

## Basic Instincts

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# Basic Instincts

by [manic\\_intent](#)

## Summary

“Who are you?” Graves demanded hoarsely.

“I’m Newt. Scamander. Err. Pleased to meet you. I mean, I would’ve been pleased to meet you, under normal circumstances.”

“Scamander.” Graves frowned to himself. For someone who was supposedly in a bad rut, he seemed perfectly in control. “Your accent, it’s British. Any relation to Theseus Scamander? Head of the DMLE?”

“I’m his younger brother.”

“Are you an Auror?”

“No. I’m a magizoologist.”

Graves exhaled, exasperated. “A what? Is this a rescue or are you a hostage?”

“Sort of neither,” Newt admitted.

## Notes

Christmas is a terrible time to get fic ideas XD;;

About the A/B/O trope: \*cough\* I have to admit it’s one of my not-so-secret favourites. And there have been a few in this fandom for some reason, which is cool, though what interests me about writing about A/B/O is not just the gender politics but also the animal part of it. Readers who’ve been following me for a while would know that I don’t go for the usual tropes. So. If you’re looking for that, you’ve been warned in advance.

**Further Disclaimer:** Unfamiliar with the Potter fandom, not usually my thing, writing via wiki. Also, in this ‘verse, Nurmengard has already been built before the events of the film.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

# Chapter 1

Nurmengard was *cold*. The chill seeped up from the stone through his shoes, and Newt couldn't be sure whether it was due to magic or mere ugly circumstance. The cell that he had been pushed into was at the top of a tower, judging from the cloud banks that fed sluggishly beneath the narrow window, and like the rest of the jail, it stank of unwashed bodies and worse. It was all so terribly medieval.

The alpha chained to the wall by short lengths of links from his wrists turned in his direction, sniffing. The real Percival Graves had been blindfolded, and was wearing what looked like several months' worth of hair growth over his pale face. His silver and black hair had grown matted and lanky, and he was dressed in the torn, discoloured remains of a dress shirt and trousers, no socks or shoes. There was a chamber pot close by, though Newt couldn't see how Graves was meant to use it—maybe the chain lengthened a couple of times a day?—and dirty bedding on the floor, old rags.

Which went to show, sometimes life *was* stranger than fiction. Although it had dawned on Newt that the 'Percival Graves' he had met in the interrogation room in the Woolworth building was not quite who he claimed he was, around when they had disappeared off into some kind of fortress/dungeon... it hadn't quite occurred to Newt that foaming-at-the-mouth-crazy Evil Masterminds were actually a thing in real life.

"Who are you?" Graves demanded hoarsely.

"I'm Newt. Scamander. Err. Pleased to meet you. I mean, I would've been pleased to meet you, under normal circumstances."

"Scamander." Graves frowned to himself. For someone who was supposedly in a bad rut, he seemed perfectly in control. "Your accent, it's British. Any relation to Theseus Scamander? Head of the DMLE?"

"I'm his younger brother."

"Are you an Auror?"

"No. I'm a magizoologist."

Graves exhaled, exasperated. "A what? Is this a rescue or are you a hostage?"

"Sort of neither," Newt admitted. "Uh. I was led to believe that you were in a bad way, and. I agreed to calm you down."

"You're an omega."

"Yes?" Newt edged cautiously over to the window, peering out. He couldn't quite tell from the landscape where they were, and for a moment, his worry over his case, Tina, and Jacob

pushed him close to panic. Pressing his face as close to the window as possible without touching the stone, he breathed deeply, trying to calm himself.

“Don’t be afraid.” Graves said, misunderstanding. He rattled his chains pointedly. “It’s not like I can get at you like this, even if I wanted to.”

*Even if I wanted to.* Guiltily, that brought Newt up short. He’d forgotten to consider whether Graves might even have wanted this, when he’d agreed to the bargain. “You’re... doing rather well,” Newt said cautiously. Graves let out a harsh laugh, leaning back against the wall. “Or not?”

“Give it a day. I shouldn’t have fucked around with heat tea for four years, but it worked out fine. Without a source, Grindelwald wouldn’t be able to keep up the polyjuice pretense, and presumably Picquery would finally figure things out.”

“Four years!” Newt said, aghast, then he clenched his fists. “All right. No. You’re not going to die. If anything,” he said quickly, as Graves started to object, “it’s going to be terribly depressing for me to watch.”

“Depressing?” Graves repeated, and curled his lip. “I’m so *sorry* about that,” he said acerbically. “Stay away from me.”

He followed his words with a *push*, an alpha-only form of wandless magic. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Graves’ was stronger than most. The compulsion burned, and Newt twisted his face away, gritting his teeth. Discipline held. He breathed out, tightly, then more evenly. It wasn’t so hard. Wizards and witches weren’t the only magical beasts who knew how to push. Newt had faced down worse, from far larger creatures.

“That was terribly rude,” Newt said reproachfully, and he could see Graves stiffen in surprise.

“You’re.” Graves sniffed again. “You *are* an omega.”

“And you’re meant to be an Auror! Using a push against an omega without mutual consent’s illegal under the Statue of Secrecy.” Newt could even name the precise section, thanks to Theseus. ‘Just making sure that you’re aware of your rights’, his brother liked to say, before torturing him with quizzes. Suffrage was still young.

“I’ve never met an omega who wouldn’t just buckle before,” Graves said, still mystified.

“You did that to someone else?” Newt said stiffly.

“Only in a law enforcement capacity.” Graves took in a slow breath, then another, bowing his head. “Sorry. I’m sorry that I did that. But I don’t want your help. Wanted to... wanted to make sure that you didn’t try.”

“Well, you’re getting it,” Newt decided firmly. “Things are a mess out there and you don’t get to sit it out. I’ll help you through this, and then we’ll get out of here and get back to New York.”

“You think I’ve just been trying to ‘sit it out’?” Graves said, incredulous, and he was pushing again, because he was angry. “*Fuck you.*”

Graves was losing control. The rut was worsening. And Newt was starting to react to it, even though the stink in the cell had dampened matters. He could feel himself growing warmer, getting a little wet, his senses growing keener. Estrus. The fight or flight instinct, switched over to mating, dialled up. He removed his coat and vest, folding them in the cleanest part of the cell he could find, then he sighed, took another breath from the window, and stepped cautiously closer.

“Let me help you,” Newt said soothingly, once he was within reach.

“You said that you ‘agreed’ to this. You’re working for Grindelwald.”

“Unwillingly, I assure you. He has a case of my... ah, a case of important things and the lives of a couple of my friends in his hands.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Graves said, and actually sounded sincere. “But I don’t want to... with... for something like this, though,” he took in a harsh breath. “If it’d save your friends —”

“Shh. Calm down. We don’t need to get to that. I can still help you.”

“How?”

“It’s biologically strange that magically inclined humans get into rut,” Newt said, gingerly straddling Graves’ lap, trying not to look too hard at the dirty clothes, undoing the blindfold. “In nature, it only happens to ruminant creatures. Deer, goats, astral rams, the like. We don’t ferment our food in specialised stomachs. But structurally, our alphas still go into rut, and our omegas into estrus, a unique quirk of nature that’s oddly separate from base gender.”

Graves seemed a little thrown by the lecture, but as Newt hoped, the careful, calm tone of Newt’s voice was proving reassuring: he was getting less tense, and didn’t try to buck him off, or rub against him. The moment the blindfold came off, Graves seemed to calm down a little, his eyes widening as he looked Newt over, as though surprised by what he saw. Disappointed, maybe? Newt ignored the faint worm of doubt as he talked.

“We do still get the aggressiveness, and the sexual inclinations, and the cycles. But it’s clearly tied to our magic. Muggles are all betas. And less powerful wizards and witches tend to be betas. There are exceptions, particularly—oddly—the animagus, but the more innately powerful you are, the more likely that you’re either an alpha or an omega.”

“I know that,” Graves said, though he sounded subdued. He flinched as Newt pressed fingers to his neck, though he let himself get pulled closer, and released a shaky breath as his lips pressed against Newt’s throat.

“One of my Professors had a theory that it was tied to magic specialties. All of us have areas of magic that we’re naturally better at. And. Although it’s not a study of magic that’s proven to be rather popular, she believed that people who were particularly strong at wandless magic

were most usually alphas. While omegas tended to be very good at scrying and such,” Newt murmured, stroking Graves’ shoulders, his dirty hair, trying to calm him the way he would calm a spooked creature.

“What about you?” Graves whispered, his voice uneven. “What are you good at?”

“Care of beasts,” Newt said, with wry humour, and Graves actually managed a laugh, nuzzling Newt’s throat for a moment before he froze. Newt pretended not to notice. Or breathe in too deeply. “It made sense to me. My mother breeds hippogriffs, of which there are several subspecies, all of which have different preferences and traits, though they can all interbreed. It seemed logical to me that there might be, as it were, several subspecies of humans.”

“I can see why this was not a popular study of magic.”

“Hmm yes. It was all theoretical anyway. But either way. A *human* rut, like yours, doesn’t normally need, ah, sexual congress to wind down. Not all male deer are lucky enough to mate with female deer in estrus during a rut, nor do they die because of it. For alpha wizards and witches... heat tea tricks your body into thinking a cycle is over. But rut is a pressure valve. It can’t be put off forever. Particularly. If the alpha is very powerful. Magically.”

“I can smell you,” Graves said, a little thickly, distracted. “God. Even under... under everything. It smells so good.” His hips jerked up, rubbing up between Newt’s thighs, and Newt had to bite down on his lip to stifle his own moan. “Sorry,” Graves gasped.

“No. That’s all right.” Newt said, though it took all his self-control to project calm, to keep his breathing even. Graves was syncing to it, instinctively. They were breathing together. “My theory is, what we’re going through right now—rut and estrus—isn’t actually tied to reproduction at all, but to magic. That’s why it makes no real evolutionary sense, the same way that magical creatures don’t always make any evolutionary sense. Magic is the spanner in Mother Nature’s work.”

“Have you... I think I know what you’re trying to do,” Graves mumbled. “If it’s a pressure valve, and there are different strains of magic. Ending rut or estrus is a matter of... ngh... melding magic, isn’t it? Forging a connection?”

“The temporary heat bond, yes,” Newt said encouragingly. “That’s impressive. You’re making a logical leap even in the... circumstances.”

“Not that far gone yet,” Graves grit out. His hands were clenched tight in his chains as he started to tense up, but Newt rubbed his back in slow circles until their breathing synced again. “Have you done this before?”

“No,” Newt said, chuckling wryly. “Alphas are rare. And most of you people get mated early. Also, I do a lot of travelling.” Graves had an omega somewhere, perhaps. Was that why he had been so resistant at first? Newt offered whoever it was a silent apology, doing his best to tamp down on his instinctive envy.

“You seem like you have.” Graves relaxed further, his voice going slurred. He was pushing again now, and Newt didn't evade it this time, meeting it instead, allowing a heat bond to take seed. “You're pretty. So pretty. I thought I was dreaming.”

That was the heat bond was talking now, though Newt couldn't help but flush a little, pleased. “If I can calm a mantled Erumpent down by simulating a courtship ritual, I can calm down a member of my own species. But I'm going to need you to trust me,” he said carefully, as confidently as he could.

“I don't know you.” Graves was trying to resist the bond instinctively, but thankfully, only briefly. “Yes. I trust you.”

“Good.” Newt reared back, grimacing at the distressed sound that Graves made. Quickly, he leaned their foreheads together, murmuring gentle, nonsense words until Graves calmed down again, and his eyes closed.

“I really need to be inside you,” Graves growled, and the push was harder this time, fed by the bond, but Newt was waiting for the wash of it, this rush of old magic, older than wands; with the bond in place, he reached for it, drinking it in, arousal spiking in his blood.

“Will you do what I want?” Newt whispered, for this was what nature had taught him. The male of the species, the alphas, might preen and posture, but it was the fairer sex that set them to dancing and fighting for their amusement.

Graves shuddered, his breathing hitching. “Yes. Please. I'll take care of you, I'll... what do you want? Tell me. I'll do it.”

His trousers were probably ruined now, and distantly, Newt could hear his breathing hitching into little moans. He bit down on his lower lip, hard, until he could taste blood in his mouth, hear Graves sniff the air and make a sound of distress—*omega wounded!*—then he rode the connection, the way he had before to soothe and calm creatures, and fed it back.

“Sleep,” Newt commanded, and pressed his palm over Graves' face. The body beneath him locked up, with a startled gasp, then Graves sank back against the wall, limp.

Satisfied, but breathing hard and drained to the bone, Newt sat back, grimacing at the tacky feeling of his clothes. He tried to get up to the window for some air, but Graves stirred the moment Newt shifted, with a low sound, frowning in his sleep. With a sigh, Newt settled back down, unbuttoning Graves' shirt, checking for wounds. His pale skin was green and purple with bruises over his chest, nothing severe, though the muscle mass was wasting, ribs starting to show. Swallowing anger, Newt buttoned the shirt back up and leaned down, resting his cheek against Graves' shoulder, trying to get as comfortable as he could. This was going to be hell on his knees.

#

Graves woke up with a violent flinch and a gasp, toppling Newt off onto his flank. Scrambling up, wincing at the ache in his knees, Newt studied Graves quickly. Clear eyes.

That was good. “Worst of the rut’s passed,” Newt said, getting to his feet and grimacing, rubbing his knees, prickling and numb. “For now.”

“You’ve just prolonged the inevitable,” Graves said pointedly. “Grindelwald will be back. He’ll put you in a cell like this one. Chain you to the—” Graves cut himself off, turning his face away as though anguished by the very thought. The heat bond was still in place.

“He won’t.” Newt said, with forceful cheer, rubbing until sensation returned to his knees. “This isn’t actually my first time being thrown into a dungeon.”

“Really? The life of a magizoologist must be more exciting than I thought.”

“You’d be surprised.” Newt padded over to his coat. “Pickett? Pickett, wake up.”

The Bowtruckle peered cautiously out of his pocket, and climbed out, green limbs stretching. It waited as Newt pulled on his vest and coat, then climbed up to his shoulder. “That’s a Bowtruckle,” Graves said, to Newt’s surprise. “You had it in your pocket all this time?”

“You know what it is?”

“I’m the Director of Magical *Security*,” Graves said, annoyed. “And that’s an all-purpose lockpick on your shoulder.”

“Pickett is a friend,” Newt said, growing irritated himself, though whether it was feedback from the sync, he couldn’t quite tell.

“Well? Open these up,” Graves rattled his chains pointedly.

“Please.”

“What?”

“Open these up, please,” Newt said pointedly. “Or are you normally this impolite when asking someone for a favour?”

Graves glowered at him, but when Newt held his stare, he dropped his eyes, shuddering. “Fine. Sorry. Please. Get me out of these.”

“Better.” Newt lowered his hand, nodding at Pickett, though the Bowtruckle had to be coaxed down to work. At least Graves kept still through it all, and afterwards, when Newt stepped back, nudging Pickett back on his shoulder, Graves rubbed his wrists, then his shoulder, frowning to himself.

Then he abruptly surged to his feet, and before Newt could blink, had the fingers of one hand around Newt’s throat. “*Don’t* put me to sleep like that again,” Graves grit out, though he didn’t push, and although his grip was firm, it was carefully light. Newt fought against his instinctive urge to twist free, and frowned at Graves instead, keeping eye contact, the way he would with an errant creature.

“Let me go.” When Graves glared, and didn’t move, Newt lied, “You’re hurting me.”

Graves dropped his hand as though scalded, looking sick: his own nature was punishing him. “Sorry,” he mumbled, though aggression was starting to bleed off him in waves. The stay of the rut was only temporary.

“Normally,” Newt said, as gently as he could, “I’d recommend waiting out your rut before trying to escape. But my friends are depending on me, and you’re out of immediate danger. I’m going to need you to trust me—and listen to me—if we’re both going to get out of here.”

“Nobody breaks out of Nurmengard.”

“I’m going to try. You can stay in here if you want,” Newt shot back, and got to the cell door. It wasn’t enchanted, thankfully, and as he peered out of the small grate at the top, he couldn’t see any guards, only an empty, dim corridor that wound away to a flight of stairs, set against the curved wall. He let Pickett out through the grate, waiting, until there was a little click at the door from waist level. Setting his hand against the grate, Newt pulled, and the door swung open.

“Well done,” Newt whispered to Pickett, which looked pleased, and allowed itself tucked into his pocket. He turned at the open door, to find Graves still standing indecisively by the wall. “Coming?”

“Do you actually know a way out of here?” There was something brittle about the question, desperation stretched thin over ingrained hopelessness. Graves had been here for weeks, probably months. Alone with nothing but his thoughts, save for the occasional polyjuice extraction, and judging from the mottled bruises, the occasional beating. Prolonged isolation was itself a most brutal form of torture. Newt had seen it before, in the creatures he rescued, shut into small cages that broke once proud beasts into drab shadows, waiting for death.

Forcing himself to walk back into the cell was difficult. Graves flinched back as Newt got close, though he shivered as Newt stroked his cheek, and was pliant enough as Newt pulled him down. Graves breathed deeply against Newt’s neck, scenting him, and with his palm pressed to Graves’ throat, Newt kept his own breathing even. Slow. They synced, though Graves fought it for a moment, his hand clenching and unclenching from a fist on the small of Newt’s back.

“I’m going to get us out of here,” Newt promised, trying to stay calm. “But you’re going to have to trust me. And I’m going to have to be able to trust *you*.”

There was a long, uneven pause, then Graves let out a low, strangled sound, as though his concession was being forced out of him. “All right. All right.”

It was going to be a big ask: Graves clearly wasn’t used to following orders, and Newt couldn’t be sure what solitary confinement had done to Graves’ state of mind. But the lives of Newt’s creatures and friends were at stake. He had to get out of here, and trust the heat bond to keep Graves under control—for all their sakes. “Come on, then,” Newt said encouragingly, backing slowly away to the door, and this time, Graves followed.

## Chapter 2

They took the two wardens in the guardroom on the floor under Graves' cell by surprise. Newt grimaced as he swung at the one closest to him, by a desk, but the stout man shrugged off the punch, grabbing Newt by his coat and slamming him back against the wall. Thankfully, Newt had grown up with *two* Aurors: his father and brother—and old lessons bubbled to the fore. He kned the warden in the stomach, twisting free even as the man yelped and doubled over. Beyond, there was a snarl, and a crash. Graves had slapped the other warden across the room with a surge of pure force, bouncing him like a doll against the wall, then he pounced on the warden Newt had been grappling with.

The warden's head cracked against the stone floor, and his eyes rolled up, going still. Teeth bared, Graves hit him hard on the jaw anyway, his fist clenched so tightly that his knuckles were white, and Newt scrambled over before the second blow fell, grabbing for his wrist.

"Hey. They're both out. Don't overextend yourself. You're still weakened."

Graves glared at him, his eyes wild for a moment, then he shut his eyes, breathing hard. He shoved Newt roughly back when Newt tried to lean in closer, to sync up, then he started searching the warden's clothes. "Ash wand," he muttered. "Can you use that?"

"Pretty close to mine." Wordlessly, Graves handed it over. The wand sat uneasily in Newt's grip. It wasn't *his*, similar as it looked.

Graves searched the other body as Newt glanced around the guardroom. Playing cards had been left on the table, as well as the half-eaten remnants of bread and a roasted chicken. Outside, the sky was going gray. How long did they have before Grindelwald returned?

"Another fucking ash wand," Graves grumbled, though he took it anyway, and as an afterthought, started removing the warden's black coat, shoes and socks to put them on. Newt looked away, searching hopefully through the lockers. Nothing. Graves swore. Newt glanced over, just in time to see Graves try and fail to cast something on himself. "This isn't going to work for me." Graves tossed the wand angrily across the room. "Fuck!"

"Let me try," Newt said soothingly. The wand felt like it was twisting in his hand, but it grudgingly managed a cleaning spell on the both of them, and even a light healing spell on Graves. Graves nodded curtly, taking a step towards the table, his stare fixed on the food, and Newt said quickly, "What have they been feeding you all this time?"

"Water. Bread, gruel. Why?"

"If you eat rich food right now, you're going to regret it later." This got him a glare, but Graves grudgingly drank just the water, and took the bread. Then he paused, frowning, and offered it to Newt, who shook his head, shuffling through the papers on the desk.

"What are you looking for?"

“A schedule. If this place is like the others that I’ve been in, there’d be some sort of system of communication. Often, it’s in writing, so there’s no misunderstandings. Standing orders, notes about new prisoners.”

“What for?”

“I need to know whether my case and my friends are here.”

“I was taken past a general floor on my way up here,” Graves said, in between choking down the bread. “If your friends are in Nurmengard, they’d be there. Still. We took these two by surprise, but we don’t have our personal wands, and the alarm will be raised sooner or later. We’re going to get caught.”

“You’re an immensely optimistic person, I see.” Newt gave up on the desk, patting down the first warden, and found what he was looking for in the inner pocket of his robe. “Here. See that. ‘Check on Tower in 48 hours. Send urgent update to NYC. Regardless of outcome, dispose of omega.’” Newt caught hold of Graves’ elbow quickly as he stiffened and turned towards the guard’s body. ““Case has been locked in the Viewing Room, pending further investigation. Do not open without authorisation.””

“Nothing about your friends. Not a good sign.” Graves raised his hands in mock surrender when Newt glared at him. “Just stating facts.”

“Well, keep those to yourself. Where’s this Viewing Room?”

“I’ve no idea.”

“Fine. We’ll get to the general floor. See if my friends are there. Then figure things out after.”

“Outstanding,” Graves said acidly. He seemed to have settled on a reckless mood. “By the way, there might’ve been only two guards up here, but there were many more on the general floor and beyond. Grindelwald’s been building up a private army. And we still can’t apparate out of here.”

“How do you know that?”

“MACUSA tried to attack Nurmengard before. I was in the strike team.”

“That was then,” Newt said, forcing patience, as he took a second look around the guard room. “Polyjuice needs a refresher fairly regularly. This place doesn’t look remotely close to New York, which means to keep up daily pretenses, Grindelwald probably has to apparate here regularly. Which means. The apparition block on this place probably has a timed drop, or something similar.” When Graves blinked at him, Newt tried not to sigh. “I’ve told you. I’ve been in dungeons before. Now. Here’s another tip. Where do you think this food and water and such came from?”

“Kitchens? Somewhere below?”

“Up and down all those stairs? Each day?”

Graves started to reply, then he also took a slow look around the guard room. “There’s a dumbwaiter. Somewhere.”

“It’d be near this table, because people are lazy.” Newt opened an innocuous-looking cabinet, recessed into the stone wall closest to the table. Within it was a dark space, hung with two cables, a long drop. Newt waved at it with a courtier’s flourish, gleaned from fragments of his childhood, and Graves smiled, ruefully.

“Someday I’d like to hear about your other dungeon escapes.” Graves climbed in first, before Newt could argue. He seemed competent with the climb, at least, easing himself down the narrow column.

“Maybe if you asked nicely. I presume that’s not actually beyond you.” Newt’s stolen wand managed a Lumos spell, casting sharp shadows and bands of harsh light down the shaft as Newt climbed in and pulled the hatch closed behind them.

Graves chuckled, which was possibly some sort of apology, inept as it was. They made their way carefully down into the dark. The air smelled musty, and with each inch Newt imagined the cables starting to twist and pull, hauling the dumbwaiter back up, dislodging them from their precarious perch. The cables hurt his hands, and the strain of climbing hauled painfully at his shoulders and arms, but Newt endured it with gritted teeth. His creatures. He had to find his case.

And Tina and Jacob, of course.

He just wasn’t that used to rescuing *people*. It was a novel concept. The matter of the Sudanese Obscurial had been different.

“All right down there?” Newt whispered, just to take his mind off his worry.

“This is going to be an interesting way to die.” Graves’ dour reply drifted back up. In the dark, Newt resisted slapping a hand over his face, and bit down his retort, concentrating on climbing. He could be calm. In his experience, getting frustrated never helped anyone, whether it was with creatures or with people.

Just as Newt’s arms felt like he couldn’t quite hang on for that much longer, Graves whispered, “We’ve reached another floor. I think it’s the general sector.”

“All right. It’d open to a guard room, probably so—”

“I know what to do.” Graves cut in. The aggression again. In the dark, Newt swallowed his sigh, forcing calm. Below, Graves was grumbling inaudibly as he tried to haul the dumbwaiter hatch open. It took several tries, the cables creaking ominously all the while, Newt imagining wardens hauling open the hatch, the alarm being raised, worse—

Then a bar of light pulled open into the shaft, and Graves was through. Hastily, Newt dismissed the Lumos charm, shimmied down the cable, ducking out into the light. The fight had already gotten started. Graves was crouched over a warden whose head he had bounced off the wall, judging from the blood smear, and the warden beyond was backpedaling, wand

raised. Hastily, Newt cast a Full-Body Bind, hoping that the wand would obey. It bucked in his grip, but the spell caught, and the warden twisted up, falling over sideways, fetching himself a sharp thump against a desk. Newt winced.

“Not bad,” Graves said grudgingly, as they took the wardens’ keys and hid the bodies in a storage closet at the back. Newt managed not to look pleased at the scant praise. The heat bond might be necessary for now, but given how much of a royal pain in the arse Graves was turning out to be even under the bond, Newt couldn’t quite imagine what he would be like *without* it. ‘Unbearable’ would probably be an understatement.

Typical.

This guard room was much larger than the one above, and sat as a junction point between corridors that ended in vault doors. Heavy steel doors with barred grates separated the guard room from the corridors, lockable only from the inside. Newt peered out from one grate, then the other. Grindelwald had actually bothered to invest in basic wayfinding: above one door was carved ‘SECTOR 1’, while the other, ‘SECTOR 2’.

“That is actually,” Newt said slowly, “*completely* unhelpful. What is wrong with people?”

“Here,” Graves called, to his right. Set into the long workbench that lined the wall connecting the two doors were rows of scrying mirrors, six by three, each the size of a palm. Each had a permanent view of some section of the fortress, the viewpoint flickering away every ten seconds. The kitchens. Some armoury. Another guardroom somewhere.

Graves was pointing at a view set in a corner of a large chamber, a cell block with rows of cells. The corridor in between was wide and tall, made to accommodate the huge, armoured golem pacing heavily up and down, a huge, beetle-like suit of black armour that stood twice as tall as a man. Newt peered closer at the cells. Some seemed to contain occupants, also chained to wall and unmoving. The viewpoint flickered, following the golem from set scrying points, and Newt let it cycle twice.

“Well?” Graves said gruffly.

“They’re not there.” Newt paused. “What happens to people whom MACUSA arrests?”

“There are cells under the Woolworth building. Why?”

Maybe Tina and Jacob weren’t here. Newt relaxed. It *would* have been rather weird for Grindelwald to apparate here with just Newt, then make a return trip to bring in two people of no immediate use to him. Tina was an alpha, after all, and Jacob had no magic. “What about a muggle arrest?”

“A No-Maj? They get obliterated and returned to the public.” Graves frowned at him. “What the hell happened? Who are your friends?”

“They’re people I met here. One of them seemed to be an ex-Auror, Tina Goldstein. The other’s a muggle who got caught up in the situation.”

“*Ex-Auror*?” Graves repeated, puzzled, then he shook his head. “Maybe Grindelwald is purging the ranks. She’s an excellent Auror, if a bit inflexible. Did Tina find out about him? Is that why she’s in trouble?”

“Well,” Newt hedged, torn between loyalty and the truth. “Not really? It’s very complicated. Can the explanation wait for a less fraught time?” When Graves wavered, suspicious again, Newt sighed and reached for his arm, only for Graves to step quickly out of reach.

“Stop doing that,” Graves said flatly.

“I need you to be calm.”

“I don’t like you using this,” Graves gestured vaguely between them, “to make me do things.”

“And what exactly did you think the result of using an alpha ‘push’ on me would be?” Newt said, folding his arms.

“It didn’t work. Also. I said that I was sorry. And it was for your own good.” Graves grimaced when Newt raised an eyebrow, the irony of his words belatedly catching up with him. “Do you want me to apologise again?” he growled, annoyed.

“No. I need you to be calm. If you can manage that by yourself, fine. I won’t touch you.” Newt pointedly looked back at the scrying windows, trying not to feel hypersensitive about Graves’ presence, the uncomfortable way Graves kept fighting the bond. It gave Newt a sour feeling, like the edge of nausea. Taking in deep breaths, he tried to study the flickering pictures. There were golems on other floors as well, supplementing the staff, though none as big as the one on the jail floor.

“Sorry,” Graves said finally, gruffly.

“Stop saying things that you don’t mean,” Newt snapped, before he could help himself, then he grit his teeth. Calm. He could be calm. One person in this bond had to be the anchor. “Right,” he said, in a more controlled tone. “My case is here, we know that much. It’s a travelling case. Brown. About this big.” He measured space with his hands.

“Why do you need your case? What’s inside it?” When Newt was silent, Graves said flatly, “I think you said something about trust. When we were still in the cell.”

“I do recall someone trying to strangle me,” Newt retorted, just to watch Graves blanch and look away. Guilt fed in quickly. Neither of them could really help their circumstances, after all. “My apologies,” he said, in as careful a tone as he could manage. “I am, as I’ve told you, a magizoologist. More accurately, I’m a conservationist. My case contains a number of creatures that I’ve been working to reintroduce to the wild, many of them survivors of poaching or trafficking. Several of them need daily medical care. Most of them need regular feeding. Do you understand my concern?”

“We’re going to sneak around *Nurmengard*, risking capture, for a case full of *animals*?” Graves said, incredulous.

So much for guilt. He should have expected this. Stung, Newt drew back. “You don’t have to help me. I’ll do it myself.”

“What about the people in those cells?”

“I can’t deal with that golem without my wand. Besides, if they’re long-term guests of Grindelwald, sadly, I think they’re going to need a rather larger rescue effort than just the both of us, one with dedicated healers. But if you want to rescue them, fine.”

“...Look,” Graves said, more reasonably. “Presumably, you can apparate. Even with that wand. We’ll risk splinching, but at least splinching can be healed. Once the block comes down, if you get us out of here, we can return with a complement of—”

“No.”

“You’re being difficult,” Graves said, narrowing his eyes, *pushing* as he advanced. Newt shed the compulsion with conscious effort as he backed off, raising his wand in warning, and that brought Graves up short, blinking owlishly.

“You people attacked Nurmengard before, to no avail,” Newt reminded him grimly. “I’m getting my case. If you want to get out with me, then come. If you want to find your own way out, then go. But if you try and compel me again, I’m going to put a silencing spell on you.”

“I need to get us both to safety,” Graves said, though he rubbed his hand slowly over his face, his free hand curling and uncurling into a fist. Ah. Instinct again. It was the bond, making Graves protective, as much as he clearly didn’t really want to be. Maybe therein lay the conflict. Newt relaxed. He could deal with that.

“You are. This room right now is safe. Thanks to you, remember?”

“I’m not the one who cast the full bind,” Graves said, though some of the tension seemed to leave him, and he seemed slightly calmer as he looked back at the mirrors. “There’s a logic to this,” he said finally. “Look, that’s the tower. At the top left. Then the general floor, the guard room. It’s going by levels.”

“Makes sense.”

“When Grindelwald took you here... where did he apparate to? Maybe that part of the building isn’t under a block. That’d take less effort than taking down and renewing an apparition block daily.”

“I’m not sure. I wasn’t conscious at that point. When I woke up, I was on the stairs with the wardens, being frogmarched up to your cell... Here. The other mirrors keep changing, with different sections of the floor that they’re set to. But this one’s fixed on a balcony.”

“Four floors down, I think. Look at the angle of the skyline compared to the upper floors. Let’s go.”

“Not without my case.”

“Is it worth both our lives?”

“Not. Without. *My case*,” Newt said evenly. Graves bared his teeth, clenching his fists tightly, then he sighed loudly.

“Fine! Fuck. All right. There’s. Probably a place in here like a vault, a treasure room of some sort. I’ve fought dark wizards like Grindelwald before. They’re all goddamned birds of a feather. Let them get away with too much and they build a fucking... fuck-off tower in the middle of nowhere with a dungeon and a treasure room, Christ. That’s the problem with people who get consumed by their own magical power. They start losing their fucking grip on reality.” Graves glared at the mirrors. “Chances are, the treasure-room’s either at the top of a tower or at the very lowest floor. Dark wizards always think they’re so fucking clever. What?” he growled, when Newt blinked at him.

“All right, well,” Newt said hastily. “*You* were at the top of the tower. So. If we follow that logic, then. We go to the basement?”

“Yes. No. Wait. Look at this. Other than the skyline from the tower, the windows of the others are angled regularly against the mountain range beyond. Nurmengard’s levels have regular heights.”

“Makes sense.”

“But we’re missing a floor. Between here and here.” Graves pointed between two mirrors. “That’s two floors beneath this one. So either there’s an empty floor, for no reason, or there’s something in there that Grindelwald doesn’t want his subordinates to see.”

“Private chambers?”

“A whole floor?” Graves shrugged. “Possible. But I doubt it. Nurmengard wasn’t built to be lavish. We’ve been tracking Grindelwald for years. He’s not given to luxuries.”

“All right.” It was on the way down anyway. “Great work,” Newt said warmly. “I wouldn’t have noticed that kind of fine detail. Thanks.”

Graves glanced away, frowning. “I’m already doing what you want,” he said curtly. “So stop that.”

“I wasn’t trying to...” Newt trailed off when Graves started to tense up. “Fine,” he said, neutrally. “Let’s. Head down now, then.”

# Chapter 3

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Thankfully, the dumbwaiter *did* open up into the hidden floor. They were in a large chamber, bisected by the occasional pillar. Near the hatch they had climbed out from was a wooden table, partly piled over with leather-bound books. Rows of bookshelves were set into the walls, lined thickly with books, and the air smelled stale, of old parchment. There were other glass cases on display on the floor, holding various artefacts: a floating cloak, a blade, strange floating metal spheres, a mask. There was an unmade cot against the wall, and a wardrobe of clothes, and a door that presumably led to an ensuite bathroom. The room was lit with magelight charms, set into the walls and ceiling.

Grindelwald's private chambers. Graves started to walk forward, but Newt grabbed his wrist. "Wait. Look at the floor," Newt whispered. "That slab you were about to step on. It's of a slightly different colour from the others. This is a nightingale floor." At Graves' blank look, Newt explained, "A trapped floor. Probably sounds an alarm, if you step on the wrong pressure plate. So. Watch your feet."

"You *do* lead an interesting life," Graves said, again with that grudging praise.

"People who like poaching and collecting magical beasts for their own pleasure tend to all be a certain kind of bastard," Newt told him. "You should track that. Since you're the Director of Magical Security."

"Remind me about it when we get out of here." Gingerly, Graves stepped onto another slab, then he came to a stop. "Maybe you should lead."

"Are you sure?" Newt said dryly. "An omega leading the way?"

Graves glowered at him. "I don't have anything against omegas. I voted in favour of MACUSA adopting the Younder Amendment to the Statute. I'm just concerned that I'm placing my life in the hands of someone whose priority in life seems to be a box of animals."

"If you hadn't," Newt reminded him bitingly, "you'd still be in your cell."

Graves grimaced. "I concede that."

"Besides. A life's a life. And on the whole, to be honest, I've met rather more animals that I've liked, magical or otherwise, than people whom I've found tolerable." Newt picked his way carefully around the table, testing his weight on slabs before stepping down.

Graves laughed, startled, then he tried to cover it with a cough. "All right, you've got me there as well."

“That kind of attitude is precisely why we’re bleeding our world to death. Not just the muggles. Magical creatures might not make any evolutionary sense, but their presence isn’t random. By destroying creatures, magical or otherwise, and their habitats, we’re sawing away the very branch—careful, that slab’s rigged—on which we sit.”

“You don’t need to keep lecturing me. I’m calm.”

“I’m not lecturing you. I’m making conversation.”

“Unbelievable.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

Graves started to answer, then paused. “There’s a photograph of Albus Dumbledore here. Interesting.”

Newt turned. Graves was by the workbench closer to the cot, which had an inkwell, several unopened letters, and an old copy of the Daily Prophet. Graves was setting down one framed image and picking up another, where a young Albus, a boy and a girl grinned out at the world, all dressed in Hogwarts uniforms. “That’s the Dumbledore siblings,” Newt said quietly. “A brother and a sister.”

“I’ve heard that Dumbledore and Grindelwald were once friends. I didn’t realize that they were this close.”

Newt started to correct Graves, then he swallowed the words. “It was a long time ago,” he said instead. “Come on. There’s nothing for us in here.”

“This would all be valuable evidence,” Graves disagreed, though he set down the other frame. “You’re right. We don’t have the time.”

They crossed the room to the exit, an oak door set into the wall. Newt opened it, as quietly and as slowly as he could, peering out, wary of trip wires. He was looking out into the centre of a narrow corridor, one end leading to a stairwell, one to a balcony. A very large vault door was inset into the wall in the opposite side of the corridor, locked shut.

Graves wandered over to the balcony even as Newt urged Pickett out of his pocket, inspecting the vault. “The balcony that’s fixed in the scrying mirror,” Graves said, peering out. “I can see it from here. It’s a bit of a jump,” he added doubtfully.

“Is it empty?”

“Yes.”

“No sound of an alarm either. We still have time.” Pickett had crawled neatly into a slot in the vault door, fiddling with tumblers. Faint clicks could be heard from where Newt bent against the keyhole.

“That’s useful.” Newt tried not to flinch: he hadn’t noticed Graves walk soundlessly over to his side.

“He’s a friend,” Newt said defensively.

“Friends can be useful.” Graves retorted, though his lip curled, whether in a sneer or in amusement, Newt could tell from the gray light of the balcony. “I didn’t know they could pick *vault* doors. Small wonder Gnarlack’s been dying to get his hands on one.”

“Yes. I’ve had a run in with Gnarlack.”

“Unpleasant, I presume.”

“A friend of mine punched him out,” Newt admitted, then belatedly remembered that he was talking to an Auror. “It was necessary at the time!”

“Oh, I have no doubt.” Graves chuckled. “I’ll buy your friend a drink when we’re out of here.”

“He’s the muggle friend in question,” Newt admitted. “In Grindelwald’s custody.”

“We’ll rescue him first before I buy him that drink, then. What? I’ve got nothing against No-Majs.”

“MACUSA has a strange attitude to them, given Ilvermorny was partly founded by one.”

Graves shrugged. “And the ones I’ve met have tended to be decent people, at least to me. I don’t make the laws. And they won’t change under Picquery’s tenure. She has no love for many of them, and for good reason. They have strange and often violent prejudices against people with dark skin. Against women. She doesn’t want their prejudices to contaminate our society.”

“Fighting prejudice with prejudice?” Newt said neutrally.

“It’s a theoretical issue to us. We’re both male, and white. Top of the No-Maj societal food chain. It’s not at all a theoretical matter to her, or to more than half of the members of Congress for one reason or another,” Graves said dismissively. “You can’t condense social issues down to simple factors.”

“You’re right,” Newt decided, abashed. “I didn’t think of it that way. It’s different in Europe, but not that different.”

The final tumbler clicked in place, and Pickett emerged, looking pleased with itself. Newt tucked the Bowtruckle away in his pocket, even as Graves started to turn the spoked handle, hidden gears grinding and locking together, until the handle caught, and the door could be pulled ajar on oiled hinges.

The chamber within was dimly lit from narrow windows, and the stink was familiar, of the waste of some great animal, left unattended, fresh and old. Something stirred in the gloom in the corner, and there was the sound of a great chain, dragging against stone, and a warm, low huff.

Graves grabbed Newt's elbow tightly before he could step into the chamber. "Sounds like there's a really big animal in there," Graves whispered.

"Amazing," Newt shook off Graves' grip. "I can't imagine how I might've missed that."

"My point is," Graves grit out, "it's probably a guard animal. You don't have your usual wand."

"... I know you're worried about me," Newt said, swallowing his instinctive response. "But this really is what I do for a living. So. Stay out here. And whatever you do, *don't* attack it."

Newt stepped into the chamber without waiting for Graves to respond. Whatever it was huffed again, and the sound serrated into a low, warning growl, drifting up. The creature was getting to its feet. Some sort of large predator, catlike, judging from its soft tread, the great sniffs at the air, as though from a huge set of bellows. Newt took a step closer, hunched down to make himself look smaller, squinting into the dark, then he let out a soft gasp as the creature padded into one of the gray shafts of light from a window.

"That's a... really fucking big... cat?" Graves whispered from the door.

"Shut up." Newt hissed back. "And stay where you are." The creature did vaguely resemble a cat, in the shape of its powerful haunches and claws, its furred bronzed sides, but there the resemblance ended. Its tail crested over its back in a thick furl, and slate-like gray armoured plates fed up along its paws to the joints, like greaves. Standing tall, Newt would have barely come up to its shoulder. Its flashing eyes seemed to burn with pale fire as they caught the light, set over parted, powerful jaws with curved teeth and sharp tusks. A long, thick black and tawny mane grew in rich waves behind its jowls, bedraggled and knotted with neglect, under which whorled horns curved outwards, stout and sharp and intricate, like stone carvings.

Newt hesitated, blinking in surprise. "I've actually never met one of these before."

"So are we leaving?" Graves asked hopefully from the door.

"I thought they were extinct."

"*You're* going to be extinct soon if you go near it. What is it?"

"It's a *fúshī*. A guardian lion. They're native to China and Tibet. They're meant to bring luck."

The guardian lion growled, shaking the ground. "I really rather doubt that," Graves said faintly. "Come back here. Please."

The plaintive note to Graves' voice nearly gave Newt pause. "I know what I'm doing." Newt tried to assure him. "It's a guardian creature. But it's chained here, even though it's an enclosed room. That means Grindelwald himself doesn't trust it. And that means there's a way to get around it to that door behind it."

“Newt!” Graves hissed, as Newt started to approach, warily, racking his mind on the few details he remembered. Guardian lions liked mountains. Befriended, they could be persuaded to guard temples and fastnesses, which was why they’d gone extinct. It was the same story. Demand outstripped supply and neglect had done the rest: not just for live specimens, but for their horns and tusks. He’d been shown a little collection of sculptures once, in Tibet. In most of them—

“I’m going to turn it away from you,” Newt said quietly. “I need you to tell me whether it’s male or female.”

There was an incredulous laugh from the door, but thankfully, no objection. Newt startled to circle around, hugging the wall, and the guardian lion strode closer, sniffing. It was hungry, drooling on the ground, but more curious than hungry. Thankfully it didn’t look like it saw humans as food. That made things slightly less complicated. The lion turned with him as Newt reached the first window, shaking its great head. Its hollow horns sang, a high-pitched, sweet tuning-fork hum, and began to glow a pale jade green, a ringing warning.

“I can’t believe I’m doing this, but it’s most definitely a male lion,” Graves hissed from the door. “Now what?”

“Now we hope for the best.” Newt slowly drew his stolen wand from his coat. The guardian lion crouched low, growling, louder this time.

“Newt!”

“Stay there!” The wand shuddered in his grasp, and refused to work the first time. Newt shook it, as the lion prepared to pounce, sucking in a slow breath. Animals could smell fear. He stared the guardian lion in the eyes, and it bared its teeth, huffing, but didn’t leap. “Shh,” Newt told it softly. “Shh. I know you’re hungry. I know you shouldn’t be here.” It shook its great head, snorting, pacing again, to the left, to the right. It was trying to decide whether to attack, but for now, Newt didn’t seem like prey.

The second attempt worked. The wand spun a large globe of light, and Newt sent it across the stone floor, away from him. The lion tensed, then it reached out with one great paw, batting at the globe. Its claws glowed jade green, for a moment, then the light wove into threads, twisting organically together, until it was a ball, knee-high, a whorled sphere. The lion batted it into the air, then snapped its jaws over it. There was a sound like a tuning fork being struck, then the lion crunched down the sphere, snapping out shards from the air, lightning quick. The jade glow of its horns grew darker. Newt fed it another ball, then another, until the guardian lion sat on its haunches, apparently content.

Newt walked slowly towards the door, and the lion started to wash its paw, ignoring him. “It’s probably safe now,” Newt called over to the door. “He was just hungry.”

“You don’t say.” Graves took a cautious step in, giving the lion a large berth until he got to Newt’s side. “That was incredible. One of the bravest things I’ve seen.”

“I do this for a living,” Newt reminded him, glad that the dim light hid his pleased flush. “Now for my case.”

The Viewing Room was a wizard's lab. Potion cabinets and a stained workbench occupied most of the chamber. Something was brewing over a heat charm over part of the bench, and judging from the materials set neatly in glass jars beside it, it was fairly obvious what it was. Polyjuice. Graves grabbed the jar of human hair, heading purposefully for the nearest window, and Newt left him to it. There were rolls of film on another workbench, along with an open notebook, and a photograph. With an ugly start, Newt recognised the Sudanese town, where he'd tried to save the Obscurial child. There were other photographs. A Japanese village. A Mongolian tent, with a blank-eyed boy, standing before it.

Newt pushed the photographs aside, flipping through the notebook. There was a sketch of a girl child in pigtails, inserted between the pages, and further in, an animated photograph of a young man with an intense stare and a severe bowl cut. No visible script: the book was encrypted, probably keyed to a hidden command. Newt shoved the photographs and the rest of the documents on the workbench into the notebook and picked it up.

Graves was pouring the brewing potion down a sink. Then he smashed the flask and other vials in the sink, and ran water over the mess until all of it was gone, tense, his hands clenched tight. "Are you all right?" Newt asked carefully.

"I'd feel better once I get my hands on that bastard."

"This might help." Newt passed the notebook over, then picked his way past a stack of books and boxes.

He found his case bound with twine, locked in some sort of isolation room at the far end of the chamber. Pickett took care of the lock, and Newt let out a sigh of relief, undoing the knots.

"What are you doing?" Graves asked from the door.

"Checking on my creatures."

"Are you crazy? We don't have the time. Let's go."

"Two minutes. You can watch the door. Or better, search the room. Maybe my actual wand is around here somewhere." Newt doubted that—it had been confiscated in the Woolworth building.

"Newt!" Graves hissed, exasperated, but Newt was already opening his case, hurrying down the ladder.

Graves was openly pissed off when Newt returned and closed his case. "No real damage," Newt said, with relief.

"I'm *so* glad. Can we go? Now? Your wand isn't here, by the way," Graves said acidly. "As you probably guessed."

“Thanks for looking for it,” Newt said, just as insincerely. “Also, there’s one more thing I need to do.”

“What now?” Graves growled, then he flinched as Newt passed him the case. “Oh no. Don’t tell me.”

“Hold on to that very carefully please.”

Outside, the guardian lion was settling down to rest. It got back on its feet when Newt started approaching it, snorting, curious now, no longer hungry. It ignored the first ball of light that Newt sent its way, but spun the second into a whorled sphere, tapping at it with a paw. When Newt took another step closer, it crouched, with a low, growl that made the floor tremble again.

“Shh, shh.” Newt whispered, reaching out. “I’m here to help.” An alpha creature. He could feel its alien push, as he got closer, threaded into its growl, amped to warn and scare. He fed back calm, reassurance, keeping eye contact, his hands up. The lion snorted again as Newt took another step, flinching, but it allowed him to take the next, though its growl throbbed louder. “I’m here to help. Let me help,” Newt said, more softly. One step. Another.

He didn’t see the blow coming—the lion was that quick. One moment Newt was on his feet; in the other he was being bowled across the floor, fetching up against the wall, hard enough to bruise, breath slammed out of his lungs. “Newt!” Graves hurried to him, pale, even as the lion snarled.

“He didn’t use his claws.” Newt got to his feet, wincing. “I’m going to try again.”

“We’re wasting time. And he might use his claws next. Newt, please. Let’s go.”

“I can’t leave him here.” Newt spun the lion another ball of light, which it ignored, and another. The lion stopped snarling, glancing at the spheres, snorting. “I want to help you get free from here,” Newt told it gently. “I want to help you get home.” The lion huffed, shaking its horns. “You don’t belong here,” Newt said, more softly, reaching for it again, against its push. “Let me make amends for what we’ve done.”

This time, the lion let him get close. It huffed and flinched slightly as Newt reached for its steel collar, but it let Pickett work on the lock, staying still until the collar finally came free. Newt backpedaled as the lion shook itself free, with a startled huff, then a coughing roar, loud enough that Newt instinctively clapped his hands over his ears. It seemed endless, a triumphant sound, a belligerent declaration of freedom and war.

“That’s fucking torn it,” Graves said tensely. From the vault door, wardens were coming in, wands upraised. The guardian lion snarled, shaking its mane again, its horns glowing a brighter green. Then it crouched low beside Newt, huffing urgently, and *pushed*, a wordless impression, a dream of wind and speed.

“I think it wants us to get onto its back,” Newt said slowly. There was another incredulous laugh from Graves, but when Newt climbed on, grabbing handholds of the thick mane,

Graves followed, case and notebook pinned against their bodies, curling an arm around Newt's waist hastily as the lion hauled itself to its feet.

The guardian lion covered the chamber floor in a single lunge, skidding low to angle itself out of the vault door, bowling aside screaming wardens who scuttled quickly to get out of its way, ignoring stray bolts of magic. It turned for the balcony, sniffing, bounding forward, and behind Newt, Graves stifled a yelp into his back as the lion leaped from the balcony to the lower one, then out into space.

They landed heavily on barren ground that twisted for a moment under the lion's paws, unfurling great dark claws that calcified in place as the lion's horns glowed. Then they were sprinting away, somehow ignoring the traps and wards that crackled and spat beneath them, streaming over the cracked earth with impossible speed. Newt whooped, face turned into the wind, and the lion roared again beneath them in answer, chasing the horizon.

## Chapter End Notes

Refs:

[http://www.azquotes.com/author/4248-Gerald\\_Durrell](http://www.azquotes.com/author/4248-Gerald_Durrell)

### **Further Edit:**

It seems some readers are unfamiliar with the effect of solitary confinement on people, possibly because it's so common in certain prison systems, so, in case you're wondering why Percival is behaving "strangely" in this story:

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=40097#.WGKEKbZ96JQ>

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/what-does-solitary-confinement-do-to-your-mind/>

<http://io9.gizmodo.com/why-solitary-confinement-is-the-worst-kind-of-psycholog-1598543595> which has a list of typical symptoms

Long term solitary isolation is torture, cruel and inhuman. The US' supermax prisons, for example, are a violation of international law. Yes, I've chosen not to have Graves affected by it in my other fics, which were written to be more lighthearted/humorous. Yes, it's probably a bit weird to have it explored, however randomly, in an a/b/o fic. But here we are. :O

# Chapter 4

## Chapter Notes

**Warning:** This chapter changes the general rating of the fic to E. Also, further warning for the usual A/B/O kinks, just in case: convenient alternate boyparts, self-lubrication, etc. Don't like, don't read.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The hotel in the large muggle town that they walked into was drab on the outside, but at least it was clean, and served food. Newt had some muggle money, thankfully, and he bought a meal and a room for them both with what he had. He left Graves in the room as he went into his case, soothing down frightened creatures, feeding them, and checking on the guardian lion, which he had settled in a spare section.

When Newt climbed out of the case, Graves was sitting on one of the beds, drying off his hair with a towel. He was dressed in one of the hotel's bathrobes, and he was... surprisingly *handsome*, clean-shaven and washed, hair hacked a little shorter with hotel scissors. "I'd like to burn the clothes that I was wearing," Graves said, oblivious to Newt's gawking. "I don't know if I'd be able to fit into any of your things, though, even if you had any spares that I could borrow. Buy something for me out in the town, I'll pay you back."

"That's all right." Newt closed his case, setting it in a chair. "I'll. Do that now."

"Shops are probably closed at this hour," Graves reminded him.

"Right." Newt wished now that he'd thought to get two rooms, but the shared room had been cheaper, and he didn't have that much muggle money on hand. The bank had been closed for the day by the time they'd walked in, having gotten off the lion farther away to avoid having to oblivate anyone. "Um."

Graves frowned at him, tilting his head. "It was a rescue after all," he said wryly, and it took Newt a moment to place the reference. "And for that, I'm very grateful. I'm sorry about my behaviour."

"All of it?" Newt inquired, unable to help a faint grin.

"Don't push it." Graves said, though he seemed amused for a moment. "Thanks. For helping me. And. Enduring my bad temper."

"You're welcome," Newt decided, because he could be gracious now that nobody was in a dungeon. Now that he was looking closely at Graves, though, he could see the strain, the faint wildness to his eyes, the tense grip that Graves had on the towel. "About your, um. Your rut."

“No need,” Graves said curtly. “You’ve done enough.”

“Sorry.” Newt tried not to feel stung, retreating towards the shower before Graves could see his irrational hurt. “But if you wanted to call your omega here, the hotel reception has a telephone.”

He shut himself in the bathroom before Graves could respond, and leaned his shoulders against the door, breathing out. Setting Pickett on the sink, Newt used a cleaning spell on their clothes anyway, even Graves’ hated ones, just in case, and took a very hot shower, with a lot of soap. Now that the adrenaline of escape was winding off, Newt felt hyper-aware of the heat bond, of Graves’ presence, so close by. His thighs still felt slick. Could another omega even take over at this point? Newt forced down his instinctive jealousy, reaching for clinical detachment. He was a scientist, after all. And an adult.

Newt dressed slowly, leaving off the vest and coat. Scooping up Pickett, he stared at the mirror. Skinny. Too many goddamned freckles. A reddened mark over one side of his face, from where he’d fallen against the wall when knocked away by the guardian lion, which was definitely going to bruise up. He exhaled, more softly, and closed his eyes. He’d faced an Erumpent in estrus head on, and freed a Thunderbird singlehandedly; he’d grown up with hippogriffs, and stared down dragons and chimaeras. And yet for a moment he was tempted to hide in the bathroom until Graves fell asleep.

No. This was childish. Newt took in a slow breath, folded his vest and coat over an arm, and let himself out of the bathroom.

Graves hadn’t moved, and he was frowning. The first thing he said was, “I don’t have another omega.” He hesitated. “I don’t have *an* omega,” Graves corrected himself, more slowly, which hurt, even though it shouldn’t. The heat bond was making them both irrational again.

“Noted.” Newt hung his coat and vest in the wardrobe, placed his shoes beneath them, left Pickett on the coat, and sat on the other bed, a little awkwardly. Bereft of overriding concerns, he’d always felt rather lost around people, struggling to read social cues. Animals had always been simpler.

“I thought it was obvious,” Graves said soberly. “I told you that I was drinking heat tea.”

“There’re many reasons why people do that,” Newt said, wondering what Graves was trying to get at. “Look. I understand. It was a bad situation and you didn’t want my help to begin with. While I mainly didn’t want you to die in front of me. The heat bond’s temporary and I noticed you fighting it the whole way while we were in Nurmengard. So if you think you can manage the rest of the rut yourself, that’s... good?”

Newt wasn’t sure whether to feel relieved about that. Now that they were alone, and the threat of death wasn’t hanging over their heads, it was easy to imagine this handsome alpha between his thighs, to remember the sounds Graves had made, with Newt in his lap, the way he had begged.

Hastily, Newt climbed into the bed, even as Graves stared down at his hands. “Yeah,” Graves said, a little unsteadily. “Thanks again. For your help before.”

“It’s going to be a long way back to New York City,” Newt said, more gently. “Try and sleep.”

Graves nodded jerkily, and leaned over to turn off the lights. There. Newt had handled it. In an adult fashion. Theseus would’ve been proud. He curled under the quilt, squeezing his eyes shut, and tried not to listen to Graves rustling around on the other bed. Sleep came easily, at least. At least the exhausting day had been good for something.

#

Newt woke up abruptly when the table lamp shattered against the wall next to his bed. With a yelp, he fell out of bed, panicked for a moment when tangled up with his blankets, then he scrambled to his feet. Had Grindelwald found them already?

On the bed, Graves groaned in his sleep, waving a palm. The chair with Newt's case on it jerked back, rattling against the wall. Hastily, Newt shook Graves’ shoulder. “Hey. Hey, wake up! Wake up!”

Graves shuddered, then he opened his eyes blearily, frowning up at Newt in the gloom. “Wha...? Who?”

They froze as someone in the room beside them thumped the wall and bellowed something indecipherable. Newt nodded at the shattered lamp by his bed, the glass over the sheets, and Graves flushed, rubbing a hand over his face. “Fuck. Did I...?”

“You were having a nightmare.”

“God damnit. I haven’t done something like that since I was a child.” Graves said miserably.

“Maybe you should drink some water,” Newt said uncertainly, not particularly sure what to do about night terrors. He circled over to his coat, fishing out the stolen wand. It resisted his attempt at Reparo, annoyingly enough, even when he shook it a few times. “This is really inconvenient,” Newt told the wand.

“Come here,” Graves said gruffly. When Newt hesitated, Graves tensed up, then he sighed, sitting up. “I’ll sleep on the chair. Take the bed.”

“You’re the one who’s been sleeping in a cell all this time. The healing spell I managed in the Tower probably hasn’t helped all that much. I’ll take the chair.”

“I won’t be able to sleep knowing that you’re not comfortable,” Graves said, made blunt by weariness.

“I’ve slept in worse places,” Newt said, though he got Graves’ point. Cautiously, he put the wand aside, and got onto the bed, under the quilt, on the far edge. It didn’t help that much. The single bed was narrow, and trying to sleep apart meant they were both risking tumbling off. “This is probably not going to work.”

“I said I was willing to take the chair.”

“No, just. Here.” Cautiously, Newt shifted closer. Graves stiffened. Just as Newt thought that Graves was going to insist on the chair, he grudgingly twisted over, until their flanks were pressed together. They fit awkwardly together, and Graves felt uncomfortably warm beside him, an unfamiliar presence.

“Is this all right?” Graves asked, subdued.

“I’m comfortable,” Newt said, though he wasn’t. Graves nodded however, relaxing. “When we get back to New York, you should probably, ah, look for an omega.”

“Mm? Why?” Graves sounded faintly annoyed, but Newt pressed on, grimly.

“Because judging from the severity of what happened, you probably should leave off on the heat tea for a while. And. Since your current circumstances are being resolved in an incomplete way—you’re rejecting the bond—you’re just going to cycle back into a rut. At some point. Possibly soon.”

Graves pressed a hand over his face with a groan. “Let’s not talk about that right now,” he said, muffled.

“Just thought that you’d like to know—”

“Thanks for your concern,” Graves said acidly, “but I haven’t actually been living under a rock all this while.”

Just a short time more, Newt thought to himself, counting silently to ten. As far as he was concerned, if Graves was safely out of his rut, Newt’s obligation was technically over. Maybe they could even return to New York City on their separate ways. That would be nice. It would be uncomfortable, with a residual bond in place, but Newt would rather *be* uncomfortable at this point.

“...Sorry,” Graves said, to Newt’s surprise. “I’m rather frustrated right now, uh. Physically. And I’m taking it out on you, even though I owe you a debt.”

“Normally,” Newt said, only slightly mollified, “the heat bond’s meant to make alphas *nicer* to the omega. So either something’s gone terribly wrong, or this is your idea of being nice to someone, and I’m not sure which scenario worries me more.”

Graves started to laugh for a moment, then he coughed, sobering up. “I’m not bonded to an omega for a reason. As you’ve seen repeatedly, I don’t react well when caught in a heat bond. I don’t like it. Being instinctively driven to do things.” Graves let out a shaky sound. “You startled me badly,” he admitted. “When you just put me to sleep like that. In the tower.”

“I should’ve asked you first,” Newt conceded. Had that been the problem? There still seemed to be something brittle about Graves, like something broken and put back together badly.

“But I’m not sure if you would’ve heard me at the time. Or agreed to it.”

“I probably would’ve fought you,” Graves admitted, flushing a little. “Right then, all I wanted was...” He trailed off, with a cough. “It was the best decision you could’ve made at

the time. I see that. Rationally.”

“It’s interesting that you react this way,” Newt said, the scientist within him taking over. “Though in your case, you were fairly disoriented at the start. And it’s also a matter of trust. Perhaps you’re usually slow to trust others?” That was generally the case with some creatures, especially those used to humans and their violent ways.

“I’m surprised that you don’t have an alpha,” Graves said, bluntly changing the subject.

“I’ve told you. I travel a lot, and there aren’t that many alphas. Besides,” Newt said lightly. “I don’t think I’m the sort of omega that alphas would even be interested in, in normal circumstances. Look at what happened. You were completely shocked when I didn’t ‘buckle’.”

“I said that I was sorry.”

“That aside,” Newt said mildly, “I’ve met a handful of alphas here and there, and to be honest, most of them would’ve reacted the same way you did to me, had they realized what I could do. They’d have been afraid too, if I’d put them to sleep.”

“I didn’t say that I was afraid,” Graves said stubbornly. He was probably a prideful man, like many alphas. “It was just very unexpected.” He paused. “*You’re* very unexpected.”

“So I’ve been told.” Usually, by alphas.

This time, there was an even longer silence. Graves was breathing shallowly, and Newt could guess why. He was fighting the bond again, testing it, and this close, it was even more uncomfortable, like a low buzzing under his skin, an achy restlessness. Newt was tempted to go out for a walk, despite the rude hour, but he couldn’t risk Graves destroying the room in his sleep again, especially since he wasn’t sure if the wand would manage an obliviation spell on the hotel staff and residents. They were stuck.

“... I don’t think I’m actually able to handle the rest of this myself,” Graves said finally. Stiffly.

“That’s quite all right,” Newt said, trying to sound gentle rather than exasperated. He wasn’t sure if he succeeded, given how Graves tensed up. “What do you need?”

“I’m not that sure.” There was another long pause, then a sober, very formal, “May I touch you?”

Newt refrained from pointing out that they were already technically touching. “If you wish.”

Graves twisted around, rolling carefully on top, keeping his weight off Newt by his arms and knees. He nuzzled Newt’s throat, feather-light, breathing in. Newt waited, lying still. This probably wasn’t going to be enough for Graves: it hadn’t been, before. “You’re very...” Graves trailed off, his breath intimately warm on Newt’s throat. “If you don’t want to be doing this with me, tell me.”

“You just said that you can’t handle the rest of your rut yourself.”

“I’ll manage, if I have to.”

“That’s not a logical answer.” Newt tentatively curled his hand into Graves’ hair, petting lightly. “Also, the last few times that I tried to touch you, you pushed me away.”

“Didn’t like you using the bond against me.” Graves sounded distracted now, his voice slurring. “Can I kiss you?”

As an answer, Newt tipped Graves’ chin up towards him. It was a lie that they were building together as they kissed, with Newt growing slowly wetter, with Graves’ heavy cock pressed against his thigh. Graves was naked under the bathrobe. But. This wasn’t so bad. And for all of Graves’ prickliness, he *could* kiss, far better than Newt, confident as he licked into Newt’s mouth. Graves was purring, low and calm, probably without even realizing that he was doing it, a subtonal alpha push of reassurance and arousal.

“You didn’t give me an answer before,” Graves said, his voice indistinct now, husky. “About whether you want to be doing this with me.”

Did he? There was a nagging wrongness about this. Graves had been fighting the bond only moments before. Newt tried to correlate things to science, to what he knew of his creatures, but lust was derailing rationality, especially now that he was unmoored. Graves tensed up against him. Newt had taken too long to answer. Quickly, Newt stroked the back of Graves’ neck, lightly, trying to calm him down.

“You’re not repulsive or anything,” Newt began slowly.

“... That’s probably the worst backhanded compliment I’ve ever heard.”

“It’s just that you’re going to make things worse, if, well, things take their natural course.” Newt said, ignoring the jibe. “Right now, we’re less than a day away from New York City by train. If the heat bond remains uneven, theoretically, if you find an omega you prefer—”

“And what makes you think I’d find this magical, theoretical person in weeks when I haven’t in decades?”

“Possibly by keeping an open mind, combined with a far less grumpy attitude,” Newt said, keeping his tone deliberately light. There was still a tense silence, then Graves began to laugh, burying his mouth against Newt’s neck, breathing in deeply. Urgently. His hips twitched for a moment against Newt’s thigh before freezing in place, but Newt tried to ignore it.

“*You’re* not repulsive or anything,” Graves said, though desperation stole the humour from his voice. “You’re. Really very pretty.” Another lie, heat-fuelled. Newt made a noncommittal sound. “You don’t believe me.”

“You *did* spend a whole day fighting me. It’s all right,” Newt said soothingly, as Graves startled to mumble a protest. “I understand. It was a bad situation.”

“What you did with the lion back then, it was very brave.”

“So you’ve said. I’ve faced more difficult creatures before,” Newt said, wondering what Graves was trying to get at.

“And you’re. At least a very competent wizard.”

“Alphas and omegas tend to be.”

“And you’re the one who got us out of Nurmengard.”

“You helped,” Newt reminded him.

Graves buried a groan in the pillow, frustrated. “Why is this so difficult?”

“What is?” Newt asked, puzzled. “Oh. You were trying to. Pay me some compliments.” He started to chuckle, helplessly, and Graves stiffened for a moment before the sound relaxed him—*happy omega!*—and he sighed, nuzzling Newt’s throat again. “That was terrible.” If Graves was struggling so hard to even say anything nice, then the solution was clear, at least to Newt.

“Thanks.” Graves said sourly, if muffled.

“Look,” Newt said, as kindly as he could. “You need help, I can sense that. But I think you’re still heat-addled right now. So. Let me help you rest.”

“No,” Graves said quickly.

“All right, then what’s your solution? You clearly don’t want to, ah, be intimate.”

“Don’t I?” Graves sounded incredulous, leaning up to stare at him. “What the hell are we doing right now, then?”

“You spread glass all over my bed,” Newt pointed out. “And you don’t seem to be in a hurry to get my clothes off. As it were.”

“That’s... but... I don’t even...” Graves let out another frustrated sound. “Well,” Graves said, in a slightly more normal tone. “What would you have done if I’d just tried to get your clothes off at the start?”

“...Probably put you to sleep,” Newt admitted. “All right, I see your point. You do seem to be in control, though.”

“It’s taking a lot of doing, believe me,” Graves grit out. “So. You don’t. Want to fuck.”

Newt grimaced at the obscenity, even as his body involuntarily grew a little wetter just at the thought. “Well. Um. If you knot me, that’s going to exacerbate the problem. The resultant, reinforced heat bond will last for weeks.”

“What if I don’t?”

“It’s a reflexive, involuntary bodily function caused by blood collecting in your glands—”

“Oh my God, please don’t explain. I meant,” Graves said slowly, carefully. “Would you let me. Just use my mouth. On you.” When Newt said nothing, blinking, Graves added, defeated, “Or you could put me to sleep.”

Chemicals from the slick, maybe? Or pheromones? Would that help? Maybe Graves was giving his personal reaction to the bond too much credit. The first haphazard reset, in the Tower, wasn’t technically natural, after all, and Newt had never tried it before on a human alpha. Admittedly, none of this was, but forcing a hard reset of Graves’ valve might have been part of the problem. This was a gentler way. And. One that Newt had to admit, deep down, that he wasn’t really that averse to.

“If you’re sure,” Newt said finally. “Though. This might still make things worse. Not as bad as um, a knotting, but. Yes, all right.”

Graves kissed him in response, roughly at first, then he seemed to make an effort to slow down, purring again, trying to reassure. When Newt allowed himself to fall pliant, Graves fumbled at the buttons on Newt’s clothes, clumsily, and purred louder when Newt hesitantly began to help, the shirt and union suit unravelling over his skinny chest, the scarred and freckled skin. “God,” Graves growled, as he reared back to watch. “You’re gorgeous.”

“Stop talking please,” Newt whispered, tiring of heat-spoken lies, and Graves stared at him silently.

Nodding curtly, he bent, mouthing curiously over scar tissue as they got Newt’s clothes off, his belt, his trousers and the rest. Being naked felt akin to being flayed. Newt was abruptly self-conscious all over again, not just of his scars, but of his knobby knees, his far too lanky body, the freckles, everywhere. The dim light helped, or maybe it was the rut. Graves’ breathing was shaky against him, reverent as he kissed his way down, licking ticklish stripes over Newt’s belly, over the valley between thigh and pelvis, chuckling when Newt tried to stifle his squeaks.

Graves knelt off the bed, tugging Newt to the edge, nipping as he pushed Newt’s thighs open, breathing deeply. Loudly. “Sorry,” Graves said, and he sounded drunk—drunk from Newt’s *scent*, God. “I’d normally. Suck you off first, but I really need this.” He groaned when Newt kicked a heel pointedly against his shoulder, and leaned in, purring, long, wet stripes at first, moaning as Newt tangled fingers in his hair to pull him closer. Newt stuffed the fingers of his free hand quickly into his mouth as Graves kissed him *there*, over the wet seam between his thighs, sealing his mouth over the folds.

For a moment, the scientist inside Newt tried to take over, chattering about vestigial parts and evolutionary quirks, but that soon shattered into a consuming, growing ache, winding tighter, tighter. Heavens, this was obscene. Graves was moaning loudly as he sucked, as though he was trying to burn Newt’s taste into his memory, and just as Newt thought that it couldn’t get any better, Graves started to lick.

Newt had others do this to him before, but not like Graves. Instead of thrusting in his tongue in a mimicry of mating, Graves lapped, exploring, completely focused on just Newt’s pleasure. It was making Newt wetter, just thinking about it, and the keening groans forced shut against his fingers pitched higher, then he was coming, digging his fingers tightly into

Graves' hair, arching against the bed. Graves licked him through it, greedily, and kept sucking until Newt dizzily pushed his heels against his shoulders.

"Fuck, you're sensitive," Graves gasped, rubbing his cheek against Newt's inner thigh, leaving a wet smear. Newt didn't answer, dazed. The bond felt like a warm weight around them, pressing them closer, back into sync.

"Are you feeling better?" Newt asked breathlessly, unsure of what else to say. Thanks? I really enjoyed that? It seemed crass. Graves went still, his breathing growing unsteady for a moment.

"Yeah," Graves said eventually, subdued again. "Thanks." He got to his feet, heading to the bathroom. Newt listened to the tap running, staring up into the dark, then he managed a cleaning spell, and dressed quietly, rolling onto his flank. Sleep came blessedly quickly.

## Chapter End Notes

refs:

1920s bathrooms lol <http://antiquehomestyle.com/inside/bathrooms/1920s/index.htm>

# Chapter 5

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Thanks,” Graves said, pulling on the coat over the rest of the clothes that Newt had bought.

The morning had been terribly awkward, with Graves so quiet, and Newt had gratefully used the excuse of having to head out to buy supplies to leave the premises after feeding his creatures. Thankfully, an enterprising shop was open, as was the local bank, though Graves looked odd in an ill-fitting tan trenchcoat, a cheap shirt and trousers. No shoes—they were stuck with the stolen ones, which were a little too big for Graves.

“Something wrong?” Graves prompted. “You’re staring.”

“Maybe I should have purchased a tie. And a vest.”

“These are temporary clothes,” Graves reminded him. “That I’ll pay you back for. They’re enough. What’s the plan?”

The heat bond was humming warmly at neutral, at least. Maybe last night had been worth it for the both of them. “I don’t want to apparate long distances with this wand. Luckily, Rupert took us close to a town big enough to be on a train line yesterday. We can get breakfast and catch the train to New York City.”

“You named a magic Chinese lion *Rupert*?”

“He didn’t seem to mind...?” Newt said, trying not to get defensive. Graves merely smirked at him, though, and they ended up checking out and holing up in a diner close to the train station, a stripped-down affair that looked like a recycled old train carriage, left to rest. Graves stared at the bleak ‘MODERN DINER’ sign with such open suspicion that Newt stifled a laugh, but he followed Newt in anyway, and they took a seat next to a grimy window.

“Update me on the situation,” Graves said briskly, once coffee was served.

“I wouldn’t know where to start,” Newt admitted. “I arrived only a few days ago on a steamship. It’s been a rather... eventful visit so far, what with being chased around by Aurors and then being falsely imprisoned in a tower.”

“Life’s usually not that exciting,” Graves said wryly. “Start from your visit, then. When you arrived.”

Newt studied Graves curiously before answering. With a cup of coffee in his hands, clean and in new clothes, Graves seemed to have regained a modicum of the elegant poise that Newt had seen Grindelwald’s facsimile wear. Was Grindelwald mimicking Graves, down to his mannerisms? None of the Aurors around him—not even Tina—had seemed to notice a

difference. Or maybe there *was* a difference, but Newt's very short perspective on the situation hadn't given him the necessary window to hear anyone's reservations. He'd only visited MACUSA very briefly after all, twice, and as an arrested suspect.

"You've gone quiet again," Graves said, frowning at him. "Is this about... the night?"

"Not exactly. How are you feeling right now?"

"Better after coffee. Which is usually the case." Graves archly toasted him with a cup. The breadrolls arrived. Graves had let Newt order, and Newt had settled for bland food, wary of making Graves ill. The creatures he rescued had always needed to be weaned back onto a normal diet over time.

"It's rather strange," Newt said thoughtfully. "I keep thinking that I've met you before, but clearly I haven't. That was Grindelwald."

Graves sniffed. "God knows how he kept up the charade. Either he's a far better actor than anyone's given him credit for, or, more likely, he's purged Magical Security of anyone with half a brain. Rotting the Security arm of MACUSA would be a fine way not only to revenge himself on us but also to keep his ops in this part of the world quiet."

"President Picquery didn't seem stupid."

"She's not, but she's extremely busy, and we've never gotten along, not since Ilvermorny," Graves said. "Generally, we try not to talk to each other unless we have to."

"That makes sense," Newt said. "I'm not sure why he'd go to all the trouble of impersonating you for months otherwise. Actually working at your job. If he was there to assassinate Picquery or something, he could've done that earlier. Or if he was just in hiding, there're far easier ways to do that. The world's a big place."

"Not if he wanted to keep Nurmengard. As Director, he'd be able to stop any further attempts on it. Which he clearly did. Undercut the department, influence policy, vote at MACUSA..." Graves trailed off, rubbing a hand over his face. "Lord knows how much damage he's already done."

"I could send my brother a message," Newt volunteered. "Telegraph him from here, even. He might be able to help. He can bring backup."

"It'll take them a week to get here," Graves said thoughtfully. "And the Head of the DMLE decamping for New York might alert Grindelwald—"

"You mean our escape hasn't?"

"True," Graves conceded, with a quick curl to his mouth. "But a week is a long time at sea, for a lot of accidents to happen. Notify your brother anyway. He might have some insight. If anything, it might stop an international incident."

"What incident?"

“You’re not a subject of MACUSA, but of the Ministry of Magic. Presumably, your arrest without repatriation negotiations must have at least raised some eyebrows. Particularly your brother’s.” Graves paused. “Assuming it got logged. You *were* arrested by Grindelwald, weren’t you? You mentioned being chased by Aurors.”

“All right,” Newt said, uncomfortably. “I’ll tell you what happened, as far as I know. But. Ah.”

“How many laws did you break so far?” Graves asked, his voice dry as dust.

“That’s such a terrible instant assumption to make of someone,” Newt said, though he smiled ruefully.

“Newt Scamander, it’s already obvious to me that you’re a troublemaker of the first degree,” Graves said, deadpan, though the heat bond seemed to warm further, humming. Affection? Amusement? This was still too new for Newt to read with any real confidence. “Did you kill anyone?”

“No?”

“Use any of the Unforgivable Curses?”

“Of course not.”

“Well then, I suppose, particularly given your invaluable assistance to date and the circumstances, let me make you an offer of full amnesty. And I’ll write you a backdated permit for your case of illegal creatures, once things are back in order.”

Newt tried to condense down his disaster of a visit during the rest of breakfast and afterwards, when they sent Theseus a quick telegraph and purchased first class tickets aboard the *Laurentian*, sharing a cabin. Graves proved to be a good listener, at least when nobody was trying to escape from a dungeon: he was silent, nodded encouragingly at intervals, and Newt found himself telling Graves about everything, even the parts that he’d been determined to leave out, like using a full bind on the muggle in the bank, or chasing the Erumpent in Central Park.

“Amazing,” Graves said at the end, when Newt was done. “All that in a few days? That must be some kind of new record.”

“It all snowballed terribly,” Newt said defensively. He sat by the window, with Graves on the opposite seat, facing him, their knees nearly touching. Now that the bond was stable, though, with neither of them fighting it, this seemed enough. For now.

“The Erumpent in Central Park... that incident in Macy’s... using a Bind on a No-Maj... destroying a jewellery store and getting seen by the No-Maj police... Good Lord,” Graves said, blinking owlishly. “The number of people we’re going to have to find and oblivate... not to mention that poor No-Maj you’ve gotten caught up in all this. He’s been seen at two separate apparent robberies. You might just have ruined his life. Cavalierly. Because of your animals.”

“I’ll fix things.”

“Given how that’s all worked out... Don’t. *I’ll* have to put the fix in personally,” Graves said heavily. “Why did you even drag this man, Jacob, along everywhere?”

“I didn’t know how to get to Central Park.”

“Apparating to the top of a skyscraper in Manhattan would’ve told you how to get there. Or buying a map. If Jacob had died... you’ve no idea how serious a breach of the Statute of Secrecy that would’ve been.”

Newt said nothing, feeling belatedly abashed. It *had* been selfish, on hindsight, dragging Jacob around, prodding him into helping. Just. It had been... nice, finding someone who had looked on Newt’s charges with awe and wonder, rather than with fear and avarice. For a moment, Newt had thought perhaps that he had finally found a kindred soul. “You’re right,” Newt said soberly. “I owe him an apology. And. It’s possible that I’m rather unused to large cities,” he concluded sheepishly. “Things are different in Saharan Africa, and such.”

“The Statute of Secrecy applies everywhere,” Graves reminded him pointedly. “Why the hell didn’t you just tie down your case?”

“I don’t usually need to. But I was in London before New York, and Dougal—the Demiguise—and the Niffler aren’t really used to being confined for long periods of time in my case,” Newt admitted. “I didn’t think that they’d actually try to escape. They’re quiet now,” he said quickly, when Graves started to say something. “What are your plans?” he asked, trying to change the subject. “We’ll be back in New York City by the evening. I presume we’re not just going to burst back into the Woolworth Building and confront Grindelwald up front.”

“Tempting,” Graves said wryly. “But I’ve never been one for dramatic gestures.”

“Should we talk to President Picquery? Do you know where she lives? Maybe we could speak to her in private.”

“I do. But there’s no love lost between us, to put it mildly. She’s more likely to try and arrest all of us first, to be safe.” Graves leaned against the side of the carriage, staring distractedly out of the window. “I’ve never been out of New York City before,” he said abruptly. “Other than to study in Ilvermorny. Or on business.”

Newt peered out at the streaming landscape, wondering what Graves had seen. “It’s a beautiful country,” he said, settling for a neutral answer.

“You’ve seen more of the world, haven’t you? All of it?”

“Well,” Newt hedged, “it’s a very large world, so not precisely. But I’ve been privileged to see more of it than most, for people my age. The Ministry’s been very generous to me.”

“Because of your brother?”

“I doubt it. I had my difficulties in Hogwarts, to say the least, but I still qualified with enough honours to become an Auror, if I had wanted to be one. It’s unusual for people to turn down

an offer from the DMLE, but not unheard of. Albus Dumbledore did so, for example. The Ministry tries to fast-track powerful wizards and witches through to the roles that they're suited for. Keeps us occupied."

"You're doing it again," Graves said flatly. "Trying to affect me. Stop that."

The bond soured, so quickly that Newt nearly yelped. It was only habit that made him calm, that forced him to hold Graves' stare, a discipline that had kept him alive before dragons and chimaeras. "I'm not doing anything," Newt said neutrally. "I was talking about myself, because you asked." Now that he was looking closely again, the brittleness was clear to see. The poise from the diner had been a veneer, perhaps, or a fragment, spun only briefly to the fore. The volatile, anxious prisoner Newt had hauled out of Nurmengard was back, glaring suspiciously at him, sniffing for a way to lash out.

In the cold light of day, with a resettled bond, the problem now seemed so obvious. Newt's first impression had been the right one, after all. He had seen this before, in the Demiguise now in his care and more. Social, intelligent creatures, locked into cages and left alone often destroyed themselves. It was a form of cruelty made all the worse because it was often unintentional, and therefore, widespread.

It had taken Newt years to earn Dougal's trust. He didn't have the luxury of time now. But he resolved to be kind. Or at the very least, patient. "Do you want me to find another cabin?" Newt asked gently.

"There aren't any other alphas on the train," Graves said suspiciously. He was *jealous*. A side-effect of the bond? That would have been funny, in better circumstances. Newt stared, now unsure of how to defuse the situation. "Stop looking at me like that," Graves growled. "I'm not one of your pets."

"They're not my pets. Also. If you *had* been one of the creatures in my care, this would've been easier to handle," Newt said, before he could stop himself. Graves arched an eyebrow, and Newt found himself explaining, "I, ah, rescue a lot of creatures. And. The suspicion, the anger, depression, all that. It's normal. In intelligent creatures, especially. The anxiety. Being easily distracted. Disoriented. Feeling—" *suicidal*, Newt nearly said, though he coughed hastily to swallow that down. "Of course, you're not remotely like a Thunderbird or a Demiguise or anything," Newt added quickly, when Graves started to scowl. "But if you were, I'd have just either left the vicinity until you were calm again, so as not to add to your stress. Or. Tried to bribe you with treats."

Graves stared at him. And started to laugh, all helpless coughs, at first, averting his eyes, staring out of the window, easing into warm chuckles. The bond eased. Newt tried not to look relieved, smiling in response. *No sudden moves. Try to keep eye contact, unless the creature starts to feel challenged. Appear unthreatening. Keep trying to defuse the situation.*

"That's ridiculous," Graves said dismissively, when he calmed down. "I'm fine."

"Are you sure?" Newt asked lightly. "I might have biscuits in my case somewhere."

"You can't bribe me with biscuits... What kind of biscuits?"

“Butter wafers. Dougal’s mad for them. The Demiguise. I keep hiding them and he keeps finding them.”

“You can’t bribe me with Demiguise treats,” Graves said, though he grinned briefly, amused again.

“Either way,” Newt said, as gently as he could, “remember, last night, I *did* just offer to help you sleep. What we did stabilised the heat bond, which is why the bleeding effect might be growing stronger. And. More involuntary on both our parts. I’m not consciously trying to affect you.”

“You didn’t want to do what we did?”

“I wanted to,” Newt said quickly, as Graves tensed up. “But I warned you that there would be consequences.”

Graves stared out of the window again, picking at his sleeves. They’d packed Grindelwald’s notebook into Newt’s case, not that Newt was any good at breaking decryption charms. He had several books in his lab, but he’d forgotten to bring any up, and disappearing down his case right now could be a problem, since the way in to the cabin had glass windows and the occasional wandering passenger.

With Graves in this mood, Newt wasn’t sure if it would be a good idea to sleep. He was starting to regret not buying one of the muggle newspapers at the station when Graves said, “What are you planning on doing once we get to the city?”

“I’ll check on Queenie Goldstein. She might know whether Tina and Jacob are still in the Woolworth building.”

“And if they are?”

“Stage a rescue?” Newt wasn’t so sure how he was meant to go about doing that, but maybe Queenie would have a better idea.

“So. Break into the headquarters of MACUSA. To break out two prisoners. Just like that.”

“Feel free to help if you like.”

Graves huffed, a barked laugh that briefly bared his teeth. “I really don’t know what to make of you.”

“*You* didn’t tell me what you were going to do once we got to the city.”

“Because I don’t know. It’s a funny thing. I spent months making plans. Over and over. It was the only thing keeping me sane in there,” Graves said frankly. “I’d make these elaborate contingency plans, these grand ideas about how to expose Grindelwald and take him down. But now that I’m actually on my way...” Graves made a flicking gesture, his lip curling. “It’s hard to stay focused on anything but anger. Anger is easy. But. I know that’s how I’d make mistakes. I already have.”

“I didn’t see any,” Newt said gently. “Why beat yourself up over what’s been done? That’s no way to keep moving forward.”

“You don’t ever have regrets?”

“I try not to.”

Graves made another abortive laugh. “That explains the recklessness. If you didn’t love your creatures so much, you’d probably have been a career criminal.” He paused. “As it is, I’m beginning to wish that I didn’t offer you an amnesty.” He smiled though, even if it was faint.

“Too late now,” Newt said firmly.

“So you don’t resent any of this?” That wasn’t the question that Graves was really asking. With the bond like this, Graves was a little easier to read: he was feeding tension down the line, braced for hurt.

“You mean, do I resent you? The temporary bond?” Newt watched a muscle jump in Graves’ jaw. “Of course not. Resentment is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die. Besides, the circumstances weren’t exactly ours to control. Why? What about you?”

“I’m glad that it was you.” Graves said, though he didn’t meet Newt’s eyes, still watching the world come by. Newt smiled wryly, shaking his head, and Graves narrowed his eyes, glancing back. “You don’t believe me.”

“You’re predisposed to be complimentary right now. It’s all right,” Newt assured him quickly. “I’ve told you. I don’t generally expect alphas to like me. I don’t mind.”

“Do you really think the heat bond’s having that much of an effect on me?”

“It’s having *an* effect on you,” Newt pointed out.

“...Fine,” Graves growled. “It’d probably be over in what. Two days? Less?”

“Likely, if we don’t exacerbate it.”

“I’ll tell you again then. Same words. I’m glad it was you in the tower. And. I’m glad that you don’t have an alpha. Yet.”

“If I did, things would’ve been a lot more complicated,” Newt agreed. He might not have been able to help Graves at all. Hell, *life* would have been a lot more complicated. His creatures would have had to accept his mate, and worse, his mate would have to accept and understand why Newt did what he did. Once, in Hogwarts, he’d thought that he’d met an alpha who was also a kindred spirit. “I’ve learned the hard way to be careful.”

Graves was wearing a strange expression, not quite a frown, not quite resignation. When Newt raised his eyebrows, though, Graves rubbed a hand over his face, and leaned back into his seat, folding his hands on his lap and closing his eyes. “Wake me up when we’re back in the city.”

## Chapter End Notes

Refs:

I was going to give the lion a Chinese-appropriate name, but then, this is a character who named a Thunderbird 'Frank'... XD;;

<https://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2016/09/the-history-of-the-american-diner.html>

<https://restaurant-ingthroughhistory.com/2008/10/14/taste-of-a-decade-1920s-restaurants/>

Trying to navigate the American 1920s train system is giving me a headache, so the details are going to be fuzzy. Nurmengard in this story is around the Gothics mountains. For those who are really curious, they probably took the Laurentian from around the mountains section north of New York on this map down to NYC:

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7a/1918\\_NYCRR\\_map\\_only.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7a/1918_NYCRR_map_only.jpg)

Trip was apparently about 9 hours on the whole line, Montreal to NYC:

<http://www.american-rails.com/adirondack.html>

The quote about resentment is by Carrie Fisher. Damn this year. RIP, General Organa.

# Chapter 6

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Graves made Newt bind his case with twine before the train disgorged them into Grand Central Terminal, despite his protests that Dougal had quite gotten over his taste of dubious freedom. “Stay close and don’t wander off,” Graves told him, as they squeezed through the crowds and eventually made their way out next to the Grand Hyatt’s cab ranks.

“I don’t actually know where the Goldsteins live,” Newt admitted. “We apparated there the last time.”

“I do.”

“Really? That’s a little... Because of Queenie?” Queenie had been a beta, but she was beautiful the way few people could hope to be beautiful, golden-haired and sweet-natured and brilliant like the sun, inside and out. Small wonder Jacob was besotted.

“What? No. What does Queenie have to do with it?”

“She’s very pretty?”

Graves actually paused to stare at him. “And so? Did you think... that’s such an incredibly creepy reason to find out where someone lives. What the fuck. I have a good memory for details and I signed off on Tina Goldstein’s goddamned employment contract, that’s why. Wait. You think Queenie Goldstein is ‘very pretty’? She’s a beta.”

“And so?” Newt mimicked Graves’ tone playfully, which unfortunately had the effect of annoying him—Graves scowled, said nothing, and continued marching towards the yellow cab ranks.

“You prefer women?” Graves asked curtly.

“I didn’t say that.”

“Betas, then?”

“Why are we having this conversation? In public?”

“I’m curious,” Graves grit out, as they stepped into queue. “Humour me.”

“It’s a very personal question and we’re *in public*.” Newt gestured pointedly at the muggles swarming around them.

Graves grumbled something under his breath, but thankfully stopped asking, keeping up a stormy silence all the way to the Goldsteins’ apartment block. There was no light at the

Goldsteins' window, even at the darkening hour, which was possibly a bad sign. The building was still standing though. Which was good? Maybe?

"Men aren't allowed in that block," Newt said doubtfully. "I could open the door with Pickett and sneak upstairs. You can wait for me here."

"I'm coming with you."

"Queenie doesn't know about the switch. As far as she's probably concerned, the last thing 'you' did was throw her sister in jail," Newt pointed out. "She might scream," he said vaguely, not having much of a reference point for women-being-shocked-by-Graves in general, or Queenie in particular. "Or punch you."

"Or it could be a trap."

"I'll be careful. You can hold my case."

"Not again. No. I'm not going to stand aside again with your goddamned case."

"It's an important job," Newt said reasonably. "And besides, you don't have your wand."

"Neither do you!"

Newt exhaled. "Why do you always have to argue with me?"

"Why are *you* arguing with *me*?"

"Okay," said a voice behind them. "That's enough, you're giving me a big headache. Hands up! This is a stick up! Actually, it's not a stick up, I just, always wanted to say that. But hands up!"

Newt drew the stolen wand silently, about to try to apparate, but Graves reached over and grabbed his wrist, turning. "Really, Diego?"

"Whoo, it's really you, boss." The intruder tensed up, raising his wand higher. "Or should I say. Ex-boss. You really more of an asshole than I thought you ever were, which is saying a lot. You the most asshole person I *ever* met, more than my Uncle Jesús. And he was a *serious* asshole. Eh! Eh, *cabrón*, I said, hands up!"

Newt stared. Diego was a short man, coming up to Newt's shoulder, an omega, stout, with a thin black moustache and beard that traced an uneven circle over his mouth. He wore a gray porkpie hat with a yellow ribbon, and he was dressed nattily in a charcoal suit, a white dress shirt and a silver tie. The general effect was rather ruined by the virulently pink scarf that he wore draped over his suit.

"I've told you about your scarves," Graves said patiently. "They draw attention."

"Well, you don't get to tell me what to do no more," Diego said triumphantly. "You fired me two months ago, remember? Said I was stealing stuff from Evidence?"

“You *have* stolen things from Evidence before—”

“It was a little bit of smokum! And I put it back. Tina made me.”

“—but I wasn’t the one who fired you.”

“Yeah?” Diego frowned at them both, the tip of his wand darting between pointing at Newt and pointing at Graves. “Sure as hell sounded and looked a lot like you to me. Except. A more asshole version. But only slightly. Now you here. We been watching this place for days. We know you come for Queenie. We know you working for *Grindelwald*.”

“All right,” Newt said carefully. “Firstly, this is the actual Percival Graves. We broke out of Nurmengard yesterday. He’s been a *prisoner* of Grindelwald for months. Secondly. The man you think is Graves in MACUSA is actually Grindelwald, with a polyjuice potion. And. Is Tina all right? What about Jacob?”

Diego looked thrown by the torrent. “Who are you?”

“My name’s Newt. I’m a friend of Tina’s. And Queenie.”

“It doesn’t matter who he is,” Graves said, with a touch of impatience, trying to nudge Newt behind him. “How many people were fired? Over the last three months?”

“Twelve. Me, Tina, Amelie... wait. Wait. I don’t need to be telling you this. You’re not the boss of me anymore. I think. Breaking out of Nurmengard? Yeah, fucking right! Tell me another one.” Diego raised his wand warningly.

“Let me talk to Amelie.” Graves growled, losing patience. “Now.” He pushed as he spoke, *hard*, but Newt hastily used the bond to sabotage it, twisting away the force of it, grounding it with himself. As Graves and Diego both stared at him in shock, Newt grimaced, unsettled enough to feel a little nauseous.

“That was terribly rude!” Newt told Graves accusingly, as he tried to steady his own breathing. “You... you can’t just keep *doing that to people*. It’s illegal! What is wrong with you? You’re an Auror!”

“He was threatening you!”

“No he wasn’t! You really should apologise!”

“Wait...” Diego said slowly, glancing at Newt’s case. “Newt Scamander, right? Rings a bell now. You the guy with the box full of animals?”

“Yes?” Newt and Graves both snapped.

Diego took a step back, palms up. “Whoah, whoah. Tina told me about you, that’s all.”

“Tina? So she’s all right! What about Jacob? There was a muggle with her. A No-Maj.”

“They’re all fine.” Diego grinned slowly when Newt let out a loud exhalation of relief. “Hey, you could’ve just brought up your animal box, man. How was I to know?”

“He told you his name,” Graves said pointedly. “*Now* can you take us to Amelie?”

“You’re. Really the Director?” Diego asked cautiously, though he lowered his wand.

“Yes,” Graves said curtly. “And you’re Sergeant Major Diego Peña, third of six children. You grew up in Queens. Your parents run a fairly successful cloak making business. You drink approximately twelve cups of coffee a day, plus sugar, and it remains a wonder to me how you’re still alive, especially given your tendency to cause trouble, set things on fire, and jump to conclusions.”

“Okay,” Diego said slowly. “Pretty sure it’s you. Sorry. That I called you an asshole.”

“And I’m ‘pretty sure’ that you completely meant it,” Graves shot back evenly.

“So, uh.” Diego looked with open curiosity between Graves and Newt. “You. Got bonded, huh, sir? Congratulations? Wow. Wait till Kai hears about this. He used to say, you so *scarily* bad at dating, you gonna be forever alone. Don’t tell him that I told you that, he’ll kill me.” He grinned ingratiatingly at Newt. “And you gotta be some kinda saint! Like the Buddha.”

Graves closed his eyes briefly. “Just. Take us to Amelie. Now.”

#

Diego apparated them to the delivery entrance of the back of a factory. Newt got a brief glimpse of the city skyline, lit further away against the skyline, before Diego was shooing them both through a narrow door beside the shuttered delivery entrance, looking around warily as he did so. “Stop doing that,” Graves said, the moment they were indoors. “You might as well hold up a neon sign saying ‘Suspicious Activity Here’. It’s a bad habit and it’s high time you corrected it.”

Newt flinched when Diego patted his shoulder consolingly, stage-whispering, “You must be really like Jesus. Not my uncle. I mean the guy who makes fish miracles.”

Graves pointedly shoved Diego’s hand off Newt, baring his teeth, and Diego backed away, hands up. “Sorry boss. New bond, huh? Loud and clear. Uh. This way.” He scooted off down the corridor.

“Can we trust these people?” Newt asked quietly, too disoriented to object to Graves’ posturing.

“Amelie was my second in command. The Deputy Director. I’m not surprised that Grindelwald had her fired. I’m surprised that he didn’t have her killed,” Graves said grimly. “This Unfolding Charm, linked to that door, has to be her work.” He had a palm pressed to the small of Newt’s back, casually possessive.

Newt allowed himself to be guided along, a little surprised, and was still wondering how to sort *that* out with Graves when they walked out into a large, square chamber. He got a

glimpse of messy workbenches, of a wall with a large map of New York City tacked full of pins, strings and photographs, then there was a cry of joy, and Tina was rushing over from a desk.

“Newt! You’re all right!” She looked none the worse for wear, though she was missing her hat, her white blouse and gray trousers rumpled, and her grinning face had dark circles under her eyes.

“You made it out,” Newt exhaled with relief, and laughed when Tina hugged him tightly. She flinched back as Graves growled, as though belatedly noticing his presence, then she paled, dragging Newt with her, fumbling with her free hand for her wand.

“Um,” Newt began, just as Diego yelled, “*Hey everyone. THE BOSS IS BACK.* The one in MACUSA is fake!”

“Polyjuice,” Newt tried to explain nervously, into the stunned silence, never his best when put on the spot. “Um. This is. The real Director Graves? We. Made it out of Nurmengard? Yesterday?”

“Where’s Amelie?” Graves asked curtly, then he looked to a side as a woman with a frizzy, tawny mane of hair peered out from behind a set of shelves, frowning with suspicion, her skin and long coat as dark as her eyes. He strode over to her, trailing Diego in his wake, and Newt left them to it, especially now that Jacob had ambled over from another desk. His broad, honest face was crinkled with joy, and he seemed unhurt—and had even had a change of clothes, to a smart, dove gray vest, hugged smartly over his portly belly. They shook hands, both grinning with relief.

“How did the two of you get out?” Newt asked.

“Queenie saved us,” Jacob supplied, his face assuming a dreamy cast for a moment. “She was *amazing*. Sneaked us out through a servant’s entrance, used her mind trick to evade everyone. She’s out with Kai on a ‘supply run’. I said that right, didn’t I?” he asked Tina earnestly. “Wow. This is. *So much like the movies.* You wizards and witches live crazy lives.”

“It’s not meant to be this crazy,” Tina said, looking resigned. “But I see I’m never going to convince you about that.”

“Why is. Well.” Newt made a gesture at his temple. “I mean. I’m really glad that you’re still here, awfully so,” he told Jacob, “but as far as I can tell, everyone here is an ex-Auror?” Not that there were others in the chamber, but the mess and the papers everywhere and the strange devices/experiments/do not touch at a far bench at the back rather reminded him of his father’s office.

“Ah. Well.” Jacob coughed. “Seems I’m wanted by the, um, normal police. So Queenie said I should lie low here with her and Tina’s magic police friends, at least until we sorted everything out. Said we wouldn’t have gotten this far without me, and all that, even though I didn’t do much, it was all you, Tina and Queenie.”

“I’m so sorry about that,” Newt said, abashed again. “I’ll fix it all, I swear.”

“I’m really not upset at all,” Jacob told him earnestly. “I’ve never had anything this exciting happen to me, ever. Are you hungry? Queenie and I made a pie and more strudel earlier, but there was some left over. There’s a kitchen at the back.” He glanced over at the group of Aurors. “And I think they’re going to be talking for a while.”

“I... probably should...” Tina trailed off, a little reluctantly, but she allowed herself to get shooed off to the Auror huddle, while Newt followed Jacob into the kitchen for some food.

“Just strudel, please. I’m vegetarian. How did you people even get here?” Newt asked.

“Tina kept in touch with Diego over there after she was fired. He was fired too, before her. And then Amelie was, after. And Kai after that. And uh, the others. Most of them have left New York, though. Amelie said they didn’t want to have anything to do with MACUSA anymore. Felt disillusioned. The ones who stayed did so because they thought Graves, er, the fake one who arrested us, was working for Grindelwald, they’ve just been trying to prove it. So. He *is* Grindelwald? Are they twins?”

“No, not at all. It’s magic. Grindelwald’s using magic to wear Graves’ face. While he shut the real one in a prison up north.”

“And then you broke the both of you out of there, huh? That must’ve been some adventure.” Jacob chuckled. “Damn. Every time I think things can’t get more impossible. This is amazing.”

Newt smiled. Jacob’s open, unabashed wonder when faced with anything magical was still charming to see. Wizards and witches often grew far too inured to the fantastic: only children still loved the incredible. “I’m glad that you’re here.”

“I hope so,” Jacob lowered his voice. “Because I’m not sure what I did to annoy him, but that Graves guy you walked in here with keeps glaring at us.”

“Don’t mind him, he’s been out of sorts. Speaking of which, he probably can’t eat any pie or strudel. Do you have anything blander? Bread rolls, or, hm, an oat porridge, perhaps, though he might not be up to facing that yet. He’s been on a very basic prison diet,” Newt explained.

“I understand. I’ll see what I can do.” Jacob started bustling around the kitchen, occasionally frowning as he peered into chilled charm boxes. At least portable refrigeration was an easier matter with magic. Feeding his animals from stores would’ve been difficult otherwise.

After dinner, Newt tucked his case into a quiet corner and went into it to feed his creatures. He did a second check of the premises, just in case, but it looked like Grindelwald or a warden had done nothing more than have a look around the case. It had still been enough to spook everyone: even the Niffler was still in its nest. Though given that his nundu, Raksha, seemed far more pleased with herself recently, Newt could guess why Grindelwald may have quickly retreated: she huffed and purred as she followed him on his rounds, occasionally rubbing her scent glands over his knees.

Rupert eyed her with obvious reserve, but Raksha was an old resident of the case, and stayed out of the sectioned habitat. Newt had gone for the craggy, tilted sedimentary rock look,

inspired by Mount Tai, though planting deciduous trees was going to have to wait. Rupert seemed happy enough, eating a light sphere, ignoring the next one, and sitting down to wash himself as Newt inspected on the collar sores on his neck, applied some salve, and checked Rupert's heart beat, making notes as he went.

Abruptly, Raksha turned, huffing, her crest flaring. It was Graves, emerging from the lab, looking around with an open look of shock on his face before freezing as he noticed her. "Over here," Newt called, and made shooing noises at Raksha. She eyed him, then Graves, snorted loudly, and padded off back to her section on silent paws.

Graves gave her a wide berth. "That's a nundu, isn't it? Good Lord! How did you even manage to tame something like that?"

"She's not tame in the least. None of them are, they're all wild creatures. Like I told you, they're not pets."

"Where'd you even find it?"

"I was in Africa, and a tribe's new grazing grounds had encroached into her territory. Conflict would've been inevitable. Uagadou called me in to consult. Gave me an ultimatum, really. Either I removed her from the area, or they would destroy her. Since she was only a juvenile at the time, they probably would've succeeded." Newt shook his head, with a grimace. "Took me a few days to track her down, and a couple of weeks to earn her trust. They didn't think to try any other solution."

"I can imagine." At Newt's frown, Graves said dryly, "The poison breath and such?"

"It's a defense mechanism. That despite their reputation, the nundus don't actually trigger at the slightest provocation. They're obviously built with many ways to deal with simpler threats, with their claws, teeth and speed. I'd have been more worried about their impulses if they weren't alpha predators." Newt continued checking over Rupert as he spoke. "It makes no sense for an alpha predator to breathe toxins all over its hunting ground unless it absolutely has to. If it kills all the prey, what will it eat tomorrow?"

"Didn't you say that magic was the spanner in Nature's work?"

Considering what they'd been doing at the time, Newt was actually a little surprised that Graves had remembered that. He pinked, turning his face away. "Ah, yes quite. But. Animals themselves aren't beyond logic. Most of the time. The principles of natural selection still work with magical creatures."

"Makes sense." Graves stopped short of walking onto the rock, though he looked restless.

"Still, since everyone thinks they're so very dangerous though," Newt muttered, "negotiating Raksha's resettlement has proven to be a challenge. Which is why she's still with me. Have you eaten?"

"Your No-Maj friend made a soup." Graves' tone went flat, which was possibly a warning sign. Maybe Jacob's not-yet-obliviated state was annoying him.

“How did the meeting go?” Newt asked, trying for a diversion.

“They asked me questions until Queenie returned to verify my statements. Which she did. What a waste of time.”

“You can’t really blame them,” Newt said gently. “After all. It’s quite a story.”

“Even your *friend* Tina had some trouble believing that we broke out of Nurmengard.”

What was that emphasis for? “It’s quite a story,” Newt repeated, more slowly.

“Do you prefer women? Is that it? We’re now in private,” Graves said impatiently, when Newt blinked, startled by the sudden non sequitur.

“... I don’t have any preferences,” Newt said, after a pause. “And. To be honest. With all due respect, it’s not any of your business. So what’s next?”

Graves scowled, glancing away at the case, in the general direction of the Erumpent’s habitat. “We need to get our wands back. Otherwise, we’re of no use to the others. Yours will be easier. It’s locked in the Evidence vault, according to Queenie, and Diego’s extremely good at breaking into that place, despite my efforts over the years. He’s normally an excellent Auror otherwise,” Graves grumbled, when Newt grinned. “Good instincts, generally.”

“That’s why Grindelwald fired him, I presume.”

Graves nodded. “Diego said that now that he’s thinking about it, a day before he was fired, he made an offhand comment to Grindelwald-as-me that his wand technique seemed different recently. Personal technique is hard to mimic, and Grindelwald uses... more flamboyant gestures.”

“I’m surprised the other Aurors didn’t notice.”

“Grindelwald’s been careful to use wandless magic or simple spells around the others, but Diego saw him disappearing somewhere from an alley outside the Woolworth building, when he was on a smoke break.”

“How are you going to get your wand back? Grindelwald’s going to be holding on to it. Though. Presumably he’s staying at your house? We could ambush him there.”

Graves shook his head. “It’s never a good idea to rush headlong into an operation without having a better understanding of the situation. Amelie is going to try and recall the others who were fired, and Diego knows someone who’s good at decrypting books.”

“Grindelwald doesn’t just have my wand. He has the Obscurus I put in stasis,” Newt reminded him. “He. Obviously has an interest in Obscurials for some reason. That sketch of the girl, and that young man in the photograph. We should look for them.”

“The photograph’s recent, judging from the resolution and the boy’s clothes. I’ll get someone on it. Kai still knows people in Records. Though, if they’re No-Majs, or untrained muggleborns, that’s going to be complicated.”

Newt nodded. “The book’s in my lab, third shelf.” When Graves didn’t move, Newt petted Rupert, which lay down comfortably, huffing. “Was there something else?”

“You should probably get some rest. There’s not much room up above, though. Amelie didn’t really think she’d be hiding so many people when she created it.”

“I’ll sleep in here. It’s no problem. Jacob could too, if he wanted to. The creatures don’t mind him.”

Graves grimaced. “You’re very attached to... You do realize he’s going to have to be obliterated eventually.”

“Yes I do,” Newt said, trying not to sound annoyed, but it probably fed over the bond anyway, weakening slowly as it was. “Your point being? He’s still stuck with us for now. And yes. It was my fault. I know that.”

“All right.”

When Graves still didn’t budge, Newt belatedly said, doubtfully, “Oh. Are you... did you... want to sleep down here?” Would he even like that? Like most of the people Newt had ever met, Graves seemed openly wary of magical creatures, particularly the large ones, and some of the case’s residents didn’t tend to have firm boundaries about visitors.

“No, I think... I can manage today,” Graves said gruffly, which was probably a sign that the bond *was* wearing off. Finally. Newt forced a smile, hiding his irrational disappointment. This really was for the best.

“Good night then.”

“... ‘Night,” Graves said quietly, and retreated.

Beside him, Rupert sniffed loudly, and nudged Newt pointedly in the back, in the direction of his lab and the ladder out, heavily enough that Newt took an involuntary step forward. “Stop that,” Newt said absently, patting the guardian lion on his muzzle. Then he sighed out aloud to himself, and went to set up a cot.

## Chapter End Notes

Refs:

<http://www.amny.com/transit/nyc-taxis-through-the-years-from-horse-drawn-cabs-to-hybrids-and-beyond-1.10037203>

Forever writing Michael Peña into my stories. For the police ranks, although it feels to me like the American Federal ranks will probably make more sense (Agent, etc), I prefer the military-esque State ranks (some States have Director as the rank for Chief of Police).



# Chapter 7

## Chapter Notes

Happy New Year's Eve --- New Year to everyone!

Newt was late for breakfast, because he'd woken up to the Occamies piled over him and extracting himself carefully without anyone panicking and getting a whole lot bigger had taken delicacy and subtlety. In the kitchen, Queenie and Jacob were already clearing up, though Queenie grinned at him as he shuffled in. "Newt! I missed you yesterday. I'm so happy that you're all right."

"I heard that you saved the day," Newt said warmly. Queenie giggled and shook her head, but behind her, at the sink, Jacob nodded vigorously. "You are amazing."

"Pshaw, you charmer. Sit down. We still have some toast. Tea? Coffee?"

"Tea, please. Where's everyone?" Newt asked belatedly. The messy chamber with its map and desks was empty.

"Tina recognised the boy in the photograph. Apparently he's the reason why she got fired. She used magic when she tried to help him. She was told that it was because she'd broken the Statute of Secrecy, even though usually, if Aurors cover their tracks with obliviation, MACUSA tends to turn a blind eye." Queenie sliced Newt some toast as he sat down at the narrow kitchen table, and passed him a fork.

"Is the boy an Obscurial? Grindelwald must have fired her instantly for accidentally stumbling over him, then."

"We're not sure," Queenie said soberly. "They've gone off to try and find him. Credence, that's his name."

"All of them went?"

"No. Diego went out to check on some contacts, but he'll be back." Jacob said. "It seems he's going to go and fetch your wand. With Queenie."

"That's quick. I'll go as well."

"I wish I could help," he said, wistfully.

Queenie gently touched his wrist. "Someone needs to be here," she told him. Jacob flushed a little as he put the kettle on, but he nodded.

“Besides,” Newt said, feeling a little like an intruder. “I’m going to need someone to watch my case. And if anything happens, the creatures know you. If we’re not back in time, I’m going to need someone to feed them at about eight at night. I’ll leave some instructions.” Hopefully, it wouldn’t get to that, but Jacob nodded attentively.

Diego threaded back over when Newt was almost done writing down his instructions, on his second cup of tea. Grinning and stinking of cigarette smoke, Diego slotted himself on a spare chair next to Newt, and levitated a cup from the sink over to himself with a gesture. “Whoo. You know, Buddha man, I’m confused. Didn’t you bond with the boss?”

“It was necessary at the time,” Newt said, blinking at the blunt sally.

“Yeah, well, he damn’ near bit my head off when I asked him this morning why he wasn’t sleeping down in your case,” Diego said sadly. “Then Tina acted like I pissed on the floor or something, and she’s only a fucking Corporal. It’s a sad day when a Corporal gets to lord it over a Sergeant Major, s’all I’m saying.”

“Language,” Jacob hissed from the sink, nodding at Queenie. Diego rolled his eyes even as Queenie laughed.

“Her? Her sister’s an Auror. Her *mom* was an Auror. She’s used to us and our bad manners.”

“True,” Queenie agreed blithely. “More eggs, Diego?”

“Naw, thanks much. So what’s the deal?” Diego asked, looking back at Newt. “Since I’m apparently an idiot.”

“It was a temporary thing to get him out of a very bad rut,” Newt said carefully. “So that we could both escape Nurmengard. I used a trick, rather than uh, resolving it the traditional way. But now that he’s back here, he’s free to find another omega. The temporary bond will probably end in a day or so.”

“Yeah,” Diego said, openly unimpressed. “So you think the boss is just gonna find someone else, huh.”

“Why not? It’s a big city, and presumably, a lot of wizards and witches live here.”

“I’ve seen him push an omega once, ever, and that was to save some kiddie’s life. *After* he’d damned near half-killed himself trying everything else. He ain’t *ever* done it to me before. Or any of the others.”

“Well,” Newt said, frowning. “I hope he apologised. And. He’s not really in his right mind.”

“The last time he got accidentally heat bonded,” Diego said, with a glance at Queenie, “it sure as hell wasn’t like this. Remember?”

Queenie grimaced. “He was so mad. All the time. It actually gave me a headache, and I only came up briefly to your floor to ask Tina if she was going to be home for dinner.”

“Avoided the other guy like the plague until it was over. Was years back, wasn’t it?”

Newt's heart sank a little. "It's the same now. He's very unhappy about the situation."

"It's not the same," Diego disagreed, and Queenie nodded. "He's actually acting. Kinda normal? Like any other newly-bonded, overprotective alpha. Well. Other than sleeping on his own, which was obviously putting him in a bad mood. And then I opened my big mouth."

"You know," Jacob said thoughtfully, from the corner of the kitchen, "I have no idea what any of you have been talking about."

"Magic business," Queenie said quickly.

Newt sighed. "Life's a lot easier for you muggles. Don't worry," he told Diego. "Things will be back to normal for the Director in a day or so."

"Easy for you to say," Diego said mournfully. "You're not the one he was obviously tempted to strangle this morning."

"Can we talk about my wand?" Newt asked, a little plaintively.

Diego wagged his eyebrows, which earned him a sharp smack on the wrist from Queenie. "Okay," Diego coughed, even as Newt stared at him blankly. "Yeah. Breaking into Evidence. It's going to be fun."

"Really?"

"Well no," Diego conceded. "If we get caught, we probably gonna die. But. That's why we won't get caught."

"Outstanding logic," Newt said slowly. "This must be why you're a Sergeant Major."

"Thanks." Diego beamed. "Course, the boss was totally against you being on this mission, which makes no goddamned sense, because, there are a hell a lot of confiscated wands and shit in Evidence, and we're gonna need a getaway *truck* if we haul out all the stuff from there. So we're just going to pop over and back, and nobody's gonna tell him that you went with us. Right?"

"I don't see why he'd care. After tomorrow," Newt conceded. "Or whenever the bond wears off."

"Wow," Diego said, with another glance at Queenie. "Is this guy normally like this?" At her wry smile, Diego patted Newt tentatively on the shoulder. "Though. Maybe I'm reading this wrongly. 'Cos. The boss really is an asshole. Don't tell him I said that to you. But. I mean, if *you're* the one who can't wait for all this shit to be over, well, more power to you."

"I'd really rather like Grindelwald to be arrested and the Obscurial to be found before he or she gets hurt," Newt conceded. "But I've got nothing against the Director, and I wish him the best."

"So... you don't like him?"

“I didn’t say that,” Newt said quickly. “It’s just that this is going to be highly theoretical in a day or so. *Now* can we get my wand?”

“Whoo. Okay. No need to get scary, man.”

#

“I found this a year ago,” Diego confided, as they walked in single file along the unfinished subway tunnel, their Lumos-lit wands held before them. “Apparently, way back, MACUSA had this idea of having a special train station to themselves, like Hogwarts. So they built a station underground, next to the Woolworth building. But in the end they felt it was just kinda easier to walk from City Hall if you really didn’t want to apparate, so they never finished the station, and closed it back all up.”

“And it links up to the Evidence vault?” Newt blinked. “Isn’t that. A rather large security breach?”

“No, no, ‘course not,” Diego assured him hastily. “It’s more of a very tiny security breach. A Diego-shaped one.”

“... how did you not end up fired earlier?” Newt asked, chuckling.

“Tina’s often wondered that too,” Queenie confided.

“Hey, who’s been holding the record for highest solve rate the last two years? Me, that’s who,” Diego puffed up briefly. “Sides. The thing I took from the vault was mine to begin with, ‘cos I found it. Just so happened that nobody else saw it that way. But I put it back! And then owned up. Boss still yelled at me for an hour, though. Damn. Did I mention that he’s an asshole?”

“Several times, yes.”

“Well,” Diego said comfortingly, “he’s a strange one, and Amelie used to say that he’s living proof that ‘there’s someone for everyone’ is a fucking lie. So don’t feel like it’s your fault or anything. They’ve been friends since Ilvermorny.” Diego paused. “They’ve been *allies* since Ilvermorny. Not sure if he’s got friends.”

“Of course he does,” Queenie said firmly. “Diego. That’s such a mean thing to say, even for you.”

“Hey, don’t look at me, we’re contractually obliged to cover his ass,” Diego said, grinning, even as they came up to a heavy steel door. It would’ve looked normal to a muggle, but even steps away, Newt could feel the heavy wards slapped over it, twisting invisibly, repellent just by existing. Even Queenie frowned slightly, looking around.

“I’m... not that good with complex defensive wards,” Newt admitted. “And I don’t have my wand.”

“Eh, these? They’re my wards. I untangled them on my way in and put them back on my way out. What?” Diego said, as Newt blinked at him. “I said it was just a me-shaped security

breach, no? But maybe the two of you should stand back. If I do this wrong, maybe the tunnel explodes. Haha! No, I'm joking."

When Diego sobered up and went to work, the playfulness abruptly faded. He lit up the wards carefully in lines of pale blue, then unlocked interlinked chains with the delicacy of a pianist, manipulating failsafes, slotting counterbars into place, easing link after link until the wards untangled. Queenie clapped, while Diego took a bow.

"Now for the lock." Diego pulled a set of picks from an inner coat.

"I could help with that." Newt had brought Pickett along, just in case.

"Pssh, don't need to trouble your little friend with this. Tickling locks is *fun*."

"How did you become an Auror again?" Newt asked, amused.

"I'm the first non-beta in my family. My mama said if I didn't become a cop I was probably going to become some kinda no-good hustling *cholo* who'd embarrass the family and probably die before he gave her grandchildren," Diego admitted, as the lock clicked open. "So she made my brothers watch me real carefully in Ilvermorny and put the fear of God in me at home. First class honours, baby. After you." He opened the door with another playful flourish.

The unfinished station was pitch dark, and smelled of stale air and rats. They made their way around long-rotted scaffolding and abandoned construction planking, sandbags and rubble. The troughs for the rails had been marked out, but only one side had been partly excavated, feeding off into the gloom. Part of a set of stairs led up to nothing. Diego ignored it, circling around, picking his way towards another service door, set into the far wall, against the second marked-out trough.

"Wait," Newt said quietly. "The floor."

"Saw it too, huh?" Diego said, sounding resigned. "I always tell the kids. When you lock down an illusion charm, you can't make it all look so goddamned perfect. Just mimicking the rest of the room ain't enough. Places age. The 'planks' in there ain't as dusty as the ones out here."

"I didn't see it," Queenie said apologetically.

"Eh, s'part of our job," Diego said generously. "Boss moans about it all the time. 'Having half a brain and an eye for detail will save your life' and all that. Here goes."

The illusion unspooled under Diego's unpicking into a flat black pool, as still as a plane of dark mirror. "Ooh," Diego sighed. "Guess they really didn't want me to come back in this way. Must've put it in after I fessed up. I really hate foulglass."

"Isn't that the same as the stuff in the execution chamber?" Queenie shuddered. "I saw it briefly. When I was trying to save Tina and Jacob."

“Probably. Picquery invented it. The one in the chamber gets activated by memories. Lures you in, you go to sleep, happy and dead. This one, I’m not sure.” Diego admitted.

“Is it just me,” Queenie said tensely, “or is the pool... getting bigger?”

The dark fluid was starting to seep out, inch by inch, in a flat line, a moving tide, ebbing towards them. “Shit,” Diego swore, starting to back off. “We’re. Gonna have to find ‘nother way in.”

“What was that part before? Before the pool?” Newt asked.

“Flat!”

Newt raised his stolen wand. “Use Reparo.”

“Reparo doesn’t work that way!” Diego paused. “*Does* it work that way? The foulglass is still gonna have to go somewhere!”

“It *can* go somewhere. But we just need to get to that door while it does.” Newt shook his wand, but it stubbornly refused to work. Just like in the hotel room.

“How are we going to get out after? Assuming this even works?” Diego protested.

“We’ll figure it out!”

Queenie stepped forward, wand raised. The tide hesitated, as blocks from the rubble pile beyond started to float over, piling themselves down into the pit in neat arcs. The fluid displaced, sloshing, then Diego spat something in Spanish and gestured sharply. Entire sections of rubble around the room rose into the air. Blocks shot over, falling into place, the ground levelling back up, the foulglass staining some blocks, splashing around others.

“Run!” Diego yelled, darting over dry ground, sprinting for the door. Around them, the spell seemed to wind time back in forward motion. They dodged blocks that spun past them, darted around spikes of black fluid that speared towards them. Diego reached the door first, and for an awful moment, Newt thought that it might be locked. But it swung open, and they piled in. Diego kicked it shut behind them, and spun a quick ward over the steel that glowed a bright blue just as something slammed into the door, hard enough to dent it.

“Shit.” Diego sat down on the concrete, breathing hard. “God damn. You’re a crazy man.”

Newt peered into the dark. The shadows grew deep at the end of a narrow concrete stairwell, which rode upwards and out of sight. The ceiling was low: his head nearly brushed the cracked concrete top, and as he peered up into the stairwell, it seemed to corkscrew up into nothing. “We’re. Under the Woolworth building?”

“Yeah.” Diego got up, dusting himself off. “C’mon. Interesting bit of history,” he said, as they went up the stairs. “The Evidence floor is new. This place was built ‘bout ten years or so back, but it was just meant to be the MACUSA building at first. Us Aurors had another place near Hell’s Kitchen. We kinda preferred it there. So we said thanks but no thanks when they told us we had’ta move. Was only when the boss became Director that he agreed to

‘consolidate’. We got a few floors to ourselves, and they stripped out a maintenance floor and turned it into the vault.”

Queenie nodded. “I rather liked the move,” she admitted. “It meant that Tina and I worked in the same building.”

“Anyway, they bricked up all the ways in but the main door,” Diego said, as they reached the top of the stairwell, onto a dead-end landing. “But I found a draft of the Woolworth plans when I was in the Archives one day looking up a file. Eh. This is a better illusion. Probably Amelie’s work.”

Unpicked, the illusion revealed a metal surface, the back of some file cabinets. Using levitation to carefully move the cabinets aside, they squeezed through and into a steel cage full of filing cabinets. Diego picked the lock at the end, noiselessly, and let them out into a huge floor, made of row upon row of floor to ceiling metal shelves, thickly tagged with colourful slips. Most of the items, whatever they were, were in boxes, some warded, some not.

“Gotta be quiet, just in case,” Diego whispered. “Should be all right, though. Shift changes in an hour. In the meantime, ain’t nobody come down here.”

Just as he said that, there was a shuffling step, several rows away. Newt froze. Queenie frowned, concentrating. “It’s Richardson,” she whispered to Diego. “He’s... taking a break?”

“Fuck that asshole,” Diego hissed, incredulous. “Stay here. I’m gonna show him taking a fucking break. I get fired for a couple of months and discipline all goes to hell.” He slunk off. Moments later, there was the faint sound of a scuffle, a muffled yelp, and someone’s head getting thumped heavily against the floor. Diego reappeared, scowling, and gestured for them to follow, muttering darkly all the way under his breath in Spanish.

The Evidence vault was a maze: without Diego, they probably would’ve gotten lost. They passed a whole section with locked and chained books, and a wall behind a warded cell, hung with eight blackened swords. They passed glass cases that looked empty, and cases that seemed to hold lightning. Finally, they came to a section that held just shelves upon shelves of wands, most merely tagged with numbers. “See what I mean?” Diego murmured.

“How do you know whether my wand’s even been put here, in the right section?”

“Oh my God. If they didn’t manage that, I’m going to go right up now, fuck backup, and start kicking asses,” Diego scowled.

Newt’s wand hadn’t been filed in the recent rack, nor alphabetically. Scowling, Diego turned on his heel, but Queenie hastily grabbed his elbow. “There’s an Unsorted section, isn’t there? Tina mentioned it to me once. Very junior Aurors tend to get stuck cleaning it up,” she explained, with a glance at Newt.

“That’s meant to be cleared. Every day! At least of the bits that we can figure out. Sorting out a wand isn’t fucking advanced arithmancy.” Diego glanced around, though, to get his bearings, then he marched off, past the wand ranks.

“For someone who once got into trouble for stealing from this vault,” Newt said slowly, trying not to grin, “you do seem to take its organisation very seriously.”

“When I put back the smokum, I put it back in the right bit!”

“All right, all right,” Queenie said soothingly, with a pointed warning stare at Newt. “Coast’s still clear.”

The Unsorted section was really a large square area in a corner of the vault, piled high with boxes, some dusty, some newer. Diego got them looking through the newest few boxes, but thankfully, it didn’t take long: Newt found his ash wand with relief, buried under some used flasks and a metal cube. “Here,” he said, with relief. “And Henry’s cocoon!” Thank God the Swooping Evil had decided to stay in its cocoon form when Grindelwald had confiscated it.

“There was an *animal* in Unsorted?” Diego goggled.

“Well, it does look like a pouch.” Newt pocketed the cocoon quickly. “And. I was a little worried, but, in this form, Swooping Evils are almost indestructable, often unrecognisable, and he doesn’t need to eat for another month or so.” Still, that was a relief.

“Doesn’t look at all like a pouch,” Diego scowled. “Looks like animal poop-shaped egg. And. It should have been filed in the fucking animal section with the other eggs in stasis. What the hell. That’s even easier to sort!”

“You have. An *egg* section. In stasis.”

“Yeah. Why? Getting stuff out of Evidence takes a lot of red tape, and negotiating anything with Ilvermorny is even worse, so we just chuck them in stasis.”

“Where is it?”

“Oh no you don’t. We’re getting out of here. There’s an apparition block on the Woolworth building, which is why we had to break in here. So. We gotta get out. And I don’t really wanna head out the way we came in. But I’ve got an idea.”

“Does it involve invisibility cloaks?” The Evidence vault, after all, was obviously a treasure house of the strange, confiscated, and fantastic.

Diego deflated slightly. “Was it that obvious? Damn. I always wanted to have one of those. And we’ve got a few down here.”

“It’s a good idea. But. We’re still going to save all those eggs,” Newt said firmly.

“But—”

“Diego.”

“It won’t take that long,” Queenie said soothingly. “And if no one else comes down here to take a break, we’ll have the time.”

“If we *do* get caught,” Diego pointed out, “we’ll die.”

“We’ve escaped before.” Queenie said airily.

“If we escape, which is a big ‘if’, the boss will kill me,” Diego said sadly.

“Look at it this way. You’re already in trouble, since you took Newt along when you weren’t supposed to,” Queenie told him. “So you might as well be in trouble for something interesting. Like stealing a dragon’s egg.”

“You’ve got *what* in here?” Newt blinked.

“... true. That’s. So true,” Diego said slowly, ignoring Newt. “Since we’re already going to take a wand and them cloaks, we might as well make it a proper heist, yeah? Steal something actually worth stealing. Something that people haven’t stolen from the vault before.”

“That’s right!” Queenie said brightly. “That would be so brave. So daring.”

“Okay. There’s a section with containers. We’ve got a case in there like yours, with the Unfolding Charm. If we can float all the stasis cases in there, that’d be a lot easier. C’mon.” Diego wandered off to the right.

“Thanks,” Newt whispered, and Queenie grinned at him and winked, patting his wrist.

# Chapter 8

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

With all the eggs either buried in warm sand, set up in incubators, or left in a tank of lukewarm water, Newt was carefully returning the bubbled Obscurus to its winter section when there was a loud oath from the lab. Hastily floating it back in place, Newt ducked out of the winter habitat, just in time to see Rupert facing down Raksha, horns glowing faintly. Hidden just behind Rupert's shoulder, between the lion and the entryway to the lab, was Graves, wide-eyed.

"Raksha!" Newt hissed. "He's all right. He's a friend. Rupert! Stop that."

Newt darted over, pushing between them, and Rupert sniffed, padding back to his section. Newt grabbed Graves' hand before he could protest, and offered his palm for Raksha's inspection. The nundu glowered at Graves, even as Graves tensed up, but she deigned to sniff his palm, then she huffed and padded off, pretending disinterest.

"Don't just come down here unaccompanied," Newt told Graves firmly. "You're lucky Rupert decided to intervene."

"I. Just wanted to let you know that breakfast was ready." Graves was still staring after Raksha.

"Breakfast?" Newt blinked. "What time is it?"

"Eight," Graves said dryly, "in the morning, the next day. You didn't sleep?"

"I had a lot of coffee. Also. All those eggs. You people should've had them carefully couriered to Ilvermorny! Professor Zhang would've known what to do with them. Some of the species you were holding in stasis are critically endangered—"

"Yes, about 'all those eggs'. I do believe you people stole a hell lot more from the Evidence vault than you really should've," Graves said flatly. "I told Diego to go and get your wand back, not *loot the damned place*. May I have my wrist back?"

Belatedly, Newt let go, flushing in embarrassment, and took a step back. He'd been so occupied over the eggs that he hadn't even noticed: the heat bond was gone. "It's not Diego's fault," Newt said quickly. "I insisted on going. And on retrieving the eggs and such. And uh, the cloaks. Also, how did you even find out about the matter?"

"Diego's pathologically incapable of keeping a secret," Graves growled. "Also, I'm fairly sure that taking the cloaks was probably his idea, and quite likely necessary at the time. But the rest doesn't belong to you! You can't just keep breaking the law!"

“The Obscurus in stasis was previously mine,” Newt mumbled defensively, and then had to stifle a yawn. “And there were possibly lives at stake. The effect of stasis on magical creatures is a scientifically unexplored matter! As it is, I’m still running tests.”

Graves rubbed a hand slowly over his face. “Amazing. You’re not even the least bit remorseful. I really should charge you with something. Lucky for you, I don’t have the time to deal with it right now.”

“How did the... did you find the boy? You were all gone an awfully long while.”

“We didn’t,” Graves said, sounding annoyed. “The orphanage is knee-deep with No-Maj police. Seems someone kidnapped the boy and all the little girls in the place. What the fuck. We spent the day making our own inquiries, but it’s a big city. They could be anywhere. With that many people, he wouldn’t have apparated though, so we have that, at least.”

“Kidnapped...! So... now do we burst into MACUSA with accusations?”

“Not unless we know that all those children are safe. In the meantime, I’m going to try and reach out to Picquetry.”

“Thought you said that she’d most likely just arrest you.”

Graves shook his head. “The stakes are far higher now. Innocent lives are at stake. And the kidnapping’s going to eat up the front pages of the No-Maj papers. A major breach of the Statute of Secrecy might be imminent.”

“I can go with you.”

“Amelie’s going to go with me. You should rest,” Graves said soberly. “You’re swaying on your feet.”

“I’ve gone without sleep for longer before.” Newt peered closely at Graves. “Are you all right?”

“You mean, is the bond over? Yes, finally.” Graves said, unable to hide his relief. For a moment, Newt struggled to keep the disappointment from his face. It was irrational. “I was going to... I think we should talk.”

“Sure. What about?”

“After you rest.”

“What’s wrong with now?” Newt asked, puzzled. “If you need my help with something, I don’t have to sleep just yet. Especially if children are in danger. I’ll do what I can.”

“Not about that. About. What happened in Nurmengard, and the rest.”

“Well,” Newt stifled another yawn, “I can write you a report, like the sort that I’d file with the Ministry. Just offhand, though, I never knew that guardian lions were immune to wards. I think that’s what Rupert landed on, when he jumped from the balcony.”

"I... not that. Look," Graves said finally. "How about. After you rest. I'll probably be back in the evening. Have dinner with me."

"I told Jacob that you need a bland diet," Newt said firmly. "You can't switch over just yet. I know it's tempting to cheat."

"I meant. Would you go out for dinner with me," Graves said, with studied patience. "Outside. To a restaurant."

"Won't you get recognised?"

"Not at a No-Maj place, and there are some good ones near here."

"I don't see what's wrong with Jacob's cooking... Oh," Newt said belatedly, as Graves exhaled loudly. "You're. Asking me out. On a date? Or? I thought the heat bond's over."

"It is. And... look, you don't have to. I mean, obviously you know that you don't have to. And you're tired right now, I see that. So just. Let me know," Graves said, sounding resigned again.

Newt stared blankly, briefly speechless. "Well, that was unexpected," he said finally. "Residual effects?"

"No! I'm in my *forties*. I'm not a schoolboy."

"Says the person who tried to push another omega just a couple of days ago," Newt said, and this time, Graves actually looked faintly abashed.

"I regretted that," he admitted. "And yes, I've apologised to Diego."

"I was told that you had a different reaction during your last heat bond."

Graves pulled a face. "I've never used to enjoy being heat bonded, however temporarily. It wasn't so bad when I was younger, though, I usually avoided it when I could afford to. Later in life, though, I had to be careful. Given my position. I can't abide being manipulated."

"I noticed," Newt said wryly. "Believe me, I wouldn't have done it if I hadn't had to."

"I know that." Graves said gruffly. "And. I think it's obvious that I resented it. But at the same time. I didn't actually mind it as such. Some of the time. Which was new."

"There's probably someone out there whom you won't keep fighting," Newt said, as encouragingly as he could.

"I'd rather—"

"Psst!" Diego called down from the ladder, and Graves shut his eyes tightly. "Hey. Boss? Kai's back. And if Newt's awake, he probably needs to hear this too."

"Now what?" Graves growled, irritated.

“Kai said that he just saw Theseus Scamander riding into HQ on a hippogriff.”

“... What.”

#

“He probably didn’t get the telegram,” Newt said gloomily, as he watched the sleek tower of the Woolworth building from City Hall Park, occasionally stifling yawns. “It takes about three days to fly here from London via a hippogriff. He must’ve borrowed one from Mother. She has a breeder permit, so she’s allowed to deputise people to exercise them. It’s an exception to the Statute.”

“On the other hand,” Graves said wearily, leaning against the tree they were sheltering under, “it’d be interesting to see if he figures out the deception.”

“Haven’t the two of you been corresponding for a while?”

“Yes, but we’ve only met face to face once, years ago. Grindelwald knows we’ve escaped. That must be why he removed that boy, Credence, and those girls from the orphanage.”

“You destroyed the polyjuice stores in Nurmengard,” Newt said thoughtfully. “Hopefully he doesn’t have a lot hidden elsewhere.”

“I was losing track of time in there,” Graves admitted uneasily. “After a while. I’m not sure how far he spaced things out.”

“Well, you *were* blindfolded and chained to a wall,” Newt said carefully. “Sensory deprivation—”

“It was a simple detail,” Graves said, refusing to be comforted. “A novice mistake.”

“You really shouldn’t be so hard on yourself,” Newt said firmly. “I’d dare anyone who thinks that you should be completely fine to go through all that you’ve gone through. See if they manage to endure it. My creatures—”

“Stop comparing me to your creatures,” Graves cut in, annoyed.

“... You know,” Newt said, a little stiffly, “it’s very flattering and all, you asking me out for dinner, even if it’s as a thank you or whatever your reasoning is. But I can’t accept people who don’t like my creatures.”

“If I minded magical creatures,” Graves said, with forced patience, “would I have gone into your case twice?”

“You objected to me saving Rupert.”

“I rather thought we were racing against time,” Graves growled. “It turned out that he’d been delayed because of a long MACUSA meeting that stretched over a whole day.”

“And then the eggs.”

“Looting the Evidence Vault is a serious offence,” Graves shot back, exasperated. “And I presume you’re not going to return the eggs, which compounds the offence. I can’t just keep handing out amnesties. Diego can’t just...” He exhaled. “I would have discharged that part of the Evidence Vault into your care. After everything. I was planning to. Through legal means.”

“You really should have handed them off to Professor Zhang far earlier. He’s an egg and youngling expert,” Newt said firmly. “As it is, I’m probably going to have to go to Ilvermorny.”

“Not going to keep them all for yourself?” Graves smiled faintly.

“Of course not. Once—*if* they hatch, young creatures need a level of care that I can’t provide. They need constant supervision... some of them might need extremely regular feeding. And even then, the mortality rate tends to be high in artificial care. They’re very fragile at that stage of their lives. God knows how that long period in stasis might already have affected them.”

“I see. I’ll revise the department’s policy. After this.”

“At least you people put them in stasis,” Newt conceded. “Until I came along, the Ministry of Magic used to just put them in display cases. Or use them in silly tests! Good Lord.”

Graves started to reply, but then he straightened up from the tree, shading his eyes. A faint speck in the sky circled down, a sleek, large seagull with charcoal gray wings that darted behind the tree Graves was leaning against. After a second, Kai emerged, rubbing his jaw and yawning. He was a compact Chinese man, shorter even than Diego, hair trimmed into a short brush. Newt couldn’t easily place his age, though there were faint lines creased over his forehead, and flecks of silver in his sharp sideburns.

“He just left,” Kai said briskly.

“What? Did Diego deliver the letter?”

“How should I know?” Kai said sourly. “I keep telling you people. My animagus form is a *seagull*, not a fucking eagle. All I want to do when I’m a seagull is eat fucking chips.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised if he couldn’t,” Newt said wryly. “Hippogriffs are very alert and have a fair sense of smell. Even with an invisibility cloak, he might not have been able to approach it.”

“Why didn’t you just follow Theseus?” Graves scowled at Kai.

“Because that Disillusionment charm he has on that giant bird horse is really strong? Works on the rest of us? I told you earlier, he pretty much just appeared in the foyer on said bird horse.” Kai said grumpily. “No one ever listens to the seagull.”

“Get back up in the air and keep an eye out,” Graves growled. “And if you see Diego, tell him to stake out HQ for as long as he can. We need to know what happened in the meeting.”

“Still a slave driver,” Kai complained, though he obligingly got back behind the tree. Soon, the big seagull was hopping back into the air, spreading its wings.

“Don’t mind him,” Graves said absently, watching the sky. “He spends too much time as a bird and it’s been eating his brain for years. But he’s the only animagus we have in Magical Security.”

“I’m used to Aurors,” Newt reminded him. “My father was also an Auror. There’s a special sort of insanity that comes with your lives.”

“You’re one to talk. You have a *nundu*. And a Thunderbird. In your luggage.”

“There’s nothing wrong with—“ Newt yelped as he was abruptly pushed to a side by an unseen force. Graves took a step forward, just as the Disillusionment charm unlocked, fading in precise drips to its no-muggle stage. Hugged between a feathery flank and a wing, Newt laughed as the blue hippogriff churred in pleasure and rubbed its head heavily over Newt’s shoulder. “Theseus! ‘Seus, stop that. I’ve missed you too.”

“You probably missed him more than me,” said the hippogriff’s rider. Newt’s older brother was unstrapping himself from the saddle with the deftness of practice. He was slightly taller than Newt and just as lean, dressed in a navy blue coat with bronze buttons, cut like a soldier’s. They had the same ginger hair and freckles, though where Newt had been told that he’d inherited their mother’s softer, delicate features, despite also being an omega, Theseus had their father’s hard eyes and strong jaw, dusted with stubble. He cuffed Newt playfully against the ear after dismounting. “Really? Getting arrested by MACUSA? You nearly gave me a bloody heart attack when I got wind of it.”

“I’m fine now,” Newt said pointedly.

“You’re a goddamned fugitive now, that’s what you are.”

“You got the letter?”

“What letter? ‘Seus saw you when we were in the air and flew me down here.” Theseus frowned at Graves, blinking. “Huh. Things are starting to make more sense. Polyjuice?”

Graves nodded warily. “Commander, pleased to make your acquaintance again. Yes, the man wearing my face in MACUSA is an impostor. Grindelwald.”

“*What?*”

“This uh, is Theseus, and, also Theseus,” Newt said belatedly. “Err. Though I guess you both already know each other. My brother, that is, not the hippogriff.”

“In a professional capacity.” Graves agreed.

“I sent you a telegram telling you not to worry,” Newt said. “After we broke out of Nurmengard. You didn’t have to fly all the way here.”

“You *what* out of *where*? No. Don’t tell me here. ‘Seus is hungry and tired and my balls have probably been permanently damaged from three days of flying. Do you have a place?’ Theseus asked briskly, which was how they all ended up back in what Newt couldn’t stop thinking of as The Hideout.

He settled ‘Seus in his case with some thawed fish and water, and fell asleep on the straw, probably, because the next thing he knew, Theseus was prodding him in the shoulder. “Hey. Hey! Are you dead?”

‘Seus made a reproachful squawk, and tried to cover more of Newt with his wing, cuddling closer, prodding Theseus away with his beak. “Stop that,” Theseus said, batting at the hippogriff. “Jesus. You’re meant to be *my* hippogriff, you blasted traitor.”

“He’s not yours,” Newt mumbled, rubbing his eyes. “He’s older than you by two days and you were named after him. In his opinion, you’re *his* human.”

“Yes, well, Fido and Artemis miss you too. Wouldn’t budge from your room, even though they’re not supposed to be nesting in there. Bit of a headache for Mum. Just like you’re a goddamned pain in the arse for me,” Theseus growled. “I just got caught up by the Director. What the hell, Newton!”

“It all snowballed!” Newt protested, though he reluctantly sat up, stifling a yawn. “What time is it now?”

“Good gracious. Has it gotten to this?” Theseus rubbed his hand over his face. “You should move home. Where I can keep an eye on you.”

“I haven’t been a child for over two and a half decades. And. You’re not that much older than me.”

“Also,” Theseus said suspiciously, “something was rather strange about the Director’s account. The part where for some reason, Grindelwald decided to bring you all the way to Nurmengard to stash you in Graves’ cell. While. He didn’t do the same to your friends.”

So Graves had left out the part about the heat bond. “Grindelwald’s crazy, isn’t he?”

“He’s evil, certainly, but he’s not crazy. A frothing psychopath wouldn’t have evaded the best of international magical law enforcement for years.”

“We got out of Nurmengard. Isn’t that the important part?”

“No. Stop evading. You’re pissing me off. And you. Stop taking his side,” Theseus snapped, as ‘Seus warbled anxiously and tried to shoulder his way between them, wings curling over their shoulders. “Stop... ‘Seus! Back off. *Now*. And. *Sit*.”

‘Seus sat, several feet away, looking injured. “He gets stressed out when we argue,” Newt pointed out reproachfully. “He’ll moult.”

“*I* get stressed out when we argue. Usually it’s because *you* stress me out, that’s why we argue.” Theseus pinched at the bridge of his nose. “So. Heat bond. Yes? No?” Newt tried not

to react, but Theseus sighed. “I bloody knew it.” He got up and turned on his heel, marching towards the lab, and Newt scrambled to his feet, hastily grabbing Theseus’ elbow. “I’m going to kick his arse.”

“Wait. Wait. It wasn’t Perciv... it wasn’t the Director’s fault. He’d been a prisoner for months, he was in a bad rut and—”

“I know that!” Theseus scowled. “I meant *Grindelwald*.”

“Also nothing happened,” Newt said quickly. “I just put him to sleep. Like one of my creatures. And the heat bond’s worn off now and everything’s back to normal.”

“Really, nothing happened?” Theseus said, suspicious again.

“Oh, come on. I know how to handle a push. I’ve used it against *dragons*,” Newt said, annoyed. “I’m not helpless.”

“There is that,” Theseus conceded. “And I’ve seen you calm Zeus with it, who’s usually a complete asshole.”

“He’s not that bad,” Newt frowned at Theseus. “Honestly. He’s just old and the arthritis in his forelegs puts him in a bad mood sometimes.”

“So there’s nothing between you and the Director.”

“If there’d been a normal heat bond,” Newt pointed out, “it’d still have been in effect, don’t you think? He’s been a complete gentleman through the whole matter,” Newt added, which all right, wasn’t entirely true, but Theseus visibly started to calm down.

“True,” Theseus said thoughtfully. “All right then. Eat something. It’s dinner time, by the way. I’m going to bed.”

“Are you heading back to London?”

“No, and don’t sound so bloody hopeful,” Theseus glowered at him. “If Grindelwald’s in control of MACUSA’s Magical Security, that’s a sodding mess and no mistake. I can’t afford to turn a blind eye. The operation is Graves’ to run, I’m not looking to step on anyone’s toes. But I’m going to stay and help. We’ll call it a diplomatic exercise or whatever. It’d do me some good for him to owe me some favours.”

Auror politics again. “All right.”

“Get ‘Seus to rest. I want to take a personal look at Nurmengard when I’m up.”

‘Seus was too agitated to rest, and had to be calmed down by grooming, at which point Newt was tired again as he did his rounds, feeding his creatures. He was in his lab, creating a new batch of salve for Rupert’s sores, when Graves called cautiously down the ladder. “Newt?”

“Here. Come on in,” Newt said distractedly, measuring aloe vera extract into the flask. Graves came down, bearing a tray with a sandwich and a mug of hot tea.

“You’re meant to eat,” Graves said firmly. “Where can I...?”

“Corner of the bench.” Newt finished mixing the salve, setting it aside to steep, then spelling his hands clean. “Thanks. You didn’t have to do that. I was going to head back up eventually.”

“I wanted to make sure that you actually ate something. It’s been an entire day.”

“So it has,” Newt said, a little sheepishly. “I’m terribly sorry about Theseus. I should’ve known he would just, well, fly over the moment he’d gotten wind of my arrest.”

“He’s your brother. Besides, his help would be invaluable. And we’re not exactly strangers. Although our correspondence was always in a professional capacity, apparently his meeting with Grindelwald made him suspicious, so he cut it politely short once he could. Theseus has a second meeting scheduled, with Picquery. He’d play the concerned brother while trying to scope out the situation. I don’t suspect Picquery of anything but ignorance, but Theseus is wary.”

“He’s always tended to assume the worst of people.” Newt pulled over the tray and took a sip of the tea, self-consciously. Graves was wearing a crisp dress shirt and tie that actually fit today, with a black vest and gray dress trousers, proper shoes, and he looked even more handsome, with a hip pressed against Newt’s workbench, his arms loosely folded, framed comfortably by Newt’s world.

Newt looked away, hoping that he wasn’t starting to flush. “And he can be a very stubborn person, by the way, but he means well.”

“It seems to run in the family.” Graves’ voice had dropped a notch, and he rested his palm on the edge of the bench, leaning over, though not far enough to crowd. “Breakfast? Tomorrow?”

“You’re persistent, I’ll give you that.”

“So I’ve been told.”

“Can Theseus come?” Newt asked, feigning innocence.

Graves didn’t even miss a beat. “If you like.”

Newt sighed. “I think you’re wasting your time.”

“I’m more than old enough to decide that for myself.”

Newt tried to occupy himself by clearing up the grindstone, re-shelving bottled ingredients. This was why he couldn’t usually handle people. Nothing ended up logical. Logic told him to step away, to be firm, but base instinct pulled him the other way.

“Newt,” Graves said softly. “Tell me ‘no’, tell me that I’m annoying you like this, and I’ll leave you alone.”

“... Breakfast is fine,” Newt said, more briskly than he’d intended, but Graves still relaxed, with open relief. “Tomorrow.”

## Chapter End Notes

I have a friend who used to be a zoo vet, which meant taking care of baby animals occasionally, those that were found/rejected by the parents, and it always looked like a heartbreaking cycle of constant expert care followed by the creatures not always making it.

also forever writing jet li into my stories

for this version of Theseus my mental image is Domhnall’s character in The Revenant:



Personally idk where the fanon came from that Theseus and Percival were long term penpals... I feel it’s probably more logical that they corresponded in their capacity as Director / Head of DMLE.

**EDIT:** Ahaha sign that I'm not really a Potter fan: Actually didn't realize Domhnall is already in Potterverse. XD;; I just like how he looks in that coat.

# Chapter 9

## Chapter Notes

Early update today, going to be on a flight later :3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Annoyingly enough, Theseus invited himself along to breakfast. They went to a cafe a few blocks away that served strong Italian coffee, and sat on the sidewalk, watching the traffic while Theseus fiddled with his watch. “Imperturbable Charm,” Theseus explained. “Except combined with a version of Protego and a Disillusionment ward. Creates a bubble against eavesdropping that also makes muggles ignore you. It’s a Hobbes piece.”

“Your Quartermaster. I’ve heard of his inventions.” Graves didn’t seem put out by their unwanted guest. The cafe table listed a little to the side, and seemed unwilling to fit all three occupants plus coffee, but somehow they managed, with Newt seated between two of the most powerful Aurors in the world. It promised to be a strange morning.

“They blow up sometimes,” Theseus admitted, setting the charmed watch on the table. “He loves combining enchantments. Or trying to. We’ve got him in his own wing in the Ministry now, after the last uncontrolled transfiguration event.”

“How are Mother and Father?” Newt asked dutifully, if only to stop breakfast from becoming an endless sequence of talking shop, the way it tended to whenever Theseus and their father were within earshot of each other.

“Fine. Getting on in years. You really should go home more often. Mother’s dying for you to finish your book. She’s got her heart set on a lavish launch party.”

“Again? I told her not to.”

“She applied for a second permit from the Ministry to use the Savoy, but I put my foot down. The security alone would be a headache, let alone the amount of obliviation that’s going to have to be done. Then she didn’t speak to me for a week. The things I do for you.” Theseus sniffed, and drank some coffee. “Favourite child,” he explained, with a jerk of his thumb at Newt, when Graves looked at them with bemusement.

“That’s not true.” Newt muttered.

“I’m named after one hippogriff, you’re named after three.”

“Only because they couldn’t decide on a name,” Newt said. “I’m writing a book,” he told Graves, trying to change the subject. “I got a grant from the Ministry to do it, so it started off as a thesis and might’ve gone a little overboard.”

“I saw your last draft. It’s not a thesis, it’s an encyclopaedia,” Theseus corrected.

“It’s nowhere near as complete as I’d have liked, but the Ministry’s getting a little impatient, so I suppose I’ll have it wrapped up in the next month or so. And that’s why I haven’t been home. Mother has these endless revisions to the hippogriff section. I’m happy with what I have and don’t need the constant suggestions.”

“What else do you do for the Ministry?” Graves asked curiously, and Newt ended up talking about his travels in South America, for some reason, until breakfast had been eaten and their coffee had gone cold.

Graves got up to settle the bill, and once he was out of the charmed zone, Newt said quietly, “Did you really have to come?”

Theseus smirked at him. “Just wanted to make sure.”

“About what?”

“‘Nothing happened’, someone said.”

“It’s true!” Newt hissed.

“Please. You’ve never been remotely interested in alphas, after that Hogwarts matter. Which is fine, sure, you got burned pretty badly. And. It’s your life, we’re more than old enough to do our own thing, and all that.”

“But?” Newt prompted dryly.

“Nothing. He’s not a bad person, as far as I could tell from our letters. Normally great at his job. Recent events can’t really be helped.”

“...And?”

“And,” Theseus said evenly, “I just wanted to make sure that *he* knows that *you’re* amazing. What you do. That you just wrote a book that’s going to change how people treat magical creatures. Few people get to change the way people think about something.”

“You’re exaggerating again. Besides, you’re biased,” Newt accused him. “You’re—” Theseus raised his eyebrows in warning, even as Graves came out of the cafe and sat back down. Finishing his coffee, Theseus set his cup back down.

“Thanks for breakfast. Sorry for leeching off you, I’ll get my muggle money changed out of the pound later.” Theseus told Graves.

“Not a problem. Besides, you’re our guest.”

“I’m off, then. I’ll see how close I can get to Nurmengard. I agree, I don’t think he’d have taken the children there, but we should check.”

“Good luck,” Graves said politely, and Theseus nodded at them, getting up from the table, picking up the charmed watch, then tossing it to Newt.

“Might want to hang on to that for me for now.”

Newt pulled a face at him, and Theseus smirked, ambling off down the sidewalk, making his way back to The Hideout. “He’s been like that since we were children,” Newt muttered.

“Sorry.”

“Not at all. I used to wish that I had siblings, when I was a child.”

“Pasture’s not always greener on the other side,” Newt said, if halfheartedly. “Thanks? For breakfast?”

“You don’t sound so sure,” Graves said, with a quick smile. “It wasn’t so bad, was it?”

“Putting aside my nosy brother,” Newt conceded, “well, no. Though I think I rather rudely spent most of it talking about myself.”

“That was quite all right,” Graves said warmly, and it was easy to remember the last time Graves’ voice had pitched down like this, when he was pressed over Newt in bed, his mouth

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Newt pretended to occupy himself with pocketing the watch. “We really should be getting back as well,” he murmured.

“What are you doing today?”

“I told you earlier. I’m going to go to Ilvermorny. I think the eggs are fine to travel. I’m worried about a couple of them.”

“Go to...? No. Jesus. There’s a warrant out for your arrest now. Don’t you know what that means?”

“I sent Professor Zhang a telegram early this morning, and he’s responded.” Newt said soothingly. “He’ll meet me at Adams Station.”

“With a pack of Aurors?” Graves groaned.

“I really rather doubt it,” Newt said reproachfully. “We’re friends. He was the one who reviewed my book’s sections on eggs and younglings—I had it transcribed into Braille. And besides, you people are very busy here. I’m not exactly that equipped to contribute: I haven’t the least idea of how to find people in a city this big. I’ll be back in a couple of days.”

“Did you run that past your brother?”

“I don’t see why I have to. I’m quite capable of living life without his supervision.”

“I can’t leave the city right now. Can’t this wait until everything blows over?”

“And how long might that be? Besides, why would you need to come? I’ve got my wand back. I can handle matters myself.”

“Given your demonstrated tendency to fall headlong into trouble,” Graves growled, “I’m not so sure.”

“Operating on my own, sometimes in hostile circumstances, really isn’t anything new to me,” Newt reminded him. “I do a lot of fieldwork. And. I’ve always done things my way. For the sake of the things I believed in. That won’t ever change.” Graves exhaled, frowning at the street. “This is why,” Newt said, as gently as he could, “I told you that you were wasting your time with me. I know it’s a big ask, to get anyone to accept all that. Let alone an alpha.”

They walked back slowly, avoiding the main streets. Theseus would probably have left by now. Newt would have to catch a cab to Grand Central Terminal, or maybe ask someone to apparate him close by.

“I don’t think it’s a big ask.” Graves said, as they angled into an alley, and Newt blinked at him for a moment before context caught up. “I don’t exactly have the sanest of lives myself. Living with an Auror is a challenge. I’m no stranger to it wrecking relationships, mine or the others’.”

“My mother managed it,” Newt said, if vaguely. His father hadn’t been a constant presence in Newt’s life, at least until he had retired. “She was disappointed when Theseus chose to become an Auror, admittedly. But it’s still an honour to be asked.”

“It’s an honour to *serve*,” Graves corrected. “Regardless. Relationships shouldn’t be about forcing someone to fit your wants and expectations. It’s an arrogant way of thinking about other people, at the very least. I’m not looking to change anything about you.”

“Really?” Newt said, a little floored.

“Well,” Graves allowed, though he smiled faintly, “maybe your blithe disregard of the law. But given who your brother is, if he couldn’t manage that, I’m not sure that anyone could. I guess my point is. It seems to me that someone’s hurt you badly before. An alpha?” At Newt’s cautious nod, Graves shook his head. “I thought so. I’ve met alphas who’ve never grown out of thinking that they have the right to decide their omegas’ lives, down to the function of their wombs, in some cases. It’s a repulsive attitude.”

“That wasn’t exactly what happened.”

“Regardless,” Graves said gently, “I hope you’d believe me when I say that I’ll never seek to hurt you. I won’t try to change who you are. And I won’t use you.” Newt flinched—was that luck or perceptiveness—and Graves sighed, glancing around the empty alley before pulling him close. “Was that what happened?”

“It was a long time ago.” Newt wasn’t sure what to do with his hands, so he kept them loose by his sides, stiff as this felt.

Graves didn't seem to mind. "I've met no one like you. And. I meant what I said before. You're very pretty. But it's nowhere near the most interesting thing about you to me. You're principled. You're whip-smart. And you'd stand firm when you think that it matters—you'd tell the world itself to move out of your way. I like that," he whispered, so very close now. The pull felt inevitable. Newt's hands had crept up unconsciously to Graves' shoulders, stroking. "I'm glad that you don't have an alpha."

"Yet," Newt breathed, and pulled Graves into a kiss.

#

Learning to compromise meant grudgingly allowing a rather bewildered Tina to tag along on the trip, because all the other Aurors had been pre-assigned to other tasks. "There's something rather odd about the Director," Tina confided nervously, once their train pulled away from Grand Central Terminal, seated together in a first class carriage: she hadn't been confident about apparating them to the closest town. "Maybe it's the stress?"

"He's had a spectacularly awful past few months," Newt pointed out. "What happened now?"

"First he tells me that I'm going to have to accompany you to Ilvermorny and keep you out of trouble—not that this has ever really worked before—and then he acts like he doesn't even want me to go in the first place, so now I'm not sure whether I should have agreed to go or insisted on waiting for Amelie to reappear."

"He seems to be a terribly jealous person," Newt admitted. "I thought it was the heat bond, previously, but maybe not."

Tina pulled a face. "I thought that was over. Diego said that you weren't actually interested in the Director, that what happened in Nurmengard was just some stopgap measure. Damn. I fall for his bullshit all the time."

"It's partly true. Nurmengard was a stopgap. As to the rest. It's... complicated?"

"Really? Wow. I thought that kind of thing only happened in the romance novels that Queenie likes to read. Though. I guess the Director is a bit of a difficult person," Tina said hastily, when Newt sighed. "Even. Before everything."

"That's not really the issue. Personally, I'd never been that worried about settling down—quite the opposite. Ideally, I'd have wanted to find someone who also believes in the work that I do. Not necessarily in the same field, but at the very least, someone whom I don't have to keep justifying myself to."

"Opinions can be changed, can't they?"

"I think he's trying," Newt conceded. "But we'll see." The morning still felt too good to be true, particularly now that afternoon cynicism had set in. Had Graves truly meant all that he had said? Newt had been burned before. "How's the searching going? For those poor kids?"

“Amelie was all for confronting Grindelwald, but the Director pointed out that in a straight out contest between the disguised Grindelwald, Picquery, the rest of Magical Security versus us, we’d lose. And if we’re arrested... well, Grindelwald might just have the whole lot of us executed on the spot this time.” Tina said soberly. “So we’re still looking. Diego and Amelie have been working the usual informants. Kai’s keeping an eye out in the air. Queenie’s in an invisibility cloak over in the Woolworth Building. I was doing some legwork. Keeping an eye on the progress of the No-Maj police.”

“None of the other fired Aurors agreed to come back? You people seem stretched rather thin.”

“It’s a work in progress, Amelie says.”

“I don’t need a babysitter,” Newt said firmly. “If you get out at the next station you could keep doing what you were doing.”

“The Director might be rather out of sorts right now,” Tina said mildly, “but he’s still, as Diego would put it, the boss. Besides, I really hate getting yelled at.”

“My brother used to say that life as a junior Auror seemed to involve a lot of listening to shit loudly rolling downhill,” Newt recalled, with a smile. “Life isn’t that different across the Atlantic, I see.”

“Don’t I know it.”

“Your mother was an Auror too, wasn’t she? Diego mentioned it.”

“Oh yes,” Tina said proudly. “Passed in the line of duty.”

“I’m sorry to hear that.”

Tina shook her head, smiling. “She held Amelie’s position for over a decade. She used to say that she could’ve made Director if she really wanted to, but she felt that the job was 80% politics, 20% work.”

“Probably true. Overseeing all those branches of magical law enforcement while having to deal with the other arms of government and such usually means having no time for minutiae.” They talked about Tina’s past cases and some of what Newt remembered of Theseus’, as the train pulled them back northwards, slotting through stations, watching the towns grow smaller.

#

“Ilvermorny once considered having its own station too,” Tina said, when they alighted at Adams. The sky had darkened, speeding visibly into night. “Like Hogwarts. Since it was a bit of a hassle for some of the students and faculty to use a No-Maj station. But the cost of maintaining a train, a special station, navigating the No-Maj rail system to slot in our own train safely and such proved to be rather too much.” She glanced up at the looming weight of the mountains with fondness. “I haven’t been back here in years.”

“Did you enjoy Ilvermorny?”

“Oh yes. I was in Thunderbird. Small faculty, compared to the others, but maybe because of that, we had a grand old time.”

They found the Professor waiting patiently outside the station, on a bench, straight-backed in a black coat, his cane lying over his lap. Ilvermorny’s Magizoology Professor was an Asian man supposedly in his fifties, though Newt found it difficult to tell; he had an ascetic, sober face, milky eyes half-lidded. He tilted his head at their approach, listening, and between his legs and the bench, the shadows lengthened, fading into a heap of white fur with large, round eyes. The Demiguise tugged gently at Zhang’s elbow, and became invisible again quickly as Newt came closer.

“Professor,” Tina said respectfully. “I’m Tina Goldstein, and this is Newt Scamander.”

“Tina... Hrm,” Zhang smiled toothily. “The girl who had that rather unfortunate accident with my chimaera?”

Tina blushed. “Er, yes. But the vomit and such came off with lemon and lavender soap, as you said.”

“You’re here by yourself?” Newt asked, a little concerned. “I hope you didn’t have to wait very long.”

“Time is only a luxury if you sell it cheaply,” Zhang said, getting creakily to his feet, rubbing his back. “Nobody troubled me. Besides, I had company, though Jing’s a little shy.”

“A Demiguise, I saw, yes. I wish Dougal was shy,” Newt said wryly, “he caused me a great deal of bother the last time he decided to go on a bit of a wander.”

They took a floating black carriage up the mountains as Newt discussed Demiguise eating habits, too absorbed to notice the scenery, until Tina made a small sound of surprise. “We’re not going up the usual way?” she asked warily.

“Peace,” Zhang said, smiling wryly. “The two of you are in a grave amount of trouble, I hear. So we will enter the university quietly. Ilvermorny prefers to stay neutral, officially. The faculty’s relationship with MACUSA has been... icy, for a while. We feel that the absolute restriction on No-Majs is unfortunate, particularly given how Ilvermorny itself was founded.”

“Per... ah, Director Graves said that it was because Picquery fears infection.”

“Maybe so,” Zhang agreed. “And I’ve certainly encountered the sentiments that she fears myself. But laws built on fear do not often tend to be just, for they often lack nuance, and it’s a sad thing, what it does to 'muggleborn' children. We make them orphans out of fear.”

Jing materialised once the carriage came to a stop, descending past a thicket of gnarled trees. Zhang appeared familiar with where they were—he alighted unhesitatingly, and started briskly up the gentle slope, his cane sweeping lightly before him, Jing trotting along by his side. Tina and Newt had to jog to keep up. They threaded through the trees, and out into a

meadow that pulled gently upwards in rolling slopes to walled stone and slender towers peaked with elegant slate, linked by arching bridges that looked impossibly thin by moonlight.

Ilvermorny.

“I remember this,” Tina said, her voiced hushed. “We’re near the back of Ilvermorny. Up next to the Habitarium? Part of the wall opens up here. It was a fun class, getting to meet Granian winged horses and hippogriffs.”

“Fun?” Zhang said, with mock severity. “Class isn’t meant to be fun. Class is meant to be educational.”

Tina giggled. “Someday you’re going to get into serious trouble for mocking the Headmistress all the time, Professor.”

They walked right up to the walls, and Zhang felt along them, frowning slightly, then he abruptly paused, tilting his head again. Beside him, the Demiguise bared its teeth, crouching down, looking back into the tree line.

Graves stepped out, dressed in his beautiful white-lined long coat, his charcoal scarf draped over his shoulders, a hand tucked into one coat pocket. He smiled, knife-sharp, and Newt’s heart sank, even as Tina grabbed his elbow tightly. No. That wasn’t Graves. Beside ‘Graves’ was a man in Ilvermorny’s blue faculty robes, portly and tall, wand upraised in warning.

“Professor Zhang,” Grindelwald said, in Graves’ voice. “Hand over those fugitives, and you’ll be free to leave.”

“Ilvermorny is neutral ground,” Zhang said quietly. “Your wars have no meaning here.”

“We’re not in Ilvermorny,” the stranger in faculty robes shot back. “And you go too far. These two are criminals. Ilvermorny provides no sanctuary to those who break the law.”

“I am Auror Tina Goldstein of Magical Security,” Tina snapped, drawing her own wand. “The man beside you is an impostor. It’s Gellert Grindelwald, and he is under arrest. Stand aside, Professor Friedman.”

Instead of shock, Friedman shook his head and laughed, even as Grindelwald’s smile widened. “So the rot is exposed,” Zhang said, as though to himself. “The infection has spread. Even to these walls.” He shook his cane, and its form flickered, shrinking down into a wand. “The two of you should go. The apparition block doesn’t extend past those trees. I’ll hold them here for as long as I can.”

“I’m here to deliver something to you,” Newt disagreed, drawing his own wand. “And as far as I’m concerned, our business isn’t yet finished. Shall we?”

Refs:

My uncle pretty much held Graves' position once, albeit without the magic, and in the 60s in my home country XD;; rising up through the ranks until he became the Director. As a police wife, I think my aunt's been through a lot, she is amazing.

I can't figure out when Adams station was built in Adams, but the town's been around since the 1800s, so, /handwave. Ilvermorny's meant to be at Mount Greylock.

White canes for the blind was started by a guy painting his cane white in 1921, but didn't gain traction until much later.

# Chapter 10

## Chapter Notes

Back in Melbourne! Which means, due to the time difference, the update times are going to get a little earlier, I think. I should be able to close the fic in my usual number of chapters (approx 13+ total).

Duelling, Theseus had once told Newt, during the mild torture that was sometimes their childhood, was often a matter of luck and precision rather than raw strength. “You just need to know the counter spells!” Theseus used to yell, while chasing Newt around their home estate, often in between shouting at their hippogriffs to stop trying to intervene. Fido and ‘Seus had moulted a *lot* during Theseus’ sixth year break at Hogwarts.

It worked. Newt had passed his Defense class with flying colours, and now, against Friedman at least, Newt was holding his own. Spells flashed and died over the grass, fire flinching into steam, wind to mist. Friedman’s lip was curled up, baring his teeth, contemptuously flicking up barriers against Tina’s bolts. An impasse.

Grindelwald seemed... *amused*. He wasn’t bothering with his wand, holding it loosely in one hand while he threw bolts with the other, casually, as though playing at a game rather than duelling for his life. Wandless magic. Even with just wandless magic, he was more than a match for Zhang, shattering Protego after Protego with violent blasts. Zhang was as sober as ever, calm, even as another shield shattered, even as Jing went invisible, frightened. He gestured with a sharp flourish at the sky, shouting an incantation, hands raised, and lightning arced down, a brilliant tongue of white fire that crackled over Friedman’s hasty shield with a roar of thunder.

As their hearing slowly returned, ringing, Newt could hear Grindelwald laughing.

Friedman was on his knees, panting, red-faced and sweating. “Gellert—”

“Oh, don’t whine. I haven’t had this much fun in *years*.” Grindelwald flicked away another bolt, then an attempt at a full bind from Tina. “I regretted having to ambush Graves to capture him. That would’ve been an interesting fight. Though I hear that I’ve drawn your brother over here,” Grindelwald told Newt, smiling. “Now that would be an interesting match. Theseus Scamander, the war hero. Or it would have been, if he wasn’t an omega.”

“So what?” Tina demanded fiercely. “Omegas are just as strong as we are.”

“My dear girl,” Grindelwald sighed. “I don’t deny that. And they can be impressive as well. Mister Scamander here, for example, somehow managed to calm an alpha down in the

middle of his rut, escape from a cell instead of being incapacitated by a heat bond, *and* break out of Nurmengard with his case, the alpha in question, and my lion. Well done.”

“He’s not your lion,” Newt growled, annoyed. “And guardian lions are terribly endangered! I thought they were extinct. Besides, you’ve probably been feeding him the wrong thing. He was starting to develop eczema! Also, why in the world did you kidnap that boy and so many little girls? What is wrong with you?”

Grindelwald’s expression had gone from amused to comically bewildered, but now his angular face crumpled into anger, flushing to the ears. “Don’t speak about things that you know nothing about,” he snarled, taking a step forward. “I was planning on having some fun. But you, you had to open your mouth.” Grindelwald’s gaze swung from Newt to Tina, and he was smiling again, mirthless, a wolf’s grinning mask, his free hand going into the pocket of his coat. “Watch, child. The difference between an alpha and an omega. Or, shall I say. The difference between me and the rest of you.”

The push, when it came, was stronger than dragons’: it choked, flattening down as it drowned, endlessly, with the command that came—*Stop. Breathing*. Beside him, Zhang collapsed onto his knees, clutching at his throat, while even Tina staggered back, gasping. Grindelwald laughed, flicking a palm at her as though casually swatting a fly, and the surge of force slapped her back against Ilvermorny’s wall with a loud, wet crack.

He couldn’t breathe. He... *No*. Newt felt around the edges of the push, the threads of it, shutting it out, coring a small space for himself, then widening it. He could breathe. He could breathe, a small gasp. Their magic was not opposed, if he didn’t force logic on it, if he just *felt*. Like bars slotting into place, no longer out of sync. A connection sung into place, as much as it made Newt’s skin crawl, as much as Grindelwald’s magic seemed to roar all around him, like a force of nature. Stopping a river was impossible. But with a little pressure —

Beyond, Grindelwald’s eyes widened. His defenses were coming down, a cold rush, slabs of it jumping into place, but Newt forced back the command, all of it that he could pull, turning the river, and it was Grindelwald’s turn to stagger, to gasp and cough, dropping his wand. Newt didn’t hesitate. Henry’s cocoon was in his palm. He swung, and Henry burst into the air, wings outstretched, shrieking as he darted forward in a sharp arc, just as Newt cast a Full Bind.

Grindelwald countered, somehow. The spell deflected, right against Friedman: the Professor collapsed with a choked sound, arms frozen. Henry veered away, into the trees with a screech. Behind him, teeth bared, Grindelwald had drawn his real wand, a strange, long wand with carvings like elderberry clusters, running down its length.

With a roar, lightning crackled forward from his wand, earthing abruptly in an arced shield that Zhang threw up before them. The air smelled like the storm, and Newt was blinded by it, squeezing his eyes shut, just concentrating on trying to defend. Shields shattered, one by one. They were being pushed back, tiring. Grindelwald was laughing again, strolling forward. Something ugly was happening to his stolen face, distorting at the jaw, but he ignored it, his hand sweeping forward, calling a bolt of pure force that pierced through Zhang’s shield, catching the Professor on the arm, dropping him.

“The last one standing,” Grindelwald mused, spinning his wand up in the air, catching it deftly, even as Newt pressed his palms to his knees, trying to catch his breath. “Impressive. I think you deserve to die in way that’s just as impressive.”

He raised his wand, and to Newt’s horror, there was a flash of sickly green, a rushing sound, then he was being knocked flat on his front, nose deep in grass and soil. Above him, Rupert roared, his ground-shaking rumble of challenge—and pain. Something cracked, loud as a gunshot. Then there was an answering roar, higher above, from the distant ramparts of the wall, a woman’s bellow, amplified.

“*What on Earth is going on?*”

“Headmistress Matoskah!” Tina gasped, from where she lay against the wall, struggling to get up: Newt was also scrambling to get up, just in time to see Grindelwald dart back into the tree line, disappearing out of sight.

Rupert—the *Killing Curse*—but the guardian lion merely sniffed, sitting down on his haunches. One of his horns had shattered, lying in the grass, the broken haft of it barely visible from Rupert’s mane, and now that Newt was looking closely, the lion had five horns left. Four stumps.

“Professor Zhang,” Newt said anxiously, rushing over, even as Jing closed Newt’s case, and Dougal slid down off Rupert’s back. Kneeling beside Zhang, Newt checked his pulse. Still breathing. Zhang’s arm stank of burned flesh, blackened from shoulder to elbow, but Newt had no more energy left to try a spell: he sat heavily down on the grass, and waited for everyone else to catch up.

#

“You really shouldn’t be out of the infirmary,” Newt protested, as Zhang wandered into the Habitarium, but Zhang waved away his attempts to help, sitting down at a bench, tugged over by Jing. After a few heartbeats, Dougal materialised, shifting over to groom Jing’s back, though she ignored him. “I’ve fed your creatures and spoken to your assistants, everything’s on schedule. And. I’m so sorry!”

“Sit,” Zhang said gently, patting the bench beside him. His arm was bandaged and held in a sling against his body, his shirt rolled up high to his shoulder. “Where is your friend?”

“Tina? Her injury... Clean breaks, so healing spells worked. She’s debriefing the Headmistress privately. Professor, I’m terribly sorry to have brought all this trouble to your door. I feel awful about it. I didn’t think—”

“How are the eggs?” Zhang cut in lightly.

“Your assistants and I moved them into the appropriate settings that you pre-prepared. No change on the Nessa egg, I’m still concerned about that one. But the Ileshy egg’s finally gone a warmer colour, as you hoped it would.”

“Just in time, too,” Zhang said comfortably. “Eggs are often more resilient than we think, but they’re still fragile.”

“Yes. That’s why I wanted to get them into your care, before any further damage was done,” Newt sat, staring at his hands. “I thought it would be a quick trip out of New York and back on the night train. I nearly got all of you killed. I’ve... I’ve always worked by myself. Risked only my own skin. I’ve been lucky so far. It’s made me reckless, I think. And selfish.”

“Ah.” Zhang smiled. “To be young again.”

“Professor!” Newt protested, with a startled laugh. “I’m hardly young.”

“It’s a matter of perspective,” Zhang said, amused, patting his arm. “Remorse is often a good start. Knowing that you actually have a problem.”

Newt buried his head in his hands with a groan. “Yes. I. Just only had to almost get us murdered by a dark wizard to realize it.”

Zhang sighed. “It’s common for people who feel extremely strongly about a cause, particularly an unpopular cause, to develop a narrow focus, my friend. Particularly if they feel, rightly or wrongly, that they have to keep defending themselves against the world. It’s easy to become insular, to define everything in black and white. But as you’ve perhaps begun to see, simplicity itself often invites complications.”

“I’m so sorry.”

“I asked you to come,” Zhang reminded him wryly. “To be honest, perhaps some of this is also my fault. I was highly concerned about the status of the Nessa egg, in particular, and so I applied for a visitor’s pass from the Headmistress. She refused, giving no grounds. I thought that she was simply being difficult. So I invited you here anyway.”

“That’s why we didn’t go in through the front entrance?” Newt asked dryly.

“Yes. Matoskah explained to me later—in the infirmary—that she’d long been concerned about... a faction within the university, one with sympathies for Grindelwald and his practitioners-first philosophy. Where witches and wizards rule over all of humankind as kings and queens.” Zhang sighed again. “She was concerned that your visit might escalate something before she was ready to deal with it.”

“I... suppose it did,” Newt said soberly.

“So you see,” Zhang said gently. “You are not the only reckless one here. I was prepared for something to happen. But I did not think that Grindelwald would come after you personally. Did you somehow offend him deeply before?”

“I suppose I did rescue that guardian lion in his keeping. And, oh yes, uh, I did free the Director. Though. I did rather hope that Grindelwald had too much on his plate to follow me, what with Graves and the others trying to hunt him down in New York. Also. He’s far more powerful than I thought someone could be. Heavens.”

“That wand,” Zhang said grimly. “The way it sang. There’s something strange about it. And you’re right. No wizard should be this powerful. Not normally.”

“I’ll mention it to the Director.” One other good thing had come out of this fiasco, at least. Newt now had Graves’ real wand. “If Jing hadn’t opened my case... if Dougal hadn’t somehow persuaded Rupert to come out...”

“I told one of my assistants to call Matoskah the moment she heard anything strange outside the walls,” Zhang said, petting Jing’s shoulders. “I was too confident, I think. I’m a fair hand at duelling myself, particularly defending. I thought that we could hold out. I did not expect him to be so strong. And. I did not think that he would use one of the Unforgivable Curses.” He smiled mirthlessly, tickling Jing behind an ear. “I have lived far too long in my ivory tower. So I think I am the one who should also apologise.”

“Not at all.”

“Life is a learning curve, always.” Zhang patted Newt again. “As long as you think always on your sins, and move forward knowing that you must change. Making mistakes is a part of being human. But it is not a bad thing,” he added, “to speak fiercely for the creatures in this world that have no voices. How is your book?”

“I’m nearly done. As I told you in my letter before, once I get Frank back to Arizona, I should be able to polish off the book in a few more weeks. Then it’d have to go through the process of editing over at my publisher, something which I’ve been told might take a year, depending on the number of editing rounds and such.”

“Well done,” Zhang said approvingly, and they talked about the intransigent nature of hatching Nessa eggs, until one of Zhang’s assistants appeared, an Ilvermorny student in blue and cranberry.

“Professor,” she said softly. “Sorry about the interruption, but the Headmistress would like to see Mister Scamander now.” Zhang started to rise. “Alone,” she added, apologetically.

“That’s quite all right,” Newt said quickly. “I’ll see her myself.” Zhang’s worried expression followed them out.

#

Despite her fearsome reputation, Headmistress Matoskah, on first impression, looked like someone’s good-natured grandmother. Her hair had long gone ash-white over her nut-brown skin, and she was petite and rotund under her tall witch’s hat and faculty robes. Newt was ushered into the balcony of her office, where she stood close to the stone balustrade, Tina by her side.

“Ah. The man himself.” Matoskah sniffed. Her eyes were narrowed and hard.

“I’m terribly sorry about all this trouble.” Newt said, abashed.

Matoskah sighed, turning around, to stare out over at the dark range of mountains. The sky was starting to burnish into the sunrise, a cold glow that hauled itself slowly over the clouds. “I’m used to trouble, believe me. One can only be Headmistress of a school like this for decades by developing a tolerance for it. We have hundreds of students, of which a notable fraction of them are alphas or omegas. Many of those often turn out to be trouble.” She smiled faintly. “Whether they like it or not.”

Newt glanced at Tina, who shook her head quickly behind Matoskah’s back. “I see,” Newt said finally, trying for a neutral answer.

“The fact is,” Matoskah said heavily, “I’ve had my doubts about MACUSA for a while. I taught Picquery, and I taught Percival—”

“Ah—”

“—and I know the Headmasters and Headmistresses who taught Grindelwald and Albus Dumbledore,” Matoskah continued, ignoring the interruption. “There have always been powerful wizards and witches in the world. Sometimes there is peace, sometimes there isn’t. But we’re not blind to the world here in Ilvermorny. As much as some of us would like to be.”

“Professor Zhang mentioned a possible... faction? In your faculty?” Newt asked carefully.

“Yes. It’s a problem. We have Friedman under guard, and I’m having some of the others investigated, quietly. I can’t say that I like you lighting this fire under my ass, but I think it was a long time coming,” Matoskah said wryly. “Ever since Grindelwald stole the Elder Wand.”

“Is that what it was!” Newt said, blinking. “Why he was so powerful. I heard a rumour that the Wand went missing, but nothing more.”

“The Ministry of Magic chose to keep things quiet. Prevent a panic, I believe the reasoning went. Either way, with his show of strength across Europe, he’s started to build up quite a following. I was surprised that he went quiet for so long, but now I suppose it’s obvious why,” Matoskah said grimly. “By masquerading as Director Graves, he’s well-poised to deal MACUSA a mortal blow. I’m surprised he hasn’t yet tried.”

“With that wand...” Newt trailed off. “I don’t think that’s everything. He kidnapped some muggle children.”

“He’s never done something like that before,” Tina chimed in.

“A young man, and eleven girls,” Matoskah shuddered. “And one of them an Obscurial? Hrm. There was a photograph of this Credence Barebone in his notebook, Tina said? But only a sketch of a girl. I’ve offered Tina the faculty’s help in decrypting the book, should that still be needed. But as a preliminary observation, the fact that he only kidnapped Credence, and none of the other boys, tells me that quite likely, the Obscurial is one of the girls. And that Credence knows which child she is, perhaps.”

Tina nodded. "The Director thought so as well."

"Perhaps he saw Credence in a vision, and a girl whose face he could not see. That might explain it. We'll know more once the book is decoded."

"What could he want with an Obscurial?" Newt asked unhappily. "That's the part I don't quite understand. Obscurial children are an uncontrollable force. They can't be used. They need help."

"He got angry when you asked," Tina recalled. "He was amused at first. Then when you brought up the children, he said, 'Don't speak about things that you know nothing about'."

Matoskah glanced up at the sky, frowning to herself. "I know Albus," she said abruptly. "Not well. But I was called in as a neutral party by the Ministry, a long time ago. An expert witness, shall we say. It was an awful case. There had been a duel. A curse had gone astray. A child died, a girl. Those were the facts of the case, or so I was told. It was, quite possibly, an Unforgivable Curse. So there was a trial, one that came to no conclusion."

Newt said nothing, and Matoskah turned, looking keenly at him. "But you know this case, don't you? You're a friend of Albus too. He risked his reputation for you once, when you were a student."

"So he did," Newt said quietly. "The girl who died. His sister, Ariana. She was so young."

"Do you know how her mother died?" Matoskah asked keenly.

"It's not a story for me to tell," Newt said stiffly. "For it was told to me in confidence."

"While you were trying to save the child in Sudan?"

Newt glanced reproachfully at Tina, who stared right back at him, unrepentant. "All right. Yes. I asked Albus for help about the child I met in Sudan, because it was beyond my usual expertise. He told me what he knew about Obscurials and their Obscures. But I failed in the end. I couldn't save the girl. The same way Albus couldn't help his sister."

"His sister..." Tina concluded, blinking. "How awful."

"It wasn't how she died. But she had a difficult life, and... Albus never forgave himself. Over everything." Newt said softly. "Do you think... might that be why Grindelwald took those children? Because he wants to help the Obscurial?"

"I find it hard to believe how he might still feel guilty over the death of Ariana Dumbledore, when he's caused so much death ever since," Tina said, frowning. "Kidnapping the girls to do what exactly? Try and find the Obscurial? And help her? As some sort of repentance for what happened to Ariana?"

"There was a photograph in his effects," Newt recalled. "In his private chambers, in Nurmengard. Of the Dumbledore siblings. They were all very close. Once."

“People are complicated,” Matoskah pointed out soberly. “And they don’t often have one single driving force in their lives, nor is anyone completely good, or completely evil. Find the children and you’d likely find Grindelwald. But I doubt they’re the reason why he staged a takeover of Magical Security. Good luck.”

# Chapter 11

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Instead of heading straight back to the Hideout with Tina, Newt went to sit in a park. He needed the space, if only to get away from having to talk to someone for a time, and it was always nice to have some quiet. He watched people ignore him as they went by on their daily routine, a firmly behatted and coated flow of humanity, trudging through snow. The chill sank in, through the crisp air, through the metal bench, but Newt ignored it for now, the case in his lap.

“Something interesting here?” Graves asked, behind him, and settled down on the bench beside Newt when Newt flinched. He couldn’t quite help it—he looked keenly at Graves, at that amusement, now such an uncomfortable mirror, at the fine clothes, the poise.

“How’d you find me?”

“Kai saw you from the air. Your coat colour’s fairly distinctive.”

“Did Tina give you—”

“My wand back, yes.” Graves patted the pocket of his heavy gray coat. He looked calmer: the hard tension that sometimes rode his shoulders since Nurmengard seemed looser, today. The return of the wand had helped. “Apparently things turned out to be rather more of an adventure than either of you bargained for.”

“As you predicted.”

“Newt, if I’d thought that Grindelwald was likely going to follow you, I would have gone with you myself. And taken everyone else with us.” Graves sighed. “He seemed entrenched in MACUSA. We thought perhaps that Theseus’ visit might’ve spooked him. Queenie was keeping an eye on the Magical Security floor, and didn’t hear anything about Ilvermorny.”

“You did appear to expect trouble.”

“It seems normal where you’re concerned,” Graves said, which got a soft laugh. “But you’re obviously more than capable of taking care of yourself. Few people face Grindelwald and live.”

Newt felt in his pocket for Theseus’ watch. “I had help. And he didn’t run off because of me. Speaking of which. He has the *Elder Wand*.”

“I know that. As does your brother. With it, Grindelwald can’t be beaten head on by anyone singlehandedly, I think. Why do you think I was so anxious to get out of Nurmengard before he returned? Not that I think that it would’ve changed anything,” Graves said dryly, “even if you’d known.”

“Did Tina tell you about the rest? We spoke to the Headmistress.”

Graves nodded. “Kai will carry the notebook to Ilvermorny. We haven't had much luck with Diego's contact. As to Matoskah's theory...” He shrugged. “I'm inclined to agree with Tina. I'd be surprised if his motives were kind. But if he intends to use them as hostages, or whatever it is, he's been very quiet about it.”

“His motives clearly aren't kind. Or at least, not for all of them. He kidnapped all those kids from their caretaker.”

“About that.” Graves grimaced. “Tina... used a spell to stop Credence's mother—if that was his mother—from giving him a severe beating. She broke the Statute to do that, but I can't say that I fault her for it. The mother survived Grindelwald's attack, so should we recover the kids, we'd have to return them to her. Those with no magic. Unfortunate as that may be.”

“... This is why I try to stay away from human cities for most of the year,” Newt said wryly. “Or humans, generally, if I can. Though it's clearly made me unused to people. Sorry.”

“Why are you apologising to *me*?” Graves said, though he smiled.

“Tina brushed me off.” She had been surprisingly blasé about her near-death experience. Newt suspected delayed shock. “So did Professor Zhang. Lucky again, but barely.”

“An Auror's in no real position to lecture anyone about recklessness. Your brother's still at Nurmengard as we speak, for example. By himself. Said he needed more time.”

“The charm on his saddle will hold. It's another Hobbes piece. Though. I see your point,” Newt said wanly.

Graves watched him soberly. Then he sighed. “Come on.” He got to his feet, and Newt followed as they angled away from the park, heading to an alley. Once assured that they were alone, Graves held out his hand, in a playful little flourish, and Newt managed a smile as he took it. They apparated into an apartment. Still in New York, judging from the skyline from the window, which opened out to a fire escape. It was a neat little flat, warmed by hidden charms and sparsely furnished, with cheap furniture and some books, piled on a shelf above a desk. There was a small kitchenette, never used, no rugs, bare walls.

“A safehouse,” Graves said, as Newt gawked. “I bought it once, off the books, years ago, when there was an ugly incident with a black market ring. I'd thought about selling it since, but it's a nice place to sit for some quiet, since no one else knows that it exists.”

That explained the clothes and money. Newt didn't think Graves would be reckless enough to try withdrawing money from his account, not while Grindelwald was still looking for them, but he also didn't seem like the sort who would be readily willing to borrow money from anyone, let alone subordinates. “That was useful.”

“You've no idea,” Graves said, settling into an armchair. “I'm impressed that Amelie's managed to hide Diego and the others in that room for this long, and I've known them for years, but...”

“It all got too close?” Newt grinned.

“I’d no prior wish to know what Diego likes to sing in the shower, and now I can’t scrub it from my memory. May I offer you a drink? I’m afraid that I only have water and whisky.”

“Really?” Newt set his case down on a couch, trying not to feel nervous. It was ridiculous to feel nervous. Not so long ago, he’d faced down a madman wielding the *Elder Wand*.

“Bachelor habits are hard to break. You could stay here, if you liked. Rather than back there and in your case. There’s a spare room here.” Graves had leaned forward slightly, for all that he tried to keep his tone neutral.

“You do know that my brother would just invite himself again.”

Again, Graves didn’t miss a beat. “If he likes. Sparse as this place is, it’s probably still more comfortable than squeezing into Amelie’s room.”

“I feel like you’re going out of your way to be nice to me,” Newt said, a little ruefully. “It’s...”

“Annoying?”

“Not at all, no. Just. Different? I think.”

“It’s different when people are nice to you?” Graves arched an eyebrow.

“Well. Not always. I’m just terribly out of practice with people in general,” Newt admitted. “I either overthink things or don’t think things through at all. People have always been rather unsettling. I can’t figure them out. Not like creatures.”

“There’s much that’s the same,” Graves said gently, even as he got up from the armchair, circling over the sit beside Newt, only a hand’s breadth away, his arms pressed loosely over his knees, hands clasped. “And you know that. Some of it. Or you wouldn’t have known what to do with me in Nurmengard. If people had no levers, or no logic, I wouldn’t be able to do my job. I don’t think that being unable to figure people out is the problem that you have. I think that you’re afraid of people.”

“Not at all,” Newt pointed out. “Or I wouldn’t be here.”

“I didn’t mean that kind of fear. I meant. You seem to assume the worst about people. The world isn’t as bad as all that.”

“You don’t know the things I’ve seen,” Newt said softly, staring at his hands. “All over the world. The cruelty, the hatred... God, so much hatred. We’re an ugly species and a destructive one, one with war in our very nature. I’ve seen the remnants of killing fields on the Eastern Front. There’s no violence in this world quite like human violence. And yet.” He twisted his fingers together, frowning. “How do you do it? You’re an Auror. You’d see the worst of people, all the time.”

“There’s a reason why there’s only water and whisky here,” Graves said, though he smiled, and patted Newt’s knee, keeping his touch light. “I’ve been in the war too. That’s where I first met your brother.”

“I wasn’t really in the war,” Newt mumbled. “I was just. Certain creatures are attracted to charnel. I had to turn them away before everyone got hurt. I worked with dragons, mostly, but there were others.” Newt trailed off. “So it was ancillary for me, why I was there, but it was bad enough. Theseus never talks about the war, if he can help it.”

“I don’t blame him. Before this whole matter with Grindelwald, yes, I did always see the worst of people. But sometimes I’d see the best of them too. As an Auror, you’re there to serve and protect, and I try not to forget that. Recently, it’s been... rather more challenging,” Graves admitted. “But I’ve never regretted my oath as an Auror. If anything, it lets me meet the most interesting people.” He leaned close, landing a playful peck on Newt’s cheek.

Newt exhaled loudly, which made Graves jerk back, as though scalded, though he blinked as Newt climbed, albeit awkwardly, over onto Graves’ lap, leaning his elbows over those gorgeous broad shoulders. It felt like a strange echo of time, turned deftly. Newt had been in this position before. Graves’ hands rested lightly on his hips, neither pushing nor pulling, ceding Newt the reins. It was tempting to kiss, but Newt rested their foreheads together instead, closing his eyes. Graves hesitated, but only for a moment, then he eased into it, their breathing syncing, just as before, so very easily.

“I give in,” Newt murmured, and felt Graves start to tense against him for a moment until he calmed again, soothed by instinct. “I really do like you. You’re not like anyone I’ve ever met, either. And. I still don’t know why you want to go to all this trouble. But I feel like I’d regret it, if I do what I always do, and walk away at the end of everything.”

“Then don’t,” Graves murmured, and leaned over for a kiss. Like before, it seemed easier to let Graves lead, to relax into it, allow him to lick into Newt’s mouth. The alley had been rushed, the hotel room wired in misunderstandings, but this—*now*—had an inevitability to it, an easy push and pull. Newt stroked his fingertips up into the spikes of Graves’ hair, and Graves started to purr, that low atonal push—

“Sorry,” Graves gasped, abruptly jerking back. “Didn’t. Mean to do that.” Flushed and a little disheveled, his eyes wide, Graves looked like a man teetering, gladly, on the edge of ruin. And it had been *Newt* that had done that. The moment felt surreal, distorted by his own disbelief.

“It’s a natural phenomenon caused by—”

“Don’t explain, please.” Graves said, though he smiled, and caught his lower lip briefly in his teeth as he looked Newt slowly up and down. “I can usually control it.”

“I didn’t mind,” Newt assured him. “But if you’re not quite yourself yet, I... should probably check on my creatures,” he mumbled, though he didn’t move, and this time, when Graves pulled him into a kiss, Newt was dragged flush, Graves purring again as they kissed, louder, deeper.

Newt was awkwardly aware that he was growing wet, slowly, even outside of estrus. He whined when Graves nipped, his hands nervously pulling at Graves' shirt as Graves tugged out Newt's bow tie, unbuttoning the collar of his shirt. Modesty seemed trite when Graves had already seen him naked, but Newt felt hyper-aware of his gangly fit over the couch, of his bony elbows, the edge of the ugly scar that scraped by just under his collar, a souvenir from the war. As Graves mouthed down his neck, Newt twitched back instinctively, and Graves stilled, glancing up questioningly.

"Scars," Newt tried to explain, and Graves sighed.

"Do you think that I don't have any?" Graves inquired, as he nuzzled the hollow of Newt's throat. "Should *I* be concerned?"

"Well, true, it's just, it's been a bit of a shock before, for some," Newt said distractedly, trying not to tense as Graves brushed a kiss over the puckered tip of the old scar.

"Either you've had terrible luck with your previous partners, or terrible taste," Graves muttered, pushing Newt's coat off his shoulders, then starting on his vest, more gently. "I'd... previously, I was too caught up in my rut to properly attend to matters. If you'd let me, I'd like to remedy that now." Graves breathed deeply against Newt's throat, even and slow.

"Attend to what?"

"Just my mouth again," Graves assured Newt, loosening his own tie. "But here, this time." He skated fingertips over the growing bulge in Newt's trousers, and squeezed lightly when Newt tensed up instead of flinching.

"You... really?" Newt said, surprised. "You'd want to?"

"No one's done that for you before?" Graves asked, sounding equally incredulous.

"Well," Newt coughed, "nor have I, I mean, it's not really *done*, ah, on the Continent, and, I'm not even sure if that's particularly hygienic."

"Englishmen," Graves said, startled into laughing. "How about we start, and if you don't like it, tell me." Newt nodded, his next breath going a little strangled, unable to trust himself to speak as Graves kissed him, roughly enough to push him back against the couch, leaving Newt gasping in small protests as Graves eventually let up to kneel on the floor before him. This felt surreal again, Graves on his *knees*, the elegant fingers on Newt's belt shaky with impatience.

Again unsure of where to leave his hands, Newt pressed a palm tentatively over Graves' hair, and Graves grinned up at him, something nearly feral in the bared line of his teeth. "Pull my hair, I'd like it," he rumbled. "Just. Not too hard."

"Americans," Newt said, trying to imitate Graves' insouciance but only sounding a little desperate instead, as Graves muttered darkly under his breath about European underwear, tugging Newt's trousers down to the floor. He seemed to lose patience once he'd unbuttoned enough of the rest to draw out Newt's plumping cock, and even as Newt made a tiny gasp of

surprise, Graves leaned up and deliberately licked the tip, curling his tongue over the fleshy cap.

“Oh,” Newt breathed, shakily.

“First, I’m going to get this nice and wet,” Graves said conversationally, as though describing the weather. “No need for that,” Graves growled, when Newt’s palm jumped to his mouth.

“Your brother’s watch is still in your coat, isn’t it?”

“I... I don’t think this was what he meant when he asked me to hang on to it,” Newt protested, but he curled his fingers over Graves’ shoulders instead, sucking in a startled breath as Graves chuckled and started licking, first long, slow stripes from root to tip, until Newt’s cock ached from it, flushed an angry red. Newt whined, pulling as lightly as he could on Graves’ hair, and Graves groaned, mouthing small, worshipful kisses over the vein, the swell of the thickened head, the tip. “Director—”

“Really?” Graves said, though he chuckled, his breath deliciously hot, and he licked from root to tip again, harder.

“Christ!”

“Hrm. Not quite that either,” Graves teased, and laughed as Newt scowled at him, dazed. “All right, pet. Now for the next part.” He swallowed Newt down, hands curled over Newt’s hips to keep him pinned, lips wet and stretched, and it was possibly one of the most obscene things that Newt had ever seen, and yet—and yet he was keening, his hands twitching in Graves’ hair, and Graves was purring deeply in reply. Newt didn’t fight it. He could feel it, the warm rumbling push, relaxing, watching, dazed, as Graves took another inch, another, frowning in concentration.

“I can’t believe,” Newt began, breathless, then he whined and jerked as Graves pressed his tongue up, hard, against the flesh in his mouth. As Graves choked, Newt froze, trying to scramble back, only to be held in place. “Sorry,” Newt said quickly, fingers tensing up in Graves’ hair, only to freeze again as Graves groaned loudly, if squeezed through his full mouth and *oh*.

“You don’t just like this,” Newt breathed, as Graves made an impatient sound and tugged at Newt’s hips. “You want me to...” He pushed his hips up, carefully, and Graves sniffed, tugging harder. It wasn’t... it wasn’t so strange after all. It was *good*, even, thrusting into the wet, hot clench of Graves’ throat, the moans he made, especially when Newt rolled his hips and pulled at Graves’ hair at the same time. Doing this to an *alpha*, to *Graves*, felt unholy. Then it got better, impossibly, as Graves started sucking, loud and wet, muffling purrs, and it was too much, the white jolt of sensation, the *view*, the shameful high of given power. Newt yowled, scratching at Graves’ shoulders, trying to warn him, but he was ignored, *swallowed*, Graves’ throat working to drink him down.

Newt lay on the couch, sweating into his shirt and underclothes, still blinking dumbly as Graves made a satisfied noise, unbuttoning further, then grumbling under his breath and pulling Newt to the edge of the couch, fiddling with his clothes. There was a rip, and Newt flinched. “*Percival*,” he hissed.

“Sorry,” Graves said thickly. “I need—” he dipped his head down, to the bared, wet slit between Newt’s legs, licking roughly, holding Newt down with an arm over his waist. Newt yelped: lust was thorny, this close to the heels of orgasm. He tugged at fine hair, and Graves shuddered, with a moan that he pressed between them, then he sat back, flushed and panting.

“Liked that?” Graves asked in a bruised voice. He looked terribly smug.

“Get back up here,” Newt told him, red-faced, and tucked his fingers around Graves’ tie, pulling him up.

## Chapter End Notes

Going to have to take a break from this fic for a week because of IRL deadlines. :O see you guys again in a bit!

# Chapter 12

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

One of the mooncalves had developed a minor eye infection, an unfortunate if common side-effect of captivity, and treating it always meant having to wrestle a squeaking, kicking, sad-eyed mooncalf into submission. Newt had gotten the treatment solution all over his sleeves, shoes and the mooncalf's haunches by the time he managed to squeeze some into the correct eye, and by the time he crawled out of his case, he was exhausted.

Newt spelled himself clean, tucked his wand away, and went to fetch himself a glass of water. It was an ugly hour of the morning, judging by the colour of the sky outside, the street lamps casting clouds of dim light on the empty streets. Passing Graves' room, Newt paused—light spilled in a dull line from the door.

Was Graves still up? Newt hesitated outside the door. He couldn't hear anything but gentle breathing. After the Incident on the Couch—the only way Newt could think of all *that* without starting to flush—they'd cleaned up, gone out for a lovely dinner, and then spent far too long talking about everything and nothing. Graves was good company, when relaxed, to the point that Newt was late to feeding his creatures. Raksha had been terribly grumpy.

Maybe Graves was awake. Cautiously, Newt pushed the door open. "Hey," he said softly. "I'm going to get a glass of water..."

Newt trailed off. Graves was curled against the window, his face pressed next to the sill. The light in his room was on, but Graves seemed to have dozed off on the bed instead of getting under the covers. At least he'd gotten changed, and taken his shoes off, though he was still holding his wand loosely. Some sort of Auror work, maybe?

"Percival?" Newt murmured, edging closer. Graves' bedroom in the safehouse was just as bare as the rest of the apartment, with a single bed, a wardrobe, a desk, and no other furnishings. With the window partly open, the room was freezing. "You probably shouldn't be sleeping like that. You'd catch a cold."

When Graves didn't answer, Newt walked over to the bed, shaking Graves by the shoulder—or trying to. The moment his hand closed on Graves' shoulder, Graves let out a hoarse cry, jerking awake, lunging. Newt yelped as he landed on the floor, hard enough to jar his shoulder and rattle the breath out of him; Graves was snarling something incoherent as he twisted Newt's arm around his back, pressing the tip of his wand to Newt's temple.

"Percival!" Newt gasped, and Graves' grip tightened painfully on his wrist. Just as abruptly, Graves let him go, scrambling back on his heels, fetching up against the wall, pale and breathing hard.

"Shit," Graves said shakily. "Shit."

Cautiously, Newt sat up. “Sorry.”

“Fuck. Why are *you* sorry?” Graves rubbed his hand over his face, slowly. “*I’m* sorry. Fuck. Did I hurt you?”

“No, of course not.” Graves’ eyes dropped down to the reddened marks on Newt’s wrist, and Newt quickly pulled his sleeve down. “I. Probably should have knocked. Um. Did you want a glass of water?”

“The walls,” Graves said, shuddering. “Felt like the walls were closing in. Had to get some air.”

“I’ve seen—”

“*Stop*,” Graves snarled, “comparing me to one of your *animals!*”

Newt flinched, and in the ringing silence, Graves ducked his head over raised knees, carding fingers through his hair, his free hand clenching and unclenching into a fist, his shoulders locked in furious tension. Without a heat bond, Newt now wasn’t really sure how to read this. It’d seemed like Graves had improved considerably; Newt had been ready to consign the unpleasantness of the first few days into history. Some creatures, particularly predator-and-prey creatures, tried to hide illnesses all the way until it was too late, lashing out at anyone who tried to help. Nature was often unkind to any sort of weaknesses, perceived or otherwise. Was that it?

“I wasn’t going to,” Newt said gently, and shifted fractionally closer. When Graves didn’t react, Newt shuffled over further, incrementally, until Graves was within reach. “Percival.”

“Don’t touch me.”

“All right,” Newt said soothingly, folding his hands in his lap. “Do you want to talk?”

“No.”

“All right.” Newt folded his legs under him, waiting, but when Graves said nothing further, Newt occupied himself by thinking about mooncalf eye infections, and possible causes, and the need to attempt a renegotiation of potential burrow territory with Hogwarts. Or maybe Ilvermorny, though Ilvermorny wasn’t exactly native ground for mooncalves. The problem, quite possibly, was the soil, or the temperature of the soil, or the lack of depth in an artificial burrow—

“Why are you still here?” Graves asked gruffly, without looking up.

“Do you want me to leave?”

“Yes. No. Wait.” Graves reached for Newt, his touch hesitant, as though expecting Newt to flinch back, and he pulled Newt closer, his breathing hot against Newt’s neck. Scenting. The hand curled over Newt’s hip was trembling, and Graves bit out a harsh sound. Eventually, very slowly, he grew calmer. Their breathing was syncing. “Shit,” Graves kept muttering, in a low monotone. “Shit.”

Newt forced himself to stay calm, to control the cadence of his breathing. He thought of mooncalves again, making mental notes, until Graves pressed his cheek over Newt's shoulder, and turned up Newt's sleeve, studying the marks. "That's going to bruise."

"It's nothing."

"No it's not," Graves growled. "I just hurt you."

"By accident. It's all right. Do you want—"

"*No!*" Graves snapped. "I don't *fucking* want to talk!"

"—a glass of water," Newt said mildly. "Because I was on my way to get one."

Newt started to get to his feet, tugging lightly on the sleeve of Graves' nightshirt, and as he hoped, Graves followed him, though he was subdued again, quiet even as they got to the kitchen. Graves leaned his shoulder against the wall as Newt poured them both a couple of glasses of water from the jug, though Graves didn't touch his, watching Newt instead with a faint frown. At least the short walk out of the smaller confines of the room had worked? Graves' hands were now loose at his sides, and he'd left his wand back in the room, in his coat.

"I can see it," Graves said neutrally, when Newt finished his glass. "The way you're thinking."

Newt kept a careful grip on his temper. "I've a poor frame of reference for people in general, otherwise. Bit of an occupational hazard, sadly."

Graves pinched at the bridge of his nose and chuckled, a brittle, hoarse sound, like an animal coughing. "I suppose it did get us out of Nurmengard."

"You helped. And yes, we were awfully lucky."

"I..." Graves exhaled. "I was so convinced that I had gone blind near the end. The cloth over my eyes, you see. Rationally, I mean, it was obvious that I hadn't, the blindfold wasn't keeping out every bit of light, and I could still tell the difference between day and night. Just. Bit by bit. Each time. Whenever I started to think that I had nothing more to lose. They'd take something else."

"You're not in Nurmengard any more."

"I *know* that," Graves said sharply, glowering at Newt. He grabbed his glass, drinking convulsively. Then he shouldered past with both their glasses, washing them in the sink. "It was just a few months. Fuck. We shut people in Azkaban for their whole lives."

"Chained to a wall and blindfolded?"

Graves shook his head, setting the cups aside. "The chains came when I broke the arm of one of the wardens by wrenching it through the food slot. The blindfold... I don't remember. It might have been arbitrary. Grindelwald liked that. Mind games. Once, I told him he was a

very boring kidnapper. Tried to rile him up. He *laughed*. Said that he was going to enjoy ruining me. Not just me, but everything I ever cared for. And at the end, he was going to enjoy watching me drive myself crazy.”

“Well,” Newt said quietly, “you were right. He *was* a very boring kidnapper.” Graves blinked. “Come on. Highest room in the highest tower? Chains? Blindfold? You’re free. And what has he really accomplished? He’s fired a few Aurors... and, all right, kidnapped other people for dubious purposes... but MACUSA’s still standing. You still have people loyal to you. The damage he’s done to policy and all that can be undone. If MACUSA’s anything like the Ministry, stratified bureaucracy’s like a big old cruise ship, slow to turn. Hard to capsize.”

“You’re trying to make me feel better. And. It’s working?” Graves muttered, sounding so terribly suspicious about it all that to Newt’s mortification, he startled to laugh. He covered his mouth, trying to stop, but Graves’ mouth twitched, infected by mirth, and he gathered Newt close again, his touch feather-light, again pressing his lips to Newt’s neck. Newt rubbed Graves’ shoulder lightly, but when Graves didn’t seem to notice, Newt started to pat his back, stroking a palm in formless patterns over Graves’ nightshirt.

“I wish you didn’t see all that,” Graves said stiffly, when his breathing had calmed all the way down again. “I’m sorry. The temper, all of it. I’ve wanted, so badly, for you to think better of me. I’ve been so fucking *careful*.”

“Why,” Newt said gently, “would I let what someone *else* did to you define who you are to me?” He nuzzled Graves’ cheek. “Survival is a process. Taken one step at a time.” The kiss, when it came, pinned Newt to the wall with a grateful, desperate fervour.

#

“It would have been nice,” Theseus said sourly, as he passed the decrypted notebook over to Graves in the Hideout, “if Grindelwald had just written down all his nefarious plans. What’s the fucking point of having a private diary if you don’t write everything down?”

“Does that ever happen?” Newt asked dubiously. ““Today I will kidnap some muggle children for X purpose and stash them in Y location”?”

“You’d be surprised,” Theseus said glumly, slouching gingerly down into a chair before the map of New York. The pins and threads on it had moved, tracing money drawn from Graves’ and some other flagged accounts, running out of the city proper. “Mother needs to commission more comfortable saddles. My balls are never going to be the same again.”

“Nobody told you to go riding for a whole week,” Newt shot back, even as Jacob flinched over from the kitchen and looked hastily over at Amelie, though he swallowed his objection when she shook her head. ““Seus was in such a state. You’re lucky Mother might never find out. You didn’t even bother feeding him properly.”

“He’s been too bloody spoiled, that’s what’s happened. Can’t even fish for himself.”

“Did you even learn anything useful?”

“Rude. The children aren’t in Nurmengard. And more importantly, I think I’ve figured out his wards. A way in, if another strike force comes together.” Theseus grunted, scratching his unshaven jaw. “Probably going to need Albus in on this one.”

Graves flipped briefly through the notebook, then read the last few pages. “This is like a medical journal. He was studying Obscurials. How to safely extract Obscures. There’s a section on what you did in Sudan,” Graves said, glancing briefly at Newt. “Marked as a failure in the notes.”

“Well, it was,” Newt said automatically, before pausing. “Oh I see. Grindelwald *is* trying to... cure an Obscurial.”

“God knows what he’d do to all the kiddies who *aren’t* Obscurials,” Theseus said pointedly. “Still no word on that front?”

Graves let out a frustrated noise. “I’m hobbled here and New York is fucking big. I tried to get in touch with Picquery, but it’s been difficult. She hasn’t answered any letters that I sent through back channels. She’s been holding long meetings with MACUSA.”

“Didn’t expect much else. Come on,” Theseus said, with a sharp grin. “Who controls access to Picquery? Her personal security? Matters of clearance?”

“That’s why I said *back channels*,” Graves said acidly, then he glanced away, taking a breath. “It seems Grindelwald’s taken precautions,” Graves said, in a more normal tone. “In the meantime, we can’t just rely on Picquery’s help. Acquiring it will cause delays that the children might not be able to afford. Amelie?”

Amelie straightened up attentively from where she’d been huddled next to the large map of New York. “Everyone else’s still out,” Amelie reported. “But we’re narrowing down potential areas, between Diego, Tina and Kai. Over at Woolworth, Queenie’s managed to sort out which of us we can still count on and which of us have most likely been turned. The new hires are all Grindelwald’s people, of course.”

“Can’t risk all out civil war in the Woolworth building,” Graves said. “Most of the people in there are noncoms.” He paused. “Civilians.”

“Wizards and witches make for a very different idea of what constitutes a civilian,” Theseus said dismissively. “Technically, my troublemaker of a brother here is a civilian, after all. Defense Against the Dark Arts is a compulsory subject in all universities.”

“Doesn’t mean that I want to get all of them caught in some kind of crossfire.” Graves growled. Theseus held up his hands in a gesture of mock surrender.

“May I?” Newt held out his hand for Grindelwald’s notebook, hoping to defuse the increasingly ugly mood. “I’d like to study that. Might get some insight.”

Graves handed the book over, and Newt flicked through it as the Aurors started to discuss strategy. The Elder Wand was a sticking point. Newt tuned them out as Theseus started to go over the fine details of Grindelwald’s last known European conflict, growing absorbed,

despite himself. He'd told Graves earlier that he hadn't felt like Grindelwald had done very much with his stolen position. The notebook explained why. Grindelwald-as-Graves had been busy requisitioning supplies, field studies, opinions, from every remotely relevant possible expert on the matter. He'd even been researching exorcisms. And some strange, archaic side-studies that didn't appear immediately related, like petrification and the formation of non-beings.

In Newt's hands was the most complete thesis about Obscurials he had ever read, the bulk of which had clearly been written in a couple of months. When Grindelwald had his first vision. The boy, Credence. The girl's face a blur, her body frozen with terror. Some older woman. And a writhing force, the Obscurus, expelled. Grindelwald had described his vision in painstaking detail.

Scryings and visions were notoriously fickle things. Newt read further, a few more pages, then he frowned, and read the vision again. Something felt wrong.

There were six parts to the scientific method, and Grindelwald had followed some of it, perhaps by accident. Grindelwald had asked himself, *which girl is the Obscurial?* Popular research indicated that Obscurials didn't survive past childhood. His hypothesis: Credence knew who the girl was, because his face was obvious in the vision. His experiment: Kidnap all the girls plus Credence and... hope for the best? Grindelwald had befriended the boy, according to his notebook—had Credence been able to tell which girl it was, he very likely would've said so already. Newt rather doubted that Grindelwald would've then bothered to keep holding all the kids hostage, and mercy didn't seem to be in his nature.

Newt took in a slow breath, closing his eyes. *Which girl is the Obscurial?* In the vision, Credence had been front and centre, the Obscurus flowing between him and the others. The majority of known Obscurials had been girls—the world was routinely unkind to women. And of course, the last Obscurial whom Grindelwald had known had been a girl. Ariana.

Flipping to the animated photograph of Credence, Newt watched as Credence tried to smile. There was a forced cast to his smile, now that he was looking closely, a guardedness to his eyes. Trust, given reluctantly, but desperately, a trapped creature with freedom dangled before it. Newt had seen this before. The girl in Sudan had smiled like this once, showing her teeth. She hadn't believed that Newt could save her. And she had been right at the end.

Grindelwald's hypothesis had been flawed. "I think I know who the Obscurial is," Newt said, flipping forward through the book, then he yelped and nearly fell off his chair as Theseus leaned right in over his shoulder. "Theseus!"

"You were so absorbed that you didn't notice Jacob heading off to get supplies and the other two wandering out for a 'smoke break'," Theseus said innocently.

"Percival doesn't smoke." Newt would've smelled it on his clothes.

"I meant 'smoke break' as in, if he doesn't stop being so goddamned jumpy, his own deputy's going to arrange to have him sedated or something. She was getting that look. They're probably having a chat. The hell is up with the Director today?"

“Ah. I don’t think he got enough sleep?”

“... Don’t tell me the two of you—” Theseus began, before abruptly grabbing Newt’s arm. He pulled back Newt’s sleeve before Newt could twitch away, revealing the purpling bracelet.

“Stop that,” Newt jerked his hand away, pulling down his sleeve. He’d forgotten to use a healing spell.

Theseus scowled, his eyes flint hard. “Who gave you that?”

“It was an accident.”

“Caught your hand in a fucking door?” Theseus’ lip curled, glancing towards the exit of the Hideout. “Guest or not, I can still kick his arse.”

“You. *Sit*. Over here.” Newt growled, hooking a chair over. “Sit. This,” Newt pointed at his wrist, “is none of your business, all right? I’m an adult, for God’s sake.”

“Still my little brother,” Theseus grumbled, though he sat.

“I tried to wake him up and he had a bit of a reaction. That’s all.”

“That’s all?” Theseus repeated acerbically. “You think that’s normal, do you? What about the next time he wakes up with a ‘bit of a reaction’, but uses wandless magic? Or worse?”

“He apologised repeatedly. Besides. I’ve dealt with worse before. And I can tell when something is an *accident*.”

“Fine,” Theseus growled. “But I’m not bloody happy about it. And. I’ve tried to tell you this before. I don’t know why you’re so driven to save every stray in the world, but you can’t, all right?”

“That’s not what this is.” Newt stared at his brother unhappily. “You seemed fine with all this. Before.”

“Oh yes, before,” Theseus said wearily, “after which my darling brother, whom I’d previously thought had some modicum of sanity and self-control, picks a fight with Grindelwald, over some bloody eggs, or whatever you were doing, and then someone I thought was safe didn’t turn out to be. Clearly we’re both impaired.”

“I didn’t pick a fight with Grindelwald on purpose,” Newt corrected.

“That’s what you always—” Theseus paused, tilting his head. There was the sound of rushing footsteps, skittering closer. The door opened sharply, Amelie almost tipping through in her excitement.

“Diego’s come to get us. Kai’s seen something.”

## Chapter End Notes

### Refs:

Surviving Solitary: Story of Albert Woodfox, one of the Angola 3, who was in isolation longer than any other American: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/01/16/how-albert-woodfox-survived-solitary>

# Chapter 13

## Chapter Notes

two chapter update!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“It’s that building over there,” Kai said, pointing at the boarded up old warehouse. They were outside of the city proper, the uniform lights dotting the spines of skyscrapers gleaming behind them. This industrial section had fallen into disuse: the buildings they had passed had been dark, padlocked shut.

“What did you see?” Theseus asked doubtfully. The boarded old warehouse was also dark.

“A little girl made it out of the top skylight. God knows how she’d climbed all the way up there. Roof’s warded, though. She froze up. Some grunt went up to get her.”

“The orphanage that Grindelwald raided took in some street children,” Tina reported. “Including three of the girls in there, Ellie, Jane and Marie. They would’ve learned to be resourceful.”

“Did you try to get closer?” Graves asked, but Kai shook his head.

“Wards. Bet there’re wards on them windows, boss.”

“So there’s at least one hostile in there,” Theseus said thoughtfully. “And a lot of hostages. Do we have a plan?”

“DMLE procedure is much the same, I do think,” Graves said, with a wry curl to his mouth.

“Kick the front door down noisily while some people sneak in round the back?” Theseus supplied.

“Really?” Newt said doubtfully. “That sounds awfully primitive.”

“Hey, don’t knock it. Kicking down the door shouting while rushing in mob-handed is standard police procedure everywhere. Even for the muggles.” Theseus frowned at him. “I suppose you can be in the main group?”

Graves looked visibly pained for a moment. “I really don’t like having to involve non-Aurors in an Auror matter, for the record. I know you can take care of yourself,” he said, when Newt started to object. “But I rather doubt you’d have had any experience in a hostage situation like this.”

“I’m capable of following instructions,” Newt told him earnestly. “I want to help. And frankly, I think you’re rather short-handed at the moment.”

“Fine. Credence has met Tina before, and Diego’s the best at wards. The two of you will go in through the service entrance. Try and extract them quietly if possible—I don’t want children caught in the eventual crossfire. We’ll give you a head start. Half an hour,” Graves said briskly. “Earlier, if we think that you need it. The rest of you are with me. Queenie’s supposed to be keeping an eye on Grindelwald over at MACUSA, but if he appears before we head in, retreat immediately and regroup.”

“I’ll go in with Tina and Diego too,” Newt offered quickly. “If I may. If they’re going to be rescuing the hostages, I’m the only one who’s had experience dealing with an Obscurial.” When Graves wavered, Newt pointed out, “Is this going to be worse than breaking into the Evidence Vault?”

“You weren’t meant to be on *that* op,” Graves grumbled, and glanced at Theseus, who shrugged.

“Believe me, I’ve never been able to get him to stop doing something he’s set his mind on. He’ll be fine.”

“Fine. Just. Be careful,” Graves said, biting out a sigh, visibly worried.

“What about the rest of us?” Diego inquired, grinning.

“Sergeant, if by now you’re incapable of running a tight op, then forced retirement’s obviously worn unkindly on you,” Graves said severely. “Prioritise the hostages. Stopping Grindelwald is secondary.”

Amelie cracked her knuckles loudly, baring her teeth. “Ooh, I’m going to enjoy kicking that bastard in the balls if he shows up.”

“I think I’ve spotted a common Auror fixation,” Newt muttered.

Queenie still had one of the invisibility cloaks, and Amelie had another, which meant that the last one went to Diego, while he quietly worked on clearing a way to the service entry at the back of the warehouse. Tina and Newt waited at a safe distance, while the rest hid out of sight.

“You’re sure that Credence is the Obscurial?” Tina whispered.

“We can’t be sure until I talk to him, but yes, I do think so, on the facts available.”

“That’s a terribly lawyerly thing to say,” Tina said, though she smiled.

“Excuse me, I prefer the term ‘scientific’.”

“Kai saw the Director disapparate somewhere with you. And then the both of you weren’t back until late morning.” Tina looked concerned. “Is everything all right?”

“Of course. Why do you ask?”

“Well. Just that. Sometimes the Director can be very... intense, and take things more seriously than he should, so I’m not sure what the two of you might’ve been off doing but...” Tina trailed off as Newt started to flush. “Oh. Really?”

“Um.”

“You said it was complicated. Before?”

“It’s still complicated,” Newt admitted. “But a lot of that can’t be helped.”

“I see.” Tina coughed. “I’m not sure how to put this, but Queenie asked me to try. Er. The Director’s my boss, and I think he’s a great man. A good person, even.”

“... But?”

“Well,” Tina said helplessly, “I was already working as an Auror when he got into that accidental heat bond, and, I’ve never seen an alpha react so negatively to something like that. He usually has really good self-control apparently, even during a heat, but he slipped up that one time and pushed. Normally it’s no big deal for anyone, but he was so... besides. It’s. Also terribly painful for the omega, isn’t it?”

“Yes it is.”

“Queenie said to remind you that you need a giver,” Tina looked visibly more uncomfortable. “I’m not sure what she meant by that. But that’s all. And. Please let’s never mention this conversation to the Director? No matter what happens?”

“All right,” Newt said wryly. “Thank you both for your concern. But it’s early days yet, and as you’ve mentioned, there’s much to commend him for. I’m not blind to the problems I’d—we’d—face. Life’s taught me over and over again that taking a risk on people often ends with disappointment. But I think I’d like to try again, just this time.”

“Okay,” Tina said, clearly relieved that the conversation was over. “You seemed fine to me, but Queenie felt that we had to say something. So—”

“Kai once said,” Diego’s voice drifted down next to Tina’s shoulder, “that there’s a proverb or something out there: if you interfere with luurve, you’re gonna get kicked by a *horse*.”

Tina had clapped a hand over her mouth to stifle her yelp of shock. “Diego!” she hissed.

“No one’s at that stage yet,” Newt assured Diego firmly.

“Uh huh. I’ve known the boss for years, is all I’m saying.” Diego’s hand appeared out of thin air, then the cloak was flicked back, unveiling the rest of him in a dramatic flourish. “Haven’t seen him ever get this way. I should buy you a drink, for the entertainment.”

“Sergeant,” Tina said reproachfully. “The hostage situation?”

“Okay. Serious work time. So. There were wards on the way in, but I’ve disarmed just whatever was necessary. So do what I do and don’t wander off. Especially you, Buddha man.”

“Please stop calling me that.”

#

The service room that the door squeezed into was thick with dust, and smelled acrid with chemicals. Rusting shelves lined the walls, and they crept past in single file. Diego cursed under his breath as he worked on the exit, and when he finally pushed the door open, very slowly, Newt held his breath, hand clenched over his wand.

Nothing. They were behind a wall of dusty and rotting old crates. In the gloom, Newt couldn’t make out any of the text stamped on the crates, which were stacked nearly to the same level of the mezzanine walkway above. Light filtered in through skylight windows near the roof of the warehouse, and old machinery, abandoned by the walls, took on hulking, gnarled shapes in the shadows. Newt could hear at least two sets of even footsteps, patrolling above, clinking against the metal walkway. Beside him, Tina glanced around alertly, and held up two fingers. Diego nodded, and gestured to the right.

They hugged the wall, hyper aware of the patrol above. Were the children in a foreman’s office, perhaps? Somewhere on the mezzanine floor? Or were they further on the ground floor of the warehouse, visible to the patrols? Or—

Diego froze up, so abruptly that Tina walked right into him. A little girl had just peeked around the line of boxes. Her simple frock was filthy, and her eyes were narrowed in suspicion. She glanced right over them without seeing them, sighed softly, and ducked away again.

“Wha...?” Diego whispered.

Theseus’ watch. Newt hastily fished it out of his pocket. “Bubble against eavesdropping. Also makes Muggles ignore you,” he whispered back. “I can turn it off if you like. It’s a Hobbes piece.”

“Nah. Keep it. Makes things easier,” Diego murmured back. “Right. If them kiddies have the run of the floor, we can take turns sneaking them out of here. I was kinda worried about how we were gonna disapparate twelve people without drawing attention, even with three of us, but if we can do it bit by bit around that watch, it’s gonna be easy.”

“Where to?” Tina asked.

“Just oblivate them and drop them outside No-Maj police stations. Can’t do anything more delicate right now.” Diego frowned at Newt. “As to you. Uh. Guess you can keep an eye out. Hold on to that watch.”

“All right.” Newt didn’t bother to hide his relief. He’d never been particularly good at dealing with hysterical people, let alone children.

The children had the run of the ground floor of the warehouse. Walls of crates vaguely separated the space into ‘rooms’—there was a general one for the girls, lined with cots, a smaller cooking space, a separate ‘room’ with a single bed, another space with some books and children’s toys, and a separate space with a workbench and a case of potions and implements, warded off. There was at least one bathroom facility that Newt could pick out, as they quietly prowled around the perimeter. And from the mezzanine walkway, the patrolling wardens could see everything, though they looked bored—one sat on a chair in a corner, reading a newspaper. Two chatted among themselves. The ones who were patrolling either whistled to themselves or occasionally glanced out of the windows.

There were two girls in the general bedroom, sitting together on a cot, one girl braiding the smaller girl’s long hair. *Now what?* Newt mouthed, as Tina peered around a crate.

Diego glanced up at the mezzanine floor, then at the watch in Newt’s hand. He beckoned. As Newt and Tina cautiously followed, Diego edged into the bedroom, then to Newt’s shock, Diego simply walked right up to the girls, grabbed one by the shoulder, and disappeared with the both of them.

Newt flinched, even as Tina stiffened and glanced sharply up at the mezzanine. Then she relaxed. The Hobbes watch had worked, even to mask the sound of disappearance. Another pair of girls walked in, looking around, and Tina hauled Newt over hastily, hugged both kids to herself once she was close, and disappeared before they could scream.

Four down, eight more. Newt retreated to the service exit to wait, heart pounding. It felt like an eternity until Diego returned. They scooped up the girl prowling around the perimeter. Seven more. Tina sidled into the bathroom, where one kid was washing her hair over the sink. Six. A girl in the cooking space, pouring herself some water. Five.

“Going to get tricky soon,” Tina whispered, as they waited for Diego. “The rest of them are all in the last and most obvious room.”

“And we’re running out of time,” Newt said uneasily. Half an hour. They should have asked for more. “Maybe you should talk to Percival.”

Tina shook her head. “Amelie will be crafting an anti-apparition hex on this building as we speak. Takes her a while to do it on the quiet, which is why the time limit is what it is. We’ve got to prevent Grindelwald’s people inside from running off. If we take too long... the moment they realize what we’re doing, they might escape.”

“But the kids?”

“We don’t need apparition to evacuate people,” Tina pointed out, just as Credence rounded out from behind some crates on soft feet, looking around, no doubt searching for the girls. He stared right at them, open-mouthed—so he *was* the Obscurial!—and started to backpedal, wide-eyed.

Newt didn’t hesitate. He shoved the watch into Tina’s hands and lunged over, grabbing Credence by the elbow just as he started to yelp, and disappeared.

When they reappeared in the unfinished subway tunnel, Credence yelled, jerked away, and fell over, judging from the noise. Newt lit up his wand, holding up his free hand, palm up. “I’m Newt Scamander. I’m here to help.”

Credence had backed hastily out of reach, wide-eyed and pale, though his stare was fixed on Newt’s wand, with horror and fascination both. “You’re. You’re like *him*. Director Graves.”

Newt coughed. “Uh. This is going to be complicated. But. Not exactly.”

“You can both do witchcraft.”

“The word, technically, is ‘magic’,” Newt said automatically, “though, I suppose ‘witchcraft’ is possibly correct, but only in reference to a female magic user. In my case it’s probably ‘wizardcraft’, not that we tend to use such terminology.”

Credence looked a little shell-shocked at the miniature lecture. “I...” he trailed off, blinking. “I need to get back. To. To the warehouse. If I’m gone, and... he might hurt the others!”

“Credence—”

“Take me back. You have to take me back!” Around Credence, the shadows were developing static, twisting into a familiar, whorling unreality, reacting to Credence’s agitation. He was *pushing* as well, wildly, the tonal snap of a young alpha making Newt flinch. “Take me back!”

“Calm *down*,” Newt said firmly, concentrating. As he had before with Graves, with Grindelwald, he reached for the rush of magic and met it, shunting away its force. He’d sent Grindelwald’s command back to him, pressed a command of his own to Graves, but to Credence he simply fed reassurance. Calm. “Please. The girls will be fine. My friends are rescuing them as we speak.”

“I don’t know you,” Credence said, though the Obscurus around him was ebbing. “And you don’t understand. The Director. There’s something wrong with him. With... with his face, with...” Credence hesitated helplessly. “I’ve seen him hurt people. He’ll hurt you as well. He said that he’s the strongest wizard in the world.”

“Quite possibly true,” Newt said, still as calmly as he could. “But I’m not afraid of him. I’ve faced him before. And he’s not who you think he is—the man you’ve been talking to has another name. He’s a criminal, a dark wizard called Grindelwald. He’s stolen the real Director’s face.”

Credence shook his head, stepping back, rubbing the heels of his palms to his temples. Newt had said too much—Credence was starting to reject him: walls, even imperfectly formed, were coming up. “No. No, no no. I don’t understand. This is another trick. Can’t trust people. Can’t trust magic. Mother was right. Mother was right. Magic is evil. This is all my fault.”

“Credence, please.” It was a fight to stay calm as the Obscurus fed, fattening into a deeper cloud, spilling away like ink to press malevolently against the walls, and for a moment Newt could feel only a helpless sort of *awe*. The innate power that Credence had to have, to have survived this long, to have fed an Obscurus well into his adulthood... “This isn’t a trick. I’m here to help you. Let me help you.”

“You can’t *help me*,” Credence snarled, and Newt drew up a Protego shield just in time, as the Obscurus lashed out, glancing against his shield with shattering force. “I’m a *monster*.” He bared his teeth, his shoulders hunching. “Maybe I don’t want to be helped.”

“That’s not true,” Newt said gently. “You care. That’s why you wanted Grindelwald to help you. To teach you. You don’t actually want to hurt the people you care about. That’s why you want me to bring you back to the warehouse. Even if it means that Grindelwald might hurt you for it.”

“It doesn’t matter what I do. I’m still going to hurt people. I can’t control this.”

“You can. You just have.” That had been Grindelwald’s conclusion, that excising the Obscurus from an Obscurial led inevitably to the death of the host. An Obscurus, after all, *was* magic, the host’s magic. And that was not so easily separated. Newt would have to find another solution. “You’re special. Even among people like you and me.”

“I am?” Credence glared at Newt, though the Obscurus roiled but didn’t move. “How? Why aren’t you like this? Why isn’t *he*?”

“Because you’re ill,” Newt struggled to explain. “And yet, the illness that you have often is the end of people who suffer from it—they often pass when they are children. I’ve tried treating one before. But you’ve survived all this while, by yourself, with no treatment.”

“You’ve treated someone like me before?”

“I was too late, in the end. But yes. Let me try again.”

“You’re a doctor?” Credence started to frown, though the Obscurus ebbed a little.

“Not precisely. I’m a scientist.”

“A scientist? Why would you want to help me? I don’t have money. I’m dangerous. The Director... Grindelwald thought... he thought one of the girls had power. He...” Credence looked away, gritting his teeth. “If he’d known it was me... I was tempted to tell him. Before he took us all to the warehouse. But I was afraid. He was looking for someone with magic, but I don’t have magic. I’m possessed.”

“This isn’t demon possession,” Newt said carefully. “And you do have magic. Otherwise, you wouldn’t be ill like this. It only afflicts people *with* magic. Powerful magic. It’s... it’s like a cancer, a cancer of magic, rather than of the blood. It *is* treatable.”

“Oh,” Credence blinked. “I... I never thought about it that way. That. People with magic might get ill, with different diseases.”

“We *are* human too,” Newt said softly. “I can help you. And I can teach you.”

Somehow, that was the wrong thing to say. Credence stiffened. “*That’s what he promised.*” This time, Protego shattered almost instantly, useless against the raw power that Credence so casually brought to bear. Newt cried out as he was lifted off his feet and slapped heavily into the roof of the tunnel, hard enough that he could hear his ribs crack, but Credence’s instinctive defenses were down, shorn away by his temper, and this time, when Newt reached out, it was with an urgent command: *stop!*

He was falling. Landing hard on the unfinished rails shot pain through his flank, his ribs; Newt tasted blood in his mouth. Beyond, Credence looked utterly surprised, folded down onto his knees. The Obscurus was fading away from the walls.

“You...” Credence said slowly. “You *can* help me.”

Newt spat the blood out and pushed himself up onto his feet, shakily. “I told you.”

“But why?” Credence asked, frowning again, suspicious, as though he had never known anything of kindness save as bait. Newt took a step forward, and when Credence didn’t flinch back or react, he walked over, projecting calm, and sat down gingerly beside him.

“Well,” Newt said, casting about for a reason, any reason that Credence might believe. Jacob would’ve done better here. Jacob would’ve known what to say, just as he’d seemed to know what to do around Newt’s creatures— “I, ah. It just so happens that I’m in need of an assistant.” As Credence stared, thrown by what was clearly an unexpected answer, Newt added quickly, “I’m a scientist, as I’ve said. I study magical creatures, and try to protect them. I’ve been terribly busy of late, and, uh, it just so happens that, I’m also writing a book, you see, and...”

Credence was staring at Newt’s shoulder, open-mouthed. Belatedly, Newt realized that Pickett had climbed out of his pocket, and had perched up higher, peering at Credence. “That’s a Bowtruckle,” Newt said lightly. God, his ribs ached. “His name’s Pickett. Their kind like wand-trees, and live in large family groups.” They talked about Bowtruckles, and Bowtruckle home-trees, with Credence silent at first, then asking shy questions, and by the time Diego apparated into the tunnel, the Obscurus had long been reabsorbed.

“Thought you’d be here,” Diego began, then stared. “Whoo. What happened to you? Got stomped on by an elephant?”

“Not really.” Newt got unsteadily to his feet, though Credence helped tug him up. “Credence, this is Diego, a friend of mine. And one of us.”

Diego studied Credence with open curiosity. “You’re the special kid, huh?” Credence tensed, but Diego pretended not to notice. “Nice to finally meet you, Credence. Been looking forward to it.”

That got a confused, if nervous smile from Credence. Newt asked cautiously, “How’s... did everything go well?”

Diego pulled a face. “Ah, hell. Shit just went down over at MACUSA. Seems when we were doing our raid, Grindelwald went right ahead with his friends and attacked Congress while it was in session. They got Risa and Ezekiel, but Picquary and the others rallied and held out until Queenie came to get us. So. You missed the main throwdown. Damn.”

“What about the warehouse?” Newt asked.

“We arrested everyone, easy. They’re in processing.”

“How are the girls?”

“They’re fine.”

Credence sagged with relief. “Thank you.”

“Don’t mention it.” Diego glanced at Newt. “Ready to go? C’mon. You look like hell. And the boss is worried sick, even if your brother isn’t.”

“Childhood’s inured the both of us to each other’s flaws.”

“Yeah?” Diego scowled. “You poms are crazier than I thought. Head over to Woolworth’s. When you’re ready.” He disappeared.

“Come,” Newt said, holding out his free hand to Credence.

“I’m sorry for all the trouble,” Credence said, his hands tight at his side. “And. I’m sorry that I tried to... I’m sorry that I hurt you. You can hurt me back for it, if you want—”

“Don’t say that. Credence,” Newt said quietly. “I promise you, as far as it is in my power, no one will hurt you again.”

## Chapter End Notes

click on to the final chapter :3

## Chapter 14

day 01.Percival

Had Theseus Scamander not been around to vouch for him, Graves rather suspected that Picquery would have hexed him into the next century, Legilimens testimony be damned. Just in case. As it was, Picquery looked sorely tempted during the whole meeting. Her face was bruised, her arm set into a fresh cast, and she was grim with pain. They all were.

“All right,” Picquery said finally. “I’m satisfied. Commander Scamander, thank you for your help. MACUSA is indebted to the DMLE.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Theseus said, with a sharp grin, and not for the first time, Graves felt a sense of dislocation, looking at Theseus. There was so little of Newt in his brother.

“I need a private word with the Director. Excuse us.”

“... Right,” Theseus said, glancing at Graves, who stared back at him pointedly. This was now MACUSA business, whatever it might be. “I’ll be on the Security floor,” Theseus told Graves. “We need to discuss a starting an inter-agency operation. We really should get rid of Nurmengard.”

“I’ll need to be in on that meeting,” Picquery said sharply.

“Of course, Madame President. Once we work out all the details,” Theseus said smoothly. “It won’t just be a DMLE and MS operation. We’re probably going to need some people from the other Ministries. I’ve got a shortlist.”

When Theseus left Picquery’s office, Graves straightened up in his chair. Picquery sighed, looking down at the paperwork on her rosewood desk. Her office had a fine view of New York City, of the park, of the oblivious No-Majs swarming past on the street, unaware that a magical struggle had taken place just yesterday, so close by.

“How are the obliviation squads going?” Picquery asked.

“We’re finished with the No-Maj police,” Graves said. “Now we’re working on the press. Disseminating the usual stories about a gas explosion and all that. The rest should take care of themselves. Amelie’s monitoring the situation closely.”

“Newt Scamander approached me with some insane proposition involving Swooping Evil venom and a Thunderbird,” Picquery said sourly. “Firstly, I’m rather wary of any plan involving the venom of something called a ‘Swooping Evil’, and secondly, a city-wide rain of untested mind-altering magical chemicals is only asking for a medical disaster to happen. Bloody Scamanders. His brother’s just as much of a pain in the ass, but at least he isn’t crazy.”

“Right,” Graves said, as neutrally as he could, straight-faced. He’d told Newt just as much what Picquery would say, but Newt had been, all right, rather adorably stubborn about it. Infatuation was quite possibly a mind-altering drug in its own right. And at his age.

“Grindelwald escaping after all the chaos he’s managed to sow is a disaster as it is. We’re likely going to face censure from the International Confederation.”

Graves’ heart sank, even though he’d expected that. “I’ll take responsibility. If you want my resignation—”

“Don’t fall on your sword just yet,” Picquery said wearily. “Right now, Magical Security still needs purging. Hell, some other parts of MACUSA probably do as well. And if an international operation against Nurmengard turns out to be successful, that will count in our favour.”

“Duly noted.”

Picquery studied him, narrow-eyed. “Percival,” she said finally. “Do you need some time off?”

“We can’t afford that, can we? Our house is on fire. Literally, in fact, only yesterday.”

“You didn’t answer my question. Do you need time off?”

“I’m fine,” Graves said, as firmly as he could. “Glad to get back to work. I’d have been happier about it if we’d actually caught the damned bastard.”

“There’d be other chances. Dismissed. I’m going to have to talk to the International Confederation. Eat some crow, make assurances, grovel a little,” Picquery rolled her eyes. “After that, I want to talk about Nurmengard.”

By the time Graves got back to the apartment, it was well into the night. His brownstone—which Grindelwald had been using—was still being searched for evidence, and besides, Graves was fairly sure that he’d never feel comfortable in that house again. The safehouse, however, now had an unwanted guest. The young alpha, Credence, who’d spent all the time since his rescue stuck to Newt’s side like a burr.

Like now. Newt had been reading on an armchair when Graves apparated into the apartment, and Credence was asleep on the couch, a blanket over his shoulders. “Hey,” Newt said softly, setting the book aside and getting to his feet. “You’re late.”

“Why did you wait up?” Graves made a careful circuit away from the couch to the kitchen, trying not to look at Credence. He’d agreed when Newt had asked earnestly if Credence could stay, if only because he was fairly sure it was all or nothing. Did Newt just have a thing for unstable alphas? Jealousy, Graves had so recently found, was an unwelcome companion.

“I didn’t notice the time. How was your day?”

Tired and annoyed, exasperation pressed in close, a sarcastic retort worming to the tip of his tongue. Graves bit it down in time, turning away to pour himself a drink. “Fine,” he said

curtly. That was all the civility he could manage. He drank, set the glass aside, and concentrated on getting to his room without losing his temper.

To his irritation, Newt followed. It was tempting to say something biting, to drive him off, and it was just as tempting to pull Newt closer, to kiss him, to mark Newt's neck with his teeth, somewhere that the young alpha could see. Newt took Graves' indecision as an invitation to walk into the room and close the door, switching on the lights. God. He was so *pretty*. There was something unearthly about it, the delicacy of his cheekbones, the soft mouth, the slender, elfin jaw. Helpless, Graves let Newt pull him over for a very tentative kiss, one that he eagerly deepened, licking into Newt's mouth until the brittleness of his mood was easing, until jealousy was a distant spectre.

"If you didn't want Credence here," Newt said, as Graves ended up nuzzling his throat, "you could've just said something."

The fingers petting the back of Graves' neck were... nice. Newt was taller than Graves was, which wasn't as off-putting as Graves thought it might be. Being able to lean his cheek against Newt's shoulder without cramping his neck was also... nice. Graves tried to concentrate on that to keep his breathing steady. "I don't mind him here," Graves lied.

"Really?" Newt sounded amused.

"Are you correlating this to animal behaviour again?" Staying calm was a losing battle today. Graves squeezed his eyes shut, gritting his teeth. He couldn't afford to keep losing his temper around Newt. He knew how toxic that was to any omega. Patient as Newt had been so far, Graves knew that it wouldn't last forever. Nor would he ask anyone to have that kind of patience.

"Not exactly. You haven't, for example, tried to uri—"

"Newt!" Graves yelped.

"—on my leg or anything," Newt said, and started to laugh, because there was a bit of the devil in Newt, and it was infectious. Graves growled and kissed him, even as Newt kept grinning into it, hiccuping with laughter that he fed between them, and Graves was grateful for it, for *this*, his hands unsteady around Newt's graceful waist.

"You. Have no brain filter," Graves grumbled. He felt gently over Newt's shirt, pressing over ribs, and Newt pushed his hands away. "Hurts?"

"No. You people have an excellent medical division." Newt studied him soberly. "Don't."

"Don't what?"

"It's the Obscurus that lashed out. The Obscurial has very minimal control on it. It's a parasite."

"That wasn't what I was thinking about."

"I'm not that good with people, but I'm not blind. You don't want him here."

“You said that you’re taking him on as some kind of assistant.”

“Well, eventually, yes, if he’s interested,” Newt said mildly. “But I can’t risk him going into the case now as he is. If the Obscurus gets loose in there... so. I’ve written to Albus, who’s agreed to take the next available steamship here, with some friends who might be able to help. We’ll be working on finding a less surgical solution to the Obscurus.”

“After he’s... if he’s cured, what then?”

“Ugadou has a special course for older students.”

“I see.” Graves tried not to sound relieved. It was a selfish thing to be glad of, but it was hard to stay rational about the situation, somehow.

“He’s actually a nice young man,” Newt said, very gently. “Given the circumstances.”

“He’s killed at least one No-Maj,” Graves muttered. “Yes, by accident, I know.”

There was something that unsettled Graves about Credence. He had seen survivors before, victims. Some turned insular. Some tried to forget. And some turned their anger outwards, against others, becoming violent themselves. Credence seemed balanced at a crossroads, teetering either way. There was a lot of anger in him, compressed all the way down; constantly applying that sort of pressure gave his normal, hunched-in demeanour a fragile type of hollowness.

“Albus might be able to help him,” Newt said. “He’s a great teacher. Good with people. I’m aware that I’m ill-suited to the task. What Credence’s been through, his upbringing... he’s going to need a great deal of professional help and therapy. It might be key to the Obscurus problem. Those kinds of parasites feed off negative emotions as well as magic.”

Newt’s earnest little lectures always sat in the uncomfortable boundary between reassuring and faintly annoying. The part of Graves that hated being controlled in any way had stayed suspicious since Nurmengard. But even as anger was easy, it was also corrosive. Graves forced a smile. “All right.”

“It’s very generous of you to allow us to stay here.”

Us. Graves tried not to tense up too much. “I suppose I should be lucky that Theseus chose to check into a hotel?”

Newt hooked fingers into his tie, loosening it, unbuttoning his shirt at the throat, then tucking an intimate kiss under his collar. Scenting. Graves relaxed, despite himself, even as he resented it, distantly. This would have been unsettling with anyone else. “Tina offered to take Credence. Since he knows her.”

“The Goldsteins? That’s... no. If they get caught, they’d be thrown out of their lodging house. And besides, if something happens, she might not be able to contain it. This is fine. I’ll get used to it.” Even though it was odd at the start, Credence staring at Graves, as though

they weren't strangers. At least Credence hadn't questioned the polyjuice explanation, but getting used to Graves, rather than Grindelwald-Graves, was clearly a work in progress.

"Albus should be here in a few days. Just in time, I think."

"For what? There's something else that's wrong?" Graves asked, concerned. He wouldn't put it beyond Grindelwald to have cursed the boy, or something worse. "There wasn't anything untoward in his medical report. Well. Other than the Obscurus parasite."

Newt stared at him oddly. "Ah. I suppose. I might be presuming," Newt said sheepishly. "That you might want me here for it."

"It? Newt, we're having two separate conversations right now."

"Right. Yes. Your, well, quite likely, your rut is going to start up soon, given what happened the last time, and the severity of your response and such."

Oh. *Oh*. Graves had actually managed to forget about that, given the insanity of the past few days. Shit. "Right."

"I really don't think heat tea is very good for your constitution right now," Newt said delicately, "but you might want to get a medical opinion."

"Wait, wait." Graves said quickly. "You. Do you want to be here. For that." He couldn't even say it out aloud. To have Newt here, for a rut, in his bed, willing to be knotted—

"Well," Newt said doubtfully, "yes, but only if you're sure, I guess, since you don't like heat bonding and that's obviously going to happen... ah, all right, yes," Newt said, starting to laugh again as Graves growled and pointedly rubbed against Newt's thigh, his cock already firming just at the thought.

"Did Tina give you back that watch?" Graves whispered into his ear. Newt flushed, even as he nodded and patted his pocket. "Good," Graves purred, and went down on his knees.

#### week 01.Newt

Credence had actually seemed mildly relieved when handed off to Dumbledore. "You've all been very kind to me," he told Newt in the Woolworth building, while they waited for Dumbledore to finish his meeting with Theseus and the others. "So I don't want to seem ungrateful. It's just. Er. I don't think Director Graves likes me that much."

"Pshaw, he's just terribly grumpy sometimes," Queenie said brightly. "You could've stayed with us," she pressed. "Really. If you feel like you'd rather be with friends."

"Professor Dumbledore seems very nice," Credence said, blushing, which was admittedly the average young man's reaction to Queenie's smile (and that of some young women). "It's quite all right. Newt said that the Professor used to be his teacher in school. I think I'm ready to get better. And start learning more about being a wizard."

“Well, you’re all welcome over for dinner, anytime,” Queenie declared. “And you must let me know when you’re going to get a wand. It’d be so exciting. I’ll love to be there. I’ll bring a cake! We’ll order it specially from *that* bakery, once it opens,” she added, with a wry, faintly sad smile at Newt. “I heard that he got a loan, thanks to some surprise collateral.”

“I, er, there’s no need for that much bother,” Credence protested. “I’ve never, well.”

“You’ve never had a cake before!” Queenie gasped, skimming it off Credence’s mind. “That’s terrible! Let’s go. My place, right now. We’ll leave a note for the Professor, sweetie, it won’t be a big deal.”

Thankfully, Dumbledore wandered over from the lifts, just in time to stop Credence from having a heart attack. Time had worn worry lines over Dumbledore’s seamed face, and he didn’t look like he had slept very much recently, though he smiled at them with quiet, warm confidence, all wrapped up in a gray winter coat. “Newt. And this must be Miss Queenie Goldstein. And of course, Mister Barebone.”

“Credence, please,” Credence mumbled, dropping his eyes.

“Let’s get lunch,” Dumbledore suggested genially. “Sorry for making everyone wait. It’ll be my treat, to make up for it.”

“Actually,” Newt said, with a cough, “I, ah, have a prior appointment. Next time?”

Dumbledore glanced at him thoughtfully, then he smiled. “I see.” Queenie giggled. “Remember to stay hydrated.”

“*Professor*,” Newt hissed, looking around sharply. He walked them out of the building anyway, though he ducked down an alley once he was able, disappearing over to the apartment.

It was somewhat more... homely than it had been before, when Newt had first been brought here. There were supplies in the fridge, as well as tins of tea and sugar, and new yellow cushions on the couch. Framed paintings adorned the walls, and there were shelves for books, in the living room and in the guest room. Newt was looking over the spines of the books when Graves apparated into the living room.

“Zoology *and* magizoology books,” Newt said, nodding at the shelf. Those were new: they hadn’t been there this morning.

“I thought you might like them.”

“I do,” Newt acknowledged, with a grin, as Graves angled over to him. “But you really didn’t have to keep going to so much trouble these past few days. Isn’t this just a safehouse?”

“Still thinking about that,” Graves admitted, drawing him close. “Thought I’d make it more comfortable in the meantime.”

“In Nature,” Newt said teasingly, and grinned again as Graves rolled his eyes, “it’s usually the male of the species that builds a bower. A nest. Crabs, birds, fish... all to lure in a female,

hm?”

“Yes, very funny.”

“There’s an evolutionary logic behind trying to find the best provider,” Newt told him, and drew Graves over for a kiss. He could sense the rut starting, the heightened tension humming through Graves, the dilated eyes. “Although…”

“Although?”

“This place feels like it’s missing something. A garden?”

“A garden? There’s no space for a garden.” Graves actually looked around, over to the fire escape. “Window box?” he suggested, even as Newt started to laugh. Graves scowled. “You’re teasing me, you little minx.”

“I’m biologically predisposed to savour the moment.”

“That’s it. I’m going on heat tea.” Graves said with mock severity, even as he steered them towards the bedroom. Newt managed to get Graves’ tie off at the door, though their coats suffered, draped so hastily that Graves’ coat slid off the hook and onto the floor. Graves didn’t seem to notice, already kicking off his shoes, kissing Newt as they shed vests, shirts. Graves was purring in fits and starts, trying to stop himself, distracted by bared skin as the rest of their clothes and undergarments were worked through, until they were both shorn, Newt kneeling above Graves on the narrow bed.

Graves was powerfully built under his clothes, lean muscle that tapered to narrow hips, past uneven scars, his thickening cock already developing a faint bulge along its length. He hissed when Newt touched the forming knot, and moaned when Newt squeezed it experimentally. “Fuck. Don’t do that.”

“Sorry! Does it hurt?” Newt pulled his hand away quickly, only for Graves to grab his wrist.

“No. Just. I want to please you first,” Graves said thickly, his eyes fully dilated now. “Had plans. Been thinking about this for days.”

“How do you want me?” Newt whispered. Graves shook his head, as though trying to snap himself out of a daze. He turned Newt gently onto his hands and knees, purring again as he kissed down Newt’s spine, an urgent line that bent him down as he held up Newt’s hips and nudged his thighs open. No teasing licks this time: Graves kissed him instead, sucking at his wet opening, drinking greedily as Newt wailed and nearly buckled. Fingers curled over his cock, jacking him as roughly as Graves was licking into him, dry and a little too violent and Newt let out a shocked sound as he shook into his first peak of the rut, an euphoric rush.

Graves purred louder as Newt sank onto his elbows, panting, face buried in the pillow, and Newt let the sound relax him as Graves braced over him, the tip of his cock pressed intimately against Newt’s inner thigh. “Newt,” Graves gasped. “Tell me when you’re ready.”

Estrus was making him wetter. Sensation seemed heightened, arousal simpler. “Yes. All right.” When Graves didn’t move, Newt clarified, hiding his face. “Now. Please.” In response, Graves made a strangled sound and pushed inside, slow and so thick, forcing Newt’s body to stretch to take it, a tight and reluctant fit even with estrus. Graves was curled over him, hands fisted over the sheets, making the most delicious gasping whines, breathed against Newt’s shoulders. When he was hilted, he let out an agonised sound, as though the pleasure he felt was so overwhelming that it could only be felt viscerally as pain. It was too warm like this, too strange. Newt anchored the fingers of his left hand over Graves’ wrist, and reached back to curl the rest in Graves’ hair, tugging.

“Wait,” Graves pleaded, then whined as Newt tugged again, impatient. This time, Graves obeyed, rocking into Newt, tentative at first until Newt growled at him. The first proper thrust was punishingly deep, slapping the headboard against the wall and knocking out Newt’s breath into a keening cry. Graves didn’t hesitate after that, hitching up Newt’s hips with his spare hand.

Newt could feel the heat bond rushing into place, the mesh of their magic, woven together, an intimacy deeper than sex. The full bond brought a heady pulse of clarity, a *knowing* that Newt could not describe, as though the two of them were now inextricable, a single whole. Orgasm was racking through Newt again in a joyous coda. The urgent thrusts were slowing down, the knot swelling inside him, and Newt clenched down on it, trying instinctively to milk it, until Graves shuddered and ground in as far as he still could, seeding him.

Settled on their flanks, still tied, Newt tried to catch his breath as Graves purred and kissed his shoulders, stroking his belly, his flanks, until Newt finally calmed down, clearing his throat.

“How...” Newt coughed again as the word came out as a croak. “How long? Before um, your knot goes down?”

“It’s been a while,” Graves said distractedly. “Fifteen minutes?”

“Really? I should have brought one of the books.”

“I... You...” Graves started to sputter as Newt chuckled. He bit Newt reproachfully on the shoulder. “You! You’re lucky that I need you right now.”

“Hmmyes,” Newt breathed, squeezing down, and grinned as Graves cursed and clawed at his hips.

month 01.Graves

*Dearest Newton, the piece of ‘anonymous’ owl-brought fan mail read, Congratulations on your progress with Credence. I could not have guessed that he was the Obscurial. Research had always indicated that Obscurials never survived past childhood, and are almost always girls. I confess that I may have been more shortsighted than I thought. And I could not have done any better with the boy. Allow me to express my utmost admiration for your resourcefulness, your incisiveness and intelligence, all rare qualities even among our kind. I*

*wish you the best.*  
—Yours Sincerely, G

*PS. Do you have an alpha? I do hope you haven't chosen the Director. He lacks imagination, a flaw common to members of his chosen profession.*

"The fucking gall," Graves growled, confiscating the letter. Perched on the back of the couch, the black owl watched Graves with mild reproach as he set the letter on fire, dumping the ashes into the bin. Newt stared at him with an expression of mild astonishment, cross-legged beside the coffee table with a notepad and a pen. "Wait. Are you *writing a response*?"

"Why not?"

"Why not? Grindelwald's a *terrorist*. A murderer. A kidnapper—"

"Well, I was going to ask him why he was so interested in certain kinds of Southeast Asian exorcism rituals in his thesis," Newt said. "Also, the ink I'm using is a new Hobbes concoction. Might or might not work to help locate Grindelwald, but Theseus said it wouldn't hurt giving it a go."

"Ah." Slightly mollified, Graves folded himself down against Newt, peering over his shoulder. Newt frowned at him.

"I really don't need supervision."

"Were you even going to tell me about the letter?" If Graves hadn't decided to head home for lunch, to check on his omega—

"It was on the table, wasn't it? I wasn't hiding it."

"'Dear Grindelwald'? That's terribly familiar, don't you think?" Graves grumbled, even as Newt sighed and pointedly slapped at Graves' bracketing knees. "Why don't you just start with... don't even bother with his name. Just write 'Turn yourself in, asshole'. Something like that."

"I don't write rude letters."

"I do. Give me the pen." Graves made a grab for the Hobbes pen, but Newt held it out of reach.

"No. If you want to watch, fine. But *quietly*. Or I'm just going to wait until you have to go back to work."

Graves sighed loudly, and kissed Newt against the nape of his neck, nuzzling down to his throat. "Tell him that you already have an alpha."

"Maybe."

"What do you mean, 'maybe'?"

Newt pursed his lips. “The alpha in question is being awfully unreasonable right now. Besides, you said something about how we should try out this relationship business. So we’re on probation, at the very least.”

“I... what?” Graves groaned, pressing his forehead to Newt’s shoulder. “That’s not what I meant.”

“Really? It seems eminently reasonable. After your last rut, you still fought the heat bond. Once you were, ah, somewhat in better control of your faculties.”

“Newt.” Fear was like a cold shock to the system. Graves turned Newt around to face him, even though Newt twisted briefly against his grip. “I told you. I’d get better at it. At not trying to push you away. I’ve been trying.” That was painfully close to whining. “I’ve said that I was sorry.” Now *that* was definitely a whine.

Newt was staring at him in surprise. “Um? You’re upset.”

“Of course I’m upset! I thought you understood. I didn’t mean it. Just. It takes getting used to, and, there’s probably something wrong with me so—”

“Percival,” Newt interrupted, blinking. “There’s nothing wrong with you. We’ve only known each other for nearly two months. It’s not very long at all, and. Eventually I’m going to start travelling again. Long distances.”

“I know that.”

Newt was frowning now. “I think we’re doing that thing, where we have two completely separate conversations. What do you think that I’m talking about?”

“That you’re open to—” Graves took a deep breath, “—finding another alpha. One with. Fewer problems.”

“No,” Newt said, genuinely puzzled now. “When did I say that?”

“You brought up the bond! And probation!”

“Right, well,” Newt blinked owlishly. “I was talking about myself? I travel a lot, and long distance relationships can be challenging, so, if you find someone you’re more compatible with, well—”

“All right. All right. Can we just.” Graves drew Newt down, tucking Newt’s chin against his shoulder, holding him close, nuzzling his hair.

“Is this about the letter?”

“No! Just. No. When I apologised. About the heat bond. You brushed it off. I think you even laughed. So I thought we were all right.”

“Rejection hurts through the bond,” Newt pointed out lightly. “But I thought... Wasn’t I also hurting you? I really can’t help... when we’re bonded, I can’t just shut the bond out.

Influencing you, it's not always consciously done. And sometimes, you hated it."

"I didn't."

"You can't hide sentiment during a bond."

"... I'm sorry. I'll work on it, it'll be better for you the next time—"

"Percival." Newt leaned up, visibly worried. "I didn't mean... here." He shifted up, leaning their foreheads together, and for a moment Graves nearly twitched back out of instinct. Thankfully, panic set in and froze him to the spot. Newt murmured something soothingly, petting his hair, and eventually, as always, Graves calmed down. There was something unbreakable about Newt, a tranquil centre, humbling to the touch. He craved it. "All right. I've made some inaccurate conclusions. Let's. Go get some lunch?"

"What about the letter?"

"I fed the owl, she can wait. We'll write the letter together. But. Can you keep it civil?"

"We'll see."

year 01.Newt

Graves had been fussing over him all day, even as Newt fed his animals, and finally, by Raksha's perch, Newt said, "I'm really fine, by the way. You're starting to stress Raksha out."

Slouched on the rock, Raksha sniffed loudly. Graves stared at the nundu warily, and she bared her teeth at him in playful warning. "Nobody's been kidnapped *twice* by Grindelwald."

"Well, I'm fine." Newt said firmly, leading Graves away from the nundu habitat. "The new place isn't like Nurmengard. It's a villa in Havana. Wasn't that hard to escape."

"Did he..." Graves trailed off, clenching his fists tightly. "Did he do anything to you?"

"No? It was actually a misunderstanding. I happened to be in Cuba tracking migratory Culebre Redsnout habitats and he found me at the nesting site. So I attacked him."

"Which part of that was a misunderstanding?"

"Oh, he was just trying to get me to autograph his copy of my book, and he wanted to congratulate me on getting those anti-trafficking measures passed at a Confederation level," Newt recalled. "That was nice? I didn't even think that he was remotely interested in conservation."

"What."

"Which he explained to me afterwards at the villa in question, so I signed the book—"

"What?"

“—though I wasn’t really in the mood to write a dedication, what with the shackles on my wrists. Then he asked me to join his League of Gentlemen, I do believe they’re calling themselves. There’s probably an adjective in there somewhere that I’ve forgotten. Fantastic Gentlemen? Interesting Gentlemen? Regardless, I told him, well, that’s all very fine and all, but the name’s rather... *sexist*, wouldn’t you say—”

“*What.*”

“—so we might’ve gotten into a bit of an argument, though, one of the lady League members present indicated that she agreed with me. They eventually fed me and left me alone after Grindelwald stormed off in a huff. Pickett let me out of the cell, I found my things and escaped. Wasn’t that hard.”

“I’m never letting you out of my sight again,” Graves decided weakly.

“Don’t be silly,” Newt said, chuckling. “I’m going to Ilvermorny tomorrow. The Nessa egg is hatching soon, and I don’t want to miss it. Besides, it’d be nice to see Dougal again. Jing’s expecting. Professor Zhang’s very excited.”

“Right. I’ll take a few days off.”

“... wait. You weren’t joking?”

“Right now, no.”

“We’ve talked about this,” Newt said patiently. “Alpha over-protectiveness.”

“You were just kidnapped by Grindelwald!”

“And I escaped by myself.” Newt pointed out. “Oh, all right, no need to scowl. You need the break anyway.” He left Pickett on the tree, and headed into the laboratory, towards the ladder up. Before he reached it, Graves turned him around with a touch on the elbow. Beside the crowded workbench, under magelights and shelves of potions, the flap beyond to the habitats only partly closed, Graves was again framed by Newt’s world, so comfortably in place, as though he *belonged*. They both did.

“Newt,” Graves said soberly, then he blinked as Newt stepped over, curling his arms around Graves’ waist, pressing his cheek to the scarf over Graves’ shoulders. Graves didn’t hesitate, holding him flush, brushing kisses that drifted over Newt’s cheek, nuzzling lower.

“Welcome back,” Graves whispered, and that still felt new: belonging somewhere, with *someone*. Newt kissed him in reply, for there was nothing left that needed saying. Alone, just like this, they were whole: for a moment it felt like Graves was the beginning and the end of Newt’s world, as Newt was to Graves, a looped circle, made precious by imperfections. They breathed together, a lovers’ silent prayer, for the days yet to come.

## End Notes

Thanks for reading!

If you enjoyed this fic, here is a list of frontline direct impact conservation groups

<https://www.reddit.com/r/antipoaching/wiki/frontline-conservation?v=32101804-9817-11e6-a1b0-0e783024ab5e>

Also my favourite: <https://www.rainforesttrust.org/>

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