

A Line in the Sand

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The mutual loathing shared between Umbridge and McGonagall was rooted in something much deeper than a disagreement on teaching methods. Not Pottermore compliant. An Auror based crime drama featuring an ensemble cast. Alternative Universe.

The Department of Drink

Chapter 1 of 1

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Author's Note: This story takes place in the years leading up to the first war. It is rated for later chapters. Harry Potter and the wizarding world were created by J.K. Rowling. I do not own Harry Potter, the wizarding world, or any of the characters, objects, or places created by J.K. Rowling.

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Tully McGonagall strolled casually through the second floor hallway of the Ministry of Magic. It was hot. This August was proving to be one of the hottest to sweep London in recent years. It was on days like this that McGonagall regretted wearing a muggle suit to the office.

"Morning," grunted Alastor Moody as he brushed past McGonagall. "Don't forget our meeting this afternoon."

Tully groaned internally. He had forgotten about the departmental meeting this afternoon. The Department of Magical Law Enforcement was on the verge of launching a large scale investigation into one of Knockturn Alley's most notorious crime families.

Inside his office his partner was stretched back, eyes closed, with her legs up on her desk. Her blazer was discarded on the floor, and she was fanning herself with a file folder. Her face was perspiring, and the humidity had caused her curls to turn into a frizzy mess. Despite extensive cooling charms, the upper levels of the Ministry remained unbearably hot.

"Here you go," Tully announced as he threw a lumpy, brown paper bag at his partner. The two partners were supposed to be finalizing their presentation for the afternoon meeting. However, hunger and heat had overruled duty. An hour earlier Tully had left to take lunch with his fiancée. The lumpy bag contained his partner's unfortunate lunch.

"It's about time you got here" she said. She opened her eyes, pulled her legs off the desk, and sat up straight as she explained the details of the presentation to Tully. He listened with vague interest as he removed his suit coat and loosened his tie.

"What are you doing?" She asked sternly as she eyed his loosened tie. "This could be the biggest case of the decade. We've got to look presentable."

"Speak for yourself, frizzy," McGonagall retorted as he straightened his tie. Without speaking a word there was a tiny pop and her curls were sleek again. She pulled a small compact mirror out of her desk drawer and ran her hand along one to check the quality of her work.

A soft knock came to the door, and a young woman poked her head in the door.

"Sorry to barge in," said the Auror. "Alastor said you've got the file on the Malfoy real estate holdings."

"Yes I do," said his partner as she rummaged through her briefcase.

"Amelia," said McGonagall, "How certain are you that Urquart's going to authorize this?"

"I'm positive he will," she said firmly. "But I can't guarantee his superiors will agree to his proposed budget," she added.

Fifteen minutes later they were seated in a conference room on the third level. The table was full of a mismatch of Department of Magical Law Enforcement employees from a variety of departments and sub divisions. Amelia Bones and her partner Alastor Moody were from the organized crime unit. They sat next to Tully McGonagall who worked in the Auror Investigative Unit.

Tully had expected this to be a larger meeting. As he glanced around the table, he realized he recognized everyone. He smiled to Moody's protege from the vice subdivision. Moody had made a good choice in Shackbolt. He had proved invaluable during the department's investigation into the sudden booming black market trade that had plagued wizarding London in the last three years. Seated across the table were Vance and Scrimgeour from the Major Case Unit. Rounding out the group were Kenneth Yaxley, Antonin Dolohov, and Bilius Weasley, from the Hit Wizard Department. McGonagall had first met the three during a raid on Salvador Pinelli's brothel in Knockturn Alley. McGonagall knew if the Hit Wizard division was being consulted this was a good sign that the boys upstairs were going to spare no expense.

The conference room door opened and in came Commissioner Urquart flanked by Deputy Commissioner Thomas and Tully's partner. They took their seats, and Tully heard a light click as the door was automatically locked.

"I'd like to remind you all that what we are about to discuss should be treated with the utmost secrecy," Commissioner Urquart said, "You are here because you're my people. I built this team and I trust you."

As the Commissioner continued his speech about "making a stand" against the growing crime in wizarding London, Tully focused his concentration on the pitcher of water in the center of the table. Shackbolt had conjured a pitcher of ice water only moments earlier. Now it was covered in thick condensation. Tully sat back and loosed his tie.

"Miss Black, if you would be so kind," the Commissioner said as he motioned for Tully's partner to begin the presentation.

"It has become apparent that our take-down of Salvador Pinelli was only the tip of the iceberg," she said as she motioned to the wall. What had previously been a blank wall was suddenly filled with pictures of witches and wizards, crime scene photos, and dates. All the pieces were connected with small bits of red string. "Commissioner Urquart tasked our unit with finding a way to break the Pinelli family's hold on the city. However, since Pinelli's arrest last year, we suspect that new leadership has emerged from within the Pinelli circle."

Four of the pictures on the wall were suddenly illuminated. The first was of Niccolo Pinelli. He was Salvador Pinelli's brother, but intelligence suggested he was still in Sicily. Also pictured was Declan Carrow. Carrow was employed by the Department of Magical Law Enforcement in the Justice Division. He had been the advocate responsible for putting Pinelli behind bars. The third picture was of Abraxas Malfoy.

"Malfoy's dealings are dark," said Yaxley, "His money's dirty, but he's no crime boss." Recent intelligence backed Yaxley's opinion. Malfoy was indeed involved in dirty dealings. However, Malfoy's dealings were financial. They didn't involve the disappearances, violence, and murders that the Pinelli's were known for.

The woman in the final photo was Cordelia Elliot. Madame Elliot was the owner of several significant financial holdings including the Puddlemere United Quidditch team. The Elliot family had a history of shady business dealings, but it had never been publicly linked with organized crime.

"If we take down the new leader of the Pinelli group, it would create a power vacuum," said Vance, "There would be a power struggle."

"We don't want to remove the new leader," said Black. The room erupted into a frenzy.

"This is exactly the kind of perverse backroom political dealings that ruined the last administration," Moody growled.

"I understand the desire to protect stability within Knockturn Alley, but I'll have no part of this," Weasley said firmly.

"I serve at the pleasure of the Minister not the mafia," Yaxley added.

A small knock on the door suspended the conversation. Commissioner Urquart waved his wand and the door opened. A tall man with messy dark hair entered.

"I'm sorry I'm late," he said as he set down his briefcase and stood across from Miss Black.

"Perfect timing, Potter," Urquart said with a grin.

"Hello, everyone," Potter said beaming. "I'm an advocate with the Justice Division," he added. "And apparently the only man foolish enough to agree to take down the Pinelli family once and for all," he continued with a growing grin. "With your help we can finally take out not just the men on the ground but also the leadership. All of it. At once."

Moody shifted in his seat. Yaxley and Vance sat upright. Bones was smiling.

"You will find that the folder in front of you contains the proposal for a full scale investigation and plan of action to make the Pinelli family extinct," Urquart said. "Officially this committee does not exist."

"Sir," McGonagall asked, "Why isn't Bob Ogden here?"

"Ogden hasn't been included in this committee," Urquart said definitively. "I want to make it clear that I trust Ogden." Urquart paused as if debating whether to continue on or stop. "But I don't trust his staff."

Bob Ogden was a tough old wizard. As head of the Magical Law Enforcement Patrol, Ogden's staff played a critical role in dealing with the criminal activity orchestrated by the organized crime families of wizarding Britain.

"At some point we will require the Patrol's services," Deputy Commissioner Thomas said. "However, we feel at this time it is better that Ogden be involved on a need-to-know basis. We suspect that the Pinelli's have men in Ogden's office."

Before adjourning, Commissioner Urquart requested that members of the committee refrain from engaging in relationships outside of those previously established. There were to be no inter-departmental gatherings, outings, or lunches. Tully and Moody exchanged looks. The two men and their partners frequently spent Friday nights at a small wizarding pub known as the Department of Drink. It was located near the Ministry and frequented by Ministry employees. It would be out of character to discontinue their weekly retreat to the pub. However, Tully wouldn't mind having Weasley or Yaxley join their night out.

On the other hand, he'd be perfectly happy to ignore the Potter bloke. Tully fought hard to keep his eyes open as Potter prattled on about some Ministry decree that would allow the team to engage in some undercover operations and what information obtained would be legally allowed in court. The heat was making it considerably harder to maintain his composure. The pitcher of ice water that had been conjured earlier sat untouched and now devoid of any ice.

"We'll meet again next Friday at seven to discuss phase one of the project," Miss Black said. "We anticipate it should take around three hours to get everyone up to speed."

Tully had a deep respect for his partner's attention to detail, but at times, it could be overbearing.

The meeting adjourned with a sense of excitement. The Pinelli family had plagued the city for years. The recent uprising in violence and black market trading had been a drag on the wizarding economy.

Commissioner Urquart was right when it came to the secrecy surrounding his latest project. The Pinelli's were rumored to have infiltrated the department. If Urquart wasn't trusting the Patrol staff, it meant things were bad. It felt reassuring to know that his gang, and most importantly his partner, were counted amongst Urquart's team.

Hours later as they walked out of the office and into the London heat, Tully's thoughts drifted back to Urquart's words. As the four walked along the road to the pub, they passed numerous coworkers. He nodded to Rajin Patil as they passed. Patil was a member of Patrol. Tully and Patil had coordinated on previous cases. They'd played Quidditch together at Hogwarts. Tully had been invited to Patil's wedding. It shook Tully deeply to think that Patil might be working on Pinelli's payroll.

"How are your wedding plans coming along?" asked Amelia politely pulling Tully from his thoughts.

"McGonagall hasn't got any say," Miss Black said with a grin. "She won't let him."

"She is a lady. I'd rather not talk about her with the likes of you," Tully replied as they entered the pub.

They chose a booth in the back. An Auror was never comfortable with his back to the door. Amelia was seated next to Tully. Moody was across the table with Black. The bar was stifling hot. Black was sharing her Muggle cigarettes with the gang, and Tully decided to indulge. He preferred a pipe but his fiancé had nixed it months earlier.

After seven rounds, the pub crowd began to thin out. Moody was pretty pissed, and Rin Prewett from the Administrative office had offered to walk Moody home. Amelia was teaching a sparring group in the morning for first year Auror recruits.

"My brother Edgar is hosting a picnic on Sunday at eleven if you'd like to come," she said as she placed her jacket around her shoulders. "You're welcome to bring your fiancé, Tully," she added as an afterthought.

"Thank you, Bones," he said. Their group was tight-knit. They four had spent the better part of the last seven years working together. Unfortunately, no one in the group was fond of Tully's fiancé. As of late, Tully himself wasn't particularly fond of his fiancé. He took a swig of his sidecar and waited for Amelia to leave.

"Black," Tully said in a low voice, "can I ask you a question." She waited patiently. Before he would tell her, he made her promise she wouldn't discuss their conversation with Moody and Bones.

"Alright," she agreed. "What is it?"

"Do you think that I'm making the right choice tying the knot?" he asked earnestly.

His partner's brow furrowed. Her lips thinned.

"Explain," she said simply.

He should have expected this reaction. Black wasn't the type of woman to engage in long heart-to-heart talks. She wanted to know the facts, and then she would draw a conclusion. Tully sighed inwardly. He shifted uncomfortably but said nothing.

"Well, what happened?" she demanded as she lit another cigarette.

Tully felt uneasy about sharing intimate details with her. They had been in tight, awkward, and even dangerous situations before, but never had he felt so ill at ease with his partner. He felt like her eyes were piercing into his inner most thoughts. Yet, in the end he surrendered and told her the whole tale.

Dolores, Tully's fiancé, had given him an ultimatum. He needed to lose the Muggle suits before the wedding. Over the last decade a growing number of witches and wizards were ditching the traditional wizarding robes in favor of Muggle clothing. Personally, Tully enjoyed the flexibility of being able to move between the wizarding and Muggle world with ease. As an Auror, his work often required slipping through areas with high Muggle traffic. Blending in was an essential part of the job.

"I can't understand why she's so upset," Tully said. "A suit isn't a big deal."

"If it isn't a big deal," Black questioned, "then why are you so upset?"

"I think she's worried her family won't approve," Tully said. Tully had met his fiancé's family on two occasions. Her parents were from a different era. They were the byproduct of older pureblood families that were not economically prosperous nor politically powerful. Her maternal grandmother had been a Selwyn. Her daughter had married into the working class, yet pureblood, Umbridge family. Tully had marveled at how Dolores was determined to rise above her station. Her efforts to learn the social customs, etiquette, and polish of pureblood society were unmatched.

"If someone doesn't like you for who you are, they aren't worth your time," Black said seriously. Her green eyes were beginning to glaze from the gillywater. She tapped the ash off the end of her cigarette into a small glass ashtray on the end of the table. Tully had no response so he waited for her to speak. She looked away from the conversation and out into the bar.

"You pick these brainless, busty broads from the Administrative Division," she said turning back to their conversation. Tully felt like a child being reprimanded by parent. "The only difference between the ones at the Ministry and the ones here," she said pointing to a cocktail waitress, "is a name and their blood status."

"You're wrong you know," Tully said defensively. "Dolores has a plan. She wants a career."

Black snorted. She put her cigarette out and stood up. As she grabbed her blazer jacket and hung it over her arm she said, "Those women only take jobs at the Ministry to find a husband. The only difference with Dolores is she's hoping to find the next Minister."

She stood at the edge of the table with her lips pursed as she waited for an answer.

"Like you and Bones are any different," Tully said bitterly. "You go out with men from the Ministry, and you don't settle for just anyone."

"The difference is I don't want to marry the next Minister. I want to work for the next Minister. If I happen to meet someone along the way so be it. Goodnight," she said as she walked away from the table. Tully collected his own suit coat and made for the door as well. Near the hallway for the restroom, he caught her arm. He gently spun her around so they were face to face.

"Black," he said, "I'm sorry."

"Minerva?" A cool voice interrupted. Tully looked to his left to see none other than the Potter prat he had met hours earlier. Potter was eyeing the pair carefully. Tully felt uncomfortable with the situation. He was in a bar holding a woman by the arm with a Ministry Advocate asking questions.

"Hello, Seamus," Black said as she removed her arm from Tully's grip.

"Is everything alright?" Potter asked her without taking his eyes from Tully.

"Yes," she smiled. "I would join you but I'm just leaving. Have a good night."

She tossed her blazer over her shoulder and gave Potter one last goodnight. She turned on her heel and walked out into the hot, humid London night air. Tully gave Potter one last glare before following her out into the heat. He could hear the light click of her heels as she walked along the road. The heat had caused a thick fog to envelope the streets. The lights gave off an eerie glow. There were people scattered about in the heat of the night. Ahead, his partner had turned and was heading in the direction of St. James Park. The park provided a safe apparition spot for many of the Ministry employees. Minerva had a rowhouse in Bethnal Green and often used the park to commute to and from work.

She stopped to adjust her heel and Tully took the opportunity to catch her.

"Minerva," he said as he approached her.

"McGonagall," she responded, acknowledging his presence.

"I'm sorry I never should have..." he began to say, but she cut him off. She stood upright.

"I didn't mean to..." he started, but she held her hand up to stop him.

"Now really," he said as he backed her up against the nearest tree. "I know and respect that you are..."

"Shut it," she demanded as she placed a finger on his mouth. They stayed that way for a moment. Her eyes were closed as she listened to the sounds around them. In the distance there was music from a saxophone playing. It was likely a street performer. A soft wind rustled the trees. Occasional car horns sounded from the nearby streets. Tully watched intently for any sign from her to tell him what she had heard. A bead of sweat fell from her forehead and onto her chest as it rose slowly.

Without a word her eyes shot open and she looked at Tully. He gave her look. She responded. It was a game they played. Over the course of their relationship, they had managed to communicate without words in some tight situations. She pulled him close and whispered a barely audible "trouble." In response, Tully's hand went for his wand. Minerva placed her hand over his to stop him.

"Lovebirds up ahead," they heard a voice whisper as sound of footsteps grew closer. Tully felt the hot breath of a man near his ear.

"And what do we have hear?" The man said dangerously. There were three, maybe four, of them. They were Muggles and hoodlums. Tully could smell alcohol on the man's hot breath. He felt a sudden pain in the back of his legs as one of the men hit him with a cane across the back of the knees. As Tully fell the man placed the cane under Tully's neck. Tully tried to move his arms but another man was holding them back.

Minerva stood with her back against the tree. She could easily whip out her wand and hex the men, but her actions would be a violation of the Statute of Secrecy. While two men held Tully, a third approached her. He thrust his arm out against her neck to hold her against the tree. On the ground, one of the men holding Tully was searching his pockets. He found what he had been looking for and dumped the contents of Tully's coin purse onto the grass.

"What the hell is this?" said one of the men in an angry whisper as he eyed the Knuts and Sickles.

"Teppista!" Minerva shouted as she threw out her own small stash of Sickles. She slapped the hoodlum across the face and began ranting in Italian. The men backed off to collect the coins, and Minerva grabbed Tully as they stormed off down the path.

Once they were clear of the hoodlums, Minerva stopped.

"Are you alright?" She asked as she looked at his neck. He murmured that he was fine, and the pair reached the end of the park. Minerva bid him farewell, and after a small popping noise, Tully was left standing alone in the park.

After a short walk home, Tully poured himself a small tumbler of whiskey and slid into an aged armchair. He chuckled to himself about the incident from earlier in the evening. Posing as Italian tourists was quick thinking on his partner's part. As Tully walked to the bedroom, he removed his suit coat and tie. He set his tumbler down on the nightstand, next to picture of his fiancée Dolores. She was petite with short blond curls and a rounded face. His words from earlier were echoing in his head. "She's a lady," he had told his friends. He doubted Dolores would have thought to whip out a fake Italian accent and attitude when confronted by a group of Muggle thugs.

As the humidity hung in the air, Tully drifted off into an uneasy sleep. As he tossed around in the sheets of his four poster bed, he dreamed of green eyes staring back at him. She was backed up against the tree in the park as he watched her chest rise and fall. He ran his hand across the dew drops of perspiration along her chest. When he awoke, he blame the heat for his dreams.

Author's Note: "Teppista" = hoodlum