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24th November, Saturday

Hogwarts had proved everything his brothers said it was… and more. Everything was new and exciting and… hard. Harry Potter was here, but he had joined Ravenclaw for some reason. Everyone dreamed of becoming friends with The Boy Who Lived, and Ron was no exception. But reality was often disappointing, as he discovered in the last few months.

Potter was polite yet reclusive and kept to himself except for his short muggle-born friend. The House of Wit and Learning had proved a suitable place for him, judging by his almost effortless class performance and the rumours of him disappearing just to study harder. There was no mistaking it, though: Potter was *dangerous* if DADA practice was anything to judge by. Most took the rumours of him slaying two trolls with a grain of salt, but Ron believed them.

If Harry Potter vanquished You-Know-Who as a toddler, what were two dumb trolls to him?

Ron sighed as he idly glanced around the Gryffindor table. Percy looked pristine and had his usual air of self-importance, yet he could see him mooning over his Ravenclaw girlfriend in a way that made him want to puke. Fred and George were absent, probably up to mischief again. The girls from his year had split into two groups - Patil, Brown, and Dunbar, who loved to gossip.

Sophie Roper had glued herself to the annoying know-it-all Granger, who was excitedly babbling on about the intricacies of Arithmancy as if she had already taken the class.

Seamus and the sombre Neville were talking about Peter Pettigrew's trial, with the two muggle-born boys, Dean Thomas and Jon Robbins, listening with rapt attention. Ever since that stupid duel in which Neville had dragged him as a second, the rest of the first-year boys had gathered around Neville.

Not Ron, though. He now sat at the end of the Gryffindor table, just below the staff table, under the direct scrutiny of the professors. Being named an involuntary second in the bloody duel had dragged him into hot water when Percy had written to their mother, and it was a small wonder no howler had arrived.

Their father had been under constant surprise inspections at work for nearly a month, and first-year boys had no business *duelling in the halls*. Never mind that Ron had not even cast a single spell. Regardless, his parents had forbidden him from causing any further mischief with Neville.

He did not want anything to do with the Longbottom anymore; Professor McGonagall had reprimanded him for his recklessness for half an hour the next day, and Neville hadn't even apologised! Some days, Ron just wondered if the world was out to get him.

He eyed the Ravenclaw table; half the first-year eagles were clustered around Potter and Lestrange, chatting excitedly about something boring, probably homework.

Juno Lestrange was not half as bad as Neville had portrayed her, and she did not get him in trouble! That much was clear to Ron; otherwise, she would have gone to Slytherin instead of Ravenclaw. Sure, she had some haughtiness, but she was not like Malfoy, who strutted around like a peacock with his bodyguards as if he owned the school.

It was more like Percy but with much more grace and—err, what was that word?

Elegance—it reminded him of his grandmother. Still, Ron struggled to see why Longbottom would act like a slimy snake and try to kill a girl who did him no harm. Worse, Potter seemed even more guarded against the Gryffindors, and the fleeting chance to make friends with the Boy Who Lived was now gone for real.

“So where do you reckon Pettigrew hid for ten years?” Seamus’s Irish brogue broke him out of his musing. “I don’t see anything mentioned in the Prophet.”

“Probably skulked around in some bloody hovel like a rat,” Neville shrugged nonchalantly. “Just like the rest of his murderous, traitorous lot. At least he’s now in Azkaban, where he belongs.”

“Even two weeks later, there are scarcely any details. I still can’t believe they had an innocent man in jail for ten years…” Jon Robins shook his head, and Ron tuned them out again, focused on his food, and added another grilled fillet to his plate.

The trouble with Pettigrew and Sirius Black was old news. While the whole thing had come like lighting out of a blue sky, his father had always said Felix Fawley was a great Head of DMLE, and Ron couldn’t help but agree. His dad had brought him to the DMLE once last year, and the Aurors were all amazing. Everyone knew his father, and the Director himself looked very cool in his red dragonhide robes and had this air of danger. The man was great - he had managed to chuck the greasy git straight into Azkaban. Catching Pettigrew was nothing before that.

A burst of laughter and cries echoed, and Ron raised his head to see the whole of Slytherin with… bright red hair and golden skin.

A few older years desperately tried to dispel whatever hex they had to no effect besides swapping the colours sporadically. The Gryffindor table erupted with laughter, and Ron found himself chuckling in amusement as he watched the snakes scuttle around in indignant panic like headless chickens. Some, though, looked annoyed at most and simply continued eating. It was good not to be the target of Fred and George’s pranks for a change.

Professor McGonagall’s heavy gaze sternly inspected the Gryffindor table, probably looking for his twin brothers. After not finding them, she abruptly stood up and rushed out of the Great Hall. It was like a game of cat and mouse; Fred and George would try to cause some mayhem while the professors would try to catch them red-handed. Ron wondered how the twins could manage enough spare time for mischief when they had already been punished with detention for the next five months.

As Ron gobbled up his last piece of toast, his mind wandered to the rest of the day. It was the weekend, and while he got along well enough with his housemates, he had failed to make friends.

It shouldn’t have come as a surprise since he couldn’t make any back at home either, save for Luna, who was Ginny’s friend more than his. Longbottom’s fight with Lestrange had not helped things in the slightest.

He could play wizarding chess against himself again for the hundredth time… or write his Transfiguration essay or something. The few who had agreed to play chess with him in Gryffindor had lost interest after losing a handful of times, and Ron had only been playing against himself for a good month now. He had tried challenging some older students, but they refused. He didn’t know how but blamed Fred and George for it.

Things had gotten so dreadfully boring that he had started doing his homework on time and early. It helped that the library was one of the few places where Fred and George wouldn't dare prank him.

With a sigh, he shuffled, only for a comically loud farting sound to rip off from underneath him. A slight stench of dung filled the air, and a ripple of laughter went through the Gryffindor table.

Cursing Fred and George, Ron fled the Great Hall, feeling his ears on fire. Even in school, his bloody brothers never gave him a moment of peace. He gritted his teeth angrily before sighing in frustration; what was he supposed to do about it? Even if he went to his mother, he would be punished as well…*somehow.*

"Bloody hell," a groan rolled off his chest as he stopped at the entrance hall. Sighing again, Ron realised he was faced with the niches where the hourglasses were. The Gryffindor one was almost empty - two errant rubies lay lonely at the bottom, only to float up before his eyes, and the number moved to a glaring zero; it seemed like Fred and George had been caught. Neville's stunt had cost the lions greatly, and his twin brothers were of no help.

The Ravenclaw hourglass showed a nice 673 written in an elegant flourish and was almost filled to the brim with sapphires, far ahead of the Slytherins with 531 House Points. At least it looked like the Snakes wouldn't win the House Cup this year.

Truth be told, he regretted being in Gryffindor. Percy, Fred, and George had not been of any help at all! Even being in Hufflepuff would have been better; Ron had not seen any Puffs looking remotely alone. House is your family my fo–

"If it isn't a Weasley!" The familiar, conceited voice from behind had him grimacing.

Ron turned around to tell him to sod off, only to freeze for a short moment. A chortle couldn't help but escape from his mouth at Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle with bright red hair and sparkling golden skin.

"It's not funny," Malfoy spat out, gilded face twisted in anger.

It took all of Ron's willpower not to roar in laughter and try to hide his chuckle with a cough. Shaking his head, he turned to the nearest staircase, only for two meaty hands to grab his shoulders and force him to turn around, only to face three golden scowls.

Ron snorted again, barely managing to suppress his laughter. "What do you want, Malfoy?"

"Isn't it obvious? We want some payback, and while the menaces you call brothers remain elusive, you're just too easy to find."

"But I haven't done anything!" Ron protested, his face growing hot as he clenched his teeth again. His hand nervously shuffled through his robes for his wand.

Malfoy scoffed. "Neither have we, yet you wretched blood traitors keep making trouble!" Ron's insides twisted nervously, and he tried to elbow his captors as the haughty Slytherin took out his wand. "Petrificus Totalus!"

Goyle had groaned when Ron's elbow struck his ribs, and the Gryffindor's boy tried to twist himself out of the way, but the pale spell still struck the hem of his robes.

Ron's body went still, and he fell painfully, limbs refusing to move completely as Crabbe and a scowling Goyle approached threateningly, cracking their knuckles. As his heart was beating so hard as if it wanted to escape his ribcage, Ron cursed Fred and George inwardly.

“Tsk, tsk, tsk,” a raspy laughter halted the three smug Slytherins. The following words were uttered with a heavy Eastern European accent, “What do we have here?”

“Mr Petrov,” Draco instantly turned around and nodded respectfully, his wand disappearing in his sleeve. Never had Ron felt so relieved to see the new caretaker's craggy face. “We were just showing Weasley here how to cast the full-body bind.” Crabbe and Goyle nodded dumbly.

“Five points from Slytherin for casting magic in the hallways,” the man scoffed, leaning lazily on the wall and somehow still managing to look dangerous. His thick, meaty arms reminded Ron of bear paws. “Go and run to Slughorn, telling him what you did. Don’t even think about lying, or I will find out. You don’t want me to go and speak with Horace myself, do you?” Grigori Petrov’s scarred face twisted into a savage smile, making Draco turn around and flee as if his arse was on fire, followed by his two minions.

A wand appeared in the caretaker’s gloved hand, and with a dismissive flick, Ron could move his limbs again.

“Thanks,” he said gratefully. His body was as tense as a rock as Ron rummaged through his robes for his wand and finally found it. His willow wand brought him some relief. He would still be using Charlie’s old one if it wasn’t for Professor Quirrell forcing Ron to reach out and Bill generously setting aside a third of his salary.

“Don’t thank me for doing my job, boy,” Petrov snorted, and Ron looked closer at the man, still leaning on the wall. His face looked completely bored, and he would look completely nondescript if it weren’t for the scar creeping up his neck and the dangerous glint in his dark eyes. “Took a good look?”

“Sorry. It’s just…”

Lazily, the caretaker placed a fag in his mouth with a practised motion, and with a snap of his fingers, the end was lit up, leaving Ron’s jaw hanging.

“Never seen wandless magic, Weasley?” Petrov let out a puff of smoke, which turned into an eagle and flew away into the hallway.

“No,” Ron admitted, finally closing his hanging mouth. “Could you teach me?”

“I’m not paid to waste my time training twerps like you.” Another slow exhale shaped like a smoky knife, gracefully sailing through the air. “Go ask your Professors.”

“Can’t you just… you know, just tell me a trick?” The unpleasant scuffle from earlier was still fresh in his mind. With some wandless magic in his repertoire, Ron could easily deal with Draco and his bookends.

“Trick, you say?” The caretaker smiled sardonically. “There’s no tricks. Just this spark took me months of practice, boy. Magic might be wonderful, but nothing worthwhile is ever easy. Remember that. Might want to put some muscle on you. Despite being taller than those fools who ambushed you, you're skin and bones.”

Grigori Petrov languidly sauntered away, shaking his head, leaving a dazed Ron behind.

25th of November, Sunday

“Finished already?” Padma asked from her side of the table, strewn with rolls of parchment and a myriad of books on potion ingredients.

“Yep,” Diana smiled as she shoved her things into her bag. “Want some help?”

The proud Indian girl said nothing but stubbornly returned to her work.

With a sigh, Diana muttered a quick featherlight charm on her school bag and returned to the Ravenclaw common room. It was afternoon already, and she had finally finished her final homework of the week - Slughorn’s essay. The new Potions professor was a much better teacher than Snape, but his assignments were far more demanding. Truthfully, she never expected the ridiculous amount of study and practice magic required. While completely different from the muggle education, it wasn’t that hard, only cumbersome, especially as the professors insisted she do her homework with quill and ink.

As usual, the common room was quiet, as most ‘Claws were studying hard or just reading.

Seeing her friend at a lonely table near the window, Diana instantly approached him.

“So, what are you writing?” Diana asked as Harry carefully scribbled on a roll of parchment. It was rare to see him write—the teachers scarcely gave him homework, and it was advanced material. He was usually focused and busy training or wandering around the castle, and it was almost impossible to see him doing something so… mundane.

Now? Harry Potter had a small smile and almost looked like he didn’t have a care in the world. Almost.

“A letter to my godfather,” he said as he thoughtfully inked down his quill.

“Sirius Black?” Juno’s question came as the tall girl slid over gracefully, and Diana wondered how she didn’t see her when she entered.

“The very same,” Harry nodded without tearing his gaze from the parchment scroll. “He’s recovering in Saint Mungo’s right now.”

“Azkaban is a terrible place.” The pureblood girl sat on the chair across them, face unreadable. Diana grimaced, remembering Juno’s father and mother were serving a life sentence in the tortuous wizarding prison for killing Longbottom’s parents.

“Oh,” the muggle-born girl rubbed her neck bashfully. “I hope he gets well. Wait, wasn’t your mom a Black, Juno?”

“She is,” Juno inclined her head. “Sirius Black is her first cousin.”

“I still can’t believe they put someone behind bars without trial.”

“Justice is rarely a matter of fairness but influence,” the raven-haired girl explained with a twitch of her lips. Diana couldn’t help but feel Juno looked rather vexed, but it might have been her imagination as the tall girl quickly turned impassive. “And Sirius Black was a stubborn man who burned many bridges. During the blood war, most criminals went through a quick tribunal, especially those without *powerful* friends, yet my cousin did not even get to see a DMLE cell, from what I was told. The Head of DMLE reviewed his case and sent him straight to Azkaban, and nobody said anything with a street full of muggles testifying for his rampage.”

“That sounds… unfair.”

“The world isn’t fair,” Juno shrugged. “Besides, from what I’ve heard, the muggle world is the same. Only they hide it better.” Harry nodded with a grimace from the side, confirming her words.

Diana opened her mouth to object but… quickly closed it. What did her father say again?

You can get away with nearly anything with enough money and friends at the right places.

God, all that adult stuff sounded not only dreadfully boring but irritating as hell.

“Any of you want to come visit Hagrid for tea?” Harry finished writing his letter and rolled up the parchment after the ink dried before looking at them expectantly.

“Sure,” Diana instantly agreed. It was rare for the green-eyed boy to ask them to hang out together. Juno also gave a cautious nod and stood up with them. “So, any of you staying for Christmas?”

“I’m staying,” the pureblood girl muttered, gaze growing distant.

“Me too,” Harry said. “I don’t have any places to go anyway.”

“Don’t you live with your… muggle relatives?” Juno looked at him with interest.

“Merlin, does everyone know that?” He groaned.

“No, the Ministry sealed any records about you, but rumours spread… Even if someone did know you lived with your relatives, they had no idea who or where they were.”

Harry tiredly ran a hand through his unkempt raven locks. “Well, I don’t get along very well with my aunt’s family, so I decided to spend the summers in the Leaky.”

“Why would you stay in an inn instead of one of your estates?” Juno raised an eyebrow.

“Wait,” the boy blinked in confusion as they reached the marble steps of the grand staircase. “I have… houses?”

“Two that I know of,” she confirmed.

“How would you know of his family’s properties?” Diana asked.

“House Black has knowledge of everything in Wizarding Britain, and I’m the heiress.”

“Everything?”

“Properties, businesses, loans, and… *others*.”

Diana couldn’t help but be impressed; it was no wonder the other kids looked at Juno with caution.

“Do you know where… my estate is?” Harry asked hoarsely as they stopped by an alcove before the Quad.

“Only that one of them is somewhere in Wales, the other abroad,” Juno said. “Old Houses like the Potters keep their manors unplottable to prevent unwanted intruders.” The boy nodded gratefully, face growing thoughtful. “So, will you stay for Christmas, Diana?”

“No,” the girl mouthed regretfully. “I have to go back home for my exams.”

“Exams?”

“Muggle school. My parents only agreed to let me attend Hogwarts if I continued my ordinary studies.”

Juno looked confused, then just shrugged as they moved on. On the other hand, Harry muttered something suspiciously sounded like ‘mental’, and Diana couldn’t help but agree. The mundane education was dreadfully boring now, especially when she could bend reality with a flick of her wand.

They went through the owlery, where the green-eyed boy tied the parchment roll to the leg of the ever-pretty Hedwig, who proudly flew off, and they finally headed to Hagrid's hut across the castle grounds.

Feeling trepidation, Juno loosened the reins of her mind. Despite Harry's muted feelings and calm face, he *overflowed* with joy and… nostalgia? As usual, Diana was just cheery, full of excitement and curiosity.

Juno grimaced inwardly while Harry went over to knock on the weathered door. Her new friend kept saying the Gamekeeper was harmless, but she knew better.

Rubeus Hagrid had beaten a mountain troll to death.

With his bare hands. If her aunt was correct, the titanic man was also bloody *spell-resistant*.

Several booming barks followed by scrambling echoed from the inside, and a set of heavy footsteps followed. "Back, Fang. Back."

The door creaked open. An enormous hairy face showed in the crack. "Ah, Harry n' friends! Hang on!"

Hagrid let them in, effortlessly keeping the collar of the enormous black boarhound.

The cabin only had a single room, with hams and pheasants hanging from the rafters above. A bronze kettle was boiling over the roaring hearth, and a patchwork quilt covered the massive bed in the corner.

"Make yerselves at home." The enormous man let go of Fang, who bounded straight over to Diana and started licking her hand. Despite his size, it seemed like the dog was harmless, as the muggle-born girl giggled while scratching Fang behind the ears. "I thought yeh wouldn't visit old me."

"I was just busy," Harry coughed, face ashamed.

"Ah, yer a hard worker, just like yer mum," Hagrid beamed happily. "An' who might these lasses be? Yer friends, are they?" His emotions were also so hard to… read. They were different from the muted feeling produced by shielding your mind.

Seeing someone so openly expressive but unable to feel his emotions unsettled Juno greatly.

"Oh, these are Diana and Juno from Ravenclaw."

"Ah," the enormous Gamekeeper looked at her, blinking, and it took all of her self-control not to shake like a leaf. "I knew yer mum back in the day."

"My… mother?" Juno tasted the unfamiliar word. It felt like ash on her tongue.

"Aye," Hagrid grimaced. "Wild n' proud piece o' work. Had half the boys her year 'round her lil' finger. Want some rock cakes?"

The man offered a wooden platter with some formless lumps covered with raisins, just as hard as their name. Harry shook his head to indicate that there was no need to try and digest the rocks. Fang rested his head on his knee, covering his robes with drool. The boy didn't seem to mind and instead looked fondly at the lazy boarhound.

Hagrid asked about school, and Diana enthusiastically explained, with Harry chiming in from time to time. The boy fondly looked on, idly running his hand through the boarhound's head.

Yet it was not all so bad–the offered mint tea was far better than expected, and Juno enjoyed its refreshing warmth, helping her finally calm down. Gaze roaming idly around the plain hut, she blinked when a scrawny old cat prowled through the wooden floor and began to play with the hem of her robe.

“Ah, this is Mrs Norris,” Hagrid said sombrely. “I been takin’ care o’ her since Filch passed away. Seem she’s takin’ a likin’ to ya.” Fang decided to stand up and idly made way for the feline, who quickly hissed and leapt up in Juno’s lap. “They still don’t get on well.”

“I could take care of her?” Juno was surprised at the words that came out of her mouth.

“Ah, if yer want-” Hagrid eagerly went on, prattling about how to take care of the cat. Suddenly, the gigantic man was not half as scary anymore. It was like peeking through a thick curtain, but Juno could finally glimpse his emotions.

Juno realised that the Gamekeeper was as genial as Harry had claimed as her fingers ran through the grey fur of the purring Mrs Norris.

The usually quiet green-eyed boy was a surprisingly good judge of character, and she couldn’t help but be glad to have befriended him. It did help that Harry was easy to get along with, if a bit stubborn and sometimes elusive.

Having such an acquaintance like Hagrid would prove invaluable down the line.

Juno absolutely wasn’t going to visit again just to get another serving of the delectable honey mint lemon tea. Not at all.

Finding himself a deputy proved challenging. Vector and Sinistra were not keen on the position, and neither felt ready to undertake such a hefty burden. And while this was understandable to a degree, it left him cornered, especially with the Sirius Black scandal.

Such a great miscarriage of justice left a sour feeling on Dumbledore’s tongue, but there wasn’t much he could have done. After all, he had considered Sirius to have dipped into the infamous Black madness and had given testimony of him becoming the Potter’s secret keeper. Merlin, Lily’s ruse had worked out far better than she could have expected, and not in a good way. Nobody innocent deserved to be shoved into Azkaban for a decade.

Worse, Dumbledore had been one of the many who thought Sirius guilty.

The blood war had been a dark, tiring time, and by the time Voldemort was vanquished, people just wanted everything to be over.

Yet the new problems did not end there. Animagi had been hiding under his nose in *his* school!

For good or for bad, Felix Fawley had decided to exclude that part from the official trial lest the Weasleys be unfairly implicated.

The whole thing had blown up spectacularly, and the newly elected minister scrambled around to keep his name pristine. Barty Crouch took the initiative, resigned from his post, and offered overly generous recompense to Sirius for the miscarriage of justice. Now that the can of worms was open, there was pressure from the Wizengamot, and many of his war tribunal cases were being reviewed.

Millicent Bagnold had also come under scrutiny, but the former Minister of Magic had already retired to New Zealand and cared little for the commotion from the Wizengamot.

Peter Pettigrew himself was another problem - there was no cell good enough to keep a rat animagus safely contained in Azkaban.

The Unspeakables were still struggling to create a runic schematic to prevent shapeshifting. That was not exactly the problem; a runic array had been made, but the Dementor's presence eroded the effects within days.

While Fawley had spared Hogwarts scrutiny with his actions, Albus was busy over the school again. Shoring up Hogwarts defences to detect animagi had proven far more demanding than expected, and updating the old enchantments to keep everything working had proven delicate yet cumbersome.

Of course, he had succeeded; it would not do for Merlin knows what wizards to sneak into his school with none the wiser!

Alas, the day Minerva would resign from her position as deputy fast approached, and Dumbledore's hand was forced.

"Must you truly resign, Dumbledore?" Margot Fontaine, the French mugwump and the Head of the International Proceedings, asked with a scrunched face.

"Alas, I am not getting any younger, I'm afraid," he sighed. "My full attention is required in Hogwarts, and the ICW functioned well enough even before I came around. I have notified my Ministry of Magic, and a new British Mugwump shall be elected soon enough."

"Is there nothing we can do to change your mind?"

"I have already thought this over, Marge. You all honoured me greatly with the position, but the ICW deserves a Supreme Mugwump who can devote all his attention to the work."

"Very well," the grey-haired French witch nodded reluctantly. "Your presence here will be missed."

Dumbledore went through the ICW headquarters for three hours, giving farewells to all the familiar faces and dealing with the formal resignation process. The sky had gone dark by the time Albus left the resplendent marble building and, with nary a sound, apparated from the Mediterranean to Hogwarts grounds.

The familiar sight of the castle brought him a tinge of relief. His old, weary shoulders suddenly felt lighter, as if a burden he didn't even know existed had been lifted, and the Death Stick's whispers grew fainter.

27th of November, Tuesday

"You called for me, Director Fawley?" Amelia stood rigidly in the DMLE head office. The Pettigrew fiasco had sent the whole department scuttling, and almost all were so tired they could keel over at any moment from working overtime. Even pepper-up potions were no help anymore.

It had been a good sixty hours since she had last seen her pillow, and even standing had become difficult. Bloody hell, Amelia didn't even remember the last time she had eaten, and now they were calling her for more work?!

“Indeed,” Fawley’s face twisted with distaste. The bags under his bag were deep, ugly purple, and his usually well-combed dark hair was half a mess. “You’re being suspended… indefinitely until all of your cases have been reviewed.”

Her insides twisted into a cold knot. “But-”

“I know it’s unfair, Amelia.” His tired grey eyes softened. “You did things by the book with Black’s arrest back in the day, but Fudge wants scapegoats to shift the blame. People still have not forgotten he was first on the scene. The Wizengamot is now looking through everything with a lens, so it can’t be helped. You can finally take a vacation, too—your pay won’t be docked during the suspension.”

Amelia blinked as the words sunk in her sluggish mind.

“I gave *everything* to the DMLE!”

“Let it go, Bones.” Fawley shook his head. “There’s life outside Magical Law Enforcement. Go out, have some fun.”

Her weary, sluggish mind halted as the words sank in. Then, the rage set in.

Have some fun?

Have some fun?!

She did not join the bloody MLE to have bloody fun! And now, they wanted to use her as a scapegoat, throwing the responsibility of problems big and small onto her back while she was indefinitely out of work and unable to defend herself.

Amelia Bones had more pride and self-respect than this. She took a deep breath and tried to focus and push down the surging fury.

“I resign,” the words came out hoarse from her mouth. Cursing her stiff fingers, she latched off her Head Auror badge and slapped it on the table.

“Now, now, don’t be hasty. Give it a few months, and this storm will blow over, forgotten. Even your paperwork is pristine!”

“And be demoted two ranks anyway or transferred to the *dead-end* departments and used as a scapegoat for the smallest problem in the DMLE? I’ve *seen* it before, and I know the likes of Fudge. Twenty-eight years, Felix!” Amelia hissed, barely suppressing her surging fury. “Twenty-eight years of relentless service, trying to bring law, peace, and order to Wizarding Britain, risking my life fighting all sorts of hags, crooks, dark wizards, werewolves, and even giants! All of this wasted for some bumbling buffoon of a Minister!? I have more self-respect than just to take it lying down.”

Turning around, Amelia decisively stormed out of the office. After joining the Auror Academy the same day her NEWTS were out, she poured her mind, heart, and soul into the DMLE.

Yet… Amelia was tired.

She was tired of stupid red tape, tired of greedy fools who used the law as a loose guideline only when it suited them, and most importantly, she was bone-tired and hated being pushed around. By the time she got to the atrium, Amelia’s feet were so numb with exhaustion she could barely stand, yet she angrily grabbed a handful of floo powder and forced her weary body into the fireplace.

Amelia’s sluggish mind idly wondered what she would do now, but the sight of her living room dismissed that errant thought. Barely dragging her feet, she managed to crash on the couch.

Fag means cigarette in British English.

Author’s Endnote: This was probably the hardest chapter I wrote for CoF. Maybe because I wanted to rush ahead with the plot but couldn’t exactly bin a few ideas that refused to stop niggling in my mind. Anyway, from here on, hopefully, things will continue moving faster and faster.