

Tolerable Measures

by devsgma

You never know what—or who—will save the day.

One Shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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This story was written for the 2012 SS/HG Exchange. The recipient was m_mcgonagall_65.

Original Prompt: With the growth in population and satellite and recording imagery everywhere, the Wizarding population is in constant danger of discovery. The Ministry needs to come up with some solutions. Will wizards live in the wilds of Montana, on a deserted tropical island, in a space colony? Or will they come up with better ways to disguise their presence among the Muggles? Or will Wizarding society come out into the open? And how is our favourite couple involved: researchers, colonists, advocates of new laws? Intrigue, mystery or action welcome, but wherever your Muse leads you.

The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom was at his wit's end. He'd conferred with his predecessors, but those who would actually acknowledge the fact that there *was* a problem couldn't offer any sound advice on what to do about the situation. He'd avoided looking at the painting of the little man who wore a silver wig and greatly resembled a toad for as long as possible. Standing up, he crossed the room and locked his office door before moving to the far corner of the room. He glared at the subject of the portrait, willing it to react, and when it didn't he asked, "How do I contact your minister?"

The eyes of the portrait focused and looked down in amazement at the Prime Minister. "Are you speaking to me?"

The Prime Minister ran a hand over his face and muttered, "God help me, I am."

"It's *never* been done," the painting replied in a horrified tone. "The request for an audience *always* comes from the Minister of Magic, never the Muggle one!"

Several muscles were flexed in the Minister's jaw before he leaned forward and said, "I don't give a damn if it's never been done before. Get him here, *now*!"

The little man in the portrait drew himself up, raised his chin, and sniffed before he said, "I'll see if the Minister is available," and then slid out the side of the painting.

A hesitant Muggle finger poked at the scene that was left behind, and when it found nothing but dried paint, it was withdrawn. It was duly inspected by its owner, who said, "I must be insane. There's no other rational explanation. I've gone round the ruddy bend."

A meeting between all the department heads of the Ministry wasn't an unusual occurrence, but an emergency one...particularly this late in the day...had only occurred during the days when they'd all united to battle the Dark Lord. Since none of the current department heads had actually *been* heads during that perilous time, all...save two...were a trifle nervous as they waited for the Minister to make his appearance and announce the *reason* for the disruptive summons. Those two watched their fellow heads with a touch of amusement as papers were shuffled, chairs adjusted, and soft mutters filled the silence.

Cuthbert Mockridge, Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures, was the eldest by at least fifty years of those gathered around the conference table. He was also the closest to the windows that afforded the room a magnificent view of the Atrium. Cuthbert watched with a great deal of envy as Ministry workers, anxious to get home after a long day at work, lined up before the fireplaces. Soon there was only an occasional witch or wizard seen scurrying toward an exit. "Does anyone have any idea at *all* why Shackbolt wants to see us?" he asked (in a tone of voice normally reserved for a toddler in need of a lie down) as he swiveled his chair back around to face the circular table.

The Head of the Department of Magical Accidents and Catastrophes, Hermione Granger, frowned at Mockridge and said, "We've been over this, Cuthbert. *Minister* Shackbolt sent us all the same message to meet here and wait for him."

"But it's been over an hour!" Cuthbert whined. "What's so bloody important that it can't wait until Monday?"

Ronald Weasley, the newly appointed Head of the Department of Magical Games and Sports, slurped from his mug of tea and shrugged his shoulders. "Calm down and have a biscuit, Cuthy."

"You've eaten them all, Ron," Hermione pointed out.

"I was hungry, Mione, and who knows when we'll get out of here?" Ron said with a slightly red face. "Surely there's more...somewhere?"

Severus Snape, the current Head of the Department of Mysteries, managed to glare at both Ron and Cuthbert before he drawled, "If the Minister called a ~~an~~*emergency* meeting, it follows that he's dealing with an *emergency*. There are no set agendas, no breaks allowed for sending messages to irritating twits with no patience, and above all, no time to arrange tasty little teas for those with bottomless pits for stomachs. I'm sure there's an *abundance* of biscuits waiting for you on the outside, Mister Weasley."

An almost-snicker was heard from the current Head of the Department of International Magical Cooperation, and when everyone's attention was drawn to him, Lucius Malfoy said, "Now, now, Severus. Remember, the extremely *old* are anxious to get on with things before they die, and the extremely *young*...unless they've been properly raised...have no manners."

Ron's face grew redder while his mouth opened and then shut with an audible click of his teeth when a tired-looking Kingsley entered the room. After taking his seat, Shackbolt tossed a manila folder...with a large horizontal **CLASSIFIED** stamped on it...into the middle of the round table. He placed another, unmarked folder, in front of him. "Have at it, my *knight*s. There's nothing in there you don't already know."

Basil Edgecombe, tyrannical Head of the Department of Magical Transportation, snatched the folder just as Harry Potter, the unsurprising Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, reached out to open it. Lucius said, "I stand corrected, it seems. It's not only the young who have no manners."

"Manners are for tea parties and state dinners, Malfoy, not meetings filled with department heads whose only qualification for their posts is being appointed by a Minister after the popular vote," Basil replied with a smirk. After flipping through the photos contained in the folder, slamming it shut, and then sending it spinning down the table, Edgecombe shot Kingsley a disgusted look and snarled, "What's so classified about aerial pictures of Hogwarts? Is this some trumped-up emergency to make your tenure in office appear less incompetent? I'll still trounce you in the election next month."

When Hermione, who had been studying the pictures, raised her head and opened her mouth to speak, Shackbolt raised the palm of his hand in her direction and smiled at Edgecombe. "Well, that certainly proves I can't fool you for long, doesn't it, Basil? You and Cuthbert can run along now, if you like. You've foiled my plan completely." He watched with a quiet little smile as Hermione passed the folder on to Ron after whispering something in his ear. Ron's eyes widened slightly before he took a quick look at the pictures, and then passed it...along with the whisper...to Harry. It was left to Harry to take the pictures around the table to Snape, whose response to the whispered message was a raised brow. He, in turn, passed the message and the folder on to Malfoy.

Basil glanced around the table suspiciously and asked, "What about the rest of 'em? What's all the whispering about?"

"Everyone else is on my committee for re-election, and in light of what has just occurred, I would like to talk to them ~~privately~~," Kingsley said before he sighed and ran a hand over his face.

"Won't do you any good now, *Minister*," Basil said and then revealed a large, toothy grin that could have given Gilderoy Lockhart a run for the Most-Charming-Smile Award. "Cat's already out of the bag, don't you know?"

"As true as that is, *dear colleague*, the fact remains that the Minister of Magic has asked you...not once, but twice...to leave. I believe I would do so if I were you," Severus stated.

"Just who in the bloody blue blazes do you think you are, Snape? I've been Head of the Department of Magical Transportation for six years. Only Cuthbert has more seniority," Basil said with a sneer and leaned back in his chair. "I'll leave when I'm ready. I've a few more questions for the *Minister*."

Kingsley said calmly, "I will gladly answer any questions you have on Monday, Basil. Please, leave before I have to have you escorted out."

"I would gladly volunteer for *that* assignment, Minister," Ron said while jumping to his feet and pulling his wand.

"And *me*!" Harry and Hermione announced almost in unison with their wands pointed in Basil's direction.

Snape and Malfoy exchanged a weary glance, shrugged as if to say *Gryffindors*, and then rose to their feet. Basil maintained his sneer, but vacated his chair. "Come along, Cuthbert. We'll allow them to have their *private* little disaster meeting, for all the good it will do."

Once the remaining department heads had settled back down into their chairs...and Kingsley had cast a few spells to insure their privacy...Malfoy leaned back and stated, "The files in my office must be in a *deplorable* condition. I'll have to take Elspeth to task about misplacing the invitation to be on the committee for your re-election."

Ron said, "I didn't get one. I know that for sure, since I do my own filing." He frowned and then said, "I don't have a secretary. Are we supposed to have secretaries?"

Kingsley briefly pinched the bridge of his nose before he raised his eyes and motioned for the folder to be handed to him. "No one got one, Ron, and the discussion concerning your secretary...or lack of one...is tabled." He spread out the pictures in front of him and said, "These are high resolution Muggle satellite photos. I'm not quite sure what the *high resolution* means, but the Muggle Prime Minister was having kittens over their very existence." When Hermione opened her mouth as if to speak, Kingsley once again raised his hand to ask for her silence and said, "You can explain it to me later, Hermione. Apparently, this *particular* satellite doesn't belong to the United Kingdom, the Americans or anyone else we have a liaison with. It belongs to a former third world country that's deservedly proud of its progress and is anxious to *help* the major Muggle governments."

"Oh, bugger," Ron breathed as he stood and started looking through them again. "How is that possible? Have the wards that give Muggle cameras a view of the ruins fallen?"

"Use your brains, Weasley," Snape said with an exasperated note in his voice. "Ah, do forgive me; I forgot you store them in Granger's head for safekeeping. They only work if the cameras are in range of the wards, and they don't happen to reach into outer space."

Hermione put her hand on Ron's arm and said, "I suggest we set something up to play closer attention to any and all satellites that get launched. We'll probably need to have their movements tracked, too. Maybe Professor Sinistra can help with setting that up."

"My thoughts exactly, but it still doesn't solve the overall problem," Kingsley said evenly. He opened the other folder before pushing it in Snape's direction. "The Obliviators are being run ragged keeping up, and I don't know how much longer they can cope." He rose, walked over to the windows and watched the Ministry house-elves begin their nightly cleaning.

Ron's softly spoken, "Blimey," made him wince, but when the rustling behind him finally ended, Kingsley braced himself for the anticipated question.

"What in the hell are we going to do?" Harry asked.

"I wish I had an answer," Kingsley said as he turned back around and settled into his chair. He held out his hand and accepted the folder. No matter how many times he went through it, a solution never materialized. "The *incidents* that are captured on the cameras set up by the officials and businesses are fairly easily to contain, but there are just too many Muggles with those advanced mobile phones that can immediately send out whatever photos they take." He picked out one that showed half of a person going through a brick wall and turned it around. "This one was taken at Kings Cross Station and sent to over thirty-three other mobile phones before it could be contained. I've lost count of how many *videos* we've had to compromise on the Muggle You Tube."

"I don't suppose the Department of International Magical Cooperation has any suggestions from the other wizarding governments?" Harry asked hopefully as his gaze...and every other in the room...swung toward Malfoy.

Lucius, brows elevated in mild surprise, advised, "The subject has never arisen."

"Maybe you ought to have it risen, instead of being all concerned about everyone's manners," Ron said with a smirk on his face.

"As *crudely* as that was phrased, he does have a point, Lucius," Snape said.

Lucius sniffed and cast a disparaging look in Ron's direction before he said, "I shall bring it up at the next..."

"No need," Kingsley interrupted and then breathed a small sigh. "The other leaders are dealing with the same problems we are, and they've no new answers either."

Snape frowned, sent a suspicious glance toward Kingsley, and asked, "Just how long have you and the others been discussing this particular problem?"

A small smile lifted the corner of Kingsley's mouth as his eyes met Snape's. He shrugged and said, "Since the dawn of time? It's always a concern."

"Why hasn't it been brought to our attention before?" Lucius demanded.

"Hold your tongue, Lucius," Snape said before Kingsley could answer. His eyes had never left the Minister's face. "You said they don't have any new answers. That's what it is, isn't it? They want to use an *old* solution. One that they've considered before, rejected, and now brought back to the table. Tell me it's *not* the one I think it is."

"I wish I could," Kingsley said quietly.

A very pale Hermione blurted out, "They *can't*! They simply *can't*!"

Harry and Ron exchanged puzzled looks while Lucius studied Hermione with an upraised chin and a slight frown on his face.

"Oi!" Ron said and leaned forward. "Someone want to fill the two dunderheads in on whatever it is you're all talking about?"

Snape smirked and opened his mouth to reply, but Hermione beat him to it. "They want us to quit hiding the fact that magic exists," she said quietly before violently shaking her head. "They can't do it, Minister!"

Lucius leaned forward and studied the young witch. "I'm not disagreeing with you, Miss Granger, but I do have to wonder why *you*, a Muggle-born witch, are so against our secret being finally revealed? It seems like you would be first in line to champion the cause."

"The children, they... they would grow to hate us. There would *never* be peace," she almost whispered before turning her face in Harry's direction. "You should understand, Harry."

Snape's eyes narrowed slightly and he nodded once in Hermione's direction before fixing his gaze on Harry. "Think of your Aunt Petunia's reaction to her sister being magical, Mister Potter. The lengths she went to in an attempt to attend Hogwarts even though she didn't receive a letter, sure that a mistake had been made. Her...disregard for her own sister's happiness or your safety in later years comes to mind."

Harry was lost in thought for a moment before his eyes refocused and sought Kingsley's. "They would spend years of their lives hoping, wishing, sure that on their eleventh birthday they'd receive that special letter, and when they didn't... They'd be upset, perhaps angry, certainly devastated on what should be a happy day."

"Bureaucrats, on the other hand, would believe they'd received an early present from Father Christmas," Lucius advised with a wise nod. "They'd use our very existence to explain why they couldn't keep their campaign promises, bombard us with requests to repair this or that when their budgets fall short, clean up their stinking waterways, rubbish dumps, and those petroleum spills they seem to keep having. Then there are those that would want the *secret* of magic. How many atrocities would they commit in order to gain it?"

Hermione, face flushed, started to open her mouth in protest, but instead ran a hand over her hair and then shrugged. "They probably will."

Ron, for once, had remained quiet. He glanced at each head with a slight frown on his face. "So that's it? We're going to give up and let them expose us?"

"What would you suggest we do, Mister Weasley? Locate an uncharted isle somewhere in the vast oceans and move the lot of us there?" Snape asked with a sneer.

Ron rose and walked over to one of the potted plants contained in the room. He dug around in the dirt until he found what he sought. He blew on it and then wiped the remaining smudges off on his trousers. "No," he said with a smirk on his face. Placing the small pebble in the center of the table, he leaned forward into Snape's face and said, "I suggest we place specialized wards, ones that'll do a chameleon sort of thing instead of showing ruins, like Hogwarts has against all Muggle cameras on lots of little pebbles like this one here. Then we require all of our citizens to carry one in their pockets whenever they're out and about in the Muggle world."

"Ron, that's brilliant!" Hermione said before grabbing the pebble and examining it. "If we're going to use the same type of wards that will recognize cameras, they should probably be made of the same kind of stone, but that shouldn't be too difficult, should it?" she asked Kingsley.

Kingsley, his mouth slightly open, blinked once before rising and holding out his hand to Hermione for the pebble. "No," he said slowly, before turning a blinding smile on Ron Weasley. "It shouldn't prove difficult at all." He stared for a moment at the miniscule stone in his hand before raising the other hand to grasp Ron's shoulder. "I'll make sure a commendation goes into your file." Glancing at the others, the brilliant smile still on his face, Kingsley said, "I need to contact the other ministers. Forgive me for the brevity, but meeting dismissed."

Lucius rose and walked toward the door. "I'll say good evening to you all." He stopped, nodded his head once toward Ron and said, "Perhaps the acorn fell far enough from the tree in your instance after all."

"What'd he mean by that?" Ron asked Hermione as Malfoy closed the door after leaving the room.

"Who gives a damn, Ron?" Harry said with a large grin on his face. "You saved us! You saved us all!"

A slow grin spread over Ron's face before he hooked his thumbs in the front pockets of his trousers and rocked a bit on his feet. "I did, didn't I?"

"You did," Hermione said before rising and giving him a quick kiss on the cheek. "Now, both of my best friends are the saviors of the Wizarding world in their own way."

"I'm leaving before I become violently ill all over the lot of you," Snape said after rolling his eyes. "Unlike Lucius, I *won't* wish you a good evening." He rose and headed for the door.

"Ah, that's all right, Snape," Ron said as he moved closer. He reached out a hand as if to clasp the shoulder of the other man, but apparently changed his mind and let it fall. "I'll help you find that uncharted isle, and you can move there where you won't have to put up with the rest of us."

"Ron," Hermione said with a warning note in her voice, "that's quite enough for one day, don't you think?" she asked as she took Snape's arm. "After all, I'd be moving there with him after the wedding next Saturday."

After he shut the door behind them, Severus put his hands gently on either side of Hermione's head and turned her face one way and then the other.

"What *are* you doing?" she asked with a hint of a laugh.

"I'm trying to find the spot where that idea slipped out of your head and into his," Severus replied while staring intently into her right ear.

"Oh, do be good," Hermione said in an amused tone while removing his hands from her head. "He's not stupid. He's never been stupid...just slightly dumb now and then." One of Snape's hands slipped around Hermione's waist, and they headed toward the Atrium to make their way home, blissfully unaware they were being watched by the lone occupant of the room they'd just left. A bittersweet smile lifted the corners of the red-haired man's mouth when he saw the happiness on Hermione's face. He watched, the smile slowly leaving his face, until they disappeared...together.

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