

Chapter 4

Harry had just sat down at his desk groggily, a cup of coffee in his hand when the door opened.

“Harry,” Penny said. “Madam Bones is here to see you.”

“Send her in,” Harry sighed.

Penny moved out of the way, and Amelia walked in.

“Good morning, Minister,” she said.

“Morning,” Harry murmured, raising his cup to his lip.

Sitting down in the chair across from him, Amelia pulled a thin folder out of the pocket of her robes and set it on the desk.

“I looked into the Black case like you asked,” she said, pursing her lips. “What I found is - troubling – to say the least.”

Harry sighed and rubbed his temple.

“What happened?” he asked tiredly.

“There was practically no investigation. This is the entire file of the incident,” Amelia said, nodding to the folder.

Harry looked at it closer and was dismayed by just how thin it was. It couldn't have held more than a few pieces of parchment.

"All it contains is the report of what happened at Godric's Hollow, the incident report for the confrontation between Black and Pettigrew, and the arrest record for Black," Amelia explained. "There was no further investigation than talking to a few witnesses, and even more concerning, no charges filed against Black, no trial, not even a transfer order to take him to Azkaban."

"That's good, though, isn't it?" Harry asked, flipping through the file. "For Sirius, I mean."

"In a way," Amelia nodded. "However, it also complicates matters. This will also affect the Ministry negatively when it gets out to the public."

Harry snorted. Minister or not, he really didn't care how the Ministry looked.

"So, if Sirius wasn't charged, does that mean he's free?" he asked hopefully.

Amelia pursed her lips thoughtfully and adjusted her monocle.

"Technically, yes," she said. "However, I would recommend still putting him on trial."

"What!? Why?" Harry asked incredulously.

"If you simply release him, people will still be suspicious," Amelia told him. "Some may even believe he's controlling you and try to attack him. A trial bringing the truth to light will quell most people's worries. I would much rather put Pettigrew on trial, but until he's been captured, Black is our only option."

Harry groaned quietly and rubbed the bridge of his nose.

“Alright,” he sighed.

“I’ll schedule a trial before the full Wizengamot for Monday,” Amelia said. “I trust you can get a message to Black?”

“Yeah,” Harry nodded. “What about the Kiss on sight order?”

“It’s already been rescinded,” Amelia told him. “My Aurors are under strict instructions to bring him in unharmed unless attacked.”

“Good,” Harry nodded. “Was there anything else?”

“Just a word of advice, if I may?” she asked.

“Of course,” Harry said.

“You should try to make some public appearances,” Amelia said.

Harry grimaced at the thought, and she gave him a small smile.

“I’ve never seen a Minister so adverse to publicity,” she said. “You couldn’t make Fudge stop strutting around, even if it was just to Diagon Alley. Oh, that reminds me. I need to assign your security detail.”

“Do you have to?” Harry whined.

“Yes,” Amelia said, her lips twitching in a smirk. “Just a couple of Aurors to look out for you. You’ll hardly notice them.”

“They’re not going to follow me everywhere, are they?” Harry asked warily.

“No,” Amelia replied. “Only your office and in public.”

“Alright,” Harry sighed.

Nodding, Amelia stood and collected the file from the desk.

“Good day, Minister,” she said as she left.

“It’s Harry!” he yelled after her.

When the door clicked shut, Harry sighed and turned back to his paperwork.

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An hour later, Harry was interrupted again when the Warders showed up. To say the Wards were in bad shape was a severe understatement. Fudge had neglected them for nearly a decade, leaving the delicate layers riddled with holes and on the verge of total collapse.

The Warders told Harry they would need to repair most and completely re-cast others. It was an expensive process that would take at least a week to complete.

As the Warders left to get to work, Harry had a suspicion he wanted to check out.

“Hey, Penny,” he called.

“Yes?” Penny asked.

“Can you check the records and see when they last checked the wards?” Harry asked.

“Okay,” Penny said. “It might take me a little while to find them.”

“That’s fine,” Harry said. “Just let me know what you find.”

Before he could retreat back to his office, the doors to the elevator opened, and two Aurors stepped out. One was an older wizard with salt and pepper hair, a crooked nose, and a goatee. Following him was a witch around Penny’s age. She was small and thin, with a sharp nose, bright blue eyes, and dark hair tied back in a ponytail.

“Minister,” the wizard greeted him respectfully with a thick Scottish accent. “I’m Marcus Dresden, and this is Kimberly Hargrave. We’re your new guards.”

“Nice to meet you,” Harry said, shaking their hands.

“Guards?” Hermione asked.

“Amelia recommended it,” Harry said. “In fact, she thinks I should make some public appearances.”

“That’s not a bad idea,” Daphne said. “It would make you feel more like a person and less like a character from a story.”

Harry sighed but recognized she had a point.

“Well, do you girls feel like going to Hogsmeade for lunch?”

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Twenty minutes later, Harry followed his guards through the Floo to the Three Broomsticks. The stares and whispering started instantly.

“Well, I certainly didn’t expect to see you this time of year,” Rosmerta smiled. “Would you like a private room?”

“Out here is fine,” Harry said, smiling back.

“Of course, have a seat, and I’ll be with you in a moment,” she said.

“Thanks, Rosmerta,” Harry said.

Turning, he started to make his way to the back of the pub, where the larger booth seats were.

“Thank you so much, Mr. Potter,” a witch called out suddenly.

“It’s about time someone dealt with the corruption at the Ministry,” a wizard added.

Harry blinked in surprise when everyone in the pub stood up and began clapping. Feeling his cheeks heating up, he smiled and waved while making his way to his seat.

“Wow, Potter. You’re famous,” Daphne smirked.

“Really? I hadn’t noticed,” Harry snarked, rolling his eyes.

“Oh, it’s not that bad,” Hermione said, slapping his arm lightly.

“Easy for you to say,” Harry scoffed.

Harry’s guards took a seat at a table nearby, but far enough away that he didn’t feel like they were intruding.

“Hello, dears. What can I get for you?” Rosmerta asked.

“I’ll have the fish and chips and a Butterbeer, and their bill is on me,” Harry said, nodding towards the Aurors.

Rosmerta smiled and took the girls’ orders. While they were eating, a woman came in with a young girl. When the girl spotted Harry, her eyes went wide, and her jaw dropped open. Smiling, he gave her a small wave before turning back to his conversation with Penny.

“Are you still coming over this weekend?” she asked.

“Yeah,” Harry said. “I’ll need your address, though.”

“I’ll give it to you when we get back to the office,” Penny smiled, then looked over at Hermione. “You can come, too, if you’d like.”

“Sure,” Hermione smiled. “It’ll be nice to spend time with other girls for a change.”

“Hey,” Harry said indignantly.

“Think you can survive that much estrogen, Potter?” Daphne smirked.

“Spending the day with three pretty girls? I’m sure I’ll make it,” Harry grinned.

As the girls laughed, he spotted the woman and little girl from earlier approaching him.

“Hi. I’m sorry to bother you, but my daughter is a big fan of yours,” the woman said. “Could she get your autograph?”

Harry blushed and looked at the girls for help. Seeing the smirks on their faces and the barely concealed giggles, he knew he would get any. Looking back at the little girl, she held up a piece of parchment, gazing at him hopefully.

“Sure,” Harry smiled, taking the parchment. “What’s your name?”

“Melissa,” the girl replied softly.

Writing a small note, he signed under it and handed it back to the girl with a smile.

“That’s my first autograph, you know,” Harry said.

“Really?” Melissa asked, her eyes going wide.

“Thank you so much,” the woman said. “Sorry for interrupting.”

“It’s fine,” Harry smiled.

“Aw, that was so cute,” Penny said.

“Just promise to hex me if I ever start turning into Lockhart,” Harry said.

“Whatever happened to him, anyway?” Daphne asked, looking between him and Hermione.
“There’s a lot of rumors going around about your little adventures, but no one seems to know anything for sure.”

Harry shared a glance with Hermione, who shrugged at his questioning look.

“Well, it’s a bit of a long story...”

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As Harry got ready to go over to Penny’s flat, he was glad to finally have a day away from the chaos of the Ministry. Of course, being Minister, he didn’t truly have the day off. If something came up, he could be called at any time, but at least he wasn’t expected to be in the office until Monday.

Checking his hair in the mirror, he tried to get it to sit the way he wanted but gave up after a couple of minutes. Leaving his room, he ran into Hermione just as he passed the room she shared with Ginny.

“Ready to go?” Hermione asked, standing on her toes and fiddling with his hair.

“Don’t bother. It never does what I want,” he told her.

“You should try Sneekeazy’s,” Hermione suggested.

“I’m not that bothered by it,” Harry said as they descended the stairs.

Entering the sitting room, he spotted Sirius on the couch and smiled.

“Hey, Sirius,” he said.

“Hey, kid,” Sirius smirked. “You and Hermione off on your date?”

“It’s not a date,” Hermione huffed, rolling her eyes.

Harry smiled, knowing his Godfather was just trying to rile her up.

“Sure,” Sirius said, drawing out the word. “Better get going before Molly sees you and starts to fuss.”

Glancing at the fireplace, he gave it a wistful look.

“Don’t worry, Sirius. You’ll be free to go anywhere you want after your trial Monday,” Harry said.

Looking over, Sirius smiled, his grey eyes looking more full of life than Harry had seen in weeks.

“It’ll be good to finally get outside and feel the sun again,” Sirius said softly.

Harry smiled and grabbed a handful of Floo powder.

“Just try to stay out of trouble until then,” he said.

“I make no promises,” Sirius smirked.

Snorting, Harry threw the powder into the flames.

“Clearwater Gardens!” he yelled as he stepped into the flickering emerald flames.

Spinning past the grates, Harry took the advice Mr. Weasley had given him and stepped forward just as he started to slow down. He still stumbled a bit as he landed, but he didn’t fall flat on his face like he usually did.

“Hey, Harry,” Penny greeted him warmly.

Wearing a tight, white t-shirt over her large bust and a pair of hip-hugging jeans, she walked over to him with a wide smile. Harry’s eyes were unconsciously drawn to her breasts as they bounced under her shirt, even with her visibly wearing a bra. As Penny gave him a quick hug, her breasts mashed against his chest, Daphne smirked at him knowingly.

Daphne wore a black Muggle t-shirt and a loose pair of jeans. It was the first time Harry had ever seen her in something other than robes, and he had to admit she had quite the figure. Looking away before he got caught staring, he pulled away from Penny and stepped out of the way just as Hermione came through the Floo.

While the girls greeted each other, Harry looked around the flat. It was small, with just a single bedroom, bathroom, a small kitchen, and a living room with a couch and a chair. A big blue bowl full of popcorn sat on a low coffee table in front of a large, flat telly.

“Make yourselves at home,” Penny smiled. “There’s drinks and food in the fridge if you need anything.”

“Ooh, you have coke,” Hermione said excitedly. “I haven’t had that in years. My parents don’t keep soda in the house.”

“What that?” Daphne asked curiously as Hermione picked up the red and white can.

"It's a Muggle fizzy drink," Hermione said. "There's a lot of sugar in it, but it tastes really good. Do you want to try one?"

"Sure," Daphne said.

Hermione handed her a can and then showed her how to open the tab.

"That's an odd way to open a drink," Daphne said, raising it to her lips. "Oh!"

Her eyes went wide, and she pulled the can away quickly, licking her lips.

"That is fizzy," Daphne said.

Harry smiled while Hermione and Penny giggled. Bringing the can back to her lips, Daphne took a bigger sip.

"You're right. This is good," Daphne said. "I wish we could get this at Hogwarts."

"Me too," Hermione agreed. "Pumpkin Juice is good, but I get tired of it after a while."

"It definitely tastes better than it sounds," Harry said. "I thought it would be gross."

"I thought the same thing," Penny giggled.

"Do Muggles not have Pumpkin Juice?" Daphne asked.

"No," Hermione said, shaking her head. "We have a lot of other drinks, though."

“More like this?” Daphne asked, holding up her can.

“The store I went to this morning probably had forty or fifty different kinds of soda,” Penny said. “Next time you come over, I’ll get a whole bunch for you to try.”

“You don’t have to,” Daphne protested.

“Don’t worry about it,” Penny smiled. “It’s fun seeing you try new things for the first time.”

“So, what are we watching?” Hermione asked as they all moved into the living room.

“Star Wars,” Penny grinned.

As Harry sat down in the middle of the couch, with Hermione on his left and Daphne taking the chair, Penny bent over at the waist to put a disc into the player. Glancing at her round bum filling out her tight jeans quite nicely, he looked away quickly. Catching Daphne’s eye, she smirked at him again, causing him to flush.

Straightening up, Penny turned down the lights and then sat down on Harry’s left. Picking up the remote, she hit play.

“It’s really impressive that Muggles can do all this without magic,” Daphne said as the yellow text crawled up the screen.

“Muggles are more advanced than Magicals in a lot of ways,” Hermione said. “It’s a pity so many witches and wizards look down on them. Imagine how much more we could do if we had Muggle technology and magic.”

“I thought electrics didn’t work around magic,” Daphne said, her eyes glued to the screen.

“They go haywire when there’s a lot of magic, but I bet we could find a way to shield them,” Hermione said, turning thoughtful. “I wonder if there’s a material that can block magic.”

As she fell quiet, two ships moved across the screen over a planet, green blaster bolts shooting from the big one to the smaller one.

“Are those killing curses?” Daphne asked.

“They’re called blasters,” Penny said. “They work kind of like a Confringo but more powerful.”

“Do Muggles really have those?” Daphne asked curiously.

“No, those are fiction,” Hermione said. “Most of the stuff in this movie is.”

“Next time, I’ll show you a movie that shows you what Muggles can really do,” Penny said. “Maybe Apollo 13?”

“Are those metal people alive?” Daphne asked, her brow furrowed and head tilted cutely.

“They’re robots,” Hermione explained. “They’re not alive. They’re mechanical.”

The talking died down as they all settled in to watch the movie. Penny still asked questions once in a while, but they became much more infrequent as she was drawn into the story. When they got to the scene in the cantina, Penny shifted and leaned against Harry, her head resting on his shoulder.

Glancing down at her, he swallowed thickly and tried not to move. The position was awkward, though, and his arm started to go numb over the next few minutes. Harry tried to ignore it, but eventually, he had to do something.

Nervously, he shrugged his shoulder, lifted his arm, and placed it around Penny's shoulders. He didn't dare look away from the screen, even as he noticed her looking up at him from the corner of his eye. A moment later, Penny tucked her legs under herself and leaned back against him.

As she got comfortable, Harry stayed unnaturally still, not sure what to do with his hand. At first, he hung it over her shoulder, but realizing that put it dangerously close to her chest, he moved it to her upper arm. When he did, Penny snuggled into him, her hand coming up to rest on his chest. The smell of her shampoo filled every breath he took as her head rested near his chin.

Harry had trouble paying attention to the movie as she started rubbing her thumb back and forth gently. Over the next couple of minutes, he relaxed and rubbed his thumb along the bare skin of her arm. When she didn't react, he settled in to enjoy the rest of the movie and the company of the pretty blonde leaning into him.

Over an hour later, the film came to an end, and Penny, regrettably, moved.

"What did you think?" she asked Daphne with a smile.

"That was really good," Daphne replied. "I like how there was a bit of magic in there, even though they called it the Force."

"It *is* kind of like magic," Hermione admitted.

"Honestly, I kind of want to learn how to move things around wandlessly now," Harry grinned.

Holding out his hand to mock using the Force, everyone gasped when several pieces of popcorn leapt from the bowl towards his hand.

"Sorry," Harry said sheepishly, picking up his mess.

“Harry, that was brilliant!” Penny exclaimed. “I didn’t know you could do that.”

“Neither did I,” he admitted.

Grinning, Penny picked up a cushion from the couch.

“Try it again,” she said excitedly.

Focusing, Harry held out his hand and thought *Accio*. The cushion trembled slightly in her hand. Again, he screamed the incantation in his mind and felt a slight tug on his palm. The cushion jumped from and flew towards Harry, where he caught it with a grin.

“Harry, that’s incredible,” Hermione gushed. “It’s supposed to be really hard to learn wandless magic.”

“It’s not as hard as some books make it sound,” Daphne said. “Anyone can learn it. I’ll admit, though, it’s rare for someone to pick it up like that without practice.”

“I probably just got lucky,” Harry shrugged.

“At the risk of giving you an ego, I doubt it,” Daphne said.

Pursing her lips, Daphne held out her hand towards the cushion. It wiggled a little, and she furrowed her brow. Slowly, her face turned red from effort until the pillow flopped onto the floor. Blowing out a breath, she looked up at Harry and glared.

“That’s annoying,” she said flatly.

Penny giggled and patted Daphne consolingly on the shoulder.

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“I think Penny fancies you,” Hermione said as she and Harry climbed the stairs of Grimmauld Place.

“Really?” Harry asked.

Hermione rolled her eyes at him.

“Harry, you don’t just lean against a guy like for two hours if you don’t like him,” she said.

“Oh,” Harry said. “So, what should I do?”

“How should I know?” Hermione shrugged. “It’s not like I have any more dating experience than you. Do you like her?”

“Well, yeah,” Harry admitted. “But what happens when I go back to Hogwarts?”

“Just focus on this Summer and worry about that later,” Hermione said.

“Do you think I should ask her out on a date?” Harry asked thoughtfully.

“If you want to,” Hermione said. “You deserve a little fun with all the stress you’re under.”

Smiling, Harry slung his arm over her shoulder and gave her a sideways hug.

“Thanks, Hermione,” he said.

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After a slow, lazy weekend, Harry arrived at the Ministry bright and early Monday morning for Sirius’ trial. As planned, they Floo directly to the Atrium, where they met Amelia and four of her Aurors.

“Amy!” Sirius greeted her loudly, heedless of the attention he was receiving. “Long time no see.”

“Mr. Black,” Amelia nodded. “You’re not under arrest. However, for your protection, we’ll be escorting you to the courtroom.”

“If you insist,” Sirius smiled.

“I’ll see you in the courtroom,” Harry said, then turned to Amelia. “Please make sure he makes it there safely.”

“We will,” Amelia nodded.

As the Aurors surrounded Sirius, she turned and marched towards the elevator. The crowd in the Atrium hastily parted as the Aurors marched forward. One distracted witch looked up and screamed in fright when she spotted Sirius. Grinning, he gave her a crooked grin and a cheery wave.

“Morning!”

Shaking his head, Harry made his way to another elevator. It was only when his guards stepped inside that he realized they were there.

“I have to admit, I didn’t expect to see Black just waltz in here and surrender,” Marcus said.

“It’s a long story,” Harry sighed. “You’ll get to hear it at the trial.”

“Suppose I’ll just have to wait, then,” Marcus said.

A few moments later, the elevator opened, and Harry blinked at the crowd of people trying to get into the courtroom.

“I guess word got out,” Kim sighed. “Out of the way! Coming through!”

For such a short, thin woman, she sure has a set of lungs, Harry thought.

Unfortunately, Kim’s shouting also drew the attention of the press. A rapid series of flashbulbs went off, nearly blinding him and leaving spots in his vision, all while they hurled questions at him.

“Minister! Is it true you’ve been living with Sirius Black?”

“Mr. Potter! Are you under the Imperius Curse?”

“Seriously?” Harry asked incredulously. “What kind of question is that?”

Ignoring the rest of the questions being shouted at him, Harry followed Kim into the packed courtroom. The visitor stands were packed to capacity. The front row was taken up almost completely by the press, who were snapping pictures as fast as they could.

Harry turned back once he was inside to see two Aurors struggling to hold back the crowd as they tried to push their way in.

"I'll be safe in here. Why don't you go help them," Harry told Marcus.

Nodding, Marcus and Kim help to push back the crowd, much to the relief of the other two Aurors.

"Excuse me, I need to get through!" Harry heard from a familiar voice.

"I can't let you through," one of the Aurors said.

Standing on his toes, Harry spotted a head of blond hair bobbing up and down as Penny tried to force her way through.

"It's okay. Let her in. She's with me," Harry said.

Sighing, the Auror reached through the crowd, grabbed Penny's arm, and pulled her through.

"Out of the way, you lot, or I'm going to start throwing hexes!" Kim yelled threateningly.

Penny squeezed through a gap and stumbled into the courtroom, looking harried.

"Merlin, this is crazy," she said. "I thought I was going to get crushed."

"You alright?" Harry asked.

"I'm fine," Penny smiled. "Though my toes are going to be a bit sore."

"Sorry," Harry said. "I guess we should've come a bit earlier."

“Nothing we can do about it now,” Penny shrugged. “Come on, let’s go take our seats.”

Walking up to the section reserved for the Minister, Harry waved at Dumbledore. The headmaster nodded, his eyes twinkling brightly.

“It seems you’ve caused quite the stir,” he noted.

“You know how it goes, professor,” Harry said. “These things just happen.”

“Only for you, Harry,” Penny teased.

“Ah, Ms. Clearwater,” Dumbledore smiled. “Congratulations on your promotion. I believe you’re not only the youngest Senior Undersecretary this Ministry has ever had but also the first Muggleborn. Quite an achievement, and one long overdue.”

Harry smiled as Penny blushed.

“Thank you, sir,” Penny said. “But it was Harry’s doing. I don’t really feel like I earned it.”

“What one does with power matters far more than how they attained it,” Dumbledore said before turning away.

As he banged his gavel, Penny smiled and perked up a bit at those words.

“Order! This is the criminal trial for Sirius Orion Black, seventeenth of July. The charges are as follows. That he did knowingly, deliberately, and of his own volition, aid and abet the dark wizard known as Lord Voldemort in the murder of James and Lily Potter, as well as the attempted murder of Harry Potter, and that he murdered twelve innocent Muggles along with

the wizard Peter Pettigrew. As I understand it, the Ministry has chosen to drop the charge of escaping from Azkaban. Madam Bones, would you care to explain?" Dumbledore asked.

Amelia stood and smoothed out her robes.

"Thank you, Chief Warlock," she said. "During our investigation, we discovered that Mr. Black had never been formally charged or convicted of a crime. Without a conviction, he cannot be charged with escape."

There were loud gasps around the room, followed by several shouted questions, both from the Wizengamot and the press.

"Order!" Dumbledore barked, letting loose a cannon blast from his wand.

"Are you telling us that the head of an Ancient and Noble family was thrown into prison without a trial?" Amos asked incredulously.

Harry felt like there was more going on than he was aware of when Dumbledore and Amos shared a brief look.

"Indeed, that is the case," Amelia admitted.

"This cannot be allowed to stand!" Amos yelled. "I expect a full investigation and charges filed against the persons responsible. If that could happen to Sirius Black, what's to stop it from happening to any one of us?"

"We're already aware of who was responsible," Amelia replied. "Unfortunately, Bartimus Crouch has already passed. Our investigation is ongoing, and we will press charges against anyone else that was responsible or aware of this injustice."

Gazing around the room, Harry could see that all but the darkest of families were nodding in agreement.

“Perhaps we can finish this discussion during tomorrow night’s session,” Dumbledore suggested. “For now, Aurors, please bring in the accused.”

A door off to the side opened, and the same four Aurors they met in the Atrium escorted Sirius into the courtroom. Whispers broke out as Sirius walked unrestrained to the stone chair in the middle of the room and sat with a cheeky smile on his face.

“Mr. Black, you are aware of the charges against you?” Dumbledore asked.

Sirius’s smile dropped, and he straightened in his chair.

“I am,” he said.

“And how do you plead?” Dumbledore asked.

“Not guilty,” Sirius replied firmly.

“Very well,” the headmaster nodded. “The Ministry may present its case.”

Amelia stood again and walked down to the floor.

“Sirius Black, do you agree to the use of Veritaserum?” she asked, her voice echoing around the silent room.

“I do,” Sirius nodded.

People started whispering again as an Auror brought forward a sealed vial. Uncorking it, Amelia placed three drops on Sirius' tongue. His grey eyes lost their focus, turning glassy as his face went slack. Taking out her wand, Amelia waved it over him.

"The potion has taken effect," she announced. "Mr. Black, what happened on the night of October thirty-first, nineteen eighty-one?"

Harry listened anxiously as Sirius described the night his parents died. Hearing about him showing up at Godric's hollow to find the house in near ruins, he blinked rapidly as his eyes burned.

Reaching out, Penny took his hand in hers. Harry gave her a grateful squeeze and continued holding her hand for the next half an hour as Sirius told his tale. By the time the questioning was done, and the antidote was given, the entire room sat in shocked silence for a long moment.

"Minister, Chief Warlock, given the total lack of evidence against the accused and the testimony given by both Mr. Potter and Mr. Black, I recommend all charges be dropped immediately," Amelia said.

"I concur," Dumbledore nodded.

"Yes," Harry said, his voice cracking before he cleared his throat. "I agree."

"Are there any here that are opposed?" Dumbledore asked loudly.

Harry looked around and was surprised when not a single wand was raised.

"Very well, then. Mr. Black, you're free to go with the sincere apologies of the Ministry," he continued.

“Yes!” Sirius cheered, jumping up from his chair.

Harry snorted and shook his head as his Godfather did a little jig to nervous laughter. Harry stayed behind as the room emptied. It wasn't until he went to stand that Penny finally let go of his hand. Glancing at her, he gave her a grateful smile, which she returned.

“We did it!” Sirius crowed, sweeping Harry up in a bear hug when he approached.

“Sirius!” Harry laughed.

“I'm going straight to the Three Broomsticks, getting a shot of Firewhiskey, and chatting up the first pretty witch I find,” Sirius grinned, rubbing his hands together.

“Don't overdo it, Sirius,” Harry said. “I really don't want to see you get caught by Death Eaters or something.”

“I'll be fine, kiddo,” Sirius said.

“Look, I know you want to get out. I understand. But please let me send an Auror with you,” Harry begged.

“How am I supposed to have fun with one of those sticklers looking over my shoulder?” Sirius asked.

“Mr. Black, he has a point,” Amelia said. “You would make a great target for anyone looking to get at Harry.”

“I'll keep an eye on him,”

Harry looked over and smiled as Hestia stepped forward.

“You’re going to babysit me, Hestia?” Sirius asked with a grin.

Harry snorted. Give him a witch with a pretty face, and his entire attitude changes.

“Someone has to,” Hestia smirked. “Knowing your reputation, you’d end up back in a cell in less than a day.”

“Thanks, Hestia,” Harry smiled.

“Don’t mention it,” she told him.

Just then, the door to the courtroom opened. Daphne and Hermione walked in and headed for Harry. Seeing Sirius, Hermione smiled and waved.

“I take it everything went well?” she asked.

“It went brilliantly!” Sirius said. “You’re looking at a free man.”

“Oh, I’m so happy for you,” Hermione said, hugging him tightly.

“Careful, your boyfriend might get jealous,” Sirius smirked.

Pulling back, Hermione swatted his arm.

“He’s not my boyfriend,” she said.

“He just says that to get a rise out of you, Hermione,” Harry said.

“Do you have to ruin all my fun?” Sirius asked.

“If you’re finished,” Daphne said, rolling her eyes. “The press are waiting in the Atrium. You really need to go up and answer some questions, and My mother will be coming in half an hour to get an in-depth interview for the Prophet.”

Harry groaned.

“Don’t worry, Harry,” Penny said, patting his shoulder. “You’ll do fine.”

“Are you coming with me?” he asked hopefully.

“I’d be happy to,” Penny smiled.

“Thank you,” Harry said gratefully.

“Can you two stop flirting? We have work to do,” Daphne said impatiently.

Harry and Penny blushed and looked away from each other, prompting a bark of laughter from Sirius.

“Right,” Harry said. “Let’s get this over with.”