getting the Wizengamot to spend the money for better security. The Dementors cost nothing. Staffing the prison with wizards would mean a large tax hike for everyone.”

“What about foreign prisons or the Goblins?” Harry asked.

“The Wizengamot would never agree to turn our citizens over to a foreign government, no matter how disgusting their crimes,” Amelia said. “And the Goblins would only be marginally better than Dementors, and they’d charge an arm and a leg.”

“This is ridiculous! We should be able to secure our own prison, for Merlin’s sake!” Harry ranted.

“I agree with you,” Amelia said calmly. “This trick is convincing the Wizengamot.”

“If I may?” Marcus asked, getting a nod from Harry and Amelia. “If the Ministry were to declare war, wouldn’t the Ministry have the executive powers to make that kind of change without approval from the Wizengamot?”

“Hmm, he would,” Amelia said thoughtfully. “It might be a bit of a stretch to get the Wizengamot to declare war right now. In fact, I don’t think the situation we’re in fits the legal requirements. I’ll have to look into it.”

The bathroom door opened, and Harry dropped the Silencing Charm. Penny had washed her face, and there was a bit more color to her skin. Wrapping his arms around her, Harry kissed her temple and held her close.

"I'm fine," Penny mumbled.

"You sure?" Harry asked softly.

Penny nodded against the crook of his neck.

"I can't believe they were allowed to go free for so long," Hermione raged, cheeks pink and eyes red as she walked over to join the group. "So many lives could've been saved if it wasn't for corrupt *people* like Fudge. It's disgusting. Can't we arrest him or something?"

"I'm afraid not," Amelia said. "Since the majority of the Wizengamot signed off on it, he can't be held accountable. Well, at least not without holding the entire Wizengamot liable as well."

"Like they'll ever admit they made a mistake," Daphne scoffed.

Harry could certainly understand Hermione's anger. He wanted heads to roll over this. Someone should be held responsible for allowing those monsters to walk free without a proper investigation. But maybe he could stop it from happening again.

"Hey, Hermione," he said. "Maybe you could look into making some new policies or laws to make sure something like this can't happen again. Like a law that anyone claiming the Imperious Curse has to get a full medical scan and testify under Veritaserum or something."

Hermione's brown eyes lit up.

"Harry, that's brilliant!" she exclaimed. "Why didn't I think of that?"

“Come by my office tomorrow, and I’ll help you get started,” Amelia said. This could be the push the Wizengamot needs to make some much needed changes.”

“Only we only have ten days to do it in,” Harry said. “After that, it’s up to the next Minister.”

“We can do it,” Penny said firmly. “I’ll help.”

“Me too,” Daphne added.

Harry smiled at them gratefully.

“Looks like people are heading back in,” Kim pointed out.

“You sure you want to stay?” Harry asked Penny softly.

“I’m sure,” she said.

“You’ll be alright,” Amelia told her. “The worst of it’s over now.”

Together, they headed back into the courtroom and took their seats. Looking out at the crowd, Harry noticed a number of visitors hadn’t returned, including the remaining Malfoys.

Amelia was right. The Carrow twins and Runcorn, while still despicable people, weren’t nearly as bad as the Death Eaters they’d listened to earlier. Amycus and Alecto Carrow had a knack for finding blackmail and used it to extract money, favors, and, disgustingly, sex from their victims. While they’d certainly committed more than a few murders, it wasn’t nearly at the level of McNair.

Runcorn was the last to be tried. Watching the memory of his interrogation, they learned that he'd joined the Death Eaters just a week before Voldemort fell. Unlike the others, he hadn't spent the last sixteen years hunting Muggles and committing atrocities. He'd lived a normal life as an Auror, slowly working his way up the ranks. Or, he had, until the night Voldemort returned.

The moment he knew the Dark Lord was back, he worked hard to be as useful as possible. He saw this as his opportunity to rise quickly in the ranks of the Death Eaters instead of being looked down upon as a hanger-on like he had at the end of the last war. Harry honestly found it quite disconcerting how fast he'd turned on people he'd worked with for nearly two decades for the chance at a bit of power.

All three were swiftly sentenced to Azkaban for life. It had been an exhaustive three hour trial, and everyone was quick to leave the courtroom. Evangeline waited for Harry near the doors to ask him a quick couple of questions about how he thought the trial went. After promising to give her another one on one interview later in the week, Harry jumped into the elevator with Penny, Hermione, Daphne, and his guards before heading back up to his office.

"Kim, can you take the girls out to London for lunch?" Harry asked.

"You're not coming?" she asked.

"I have a meeting with the Department Heads in fifteen minutes," he told her. "I know you're supposed to guard me, but after what Malfoy said at his trial, I don't want them going alone."

Kim shared a glance with Marcus, who nodded.

"Alright," she said.

"Thanks," Harry smiled.

Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a few Galleons and put them in her hand.

“Lunch is on me,” he said.

As Kim left, Harry summoned one of the Ministry House Elves and ordered a sandwich for lunch. While he ate, he relaxed as much as he could. A few minutes later, he left his office and was back in the elevator. Going down two floors, he headed to the meeting room where most of the Heads were already waiting for him. For once, Julia Edgecomb didn't scowl when she saw him. She was much more subdued, sitting at the table by herself while the others talked quietly.

“Hello, Harry,” Arthur smiled, clapping his shoulder lightly. “You look like you've been hit with a Tenderizing Charm.”

Harry snorted, “Feels like it. That trial was a nightmare.”

Arthur squeezed his shoulder sympathetically.

“I really wish it wasn't up to you to do things like that,” he said. “But I can't tell you how proud I am of what you've accomplished. You've made one heck of a difference around here, and you've put some very bad people behind bars. The wizarding world is a lot better off because of you.”

Harry felt a swell of pride and blinked to fight the burning in his eyes.

“Thanks, Mr. Weasley,” he said softly.

“I think we know each other well enough for you to call me Arthur,” the redhead grinned.

They talked for a few more minutes while they waited for everyone else to show up. Amelia was the last to arrive, looking as tired and worn as Harry felt. Taking their seat, he sat back with a sigh.

“Right, Arthur, let’s start with you,” Harry said. “How are things in your department?”

“Not too bad,” Arthur replied. “The new office is making things easier, but like I mentioned before, we’ve seen a rise in Muggle baiting. I looked through our case files while you were at the trial. I marked all the locations we’ve had incidents. I’m sure what you can get from that, but I thought it might help.”

Harry took the map and gave it a glance before handing it to Amelia.

“Do you have a list of cursed items you’ve been finding lately?” she asked Arthur.

Looking through his files for a moment, he handed her a piece of parchment.

“Thank you,” Amelia said. “I’ll tell my Aurors to keep an eye out.”

“Anything else?” Harry asked, to which Arthur shook his head. “Alright. Amelia, do you want to go next?”

“Certainly,” she said. “We’ve put a number of new policies into place to improve the security within the Ministry. Now, as I’m sure you’re aware, there was an incident yesterday where two of my Aurors had their families kidnapped and held for ransom. One of the reasons this happened is because they talked about their jobs in a public place. In response, we’re issuing a Ministry wide advisory. To avoid things like this happening in the future, no one should talk about the specifics of their job outside close friends and family.”

“Isn’t that a bit extreme?” Dirk Cresswell asked.

“For most of you, yes,” Amelia replied. “This is more aimed at the Aurors and anyone that works with sensitive information. That said, it’s a precaution I think everyone should take, just to be safe. In addition, we’ve placed a night guard in the Floo offices. With your permission, Minister,

I'd like to set up a line of communication between there and the Auror offices. It might only save us a few seconds compared to the paper airplanes we use now, but it could make a difference."

"Wouldn't it be easier to set up a Floo in the Auror offices?" Harry asked.

"For calls to the Aurors, yes," Amelia said. "However, in assaults resulting in injury, people almost always call St. Mungo's first. If we can catch that call in the Floo office, we can send Aurors to respond minutes faster."

"Alright, go ahead, then," Harry nodded. "Speaking of the Floo Offices, how are things there?"

"We replaced the two employees that were arrested and instituted the policies Madam Bones suggested," Julia said softly. "Have you had a chance to read the notice I sent you today?"

"No, I haven't," Harry replied.

"I see," she said nervously. "Well, I'm afraid to say six of our employees were discovered listening to private calls and relaying that information to various sources. They've since been fired, and all evidence has been turned over to the Aurors."

"Oh, bloody hell," Harry sighed, dropping his head into his hands.

"Six out of the eight people in the Floo Office were selling information?" Amelia asked angrily.

Julia cleared her throat nervously, "Yes, ma'am."

"We have got to do something about this," Harry sighed. "This is insanity. There's corruption at every level. How the hell are people supposed to trust the Ministry when people are listening to their private conversations and selling that information."

“Were any of those six sending information to Fudge or Umbridge?” Amelia asked.

“I don’t know the specifics,” Julia admitted. “The Aurors were the ones to discover it, and they refused to share any information with me.”

“Good,” Amelia nodded. “Minister, I’ll talk to the Aurors involved when I get back to the office and let you know what they found.”

Harry sighed and nodded. Continuing around the table, they discussed a few small issues, but nothing big came up. As they all got up to leave, Saul Croaker approached him.

“Do you have time to visit the Department of Mysteries today?” he asked.

“Oh, right,” Harry said.

He’d had to cancel three scheduled visits because things kept popping up and getting in the way.

“Actually, I could use a break from all of this,” he said, waving his hand around.

“Excellent,” Saul smiled as they made their way to the elevator.

“So, what does the Department of Mysteries actually do?” Harry asked.

“A number of things, but our main focus is research,” Saul replied. “We study the very depths of magic to gain a better understanding of the world around us.”

“Sounds like Hermione’s dream job,” Harry smiled.

“We’ve had our eye on Ms. Granger for quite some time,” Saul nodded. “She’s an exceptionally intelligent witch. We’d be happy to have her among our ranks.”

“You’ve been watching her?” Harry asked incredulously.

“We keep an eye out for students that show exceptional talent, such as Ms. Ganger... and yourself,” Saul said.

“Me?” Harry asked. “I’m nowhere near as smart as Hermione.”

“Intelligence isn’t the only thing we look for,” Saul told him. “You have a gift for understanding magic on a level most don’t. I watched you closely during the Triwizard Tournament. Your performance was impressive.”

“I had help,” Harry muttered.

“And you think the other Champions didn’t?” Saul asked, cocking an eyebrow.

The elevator stopped on the lowest level of the Ministry, and the doors opened.

“Level nine, Department of Mysteries,” the cool, female voice of the elevator announced.

As Harry, Saul, and Marcus walked down a long, narrow hall toward a blue door with a knob in the middle, Harry slowed his steps.

“Minister?” Marcus asked.

“I’ve seen this before,” Harry said softly.

“When?” Saul asked curiously.

“In my dreams,” Harry said. “I see myself in this hall, walking toward the door, but it keeps getting further away.”

“How often do you have these dreams?” Saul asked.

“Almost every night,” Harry said.

“Perhaps you’re a bit of a seer,” Saul said.

Harry snorted, “Not according to Professor Trelawney.”

Saul smiled and led Harry through the door. They entered a circular room with eight doors evenly spaced apart. As soon as Marcus entered, the door slammed shut behind him, and the room began to spin.

“This is designed to confuse anyone trying to infiltrate the Department of Mysteries,” Saul explained. “The trick is to look at the ceiling.”

Looking up, Harry noticed runes etched into the stone. The runes changed rapidly as the doors spun, but as they came to a stop, so did the runes. Unfortunately, Harry didn’t take Runes, so he couldn’t read them. Opening one of the doors to the left, Saul led him into a room full of cabinets containing hourglasses of all shapes and sizes.

“This is where we research Time Magic,” Saul explained. “As you can see, we mostly use Time-Turners. There are other ways to time travel, of course. However, these are the safest and most efficient way to do so. This is the one Ms. Granger used in her third year.”

Saul pointed to a cabinet, where Harry saw dozens of necklaces. Among them, he spotted a familiar looking one with a long chain. They walked through several more rooms, where Saul explained what they were for and why.

“The Cognivores were a bit of an accident,” he admitted. “We were looking for a way to store the human consciousness outside of the body for critically ill patients. However, They’re a bit too quick to devour thoughts.”

“Why did you keep them if it didn’t work?” Harry asked, keeping his distance from the tank.

“To discover what went wrong,” Saul said. “Now, if you go through here, you’ll find something very interesting.”

Opening the door at the back of the room, they walked into a room that looked like a theater. A ring of stone benches led down to a circular platform upon which sat an arch. An odd, ghostly veil covered the arch, fluttering despite the lack of wind. As they walked closer, Harry began to hear whispered voices. A chill ran down his spine, his body forcing him to come to a stop.

“What are those voices?” Harry asked.

“What voices?” Marcus asked.

“We don’t know,” Saul said. “We don’t know what the voices are, or only why some people can hear them. This is called the Veil of Death. However, that’s a bit of a misnomer. All we know is that anyone who’s gone through hasn’t come back. Many believe this leads to the land of the dead, but there’s no real evidence for that. The name mostly comes from the sixteenth century, when it was used to execute prisoners.”

“How can you not know what it does?” Harry asked. “Someone had to make it, didn’t they?”

“The Department of Mysteries, and later the Ministry, were built around the arch,” Saul said. “We don’t know who made it, when, or why. It’s the greatest mystery we have. Despite thousands of years of research, we still know almost nothing about it.”

Creeping a bit closer, Harry closed his eyes and tilted his head, listening closely. The indistinct murmur of voices seemed to grow louder, but he wasn’t able to make out what they were saying. Opening his eyes, he shivered and stepped back. A part of him was curious. If this was a bridge to the land of the dead, he could be only feet away from hearing his parents. Despite that tempting promise, something inside of him was screaming to get as far away as he could.

“That thing gives me the creeps,” he shuddered.

“Understandable,” Saul smiled. “I don’t suppose you heard anything you could make out, did you?”

“No,” Harry replied.

“Ah, well, maybe one day we’ll know what they’re saying,” he said. “If you’ll come with me, I have one last room to show you.”

Walking up the stone steps to a different door than the one they came in, Harry looked back at the arch one last time before stepping into the next room. It was massive, the ceiling three stories high. Rows and rows of shelving ran as far as the eye could see. Stacked on the shelves were thousands of crystal balls, each with a handwritten plaque sitting in front of it.

“This is the Hall of Prophecy,” Saul said, his voice echoing in the cavernous room. “Every prophecy made since the formation of the Department of Mysteries is stored here. Be careful not to touch anything. They heavily charmed to keep them safe.”

Pulling a scrap of parchment out of his pocket, Saul glanced at it before leading them deeper into the room. Looking at the numbers on the shelves, he stopped at ro eight hundred and ninety-nine.

“Ah, here we are,” he said. “Mr. Dresden, this one is yours.”

Marcus blinked in surprise and looked at the crystal ball Saul was pointing to.

“You can take that one,” Saul said. “It’s yours.”

“Why didn’t I know about this?” Marcus asked.

“Some prophecies aren’t clear who they’re about until long after they’re made,” Saul replied. “But anyone can come into the Ministry and ask if there’s a prophecy about them anytime they like. We used to send out notifications, but that was stopped hundreds of years ago to save money.”

Turning back to the crystal ball, Marcus picked it up as the mist within swirled.

“You can listen to it in private if you prefer,” Saul said. “Just tap it with your wand to activate it.”

Drawing his own wand, the Unspeakable gave it a wave, and another crystal ball appeared on the stand. Turning, he walked back toward the center aisle. Marcus pocketed his prophecy while Saul glanced at a scrap of parchment again.

“You can let Ms. Greengrass know there is a prophecy for her as well,” Saul said, leading them deeper into the room.

They walked for a long time, more than halfway through the colossal room, before Saul came to a stop.

“Here we are, row ninety-seven, shelf six,” he said.

Harry counted six up from the bottom shelf and froze when he spotted a bronze plaque with his name on it.

S.P.T to A.P.W.B.D (partial S.T.S)

Dark Lord and (?)Harry Potter

“What are these initials?” Harry asked.

“The first is the person who gave the prophecy, and the second is the person it was given to,” Saul replied. “In this case, the prophecy was given by Sybill Trelawney and heard by Albus Dumbledore. In this case, the prophecy was also partially heard by Severus Snape.”

“Snape?” Harry asked incredulously.

“Indeed,” Saul said. “I didn’t mention it at the meeting, but we’ve detected several people sneaking into the Hall of Prophecies the last few days. They were all known associates of the Headmaster. We watched them for a couple of days and determined that they seemed to be standing guard. I confronted Dumbledore about this, and after he’d waffled on for a while, he admitted Voldemort is after something here. I suspect this is it.”

“Why wouldn’t he tell me?” Harry asked, staring at the glass orb.

“I’m afraid I can’t answer that,” Saul said.

Tentatively, Harry reached out and took the prophecy. It was small, fitting nicely in his palm. Holding it, a weight settled in the pit of his stomach. Swallowing thickly, he stuffed it into the pocket of his robes.

“Do you have a blank crystal ball?” he asked quietly.

Looking at him curiously, Saul held out his hand and conjured one with a twirl of his wand. Harry took it and placed it on the stand that had held his prophecy.

“Smart,” Marcus nodded.

“What do you want to do about the people standing guard?” Harry asked.

He was certain they were Order members, and he really didn’t want to see any of them get into trouble.

“I see no reason to turn down free security,” Saul smirked.

Harry nodded in relief.

“I think that’s enough for one day,” Saul continued. “When you have time, I’d like to ask some questions about what you’ve been through. The information you have might help us get a handle on the Killing Curse and how to stop it.”

Harry nodded silently, his thumb running over the smooth glass orb in his pocket distractedly.

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Sitting in his office, Harry stared at the Prophecy orb sitting on his desk. Across from him, Penny, Hermione, Daphne, and Amelia watched him closely.

“Just get it over with, Potter,” Daphne said.

“Daphne,” Hermione hissed.

“Putting it off isn’t going to change what it says,” Daphne shrugged.”

“I know,” Harry said, his eyes locked on the orb, staring at the swirling mist inside.

Reaching across the desk, Penny took his hand and gave it a squeeze.

“We’re here for you,” she said.

“There’s a good chance Voldemort wants to know what this prophecy says,” Harry said, finally looking up and staring at each of them in turn. “Just listening to this could put your life at risk.”

“I’m not going to let you face this alone,” Hermione said adamantly.

“Neither am I,” Penny agreed firmly.

“Voldemort already wants me dead,” Amelia shrugged.

Everyone turned to look at Daphne.

“I’ve already picked a side,” she said, glancing at Hermione. “Might as well go all in.”

Taking a deep breath, Harry picked up his wand. The tip trembled lightly as he tapped the orb. The mist flowed out of the top of the orb, forming an image of Professor Trelawney’s face, her eyes staring unseeingly ahead.

“The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not... and either must die at the hand of the other for

neither can live while the other survives... The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies..."

Harry blinked, the words resonating in his mind as a weight settled heavily on his shoulders.

"Well, fuck."