

The news of Sirius Black's innocence spread through wizarding Britain with the speed and ferocity of Fiendfyre. Every media outlet, from the Daily Prophet to even the Witch Weekly, and the Wizarding Wireless were all vying for coverage, eager for a piece of the biggest news since the disappearance of the Dark Lord on the night of Halloween, 1981.

The wizarding public was shocked as they either read or heard the news, and everyone tuned in when Minister Fudge held a press conference, announcing the truth for all to hear.

The cobblestone streets of Diagon Alley buzzed with a cacophony of excited yet disbelieving whispers as witches and wizards discussed the news, disbelief and shock evident in their demeanor. The news was massive and entirely unexpected.

Magical lampposts and shop windows were all plastered with vibrant, animated posters depicting recent developments.

Most of the posters bore a large, moving photograph of Cornelius Fudge, the Minister of Magic, standing alongside an aristocratic man with shoulder-length curly brown hair. The two men shook hands courteously, their expressions a mix of solemnity and relief. The pictures were accompanied by large texts that proclaimed **'SIRIUS BLACK: INNOCENT!'** in various magical hues that seemed to leap off the parchment.

The posters stopped the passersby in their tracks who could do nothing but stare at the image in disbelief. People were shocked when they realized the handsome, well-groomed man in the picture was indeed Sirius Black - a far cry from the haunted, gaunt face that had been glaring at them from wanted posters for the past two years. It was difficult to reconcile this elegant figure with the notorious escapee who had spent over a decade in the soul-crushing confines of Azkaban.

Another series of posters revealed the shocking truth to the public. The words **'PETER PETTIGREW ALIVE: THE REAL TRAITOR'** accompanied a deeply unsettling image of a disheveled, rat-like man. The figure was on his knees, quivering pathetically as he gazed upward with a pleading expression on his face. The image had been extracted from the memory Harry had provided that included Pettigrew's confession in the Shrieking Shack.

Outside Flourish and Blotts and the office of Daily Prophet, copies of the newspaper hung suspended in mid-air, enchanted to float. The day's edition once again featured Sirius Black on the front page, but this time he stood tall and proud, his aristocratic features set in a determined expression. Beside him stood a confident emerald-eyed wizard, and the headline blazed: **"SIRIUS BLACK TAKES UP LORDSHIP, NAMES HARRY POTTER AS HEIR"**.

The article went on to describe how Sirius had claimed his seat on the Wizengamot - something that did not come as a surprise to many. What shocked some though was the fact that he had officially named Harry as his heir. There had been several people who harbored doubts about Black's innocence even after the Minister's announcement, and the decision was utterly incomprehensible for them.

Every such person asked how a man could make the son of the family he had supposedly betrayed his heir, and for many, this act finally cemented the truth of Sirius's innocence in their hearts.

The past few days had been a whirlwind of unprecedented events in wizarding Britain. In the wake of Harry Potter's shocking announcement that he would not be returning to Hogwarts, the magical community of wizarding Britain had erupted into chaos. While Harry had faced his share of negative press from the Ministry in recent months, his public image had remained largely intact, especially when compared to the tarnished reputation of one Albus Dumbledore. As such, people still put a lot of weight into his words and actions, and his openly opposing the legendary Headmaster had sent shockwaves through magical society.

The Ministry of Magic found itself overwhelmed with a flood of letters and personal attendance of concerned citizens who demanded a thorough investigation into the affairs of Hogwarts over the past four years. The Department of Magical Law Enforcement, under the leadership of Amelia Bones, wasted no time in making their findings public. The revelations left the wizarding population reeling.

It quickly became apparent that the general populace had been kept in the dark about the true nature of events that had been unfolding within the halls of Hogwarts for the past four years. While the Ministry had been aware of the various incidents - particularly the Philosopher's Stone debacle and the opening of the Chamber of Secrets - the public at large had remained woefully ignorant. Learning the full extent of the dangers their children had been in had hit the parents particularly hard.

Dumbledore had already been under intense scrutiny following weeks of negative press, and now, he faced the most severe blow to his reputation yet. This latest revelation struck at the very heart of his power base - his position as Headmaster of Hogwarts. The once-unquestionable wizard now found his decisions questioned at every turn, and people including those who used to revere him unquestioningly were now doubting his judgment.

In response to the public outcry, the Wizengamot swiftly approved an unprecedented educational decree. This new law granted the Ministry the power to appoint an official committee that would oversee all affairs at Hogwarts. This committee was supposed to be tasked with ensuring the safety of students as well as evaluating the quality and standard of education being imparted at the school, both in terms of faculty and resources. The committee was going to work alongside the Board of Governors and the Department of Education to ensure the students were provided with the highest level of wizarding education.

The decree received mixed responses from the magical community. Many who remained staunchly loyal to Dumbledore saw it as a thinly veiled attack on the venerable wizard. However, there was no lack of voices that proclaimed that it was a long-overdue step towards establishing accountability.

Rumors had also begun to circulate that a significant number of parents were seriously considering withdrawing their children from Hogwarts in favor of

homeschooling, both because of the recent revelations and Harry's announcement. This growing sentiment was precisely why Harry and his allies had pushed for the educational decree. By giving parents the assurance of Ministry oversight, they hoped to quell their fears and prevent a mass exodus from the school. After all, Harry's primary intention in withdrawing from Hogwarts had been to convince Minister Fudge that he and Dumbledore were genuinely at odds, thus making Fudge more amenable to his proposals despite feeling cornered. The last thing they wanted was for innocent students to suffer academically as an unintended consequence of his political maneuvering.

With Fudge firmly under their thumbs, they found themselves with significant power in wizarding Britain. Their manipulation of Fudge allowed them to orchestrate events as they desired, while the public remained perfectly oblivious.

Even Fudge had regained some of his usual normal demeanor, readily embracing their proposals. Say what one might about the man but he knew how to keep his benefactors appeased. The fact that their relationship was properly established was also a bonus, since both sides knew their affairs were purely transactional.

It also helped that whatever proposals they wanted to bring forward were fair and brought no negative attention to either the Minister or the Ministry of Magic. Additionally, they perfectly played on the suspicions Fudge harbored for the Headmaster of Hogwarts.

The tension between Fudge and Dumbledore had been simmering for years, fueled by the Minister's deep-seated paranoia and insecurities. Dumbledore's reputation did not reassure him either. Harry and his allies exploited this rift expertly, taking advantage of Fudge's already established belief that the old wizard's warnings about Voldemort's return were nothing more than a ploy to destabilize the Ministry and seize power for himself.

Fudge had been viewing Dumbledore as a threat for a while and had been convinced that the old wizard was spreading the fear of Voldemort's return among the masses, spreading rumors of dark times ahead in a bid to undermine his authority and potentially claim the position of Minister for himself. Harry and his allies were happy with this, knowing that Dumbledore was someone who never liked to get his hands dirty, and the less influence he had, the better it was. They were not ignorant of the fact that the old wizard still had a lot of staunch followers, but his power was decreasing, and they would take whatever they could get.

Their decision to keep Voldemort's return a secret was also not one they had made lightly. There had been an extended debate on the issue when they had been formulating their plan throughout the night, and it had taken them a while but ultimately, they had reached the consensus that revealing the Dark Lord's resurrection was not worth the hassle it would bring. For one, it would serve no practical purpose at this stage. The wizarding public, still scarred from the first war, would likely descend into panic and chaos, and such widespread fear would only make their task more difficult and potentially play into Voldemort's hands.

Moreover, they reasoned that if Voldemort's return became public knowledge, the Dark Lord would abandon any pretense of secrecy. Voldemort was known to be a harbinger of destruction, and he would not hesitate to open frequent attacks on wizarding hotspots. They all knew they were not yet prepared for direct confrontation at such a large scale. What they needed was to plan their steps in secrecy, keeping it covert rather than direct, and to avoid any confrontation with Voldemort and his Death Eaters at a scale larger than they were comfortable with.

Once they reached a consensus, their plan had been set into action. Umbridge was taken care of swiftly, and Harry followed up on it with his little interview, putting Fudge on the back foot and giving him no chance to prepare. It was also fortunate that Lucius Malfoy had not been seen for a while now and their task had become much easier. Their approach of carefully measured steps and behind-the-scenes maneuvering was indeed the best, at least right now. After all, their goal was twofold – they wanted to preserve the fragile peace for as long as possible while simultaneously preparing their side for the eventual conflict they knew was coming.

With Fudge having no choice now, they used their power to ensure he did as he was told. However, they made sure to keep Fudge reminded of his precarious position and who was truly keeping him in power. His greed for the seat of the Minister was so great that he was all too happy to comply with them.

The man was nothing more than their willing puppet, and they had already begun to implement their plans. One of their first moves was to secure increased funding for the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. A stronger Auror force was essential for maintaining law and order, not to mention the fact that they needed the force to be as prepared for the upcoming conflict as possible. In time, they would need to approve lethal measures to deal with Death Eaters as well, and they were confident that the aurors would be fully prepared for what lay ahead.

Amelia and Nym had been hard at work since then. The additional budget allocation meant more resources at hand which allowed for increased recruitment, better salaries and perquisites to entice capable wands to join, and intensified training programs within the Auror ranks.

Furthermore, new defensive artifacts and equipment had been commissioned, and already, both the women were working alongside others to develop better combat techniques that would be incorporated into their personal training as well. Also, the magical detection and surveillance mechanism in the Ministry was planned to be improved upon so that they could ensure quicker response to any magical emergencies.

All the improvements were being made under the guise of standard departmental procedure, and the fact that the DMLE had become a largely ignored department in the past decade or so also enabled them to pass it all off as a requirement rather than advanced preparation. No one got any hint of the true motivations behind the upgrades.

If the Dark Lord did get the information that the DMLE was developing at a rate faster than normal, Harry knew the bastard was prideful enough to take it as an amusing development. He could already picture Voldemort smirking at his minion who would bring him the news and either ignoring him or telling his thugs that it changed nothing. Voldemort was just like that, and they were perfectly content with him thinking in such a way.

However, that was not the extent of their plans. They had also begun working on a series of legislative proposals, carefully worded to avoid suspicion but designed to give them greater flexibility when the time came to act openly against Voldemort. These included measures to enhance magical border security, stricter regulations on dark artifacts, and expanded authority for Aurors in certain investigations. Amelia's power within the Ministry was also supposed to be enhanced as a result.

However, they planned to introduce these new laws gradually, timing each proposal to coincide with security concerns that would inevitably arise when Voldemort or his rabid dogs got a bit impatient and attacked somewhere. It was supposed to be a reactionary approach. By the time the wizarding world realized that Voldemort had truly returned, they hoped to have a legal framework in place that would support their eventual campaign against the Dark Lord.

Additionally, they were not oblivious to the reality of Death Eaters and sympathizers that worked in the Ministry, nor the need to root them out. It would be a challenging endeavor, requiring careful planning and execution. They had decided to slowly start working on it, but they knew progress would be quite slow considering they would mostly be unmarked and thus, could not be identified easily.

Harry and his allies were curious about something though, and it was the sheer lack of response from Voldemort's camp on the developments that were taking place in the Ministry. The fact that Harry was now closely working with the Ministry was so clear that it had not been missed by the general populace either. They had expected Lucius to return, but the man was nowhere to be seen. In his absence, they had expected someone else to show up, attempting to replace him, but there was nothing. It was quiet, and although Harry still stood by his previous hypothesis, it did perturb him slightly.

He had once again been in the Ministry for the entire day, and he'd left Nym with Amelia in the latter's office while he made his way out. A sudden flash to the side caught his attention and his eyes narrowed when a piece of parchment slowly floated towards him.

Already knowing who it was from, he reached out and raked his eyes over the words scrawled on it. His lips pursed as he read and he wandlessly incinerated it, making his way over to the atrium.

Mere minutes later, Harry emerged from the fireplace and surveyed the dingy old pub. Only a handful of patrons were hunched over their drinks. Ignoring everyone, Harry leisurely walked over to where the private room was, finding it

open. He entered, his eyes immediately falling on the one who had invited him here, and he shut the door behind him.

"I expected this little call," Harry remarked critically. "You're a little late, but better late than never, I guess."

"Please have a seat, Harry," Dumbledore said with a neutral expression on his face.

As he sat down, Harry glanced around. "I didn't expect you to choose this place though."

"It belongs to my brother," Dumbledore informed.

"I didn't know you had a brother," Harry remarked with slight surprise coloring his tone. Dumbledore's lips quirked a bit as he regarded him.

"I believe you know why I asked for this meeting then?" The old wizard asked.

"A lecture? As is your usual habit?" Harry asked with a raised eyebrow.

"You killed another man, Harry," Dumbledore sighed.

"A monster, technically. To be a man, you need morals. A rapist and a murderer has none," Harry replied with more calm than he felt. "It's not the first time I've killed one either."

"A fact I keep being reminded of on a constant basis," Dumbledore sighed. At his inquiring eyebrow, he added, "It's a topic of discussion during several Order meetings."

"Let me guess," Harry drummed his fingers casually on the table. "Auror Shackbolt?"

"Among others," Dumbledore nodded.

"As if he hasn't killed anyone in his career as an auror," Harry scoffed.

"Someone being an unfortunate casualty during an investigation, ministry-sanctioned encounter, or surprising development is different from seeking someone out and killing them, Harry."

"And seeking someone out and killing them because they are a raping and murdering pile of hippogriff shit doesn't even compare to murder, Dumbledore," Harry retorted.

"What about following the due process of law, Harry?" Dumbledore asked disappointedly. "You could have collaborated with the DMLE, found evidence against this person, and convicted him instead of outright killing him. If every person began picking up weapons and killing those who commit crimes, then we'd have anarchy. The law is there for a reason."

"The law is for humans, sensible creatures, even," Harry replied calmly. "Not monsters. And in a way, I chose to show mercy. Subjecting them to the horrors of the

Dementors instead of death? For all your talk, you sure have a dark mind, Dumbledore.”

Dumbledore started slightly, gazing at Harry with a troubled expression on his face.

“Can we get to the point of this meeting already?” Harry asked with slight exasperation coloring his tone. “You are here because your dear little Order told you I killed that bastard, and you thought it was high time you talked to me directly because you’re afraid I’m going dark or something. It’s so asinine, and yet, with you, I’m not surprised in the slightest. I really did expect you when I saw your Order when I was leaving.”

Dumbledore looked taken aback at Harry’s directness. He had indeed hit the proverbial nail on the head with his reasoning. He had devised up a plan to approach this matter with tact, but Harry seemed to be going for the blunt tactic.

“Seeing your actions and how you’ve started to think, can you truly blame me, Harry?”

“Knowing you now, I really don’t,” Harry replied easily. “You have a very narrow-minded approach to things. I don’t know if it’s because of the old age or you’ve been like this your entire life, but I’m not surprised at all that you think like this. Sometimes, it really surprises me how you’ve become so knowledgeable when your way of thinking is so rigid.”

Dumbledore did not let the words bother him. “You truly do not realize how serious the path you have chosen is,” he observed. “You have no idea how quickly it would suck you into its depths, Harry.”

“Come and give me this lecture when I justify the murder an innocent person in cold blood,” Harry retorted. “You don’t seem to understand it’s possible for a person to be brave and strong enough to do what needs to be done instead of pretending to be a goody-two-shoes while hoping nature runs its course and your hands don’t get dirty.”

Dumbledore frowned at the reminder of what he had been doing with Harry and he sighed. It had been a mistake taking that approach with him, and he regretted it immensely. Alas, the damage had already been done, and by his own hands, no less.

Harry continued without missing a beat though. “You seem to be living under this delusion that I would ever have the desire to follow in the footsteps of Voldemort. Let me tell you, a safe and happy world with those I love is all I want. I have no interest in killing innocents and taking over the world. Even this political bullshit I’ve got to be a part of is a constant source of headache, and I can’t wait until all this is over so that I can rest easy and do things a normal person should be doing.”

Dumbledore studied the young man sitting across from him, his weathered hands resting on the rough table between them.

The world, he knew, was not black and white. Good and evil were not as simple as children's tales would have one believe. Still, as he gazed at Harry who looked entirely unbothered, a nagging worry tugged at his mind.

Power had a way of changing people, and often for the worse. Even those with the best of intentions could go astray when push came to shove. Harry did not seem to understand it right now, and he was afraid where it would lead him.

He also could not help but dwell on Harry's words about what he wanted from his life. What struck him the most was the certainty in Harry's voice when he'd said all he wanted was a happy life with the people he loved. This wasn't the uncertain boy Dumbledore had known before, and truth be told, he hadn't been one for a while now. Sitting across from him now was a young man who knew exactly what he wanted.

There was something else too — a sense of untapped potential radiating from Harry. Dumbledore realized, with a mix of pride and unease, that Harry might soon surpass him in raw, magical power. He could not understand how the boy had grown so much, so quickly.

He knew what real strength was. It wasn't about knowing the most spells or causing the biggest explosions. It was about understanding the world and learning from experience. Somehow, Harry had grasped something that many older, more experienced wizards often missed — the importance of love and personal happiness.

And yet... he was treading the path that led to nothing but darkness.

Dumbledore wondered what Harry's future had in store for him, and what he envisioned both amazed and frightened him. The thought that Harry's immense capability to both feel and convey love and contentment could prove to be more than a match for Voldemort's darkness had never been farfetched, but now he firmly believed it could very well be surpassed.

Still, as he leaned back in his chair, hearing how it creaked under his weight, his electric blue orbs were clouded with mixed emotions.

"When I told you about the prophecy and everything else... I did not envision you choosing this path, Harry," Dumbledore said in disappointment.

"Tough luck, Dumbledore," Harry replied dismissively. "You have your ideals, I have mine. I've already told you we have to agree to disagree to everything we do. It's high time you understood it. Also, I know you've already been told this, but I have no intention of harming your dear Order members, but I won't hesitate to rough them up a bit if they prove to be a nuisance and put lives in danger. People are not collateral. You'd do well to remember that."

"You truly expect the Order to stay out when you are taking up the role of judge, jury, and executioner?" Dumbledore asked calmly. "You must remember

Harry, that the only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.”

“Which is exactly what we’re doing,” Harry replied easily before his eyes hardened. “And now that you mention it, do tell me something. You’ve had so much power for so long, and you’ve been regarded as this mighty wizard who shits rainbows and farts melodies. What have you been doing to change this rotten country, huh? You’ve got so many lectures for me, and yet you’ve been sitting on your arse, letting muggleborns be discriminated against in the Ministry, allowing people like Umbridge and Malfoy to pass bigoted laws against magical creatures, and doing nothing but sitting at Hogwarts, twiddling your thumbs. Your little quote about good men? You are a fucking hypocrite, Dumbledore!”

Dumbledore’s lips pursed as he remained silent, and Harry sneered.

“So instead of lecturing me about what’s right or wrong, maybe you need to realize where the priorities lie currently and act up on it. I’ve paid no mind to what you or your Order get up to regarding Voldemort, and here you are, lecturing me about my actions when the priority needs to be this big bad Dark Lord who kills innocents. Way to go,” Harry applauded sarcastically as he stood up. Staring Dumbledore down with a sneer, he continued, “I have zero respect for you, and it’s not only because of what you were planning to do to me. No, I don’t respect you because you have this habit of giving people this pathetic disappointed grandfather act when they don’t do what you think is right instead of using that power you’ve had for decades now to do something with it.”

All Dumbledore could do was remain seated in silence as Harry turned around and walked out of the room.

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In the wake of his impromptu meeting with Dumbledore that had left him more agitated than he’d expected, Harry spent the next hour or so in the basement of #12 Grimmauld Place, testing the powerful wards of the dueling chamber with some of the more violent spells he had extracted from Voldemort’s memories.

Narcissa was working with Evelyn, Fleur, and Andromeda on the other side of the magically reinforced wall, and the wards stood strong against his onslaught, keeping them none the wiser of even his presence in the room right next to theirs.

A powerful bolt of lightning struck the glimmering shield, exploding in a shower of blue sparks, as a loud booming sound rang out, and Harry lowered his wand. He walked over to the side where a certain brunette sat, popping one blueberry after another as she watched him go about it.

“Nice show,” Astoria smirked as she gazed at his sweaty form approaching her, and Harry smiled at her, his breathing ragged and his heart thumping from all the exertion over the past hour. She had arrived with him and trained for the first half an hour, opting to sit on the sidelines and watch him demonstrate powerful spells for the final half.

"I could say the same," Harry replied as he reached her, raking his eyes up and down her beautiful frame. Unlike Daphne and Evelyn, Astoria had dark hair but she possessed the same beauty as her mother and sister.

She had not been someone he had expected to ever bond with. She had no previous ties to him, after all. However, with him saving her as well, coupled with her previous crush on him, it made sense that she had so readily accepted the bond. He was not unhappy about it either. Although different from Daphne, Astoria had this charm that endeared her to everyone, himself included. It also helped that she was a beautiful witch and quite adventurous in bed, as evident in the way she had presented herself to him during their time out in the mountain cabin up north.

Harry returned her smirk and planted himself on the couch beside her.

"Still pent up? I might have something that could relieve you," she purred in his ear and Harry watched as she quickly kneeled in front of him and began to slide his trousers along with his boxers down his legs. He leaned back comfortably, watching as the brunette gave him a smirk as she reached out, quickly stroking him to hardness.

Astoria knew her capabilities. She had never been with someone before Harry, but it did not mean she didn't know things. She was no prude, and she had devoted a significant amount of time to literature to learn about everything that would one day matter.

She heard him groan as she licked and sucked at the tip of his cock for a few seconds, and she quickly moved on, trailing a wet line over his length with her tongue as she descended. Her hand replaced her mouth and she started to stroke him as she ran her tongue all over his balls, kissing them lovingly before wrapping her lips around them and sucking harshly.

She could hear his groans of pleasure and the realization that she could elicit such a reaction from him when he had the privilege of being with so many different women who all brought something to the table made her puff up in pride. She sucked harder, working him up as she gave all she had to both bring him the relief he undoubtedly wanted and to get him off as quickly as she could.

The bond had blessed Harry with superior capabilities that ensured he could satisfy all the women he was bonded with, and it was usual for them all to have sex frequently. However, one-on-one sessions like this were not so common, and each woman cherished her personal time with the man she loved. Astoria was no different and knew that like the others, she had to make this time count for both herself and Harry.

"Damn, Tori..." Harry groaned as her thumb rubbed his precum all over the crown of his cock as she kept rolling his balls around in her mouth, slathering them up with her slick spit as she sucked firmly. Astoria preened, gazing up at him and knowing how lewd the sight must look, but she could sense the heaviness in his balls, feel how close he was, and her ministrations intensified, her hand moving furiously as she stroked him while sucking his balls.

A little over a minute passed when Astoria felt Harry's hands reach out and grab her hair as his groans grew more intense. She knew he was close, and she knew how she wanted it. Pulling her mouth off his balls, she returned to his cock and wrapped her lips around his girth, plunging her mouth onto his length as she began bobbing her head back and forth, feeding herself his cock as she prepared for the inevitable.

Harry let out a ragged breath as his hands fisted her hair and all he could manage as he stared into her lustful orbs was a nod as he exploded inside her mouth. Astoria worked as hard as she could, keeping herself still with her lips wrapped tightly around his girth as she swallowed his entire load as quickly as she could.

His taste was as exquisite as always, and Astoria was no longer surprised with how much he could shoot. He was a powerful wizard, after all. It made perfect sense for him to be so capable sexually. She swallowed all his seed and felt his ejaculation come to an end, and gazed up at him merrily as she pulled her lips off his cock. She made a show of gulping the final bits of his release before reaching out with her tongue to lick off the last vestiges off the tip.

Grinning, she grabbed his trousers and boxers, pulling them up to his knees as Harry reached out, fixing them up in place. She held her arms out and he chuckled, pulling her up on his lap and she found herself seated sideways, leaning against him.

"That was brilliant," Harry said, fully relaxed now, and Astoria smirked.

"Happy to help, as always," she said, smacking her lips. Harry chuckled and tightened his hold around her waist, pulling her flush against him and leaning back on the couch as his eyes closed.

There was nothing quite like a nice sexual encounter with a beautiful woman to make one forget an irritating event like a meeting with a hypocrite.

To be continued...