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Listening to his little cousin's increasingly worried report, Sirius frowned; it certainly sounded like things at the Ministry were going downhill fast.

'How long do we think before there's a vote of no confidence?' Bill asked, but Kingsley shook his head.

"There are too many people who are happy to let him keep blundering through," he pointed out. "Something big would have to happen first."

None of them said what they were all thinking; Voldemort would have to rear his ugly head.

It was even more worrying, in Sirius' opinion, that the Dark Lord hadn't made any obvious moves yet, not since the breakout from Azkaban. Either his ten Death Eaters were in worse shape than he'd thought, or he was taking advantage of being presumed dead to work under the radar and get something big in place. The flurry of belief caused by Harry's *Quibbler* article had been slowly worn down by the lack of activity and the *Prophet's* continued insistence that it was all lies.

"It's bloody frustrating," Tonks growled, running a hand through his bright orange hair. "There's nothing we can do but sit back and watch more and more departments get headed by obvious Death Eaters, or at least Death Eater sympathisers."

Kingsley squeezed his partner's shoulder. "We can keep the aurors legitimate for as long as possible. Scrimgeour may be a bastard, but he's an honest one."

Sirius remembered Scrimgeour; a senior auror back in the day, gruff and a little too rough with the suspects — a little *too* keen to accuse people of dark magic. Cut from the same cloth as Alastor Moody, which wasn't ideal, but it was better than a Voldemort lackey in charge.

Tonks sighed, and shook his head. "You're right. As always," he added with a mock annoyed look. Kingsley smirked.

"We should get going. I've got to be at work in an hour."

That seemed to be the cue for all four of them to make their leave, and Sirius started to clear the table from their impromptu lunch meeting. He smiled when a familiar scarred hand picked up one of the plates. "You don't have to be anywhere?" he asked, and Charlie shook his head, sending the dishes into the sink with his wand and reeling Sirius in by the hand.

"Not 'til five," he replied, kissing him slowly.

Sirius still felt giddy, even more than a month into their relationship. After all those months of that in-between stage where he'd been trying to deny things, it felt like he and Charlie had been together for much longer than they had. But this was so much *better* than the way they were before.

"That's good," he said, leaning into Charlie's embrace, relishing in how *warm* the dragon-tamer always was. Sirius hardly ever felt cold these days, thanks to him. "Want to come read