

Harry patted the man's arm, saying nothing more and ignoring McGonagall's perplexed frown.

The old professor might have made a terrible mistake in giving the information to Tom Riddle, but Harry could see how much the regret had been weighing on him ever since. It was a burden he was more than happy to relieve.

Past the gates, they gathered to apparate to the Ministry; the floo network was still being brought back online, and Hogwarts had not yet been reconnected.

"Harry," Amelia said evenly, once they were in the Ministry atrium. "After the meeting, you will come with me and complete the paperwork for your apparition license, yes?"

It was only then that Harry realised he hadn't even attempted to pretend he needed a side-along. Oops. "Yes, ma'am."

Susan snickered quietly at his meek response.

Looking around, Harry realised that this was his first time visiting the Ministry while there was actually work going on. The last — and only — time he'd been there, it had been deserted and he'd ended up destroying half of the Department of Mysteries.

He hoped the Unspeakables weren't still mad about all that.

Now, it was a hive of activity; still likely not as busy as it was supposed to be, given the number of people who had yet to return to their jobs and the countless empty positions throughout the building, but enough that their whole group apparating into the designated zone took a few minutes to be noticed.

"Good morning, Minister Bones!" one woman called cheerfully as she walked past.

"Morning, Minister!" another greeted, then dropped the briefcase she held in shock. "My word, is that Harry Potter?"

"Oh, Merlin, here we go," Harry groaned under his breath. The group closed ranks around him, but the damage had been done — all through the atrium, people were stopping in their tracks, trying to get a look at the seventeen year-old saviour.

"You'd best get used to it, pup," Sirius said apologetically, ruffling his hair.

Luckily, with Amelia heading the pack they could avoid going through the whole rigamarole of wand screenings, heading straight for the lifts. There were so many they had to split between the two, and even that was a tight squeeze.

Harry wondered if Susan, Neville and Daphne were remembering that fateful trip to the Ministry in as much vivid detail as he was right now.

"Y'know," Sirius said as the lift shuddered and screeched to life, "last time we were crammed so tight in one of these, Char, we snogged in front of your dad. You remember that?"