

Several more cracks sounded, everyone apparating into whichever spot they remembered best, and soon there were eleven of them Disillusioned and running for Westminster Bridge.

Charlie was still holding Sirius' hand.

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Half a mile turned out to be a longer run than most of them expected; wizards were not generally prone to exercise. Considering keeping himself fit was one of the few things Sirius *could* do while confined to the house, he had no trouble keeping up with Charlie; the dragon tamer was hardly even breathing heavy by the time they made it to the Ministry back entrance; a set of dodgy-looking stairs below a fire escape with a door labelled 'Staff Only' at the base.

"I didn't know this was here," Charlie mentioned, and Sirius grinned.

"Most don't. It's for emergencies only. And considering I'm not cramming eleven of us into that bloody phone booth it'll have to do." He hoped the others were keeping track of their non-Ministry companions to guide them over. Sirius honestly had been too focused on Harry to think about it.

Luckily they heard footsteps, and as charms dropped several others came into view, some huffing and puffing more than others. Sirius strode over to Remus, who looked a little pale. "You alright, Moony?"

When he grinned, the wolf was back in his eyes. "Better than ever, old friend," he promised, and Sirius believed him.

Diggle was the last one to show up, and while he was catching his breath Kingsley jogged down the stone steps, tapping his wand on the 'Staff Only' door. It swung open, and the bald-headed auror let out a quiet sigh of relief. "This way," he urged. All of them moved forward, wands raised. Sirius was right up behind him — he was the only one who was coming fresh to this fight. More than fresh; he was *begging* for the chance to finally put his wand to use, do something other than sit around and wait.

The atrium was emptier than Sirius had ever seen it, and the hair on the back of his neck pricked up.

"Where is everyone?" George asked in a low voice.

"Department of Mysteries, I'd bet," came Sirius' grim response. A murmur of understanding swept through the group; they all knew at least a little about what Voldemort was after down there.

They split up to take the lifts, and Sirius ended up with Remus, Charlie, the twins and Arthur Weasley. As the lift rattled along, Charlie leaned his shoulder against Sirius'. "He's going to be fine," he said quietly. Sirius' jaw clenched.

"Bloody better be."