

## Chapter 12

For three days after the Werewolf attack, Harry spent a good portion of his time trying desperately to calm the public. Some Ministry officials who did polls among the public told him that they were split right down the middle. Half the Wizarding population thought he was doing the right thing not charging them, and the other half was calling for blood. While he was putting out fires and calling for calm on the Wireless and in interviews, the girls worked tirelessly on the new bills.

With everything going on, time seemed to move at the speed of light. Before he knew it, it was the day of the Wizengamot meeting on his last full day in office. Tomorrow would be the day that determined whether he remained part of the Wizarding world or if he was left destitute and without magic. But there was nothing he could do about that. Amelia had all the evidence she could gather, and no one really knew what would happen. The book simply said that magic would be the judge, but no one could tell him what that would mean. Even the DoM was clueless. Apparently, no one had ever enacted the law before.

Putting worries of tomorrow from his mind, Harry focused on what he wanted to get done. The moment he and Hermione stepped outside his office, they were met by Amelia, Penny, and Daphne. They talked about the upcoming Wizengamot session, finalizing tactics as they made their way down to the courtrooms. While Hermione, Penny, and Daphne had done most of the hard work, it was decided that it would be best if the proposals came from Wizengamot members. Daphne's father, Darius, would be introducing the bill to remove Dementors from Azkaban. Amos Diggory would introduce the amendment to an existing law that would make bearing the Dark Mark an arrestable offense. And finally, Amelia herself would introduce Hermione's Muggleborn Protection Act.

It was unlikely anything would get passed by the end of the day, but all of them hoped this would be the start of a much needed change at the Ministry. They all knew it would really come down to who became the next Minister. Amelia had agreed to run for office, but none of them could predict who the other nominees would be. There was just simply no way to know how successful they would be.

This time, as they exited the elevator, there were no reporters or concerned citizens to greet them. Only a few Wizengamot members and their aides waved as they made their way to courtroom four. They were early, but Daphne's mother, Evangeline, was already in the gallery with her photographer. When she glanced at Harry, they shared a friendly wave while Daphne and Hermione broke off to join her. Meanwhile, Harry, Amelia, and Penny made their way to the Minister's seat, an ornate seat in the very middle, and slightly raised above the rest.

"I really hate this seat," Harry sighed. "I feel like I'm sitting on a pedestal where everyone can stare at me."

"You can always change it," Amelia told him.

Harry closed his eyes and cursed under his breath before drawing his wand. With a quick wave, he lowered the chair so it was even with the rest. Looking over at Penny, he smiled and kissed her on the cheek.

"Much better," he said.

Penny giggled and laced her fingers through his while Amelia smiled at the pair.

"I can't wait," Harry said.

"Considering how many times your life has been in danger there, I thought you'd be less anxious to go back," Amelia frowned.

"I'll take those over politics any day of the week," Harry said, smiling crookedly.

Amelia shook her head, "I'd like to argue with you, but in your place, I'd probably feel the same. But you call me if something happens next year, and I don't care what Dumbledore has to say. And I would take it as a personal favor if you could teach Susan to defend herself. She's not a fighter at heart like you or I, but I want her to at least master the basics."

"I don't know how much help I'll be," Harry told her. "Matilda turned me into a cat the last time we duelled."

"Of course, she did," Amelia said, visibly fighting a smile. "Matilda has sixty years of experience over you. She thinks quite highly of you, and Moody would compliment you even if you managed to kill him. Even then, he'd grumble about you taking so long."

Harry snorted and smiled as the room began to fill up. When Dumbledore showed up a few minutes later, looking resplendent in his bright blue, sparkling robes, everyone quieted down and took their seats.

Harry didn't have much to do for most of the meeting. Others stood up to make the proposals from him, running through the well thought out points and arguments the girls had painstakingly refined over sleepless nights. A part of him still bristled that they weren't getting the credit they deserved, but the girls assured him that getting the bills passed was more important than who got their name in the press.

Amos went first, making a passionate and compelling plea to make the Dark Mark illegal. He visibly and audibly choked up when he mentioned Cedric's name, reminding the Wizengamot that it could've easily been one of their sons or daughters in his place. Dumbledore frowned at the proposal, glancing back at Harry only once to show his visible disapproval. Harry honestly didn't care if the Headmaster liked it or not. This was something that should've been done years ago. Amelia made sure to put in provisions that would ensure those who were threatened or coerced into taking the Mark would get fair treatment. The rest could go hang for all he cared.

Darius was up next, speaking calmly and coolly about removing the Dementors from Azkaban. He focused on the danger they represented to the Wizarding community if they joined Voldemort. For half an hour, he listed time after time how they'd submitted to the control of one Dark Wizard or another, and how many magicals were kissed as a result. By the time he mentioned what it would cost the Ministry, most looked ready to jump on board. Of course, it wasn't that simple. The question of what to do with the Dementors remained unanswered. It was the biggest hang up for the bill, and one that could take months or years to find a solution to. Harry could only hope someone came up with an answer soon.

Lastly, Amelia made her pitch for the Muggleborn Protection Act. This one, unfortunately, didn't garner as much support as the first two. Amelia had warned them this might happen. She thought the Wizengamot would be quick to push it to the side for more immediate concerns. Despite the lack of enthusiasm from the crowd, she pushed onward, detailing what the amendment was for and why it was needed. Slowly, she drew people in, garnering nods and grumbles of agreement from the Wizengamot. By the time her speech came to a close, Harry felt hopeful that, in time, it would pass.

"Thank you, Madam Bones," Dumbledore said as he stood. "Since we're so short on time, we'll discuss these proposals at the start of the next meeting, which will be held Thursday at nine AM. For those of you who have not received the owl, there will be a special session tomorrow at ten to resolve the matter between current Minister Potter, and former Minister Fudge. Attendance is recommended, but not required. Before we adjourn for the evening, I believe Minister Potter would like to say a few words."

Penny gave Harry's arm a squeeze as he wiped his sweaty palms on his robes. Getting to his feet, he marched mechanically up to the podium, gripping the edges tightly to still his shaking hands. The sound of him clearing his throat echoed through the room, bringing heat to his cheeks.

"As I'm sure all of you know, today is officially my last day as Minister for Magic," Harry began. "I'm not much of a public speaker, so I'll keep this brief. The amount of corruption I've seen since taking off is frankly horrifying. I don't know how it got that way and, frankly, I don't care. What matters now is how do we fix it? How do we keep this country from falling into the hands of Voldemort?"

Harry paused to let his question settle, as well as his stomach. All eyes in the room were staring at him intently, listening and judging his every word.

"I've worked with some brilliant people in my capacity as Minister, and today, we've given you the keys to what we think will help," he continued, glancing at Hermione and Daphne in the audience. "There's a lot of work to do to stop Voldemort, and I don't have all the answers. I wish I did. What I do know is that the only way he will ever truly be defeated is to end what created him in the first place. The Wizengamot has had sixteen years to stop the corruption and bigotry that led to the first war. Instead, you went back to the way things were, and now, your children will suffer because of it.

"This is your chance to fix that mistake! This is your chance to give them a better future! The choices that you make, here, in the heart of the Ministry, will determine whether we win this war, or not. It's your choices that will determine if we face another Voldemort in a generation, or two. What kind of world do you want to hand over to the next generation? One full of greed and mistrust, anger and resentment? Or a world where we can stand together, lifting each other up to heights we could never reach alone? What happens next, is in your hands."

Harry stepped back, taking a deep breath as the sound of applause swelled. The thunderous sound echoed off of the stone walls of the chamber. Amelia was the first to her feet, followed moments later by a dozen more. In moments, nearly the entire Wizengamot was giving him a standing ovation. Smiling and waving shyly, he waited awkwardly for them to stop before taking his seat.

"And on those inspiring words, I declare this meeting adjourned," Dumbledore said, banging his gavel.

Harry had barely gotten to his feet while supporters and well-wishers swarmed around him. It got so bad that Marcus and Kim hurried over to keep him from being overwhelmed.

“That was a wonderful speech, Minister,” Augusta Longbottom said, shaking his hand firmly. “It’s about time someone had the balls to say it.”

Harry smiled and murmured his thanks before she was replaced by someone else, then another, and another.

“I wish you didn’t have to go back to Hogwarts.” “Wonderful speech, Minister.” “I hope Fudge get what he deserves tomorrow.”

Harry’s arm started to go numb from the number of times he shook hands. One of the few young witches there, looking to be in her thirties with long, dark hair and a dazzling smile even kissed him on the cheek. He swore he felt Penny’s eyes glaring holes in the back of his head as he smiled and nodded at the witch politely.

“Avada Kedavra!”

Harry spun, plucking his wand deftly from his robe. He caught a flash of green out of the corner of his eye just a few feet away. Just as the thought crossed his mind that he didn’t have time to get out of the way, he was roughly knocked to the ground. The wind was knocked out of his lungs as a large, heavy body covered his. Screams rang out, people shouted his name in fear as the Aurors rushed in.

“I’m fine,” Harry said, trying to shove the person off of him.

The weight didn’t move, so he pushed harder and they finally rolled to the side. When he sat up to see who had saved his life, his heart dropped into his stomach. Marcus stared unseeingly at the ceiling, his blue eyes dead and lifeless.

“No,” Harry whispered in shock.

“Get the Minister out of here!” Amelia shouted. “Lock down the Ministry! No one in or out!”

Kim grabbed him by the arm and yanked him to his feet with shocking strength. As she forcibly pushed him out of the room with the help of Penny, Kingsley, and Matilda, Harry spotted Moody subduing someone in the crowd. With so many people in the way, he couldn't see who it was.

"No, wait! I-"

"He's gone, Potter," Matilda interrupted firmly, her face stony. "Our priority is to keep you safe."

In seconds, he was dragged out of the room and down the hall. Glancing over his shoulder, he spotted Hermione and Daphne rushing after them, their faces white and eyes wide. Harry felt numb, his chest hollow as they climbed into the elevator and rode up to his office. Hermione watched him cautiously - as if he would break at any moment - while Penny clung to his arm like a lifeline.

"Did anyone see who did it?" Harry asked, bubbling anger rising to the surface.

"Thadeus Nott," Kim said, her eyes red as she blinked back tears.

Not knowing what to say to her, Harry rested his hand on her shoulder and gave it a reassuring squeeze. As soon as the elevator door opened, Matilda held him back while Kim and Kingsley stepped out, wands raised. The staff's questions and exclamations were met with stony silence from the focused Aurors.

"Clear!" Kingsley called.

Matilda led him out of the elevator and guided him straight to his office.

"Clear this floor and lock it down until Bones gives us the all clear," she said as they passed Kingsley.

"Is that really necessary?" Hermione asked.

"Until we know more, yes," Matilda said firmly. "Minister, please wait in your office until we know it's safe."

Harry sighed but knew they wouldn't let him leave even if he tried. Minister or not, Hermione alone would tie him to his chair.

"Fine," he said. "But I want to know the moment we find out anything."

Matilda nodded and pushed him into his office. Penny, Daphne, and Hermione followed him inside before Kingsley and Kim took up positions on either side of the door, wands in hand. Meanwhile, Matilda pulled up a chair and sat down. With a wave of her wand, she sent off a Patronus.

For over an hour, Harry sat in his office, waiting impatiently for any news. Penny gripped his hand tightly the whole time. The girls tried to make conversation, but he was too anxious to pay attention for long. Finally, after an agonizing wait, Amelia's Badger Patronus shot through the elevator doors and stopped in front of Matilda.

"All clear," Amelia's voice came from the silver Patronus. "I'm sending an escort to bring the Minister to the Auror offices."

"Finally," Harry said, climbing to his feet.

As he left his office, Matilda waved her wand, unlocking the elevator doors with a squelch. A few moments later, a troop of four Aurors stepped out, a familiar head of pink hair leading the way.

"Tonks?" Harry asked. "What are you doing here? I thought you were still on the mend."

"Amelia called me in," Tonks replied, lacking her normal cheer. "She wants people she can trust around you. Don't worry, I'm healthy enough for this. How're you holding up Kim?"

"I'm fit for duty," she answered stonily.

"That's not what I was asking," Tonks said kindly.

"I'll feel better after that bastard gets his date with a Dementor," Kim growled.

Tonks nodded in understanding and gestured to the elevator. The inside expanded itself to fit everyone in and they headed down one floor to the DMLE offices. The moment the doors opened, Harry marched straight towards Amelia, who was talking to Connie Hammer and another Auror he didn't recognize.

"Not here," she said before he could open his mouth. "My office."

Nodding shortly, Harry followed her to her office. Penny and Hermione tried to follow him in, but Amelia stopped them with a look.

"Just the Minister for now," she told them. "He can fill you in later."

Impatient to find out what was going on, Harry nodded to the girls. Amelia closed and sealed the door before walking around the desk to take her seat.

"What's happening?" Harry asked, taking the seat across from her.

"Thadeus Nott was the one to cast the Killing Curse," she said, her stern expression giving way to one of tiredness as she rubbed her eyes. "He was arrested and detained after killing Auror Dresden. Judge Pennington was there for the Wizengamot meeting and signed the order to use Veritaserum before Nott was even out of the room. Under truth serum, he testified that he was placed under the Imperius Curse and forced to go against his will to attempt an assassination. A Healer from St. Mungo's confirmed he shows very recent signs of being under the curse."

Harry grew angrier with every word. When she finished, he jumped to his feet and paced back and forth, fighting the urge to shout and scream. Taking a deep breath, he thought the situation over.

"Did you get anything useful out of him?" he asked.

"Nothing," Amelia sighed. "He testified he's not a Death Eater. He doesn't have the Dark Mark. He didn't see who cursed him or recognize the voice."

"Fuck!" Harry yelled.

Furiously, he threw a punch at the wall, denting the wood paneling and leaving his knuckles throbbing.

"Feel better?" Amelia asked.

"No," Harry growled, clenching his fist against the pain. "This is bullshit! There's no way Voldemort isn't behind this and Nott didn't know exactly what was going to happen."

"I agree, but there's no proof," Amelia told him. "The question is, what changed? The other Death Eaters said he wanted to kill you himself."

"Who knows?" Harry asked. "Maybe he changed his mind after they were arrested? So, what happens now, is he just going to get away with killing Marcus?"

"I can press charges if you demand it, but there's little chance of winning at trial," Amelia told him. "Everyone on the Wizengamot can easily imagine themselves in his position. It was a common tactic during the last war."

"That son of a bitch," Harry growled, gripping the back of his chair in a white-knuckled grip. "How the hell does he know nothing about what happened? There's no way Nott has been with Voldemort since the beginning."

"Veritaserum isn't foolproof," Amelia reminded him. "There are spells to block certain memories for a time. I suspect he's used some variation of that. He went to school with Tom Riddle, and he doesn't even recognize the name. Unfortunately, without evidence, I can't order a mind Healer to check. I've ordered Aurors to search his home but I'm not hopeful. This was well planned and has likely been in the works since shortly after you took office."

Pacing back and forth a few times, Harry sighed and retook his seat.

"So, what do we do?" he asked heavily.

“As much as it pains me to say this, we need to follow the law,” Amelia said, her lips twisting in a grimace. “That bastard killed one of my best Aurors, but we can’t take matters into our own hands. Doing so would send a poor message to the public. We continue to investigate and hope something turns up.”

Harry snorted at the idea, but he didn’t have a better one. As much as he hated it, Amelia was right. Taking off his glasses and rubbing his eyes, there was a knock at the door. Amelia flicked her wand, causing the locks to click open.

“Enter!” she called.

The door opened and Connie stepped inside.

“Minister, Madam Bones, we found this in Auror Dresden’s robes,” she said, holding out a wrinkled envelope.

“Thank you, Connie,” Amelia said, taking it.

As Connie stepped back outside, Amelia read the front before handing it to Harry across the desk.

*To Harry in the event of my death*

Swallowing thickly, Harry broke the wax seal with his thumb and opened the envelope. Inside was a single sheaf of parchment folded into thirds. Unfolding the letter, he read.

*Harry,*

*If you are reading this, then I’ve likely been killed fulfilling my duty as your personal guard. Please, do not mourn my death, and ask Kim to do the same. I’ve known for some time now this was likely to happen. If you remember, I was given a prophecy of my own during your visit to the Department of Mysteries. I won’t bore you with the full prophecy, but it basically told me I would die protecting you. I felt no hesitation or fear in continuing my duties. You have accomplished more in 30 days than Bagnold or Fudge did in their entire careers. It has been an honor and a privilege working with you. You are bound for great things in this life Harry, whether you like it or not.*

*Your Friend, Marcus*

*P.S. Tell Kim I know she'll be a great Auror. Out of all the trainees I've seen rise up the ranks, she is my favorite. Watching her grow from a nervous schoolgirl into a confident, skilled young woman has been a joy.*

"He knew," Harry said, blinking the tears out of his eyes. "He knew and he didn't tell me."

Shaking his head, he handed the letter to Amelia.

"Damn it, Marcus," she said, bowing her head. "He didn't tell anyone because he didn't want to put them at risk. He was one of the best for a reason."

"How do I make sure he gets an Order of Merlin?" Harry asked.

"I'll send you the paperwork," Amelia said, fixing her monocle. "There's nothing more you can do here, Harry. Go get some rest. You have a big day tomorrow."

Emotionally drained, Harry nodded and stood.

"And send in Kim, would you?" she asked.

"Sure," he said.

Walking out of the office, he found Kim diligently standing guard outside.

"Amelia wants to see you," Harry told her.

Nodding, Kim walked inside and closed the door.

“What’s going on?” Penny asked.

“I’ll tell you when we get back to my office,” Harry replied.

The door to Amelia’s office opened a few moments later and Kim rushed up to Harry and pulled him into a tight hug. He rubbed her back as she sniffled, her shoulders trembling.

“It’s not your fault,” she said shakily.

“I know,” Harry said through a tight throat. “Come on, let’s go back to my office. I think we could all use a drink.”