Did You Know?

by WyrdSmith

Summary

Lord Potter has entered the political arena well-trained, knowledgeable, savvy, and counting amongst his arsenal a host of stunning secrets about various members of the magickal world. See how many times the powerful Lords of Wizarding Great Britain can be shocked stupid during a single court case! Some of the revelations are simply hilarious. For instance, did you know that Dumbledore ...!
Let the Games Begin

Chapter Summary

The Lords assemble.

Chapter Notes

A/N: Harry Potter AU. In this story, many who JKR killed (Bad author! Bad!) live, including Albus and Cedric. Even better, some of the dishy ones are gay.

Although not intended to be a big part of this story, except perhaps incidentally, Harry killed Voldemort in the graveyard, simply by casting a Bombarda at Wormtail and knocking him into the cauldron headfirst and catching the homunculus Voldemort in the blast. (I guess that makes his unknown power 'sheer dumb luck', after all.) You'll see what was done about any horcruxes in a flashback later on.

The Hall of Government is my solution to a greater body of governance, in which once quarterly, all of the members of the Wizengamot and all of the Lords of the House of Lords meet and have essentially absolute authority. They usually address matters of import to the whole of Wizarding Great Britain (not just Wizarding England), but have the ability to address everything and anything, although they don't generally waste anyone's time with pissy little personal issues. A 'High Lord' is one who is Paterfamilias of a Noble House, although they are generally addressed simply as 'Lord'.

Happy Reading!

Lord Lucius Abraxas Malfoy watched with interest as a tall, broad-shouldered man with dark hair entered the Hall of Government laughing, his head angled slightly toward the slightly taller wizard who accompanied him as they continued an avid discussion. The man was wearing fine black silk robes with a velvet brocade pattern throughout; a deep red, tailored shirt with black velvet fastenings; high quality black woolen trousers; and interesting boots made of some type of reptile, the surface of which seemed black till the light revealed an odd, iridescent sheen. His black hair was bound in a simple tail, secured by a clip made of the same material as his boots.

Silver eyes narrowing thoughtfully, Malfoy catalogued the visible details about the unknown wizard, trying to place him within his encyclopedic memory. The man had to be a Lord; that was a certainty. Only Lords of the Ancient and Noble Houses or Lords or Regents of the Noble Houses who held a Seat in the Wizengamot would be able to enter this Hall through the Lord's Approach doorway. All others – members of the press, witnesses, clerical assistants, etc. – would have already been required to enter through the Public Gate and be already seated in the Gallery.

Lord Malfoy recognized the unknown Lord's companion as Lord Gabriel Zabini, one of his own good friends and political allies. Still contemplating, he watched the two gentlemen approach him and, to his surprise, take the seats to his left and his right.
Raising his eyebrows in question, Lord Malfoy greeted Lord Zabini politely and glanced at the Lord seated to his left. "Lord Zabini, a pleasure to see you again. Are you well?"

Lord Gabriel Zabini smiled broadly, an expression that lit up his classically handsome face, and replied, "Lucius, until they issue the Call to Order, how about we keep it informal? I can tell by your expression that you don't recognize my friend to your left, so allow me to re-introduce you."

Lucius's expression was briefly puzzled before it froze into shock at Gabriel's next words. "Lord Lucius Malfoy, please say hello to Lord Harrison Potter."

Potter laughed in commiseration and offered Malfoy his hand. "Gabriel has been looking forward to doing that to you for weeks now, Malfoy. For what it's worth, you have my deepest sympathies on your unfortunate luck in longtime friends."

Lucius was startled into a laugh as he met the amused, green gaze. After the briefest of moments, he clasped the proffered hand and shook it firmly. "I can well imagine," he said dryly with a reproving glance at a chuckling Gabriel. "And thank you for the sentiments; it is comforting to know there are others who share my pain."

People glanced around at Harrison's deep laughter, and Lucius noticed that many appreciative gazes remained fixed on the trio of handsome Lords. With practiced ease, he ignored the public attention; he was, after all, the Paterfamilias of one of the twelve Most Ancient and Noble Houses, and he was quite accustomed to such interest. Casting a privacy shield, he smirked at the disappointed looks from the would-be eavesdroppers and returned to the conversation.

"Although I should probably make an effort at showing my customary disdain for all things not me and give you another demonstration of my obvious superiority, I think the effort would be wasted as Gabriel has clearly known you long enough to tell you too much about me. So, humor me and tell me what I want to know before the Call to Order, please." Cool, assessing silver eyes smiled back at the amused Lord Potter.

Gabriel clapped him on the shoulder and added a bit of a blurring spell to the privacy shield. Now, to anyone watching, it would seem as if they were looking through heavy, wavy glass, thus making it impossible to clearly view expressions or read lips while still allowing the three to see and hear everything in the room without hindrance. "We will share the whole story if you will consent to join us for a late dinner after the meeting."

At Lucius' affirming nod, Gabriel continued, his Italian accent lending a distinctive flair to his seemingly lighthearted summary, "Then here is the synopsis. Harrison is now eighteen. He has been working with me for roughly two months, learning everything I've been able to teach him in that time regarding our role as Lords and High Lords, the status of all legislation that has been before both the Wizengamot and the House of Lords over the past decade or so, the allegiances and enmity that exists within the groups and how they have impact, etc. He took legal control of his Lordship and his finances at his seventeenth birthday, but had hired himself some powerful trainers & advisors when he met with Ragnok at Gringott's the summer he turned sixteen. He has fantastic barristers, a lethal investment team, is wealthier than you and I together, and has three Seats to vote: Potter, Chaparral and ….. are you ready?…," grinning manically as Lucius' eyes got wider and wider and he placed a gloved hand over his mouth to contain his jaw-dropping reaction, "…..DUMBLEDORE!"

That did it. Lucius could not prevent his own dumbfounded expression. 'What? WHAT?" was all he managed to make his thoughts produce for several moments, as Gabriel and Harrison waited with deep amusement.

Just as he began to recover and was leaning over urgently to demand more information, the three saw
the gathered members taking seats and Albus Dumbledore himself came strolling in, all blinding robes and twinkling eyes and affability, to take his own seat as the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and the First Lord in the House of Lords.

Gabriel leaned in to Lucius and quickly said, "Follow my lead, support everything Harrison says and does, back him up, and we'll tell you everything you want to know later. I swear on my magic, Lucius, you will not regret it." He did not drop his gaze from Lucius' silver assessment until Lucius nodded slowly, and simply said, "Agreed."

Turning to his left, Lucius met Harrison's confident eyes and raised a sculpted eyebrow in challenge. "However, Lord Potter, you will owe me an explanation that fully satisfies my interest. You will not stop explaining until I feel entirely informed."

Without hesitation, Harrison replied, "I will give you a full explanation of what we have briefly discussed, and you may ask questions, which I may or may not answer, in whole or in part. I will share only the information I wish to share at this time. Believe me, Malfoy, you will greatly enjoy what I have to tell you." He quirked a grin at the narrow-eyed Lord and added, "And, to sweeten the offer for your cooperation through the next couple of hours, I will throw in one bottle of your choice from the Chaparral wine cellar."

Harrison turned his attention to Dumbledore, knowing full-well that Malfoy's cooperation was assured. No person of such refined taste as Lucius Malfoy would decline an opportunity at a vintage Chaparral.

His certainty was confirmed as Malfoy took down the privacy shield and sat regally in his chair, attention forward. Had the man disagreed, he would have sat back in his chair in order to keep Harrison in view. Harrison smiled to himself, and noticed that Gabriel had assumed a posture of controlled anticipation. As Dumbledore issued the Call to Order, Harrison felt a subvocal growl vibrate in his chest and rigidly controlled the anticipatory snarl that wanted to spread over his face.

Let the games begin.
Why Are You Here?

Chapter Summary

Dumbledore is surprised and displeased. Amelia has fun with that. So does Harrison.

Chapter Notes

Pardon long paragraphs. I have repeatedly coded the damn thing to death, but they REFUSE to take. Maybe tomorrow.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Lord Harrison Potter, Lord Lucius Malfoy and Lord Gabriel Zabini, seated together in the third tier of the Western bank of the Hall of Government, presented an excellent opportunity for observers to contemplate the different ways the description "handsome and powerful" could be applied.

Each of the three wizards had an almost palpable aura of power: magical, political and economic. The combined estates of these three very wealthy men, regardless of whether part of the estates was currently a secret or not, equated to roughly 70% of the total wealth in magical Europe.

Of the three, Lord Zabini was perhaps the most conventionally handsome, his bronze hair, classic Italian good looks and ready smile won him as many allies as did his political maneuverings and personal charm.

Next to him, Lord Lucius Malfoy's moonlight hair and silver eyes struck many as somewhat otherworldly, and it was not unusual for suitably inclined men and women to fantasize about him as the hero of a magical creature romance, generally casting him in the role of a Veela, Light Elf, or Fae.

The third of the trio, Lord Harrison Potter, was new to the political scene and -- at least in terms of being a mature and eligible bachelor -- new to the hungry eyes and imaginations of the panting public. His ebon-dark hair and brilliant green eyes, set within a strongly handsome face, were enough to ensure that he would feature prominently in the social pages and the imaginations of the wizarding world.

Fully aware of the image they presented, the three men focused their attention on the front of the massive hall as the venerable Albus Dumbledore, Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and First Lord in the House of Lords, seated himself next to the Council Leaders of the Hall of Government.

Perusing the seated Lords and High Lords with a genial expression, he tapped the council table sharply with his forefinger, sending out the traditional shower of sparks and hollow knocking that signaled a Call to Order. Continuing his perusal as the Lords and gallery settled in, his gaze paused and sharpened on the gentleman seated to the left of Lucius Malfoy. For a moment, he thought he'd been looking at Lord Charlus Potter, but the wizard had been dead and gone for nearly twenty-five years now. Momentarily forgetting himself, he stared.
With a growing sense of dread, his mind caught up with his eye and he realized that he was looking at Harry Potter. With a frown of consternation, he directed a practiced look of disappointment at Harry and was taken aback at the expressionless face and cold gaze of his student. What the devil was going on? Glancing at Malfoy, his eyes narrowed as the man's expression mirrored Harry's. Continuing to Malfoy's right, he saw Lord Zabini, surprisingly wearing his own expressionless mask. Lost in thought, he started a bit when Council Leader Bones waved an irritated hand in front of his face.

"Dumbledore, are you going to open the meeting, or are we all just meant to watch you contemplate great thoughts all damn night?" the harridan sharply questioned.

Expertly hiding his irritation behind his mask of affability, Dumbledore smiled ruefully and directed his gaze to Bones and sweeping it across the assembled personages. "Forgive me, my friends, I fear the increasing years occasionally make me take more time than your youthful impatience will allow."

Snorting scornfully at the jab, Bones commented, "Most of us haven't been "youths" for several decades now, Dumbledore, as you well know. But if you feel your years are beginning to affect your ability to carry out your duties, do consider the alternatives, hmm?"

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled madly at her, causing her to sneer slightly. "Now, now, Amelia, no need to fret. I can reassure you that I will be around for many years to come."

Amelia's dry "I'm ever so relieved!" was met with muffled laughter from the watching Lords. The rocky relationship between these two was well-known.

Dumbledore turned his attention to business, putting aside his concern over Harry's presence to consider later. "Well, my dear friends, here we are again. I always do look forward to these joint sessions of the Wizengamot and the House of Lords; we always have such interesting debates! Now, we have before us the agenda set forth at last quarter's session, but before we begin, I will ask if anyone has any new topics to discuss?"

Pausing briefly as tradition dictated, he said, "No? Fine, then, let us…..," only to stop speaking abruptly as Bones interrupted.

"Honestly, Dumbledore, are you even paying attention at all? You asked for new business, and before the Lord Potter can even finish getting to his feet, you're moving on. Do focus, won't you?"

Startled, Dumbledore looked over at Harry, and sure enough the young man was on his feet, legs spread apart and arms folded across his chest in an arrogant pose. Displeased at the interruption, Dumbledore nevertheless smiled genially again and said jovially, "Harry, my boy! I'm surprised to see you here. I will assume you have your guardians' permission to be out. What can I do for you? And please do speak quickly, we have much to discuss and need to get to official business."

One could almost shiver from the rapid drop in temperature as the cold, green stare became glacial. Acknowledging with a glance the looks of slight shock on the faces of many at Dumbledore's cavalier and dismissive greeting, the listeners were glad for the Hall's standard wide-cast sonorous as Potter began to speak in a controlled, measured baritone.

"Of first importance, then, is to correct the behavior of our respected First Lord," he began scathingly. The sarcasm as he said 'respected' was brutally evident. "I know I am not mistaken in believing this is an official meeting of the Hall of Government. As a matter of formal procedure, protocol should be placed before well-crafted personal images, should it not? Therefore, as your memory appears to be slipping alongside your admitted inability to focus, allow me to refresh it for you."
The cold, green gaze never wavered from Dumbledore as he continued inexorably, "I am High Lord Harrison Potter. You will address me as High Lord Potter or Lord Potter. The latter option is as casual as it will get. My personal life is of no import to you; however, for the record, I am an adult and have no need for anyone's permission to conduct my life. Neither would I insult my fellows nor this institution by conducting private business in a political forum. Understood?"

Seated next to Harrison, Lucius Malfoy was having difficulty maintaining his stoic mask. Five minutes into the session and already he was enjoying himself more than the sum total of all other sessions in the past several years! The expression on Dumbledore's face was priceless and he dearly hoped that the members of the press seated in the gallery were taking pictures. The elder wizard looked to have mistakenly gotten a triple-powered lemon drop.

Dumbledore's twinkle had faded to a cool, blue stare, but his mask of affability was quickly and firmly back in place. With a small laugh, he offered, "I do apologize, my boy. I had not realized you were of age yet. It seems just yesterday I was teaching you, all wide-eyes and knobbly knees."

Council Leader Bones slapped a hand upon the table. "Enough, Dumbledore! What is wrong with you? The Lord Potter just clearly provided you with a lesson about protocol and, hell!, simple manners that you certainly should have known, and your answer is to continue to try to condescend to him as if he's a child. This is not Hogwart's, you are not particularly beloved here, and I will stand as Second to remind you to address our Lords and members by their proper titles and with full respect."

Pausing to huff exasperatedly, she added, "Besides which, I very much doubt you were ever actually one of Lord Potter's professors. As I recall, you became Headmaster about seven decades ago!"

A smattering of laughter from the avid observers managed to distract the annoyed old man from his immediate response. Gathering his dignity about him like a cloak, he nodded regally and stated, "Again, I am rightfully rebuked. Sentimentality has no place in governance. Therefore, let us simply return to business. **Lord Potter, say what have you?**" Dumbledore chose to return to the traditional phrases and manners of a proper lord during a public meeting, knowing that it was important for him to fully regain his audience's reverence before the meeting closed, or be ridiculed in the morning's newspapers.

Lord Potter's look sharpened to that of a predator, and an aura of power and danger seemed to pulse around him. Unfolding his arms, he placed them on the table before him and leaned forward a bit to pierce Dumbledore with a fierce glare.

"My new business to put before the Judgment of the Hall of Government is this. I put this question to you, 'Chief Warlock', 'First Lord'… **why are you here?**"

Silence fell across the Lords and gallery as looks of confusion and irritation passed throughout the Hall. Thinking back to the conversational bombardment that Zabini had cast at the end of his summary of events, Lucius drew in a sharp breath, his sharp mind moving at lightning speed. Zabini had said that Potter could vote Dumbledore's seat. But Dumbledore was the Paterfamilias of the Dumbledore line, and the only other living member of that line was Aberforth. The only way that Potter could vote Dumbledore's seat was if he were, in fact, Lord Dumbledore. And, if that were indeed the case, then who was Albus Dumbledore?

Council Leader Amelia Bones watched Lord Potter carefully. It had been evident to her from the moment he had entered the Hall that something big was on the agenda for tonight, but she was beginning to get the sense that her initial idea of "big" was a severe underestimate. As Dumbledore's
response to the bizarre question seemed to be somewhat fishlike, Amelia spoke up.

"Lord Potter, could you please clarify or elaborate upon your question? It is evident that you have something of great import to share with us, as you have asked the Hall of Government not just for consideration but for Judgment."

Nodding to her in full respect, Harrison stood upright again. "I will be happy to. I will, however, offer the First Lord," again said mockingly, "an opportunity to present the information to this august Body himself. Were I in his place, not that my honor would ever permit such a thing, I would be doing my best to present myself in the best light possible."

No one was particularly surprised that Dumbledore's response was to spread his arms disarmingly, twinkle madly, and say in a charmingly elderly tone, "My dear Lord Potter, I confess I have no true idea of what you wish to know. This does, however, sound like more of a philosophical discussion than a governmental one. Why don't we meet after this session, perhaps in my Headmaster's office, and then we can chat all you like. I know that Fawkes has missed you greatly, and I have a lovely new batch of lemon drops for you to try." Taking assent for granted, Dumbledore tried to move the session back where he wanted it. "Now, to the existing agenda...."

"No, I don't think so," Lord Zabini said with a sneer, speaking over the dozens of other protests being uttered around him. "Apart from the fact that Lord Potter doubtless has little interest in compulsion potion-laced lemon drops, an issue of Judgment has been placed before the Hall; we will hear it."

"Seconded!" Malfoy stated in a firm, carrying tone. This was most amusing; there was no possible way in which Dumbledore was going to sweep this – whatever this actually was – away, but it was entertaining to watch him try.

"A motion has been made to hear the issue for Judgment, specifically "Why is Dumbledore here?". How many say ye 'aye'?" Glowing blue lights shone over most of the Lord's seats throughout the majestic Hall.

"And 'nay'?" A red light glowed here and there, and those paying attention took careful note of the fact that each of these naysayers appeared to be Dumbledore's closest allies.

"Motion for Judgment carries; the issue will be heard in full immediately. Let it be known that no one shall enter or leave this Hall until the Conclusion is heard."

Amelia paused, then added reprovingly. "And, for the record, please note that the issue would have been heard regardless of the vote, as an issue for Judgment placed by a Lord is never to be contested or denied."

She studied the worried Headmaster impassively. 'Hmmm, interesting. Not once has Potter referred to the old goat as 'Dumbledore' – only by title, and that was said with sarcasm. I wonder what that means.'
Catching the eye of Rodney Skeeter, political columnist for The Prophet with columns in syndication throughout most of the other notable newspapers, they exchanged brief nods of amused acknowledgment. Not a week ago, she and Rodney had enjoyed dinner together while laughing about his sister Rita's refusal to be bothered with "boring governmental meetings." It seemed the pestiferous gossip reporter would be regretting her words sooner rather than later.

Turning back to the Lords' seating, Council Leader Bones spoke to the body at large.

"It is clear that the issue of Judgment before us involves Lord Albus Dumbledore. Lord Potter, is that much correct?"

She paused briefly to wonder at his affirmative but qualified, "It involves the man seated next to you, who is presently the Headmaster of Hogwarts."

With raised eyebrows, she continued, "Therefore, it is the duty of this Council to suspend Lord Dumbledore's role in these proceedings until such time as the Judgment is issued and further direction is given by the Lords of the Hall. Dumbledore, if you will?"

Gazing sorrowfully at Amelia as she gestured for him to move from his seat at the Council Leader's table to the Witness Box - which was a large, comfortable leather chair on a platform set off to the side of the leader's table and surrounded by a mahogany railing – Dumbledore tried very hard to look as if rising and walking was painful to the aged man, while playing up his sheer presence and dignity. With a deep, mournful sigh, he re-seated himself heavily and turned a bravely resigned face toward the cameras.

Potter snorted in derision, causing the Headmaster's expression to briefly morph into irritation, and then began to present his case.

"Lords of the Hall, I will state upfront that I could have chosen to simply bring this case directly to Madame Bones in her role as Head of the Office of Magical Enforcement, and the evidence available to me would have immediately brought this case to the Wizengamot for trial. I chose this venue instead, partly because my own experiences -- and that of my godfather, which may surprise some -- regarding trial by Wizengamot gave me excellent reason to believe the case would not be fairly heard and prosecuted."

At that, many of those attending winced or nodded in understanding, although others exchanged puzzled looks at the reference to his godfather.

"My primary motivation in waiting for this Session, however, is the knowledge that the scope of the Issue for Judgment and all of its ramifications can only be adequately addressed by this combined Body of Government. Only here can we Judge criminal, civil, financial and private or personal injury matters and order sentences and restitution adequate to the scope of the Issue and appropriate for each aspect of the Issue. I am sure that, once you have heard the case, you will understand and
forgive me for dropping this on you unannounced. With that said, allow me to begin."

Taking a deep, steadying breath, Harrison stood tall and proud as he turned to look directly at the man known to be revered and beloved in the wizarding world, and stated in a cold, carrying voice, "I, High Lord Harrison Potter, High Lord of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Potter, Lord of the Venerable House of Chaparral, High Lord of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Dumbledore, do hereby charge the man seated before you, known to you as Lord Albus Dumbledore, known to me as Albus Percy, vassal to the House of Dumbledore, with Line Theft, Murder, Kidnapping, Conspiracy, Grand Theft, Political Piracy, Child Abuse, and Treason. I allow for the eventuality that the details of the case I here present will expand upon those charges greatly. I Demand Justice!"

With the magical demand, a magnificent glow flared and swirled around the powerful lord, whipping tendrils of his long hair loose and rippling the fabric of his distinctive cloak. Newspapers the next day would have on their front page a gripping photo of a stern Lord Harrison Potter, emerald eyes glowing, aura visible, hair and clothing moving in the unseen breezes of a powerful magical vow. An enigmatic Lord Lucius Malfoy was leaning back and looking up at him with his own silver eyes shining and reflecting the swirling magics before him.

The newspapers would be sold out within one hour.

Chapter End Notes

A/N There are nine completed chapters I'm bringing from FFN, then back to updating.

As with the original, I offer a very special thanks, with hugs and chocolate, to Pikachumomma, a wonderful fanfiction author known to many of us, for her cheerful encouragement and for luring me out of the world of "I want to do that someday" to the world of "I did it!". For those who are following the HP/LOTR crossover I co-write with her called "Demon Team", rest assured that more updates are coming.

Thanks again.
Chapter Summary

Harrison shocks the Hall of Government. Dumbledore is tap dancing. Lucius is intrigued. Gabriel sends a nod across the pond.

Chapter Notes

I'm not going to mess with coding, because I spent hours yesterday frustrated with the way my phone and AO3 were arguing with each other. For the record, REGARDLESS OF TAGS, this is a WIP, and no rape is involved, and I do actually know about style formatting such as bold, italics and paragraph breaks. Please just bear with me. : )

Wyrd

ooooo000000000000000000

Silence.

In the immediate aftermath of Lord Harrison Potter's stunning charges against the venerable Albus Dumbledore, it would always be the shocked, weighty silence in a Hall holding hundreds of the most powerful people in Wizarding Great Britain that witnesses and participants would remember. Through it all, Lord Potter remained impassive and unfazed, never taking his piercing, cold glare from the gasping, gaping figure of the aged accused.

Maintaining his emotionless Malfoy mask with difficulty, Lord Lucius Malfoy could not take his own gaze from the unconsciously heroic stance of the man beside him. The magics of the younger Lord's Petition for Judgment had flared and swirled like oil upon water before fading back into the man's palpable, powerful aura. His emerald eyes glowed with the power of the man, ready to leap out and attack at any provocation. He was confident, deadly, dangerous, and filled with controlled, righteous anger. He was breathtaking.

Tearing his attention away from Lord Potter to assess the reactions of the other lords, Malfoy found himself irrelevantly thinking that, had he just encountered Potter for the first time today, he would have thought the man considerably older than eighteen. Glancing to his right, he met the maliciously amused smirk of Lord Gabriel Zabini, and raised his eyebrows slightly as he gave an acknowledging nod. Give a wizard his due. Zabini had been entirely correct when he told Lucius that he would not regret giving his full support to Potter during this Session. Zabini tipped his head toward the Witness Box and its lone occupant. Malfoy followed his glance and stifled an inappropriate snort. Dumbledore looked like he had been gutted.

Sitting stunned in the Witness Box, wrinkled hands clinging to the armrests of the comfortable leather chair, Albus Dumbledore's pale complexion stood out in sharp contrast to the vividly awful robes he wore. It was perhaps fortunate that he had chosen one of his more circumspect robes for the Session, as the usual cacophony of animated creatures or candies would likely have pushed his
nauseous reaction beyond his control. A sudden image of 'The Daily Prophet' with a large, live-action photo of him spewing over the railing made him visibly cringe and shake his head in violent denial. Taking a deep breath, Dumbledore tightened his mental walls and straightened his spine. Fixing his stern, twinkle-free glare upon the narrowly observing figure of Harry Potter – Dumbledore refused to give him the accolade of 'Lord' – he raised himself up to a rigidly upright posture and fed Power into his aura and his voice. "Harry James Potter, how DARE you make mockery of this institution? We do not meet for your entertainment, young man. The Hall of Lords is the final authority within our society; we are all busy and highly important people with heavy responsibilities and duties. That you enter our Session and engage in such a juvenile, ill-considered prank as this is the height of disrespect. You will remove yourself immediately! Return to your home and remain there; I will attend you after this Session concludes. And you had best PRAY that I am able to keep my fellow lords from laying charges upon you! NOW GO!"

Truly, the reactions of the lords and the attendees in the Gallery were mixed. Some, the most gullible of the lot, were immediately convinced that Dumbledore had the right of it and were incensed at the idiotic behavior of the Boy-Who-Lived. It seemed obvious to them that the boy had gotten used to fame and was missing it greatly since the demise of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Others, those who tended to adopt a wait-and-see attitude, cast assessing gazes upon Dumbledore and Potter and knew that Dumbledore was attempting to manipulate the situation to his own benefit – which, for Dumbledore, always meant keeping secrets. The majority of the observers, however, could feel the importance of this moment in time. Looking from Lord Potter's authoritative posture and unflinching, green glare to Dumbledore's pasty complexion, erratic breathing and lightly sweaty forehead, it was clear to all that Dumbledore was very, very afraid of what Lord Potter had come here tonight to reveal.

Council Leader Amelia Bones' stared in disbelief at Dumbledore. The crafty old wizard was unbelievable! Regardless of what Lord Potter may or may not have to say, it was clear that the 'First Lord' of the Hall of Government quite adamantly did NOT want it said. Inwardly acknowledging that she, too, was now stating Dumbledore's titles with a touch of mockery, Bones shook her head in disgust and turned to Lord Potter. "My Lord, forgive me. I must take just a moment and address Dumbledore's comments." At Lord Potter's confirming nod, she turned to the man in the Witness Box and coldly spoke. "For the duration of this Session, I will refrain from addressing you by any title other than 'mister.' It would be inappropriate, considering the charges before us, to use political or noble honorifics, and your position of Headmaster at Hogwarts has no bearing or import here. With that said, Mr. Dumbledore," with a small smirk at his offended expression, "your response to Lord Potter's Petition for Judgment is inappropriate, condescending, and is itself an insult to this Institution. Everyone here with intelligence," looking scornfully at some of those whom she knew would have immediately fallen for the old man's tactics, "knows with certainty that Lord Potter has laid a legitimate Petition for Judgment before this Hall. Even if it were possible for a High Lord to betray his own honor and his family's honor in order to engage in such a blatant abuse of authority, the magickal wards and seals upon this Hall prevent the laying of false claims against another Lord. You do remember those little incidentals, don't you, Mr. Dumbledore? You have been quite enthusiastic in the past in reminding various members of them whenever anyone has expressed an interest in looking deeper into certain of your … hmmm …. your "extracurricular" activities with known vigilante groups!" She swept her glare across the Hall, allowing it to settle briefly upon certain squirming Lords and Gallery attendees.

Squaring her shoulders, Council Leader Bones took a deep, centering breath and declared in a ringing tone, "I, Lady Amelia Adella Bones, Council Leader of this the twenty-four-hundred-and-thirty-second Session of the Hall of Government, do by my name and magick hereby acknowledge the Petition for Judgment voiced by High Lord Harrison James Potter upon the one presently known to us as High Lord Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore. I affirm by the magick of my Office
that Wards and Seals of the Hall of Lords recognize this Petition is considered valid by High Lord Potter and is laid upon us in all honor and sincerity. Let the facts be submitted. Let the events be told. Let the Pursuit of Judgment commence." With those ritualistic words, three loud knocks echoed throughout the Hall, and a bright glow sealed the entryways and briefly settled upon each person in the Hall. A brighter, stronger glow passed through both Dumbledore and Lord Potter before seeming to settle within their very skin. Runes for truth and full disclosure became visible in the wooden railing that surrounded the Witness Box and the tense old wizard within it.

Casting a feral grin around the room, Lord Harrison Potter thanked Council Leader Bones, and then began to speak. "Rather than extend the telling of the story that led to this Petition by speaking in the more formal manner that is appropriate to this forum, I ask for the indulgence of my fellows. I ask that I can simply tell you the whole story, history actually, as I discovered it. I will present witnesses and provide evidence, and – if we can keep unnecessary posturing and rhetoric to a minimum, " casting a significant glance at Dumbledore, "we may be able to conclude this Pursuit within a reasonable amount of time."

Bones raised her eyebrows in question and spoke to the seated lords. "Those in agreement?" At the unanimous agreement signified by a veritable sea of glowing blue lights, she stated, "Agreement is given. Proceed." Turning to look directly at Lord Potter, she added with acerbic humor, "I, for one, am eager to determine the full meaning of your original issue before us. So, Lord Potter, please do explain to us what you meant when you asked Dumbledore ' why are you here?'."

Leaning over to Gabriel Zabini, Malfoy quietly muttered, "I am eager for an answer to that myself!" Zabini patted the fairer man on the arm and whispered, "Soon, my friend. Very, very soon!" The anticipation in his tone was evident. Turning away, they both shifted their chairs in order to comfortably watch Harry – or, truly, at the moment the young man was not so much Harry as he was Lord Potter – as he paused for a moment to order his thoughts. Squaring his shoulders, he began.

"I suppose the best place to start would be with the Hogwarts Book of Names. I'm sure all of you know that the Book of Names is a magickal tome in which the names and families of all magickal children are entered at birth.

What you may not know is that the book is an independent magickal object. It has a presence, a sort of rudimentary intelligence, that allows it to complete its tasks, which are to list the names of magickal children, identify their families – meaning, their families of noble lineage, their parents or guardians, or their families of Service or Obligation – and send out the Letters of Acceptance for Hogwarts. " At the puzzled looks that appeared on the faces of some, he elaborated, "Basically, it shows any parents or guardians, and any Noble Families to which the child is bound as a vassal, or a squire, or a knight, etc." At the looks of comprehension, he nodded firmly and continued. "The Book of Names was created by the Founders, as I'm sure everyone knows, and up until two years ago it was a stand-alone magickal object. Anyone who needed to correct information had to contact the Book itself."

A yellow light flashed on over a portly, jovial-looking lord on the far side of the Lord's Hall. "A question from Lord Ogden," noted Council Leader Bones. Lord Ogden raised himself slightly from his seat and asked, "Lord Potter, if the Book is a stand-alone magickal object charged with the sole task of accurately identifying and tracking magickal children, why would anyone need to correct its information? Surely it would, in fact, already have complete and accurate information." He reseated himself with a sigh.

Lord Potter smiled a little. "Lord Ogden, I'm glad you asked that! Normally, yes, of course, the Book of Names would have full and accurate information. But nothing is perfect, even in magick. Well, let me amend that. Nothing is perfect, EXCEPT magick. But the Book of Names, like every other
magickal object, was created by a person who wields magick, which means it is bound to have a few flaws and weaknesses here and there. The muggles have an expression for one of their own inventions, a computer. The expression is 'Garbage in; garbage out.' And no, this is no insult in any way to the Founders; the expression simply means that the end product is only as perfect as the original planning and information that went into an item's creation. Even with the Book of Names, how can we expect it to be perfect, unless we are willing to hold our Founders to a standard of perfection? No, the Book is flawed. Granted, it was made by Rowena Ravenclaw, and we all know that she was easily one of the most intelligent and talented witches in our entire history. Her spellwork and charmswork would have been almost pristine – but she was still, in the end, human and fallible, and therefore, so is anything she created." Some of the people in the Gallery began to whisper in outrage, but the rising noise was abruptly silenced by the sharp, reprimanding knock of Council Leader Bones' magic upon the Hall. "Please, my esteemed peers, understand that I mean no offense. I truly have nothing but respect and admiration for the Lady Ravenclaw – indeed, all of the Founders – and I doubt that, even given a hundred years in which to work, I could achieve anything as impressive as the Book of Names." As the people settled at his comments, he added with a rueful smile, "Nevertheless, the Book is not perfect. There are examples of names being misspelled within the Book. In fact, my own name was listed in the Book originally as 'Harry James Potter', when my true name is 'Harrison James Potter', and the Book failed to list any of the noble families I count as my own. You see, the Book is fallible, in that it was influenced by the Headmasters or Headmistresses of Hogwarts, as well as occasionally simply making a mistake – recording someone's nickname rather than their full name, or not recording a family or a vassalage if that information had been deliberately obscured, perhaps for nefarious purposes, say, for example, by a block upon the person's blood or line theft."

Many in the Hall noted that Dumbledore, who had been sitting in the Witness Box listening very closely to Lord Potter's recitation, became visibly more tense as the discussion progressed. Lord Potter flashed a smirk as he turned to look directly at Dumbledore as he spoke about blood blocks and line theft. Dumbledore assumed a grandfatherly, deeply disappointed expression and gazed back sadly.

Harry sent a charming smile around the room as he ignored Dumbledore's dramatics. "Now, I, for one, can completely empathize with the Book of Names for having a few errors. I'm willing to wager that there isn't a single person here who hasn't written a letter or a paper, and proofed it carefully, and re-proofed it, and maybe even had someone else proof it, only to find that once it is submitted or published, that errors remained within it. I've had that happen more times than I can count; how about you?" Commiserating laughter rippled throughout the Hall. "So, of course, the Book is occasionally susceptible as well, although it really is a rare occurrence."

"Up until two years ago, if someone needed to correct information in the Book of Names, you literally had to write to the Book itself. (I'm still amazed at the way Lady Ravenclaw charmed that; the Book isn't actually sentient, but it can read its own mail! That is some impressive magick!)" Many of the Lords had thoughtful looks on their faces, and some nodded in agreement. It was true; the complexity of that type of charmswork was very impressive.

Taking a quick sip of water from the glass that had appeared in front of him, courtesy of another bit of impressive charmswork, this one set upon the Hall of Government itself, Lord Potter continued, "The problem is, or was, that the Book IS NOT sentient. It isn't gifted with independent thought. When it got a letter, it simply confirmed that the author of the letter was magickally identical to either the person listed or that person's parent or guardian, and as long as that was true, any changes required within the letter were made – and no one else was ever notified about it.... Anyway, once I learned the truth of my full heritage, I started to wonder why my letter had my name wrong, so I did some research. As a result of that research and the information that surfaced because of it, the Book of Names accepted a sentient being as its Regent."
At this, Dumbledore loudly spoke up, "NO. My friends, that is simply not true. I understand, my dear Amelia, that young Harry here is constrained to tell the truth as he knows it, but what he thinks he knows is incorrect. The Book of Names continues as it was: an independent entity. As Headmaster of Hogwarts, clearly I would know if the Book had been tampered with!"

Bones raised an aggravated hand to her face and pinched the bridge of her nose for a moment, taking deep, calming breaths. Raising her eyes, she fixed her monocle in place and spoke coldly. "Mr. Dumbledore, if I must remind you again to keep to the formality of this Session, I will Sanction you. You WILL address me by my title and surname. You WILL address Lord Potter by HIS title and surname. Is there anything about that directive that you are truly incapable of understanding?"

With a hurt look, Dumbledore raised his hand disarmingly, "My apologies, my dear – oh, do forgive me! – Council Leader Bones. I simply believed that you were granting informality to all of us when High Lord Potter asked to dispense with formalities. Clearly, Council Leader Bones, I was mistaken, and only High Lord Potter may speak informally, while only I am to be … set apart … by being denied my formal and rightful title. No, truly, I understand completely, Council Leader Bones. Thank you for clarifying this, Council Leader Bones."

Several people watching shook their heads in mild disgust. Really, the old man was being incredibly petty. His implication that Lord Potter was being treated with leniency while he, Dumbledore, was being treated disrespectfully was ridiculous. Furthermore, his blatant condescension toward the esteemed Council Leader was childish and insulting. It was looking more and more obvious that the wise, grandfatherly elder that was Dumbledore's public face hid a much less likable truth underneath.

For her part, Bones was unable to prevent her lip from curling in scorn at the man, but she kept to her duties honorably. "You are entirely welcome, Mr. Dumbledore." Well, no one said she couldn't get the occasional dig in here and there. "Now, Lord Potter, would you address Mr. Dumbledore's assertion that the Book of Names remains independent?"

Lord Potter was greatly amused at Bones' deft handling of the old bastard's childish behavior. With a bow of respect to her, he stated, "With pleasure, Council Leader Bones." He smirked at her amused snort, which was echoed to his right by Malfoy and Zabini both as reluctant grins crossed several other faces throughout the Hall. "Despite his obvious belief, the Book of Names was never under the offices of the Headmaster of Hogwarts. Therefore, he would not have known of any changes that occurred to, by, within or on behalf of the Book." Raising his hand to forestall any protests, he said calmly, "I know I said that the Book was subject to the influence of past Headmasters and Headmistresses of Hogwarts. That was simply because the Book is tied into the wards of Hogwarts, and the Headmaster or Mistress is the holder of those wards. Their influence on the Book was basically a trickle-down effect – like having someone who lives near you singing a certain song over and over, and eventually you find yourself singing it, too. If a Headmaster constantly thinks of a particular child using a certain nickname, or obsesses over that child, the 'noise' of those thoughts would eventually trickle into the Book and influence it. To prevent that, as well as to prevent willful misinformation, we asked Hogwarts to give the Book a Regent – and she complied."

Turning to the Gallery, Lord Potter knocked once upon the correct rune carved into his table and a gate appeared in the low wall separating the people in the Gallery from the Lords' Seating. "I ask Lady Minerva McGonogall, Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, to come forth with the Book of Names and give evidence."

Across the Hall, heads turned to watch the well-known older witch rise and pass through the gate. She was a stern-faced woman with kind eyes, graying hair confined in a tight bun, wearing dark green robes with a McGonogall tartan sash. She was carrying a beautiful old book bound in white leather, on the front of which was the Seal of Hogwarts and, in each corner, a symbol from one of
the four Houses: Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff, Gryffindor and Slytherin. Stepping onto a raised platform, also decorated with runes for veracity and honor, she carefully placed the large book upon the table in front of her and looked up attentively.

With a warm smile for the imposing woman, Lord Potter sought to put her at ease. "Thank you for coming, Lady McGonogall. Shall I call you by that title, or would you prefer Deputy Headmistress or Professor?" Before she could answer, Dumbledore spoke up scoffingly, "Oh, I must protest! If I am forbidden the use of my title 'Headmaster', why then would we allow her to be addressed by her own Hogwarts title? After all, you specifically explained to me, Council Leader Bones, that a career at Hogwarts is irrelevant here!" It was evident that the petulant, white-haired wizard was still smarting under the sting of the public reprimand.

Before Bones could reply, McGonogall spoke up sharply, "For Merlin's sake, Dumbledore! Surely you aren't that befuddled? I am present AS a Professor and Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts; therefore, CLEARLY, those are the titles available to me that are most appropriate this evening. I won't go into the matter of why you are being temporarily denied your noble title, but LORD Potter was simply being gracious in offering me a choice. Are you entirely clear about the whole concept now, or would you prefer a few hand-drawn pictures, or perhaps puppets? As I recall from your past behavior, you seem to be especially fond of puppets."

Lucius Malfoy abruptly placed a gloved hand over his mouth. Damn, another inappropriate laugh almost slipped out! What on earth were these Gryffindors doing to him tonight? Merlin, if he weren't careful, he'd find himself snickering like a schoolboy – a non-Slytherin schoolboy, that is. But truly, could anyone present be expected to keep a straight face when the Lioness of Gryffindor verbally flayed the Headmaster as if he were just another belligerent schoolboy? Besides, her allusion to the manner in which Dumbledore tended to treat people as if they were his puppets and he a master puppeteer was exquisitely done! If he could, he would have awarded Gryffindor house points.

Malfoy was not alone in enjoying Professor McGonagall's sharp rebuke to Dumbledore. Many of the attending Lords and members of the Gallery had been in classes under the redoubtable woman's tutelage and had been on the wrong end of a brogue-heavy tongue-lashing, but watching one directed at the arrogant Headmaster was grand entertainment, and for some, it was immensely satisfying.

Turning back to Lord Potter, McGonogall calmly stated, "In regards to your gracious question, Lord Potter, I believe it appropriate that you address me either as Deputy Headmistress, as it is in that capacity for which I attend this Session, or simply as McGonogall. I forbid you to call me 'Deputy Headmistress McGonogall'; it takes far too long and we'll be here all night as it is."

Harry joined many others as he threw back his head and laughed aloud. He couldn't help it; it was sometimes simply impossible to be 'Lord Potter' around the incomparable Minerva McGonogall! Composing himself, he offered her a warm smile and asked her simply, "Deputy Headmistress, in keeping with my original question to Dumbledore, can you please explain in full why you are here?"

"Certainly, Lord Potter," McGonogall replied. Placing her hand lightly on the cover of the Book of Names, she said, "I am Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts. The Book of Names falls under my purview and resides within my offices. The Letters of Acceptance are signed by me. The Headmaster has nothing at all to do with the Book, and quite frankly I cannot fathom why he thinks he does. Therefore, when Lord Potter had concerns, he broached them with me. He also felt that certain information the Book had about him when he was eleven would have saved him considerable grief had it been known by an authoritative, sentient being."

At the latter comment, both Lucius and Gabriel exchanged meaningful glances. They had heard
rumors that Harrison's original letter had been addressed to him in a cupboard or something similar, and had been equally concerned that such a clear indication of a troubled childhood had gone undetected. It had not mattered to anyone, not even the Dark Lord himself, what side of the war a child was supposedly on; abuse or neglect of any magickal child – Merlin, any child at all – was unforgivable.

Ignoring the expressions of concern on most faces, and that of unease on the pallid face of Dumbledore, McGonogall continued, "After we researched the matter of errors within the Book, we conducted experiments to determine how easily the information within the Book could be changed. We discovered that it was as simple as writing a letter to the Book – a letter which no living person would ever read or even see. As long as the letter had the magickal signature or imprint of the person about whom it was written or that person's guardian or Regent, the Book would make whatever change was requested. Lord Potter had concerns not only regarding the incorrect and missing information regarding his own name, but also with the fact that anyone clever enough could fool the Book."

"Deputy Headmistress? You said that the letter had to have the person's magickal signature. How, then, could someone trick the Book?" Turning in the direction of the deep, velvety voice, Minerva was startled to realize that the politely phrased question had come from the dignified Lord Lucius Malfoy. She saw other Lords nod in agreement; apparently, they all questioned that point.

"Allow me an example. I am sure most of you are aware of the fact that Lord Potter was forced to participate in the Tri-Wizard Tournament during his fourth year as a student at Hogwarts, even though he had not entered his name in the cup. The principle is the same here," McGonogall replied.

One of Dumbledore's supporters, Augustus Arndstrom III, a middle-aged wizard with a weak chin and a pot belly, decided to speak up to try to curry favor with the beleaguered First Lord. He was appalled at how disrespectfully the powerful wizard was being treated. "Oh, really, Professor! I think everyone here understands that Mr. Potter could not have been named as a Champion if he hadn't put his name in the cup. He wasn't forced to participate; he just had to pretend reluctance to avoid getting into trouble." Glancing around at the expressions of distaste aimed his way by his fellow Lords, he hastened to add, "Of course, it was perfectly understandable of Mr. Potter … at the time, I mean…. Boys will be boys, and all that!"

McGonogall glanced enquiringly at Lord Potter, who made a 'have at it' gesture in reply as he chuckled, "Oh, no, please! He's all yours, Deputy Headmistress!" He heard Gabriel chortle, and could have sworn he heard Lucius Malfoy snicker.

Turning a thin-lipped little smile on the hapless Lord Arndstrom, McGonogall coldly replied, "Clearly, your deductive reasoning has not increased with your years – or your girth. 'Everyone' who 'knows' that young Harry Potter somehow managed to trick a powerful and ancient magickal artifact is not only wrong, but delusional. It has since been proven that it was Barty Crouch Jr who entered Mr. Potter's name, and he did so by following the explicit directions of Voldemort. He did it by confiscating a note Mr. Potter had written to a friend of his, a note that simply said, "Thank you for helping me. Harry" That was all it took. It showed his magickal signature, which also most likely showed he was expressing himself honestly and sincerely, and it included a statement which did not contradict the request added by Crouch – specifically, the final note submitted to the Cup read, "Please name me as Tri-Wizard Champion in honor of home-schooled students. Thank you for helping me. Harry (J Potter)" The clincher was that he was the only student named for the 'fourth school' and his signature was real. So CLEARLY, Lord Arndstrom, 'everyone' was wrong, and despite that fact, and the additional proof of young Mr. Potter's Wizarding Oath testifying to his innocence, which he made just five minutes after his name was called, Mr. Potter was forced to participate in a deadly competition for much-older and more experienced wizards. I will further add,
Sir, that he did so despite the derision, harassment and pressure to which he was relentlessly subjected by 'everyone' who 'knew he had done it'."

The concerted opinion of the gathered Lords in the Hall at the moment was an unvoiced and rueful, 'ouch!' and a consensus that it was never wise to get on the wrong side of the redoubtable Minerva McGonogall.

During McGonogall's diatribe, as Arndstrom sank lower in his seat, Harry's eyebrows climbed higher and higher. He had known his former Head of House felt strongly about how he had been treated, during the Tournament as well as so many other times in his life, but he was surprised that she was willing to express her anger so openly in such a forum as this. He was deeply moved by her loyalty and concern. Feeling a touch on his elbow, he glanced over at Lucius – err, Malfoy – and quirked an eyebrow in question. He was surprised at the regret in the silver eyes. Shaking his head in quick negation, he leaned over slightly, cast a quick privacy muffliato, and said, "It's fine, Lucius. Over and done with. This is a new day and all that rot." At Lucius' … err, damn it, MALFOY’s…. quick smile, he cancelled the charm and turned back to McGonagall as Council Leader Bones spoke up.

"Deputy Headmistress, while I can certainly appreciate your incisive commentary – deeply— I feel we are not yet at a point where we truly understand specifically why you are here. The information about the Book of Names is intriguing, of course, but why was it presented? Furthermore, both you and Lord Potter have stated that Hogwarts itself appointed a Regent to the Book. Can you explain that as well, please?"

Offering an appreciative nod at Amelia Bones' ability to remain focused and on task, the elder Scotswoman resumed her commentary. "Certainly, Council Leader. Last question first, I think. Hogwarts herself has become sentient over the centuries; I know that has at the very least been rumored throughout the wizarding world and it is true. She sometimes speaks to favorite teachers and students, and I will admit that both Lord Potter and I have been graced with conversations with the Lady Hogwarts. I know from Dumbledore's own regular complaints that she has always refused to speak with him." Several people sneered at the old wizard's disgruntled expression. "Now, although Hogwarts does not speak willy-nilly with just anyone who wishes to meet her, she does have someone within the castle who can always relay her thoughts. That person is Tavin McGonogall." The older woman smirked again at the blank look on almost every face. "Tavin McGonogall was the Clan Chieftain of the McGonogall's roughly two millennia ago. He assisted in the construction of Hogwarts, was one of the original professors, in fact. He was a good friend to all of the Founders. Every McGonogall since Tavin has attended Hogwarts and enjoyed his company, and every student who ever attended Hogwarts has met him personally." She slid a slightly malicious grin at a perplexed Albus Dumbledore, and said, "He is better known to most of you as 'The Sorting Hat'."

Casting a glare at Dumbledore's loud scoff, she added with deliberate malice, "Although Dumbledore seems to be in disagreement – probably because of Tavin's often-expressed dislike for Dumbledore's methods and motivations – we need not take my word OR Dumbledore's. The Lady Hogwarts answered Lord Potter's and my appeal for her to provide answers about Lord Potter's family as it relates to the Book of Names, as well as to specifically address how those errors occurred. She spoke with us, provided us with certain bits of evidence, and then appointed a Regent as her voice to the House of Lords and as overseer for the Book of Names." Removing her sash, she placed it on the table next to the book. With a vicious, Cheshire grin at Dumbledore, seated white-faced in the Witness Box, she proudly proclaimed, "Members of the Hall of Government and my fellow witches and wizards in the Gallery, I present to you Tavin McConogall, High Chieftain of Clan McConogall, Regent to the Lady Hogwarts and to the Book of Names. Known to most of you as," with a complex gesture of her wand and an eye-bending transfiguration of form and color, the sash re-formed, "the Hogwarts Sorting Hat!"
Everyone stared, floored, at the familiar old hat, resting on the table next to the Book of Names, as it – no, as HE – revealed his 'face' and spoke in an aged, somewhat gravelly voice. "Greetings, Lords. I am here this night to testify as to illegal and immoral actions taken by the reprehensible wizard seated in the Witness Box, known to you all as Albus Dumbledore, although Lord Potter is correct in referring to him as Albus Percy. Actions that started when he wrote his first letter to the Book of Names, roughly 150 years ago, and claimed a heritage to which he had no right. His crimes against the Dumbledore family, the Potter Family, and Harrison Potter most specifically, as well as against the wizarding world, are many and varied ..... Oh, my dear children, I have such a tale to tell."

Once again, silence settled within the Hall of Government. Glancing around, Harrison saw that most of those in the beautiful old Hall looked simply stunned – mouths agape, eyes wide, frozen in place. Next to him, Lucius – err, oh, hell, fine, LUCIUS! – had managed to keep his Malfoy mask on, but just barely. His gloved hand was gripping his snake-headed cane tightly, and his powerful body was taut with reaction. Harry glanced over at Gabriel, who was enjoying a scene he had been greatly anticipating for some time now. Minerva seemed to be fairly amused as well, and old Tavin simply sat there, observing, patiently waiting as the stunned people slowly recovered and returned to their senses. Council Leader Bones had processed the shock fairly quickly and was already opening her mouth to begin questioning Tavin McGonogall when Dumbledore, who had appeared to be in deep contemplation of some plot or other, suddenly rose to his feet and smiled broadly, eyes twinkling madly. Looking closely, Harrison reflected that using the words "Dumbledore" and "madly" in the same sentence was probably redundant.

Drawing himself up to his full height, Dumbledore swept his arms outward in a theatrical gesture and grandly spoke, "Ah, my wonderful Lords of the House, fellow members of the Wizengamot, and my beloved peers in the Gallery! Although I am certain you wish I would remain with you throughout this Session, as you explore the past and make marvelous discoveries – and indeed, I do envy you the journey before you – I am afraid it is time for me to bid you a fond adieu. You have your plans, and I most certainly have mine. Farewell, my friends. Fawkes!" Raising one arm high above himself and tucking his wand closely to his side with the other, he welcomed the beautiful, fiery phoenix as it flashed into the Hall and sang a triumphant song. He held the statuesque pose, which he felt would look thoroughly magnificent on the cover of tomorrow's Daily Prophet, as he waited for the glorious magickal bird to whisk him away from the Hall of Government in a grand escape that would be the stuff of legends. He waited .... and waited...

Brow wrinkling in confusion, he lowered his head slightly and glanced around. Frozen, he saw with consternation that the beautiful phoenix, HIS phoenix, HIS familiar, was not, in fact, anywhere near him. Instead, it sat comfortably upon the shoulder of a smirking Lord Harrison Potter. Stunned, Dumbledore remained poised in the position he had taken for his grand exit. His pale blue eyes were certainly not twinkling now. Instead, a look of rage and betrayal had begun to mount as his face flushed and his mouth gaped. Hundreds of startled Lords and citizens in the Gallery gazed riveted at the shocked man.

He stared at them.

They stared back.

Gabriel Zabini finally commented offhandedly to the room at large, "Has anyone ever seen that copper statue that France gifted to the Colonies? The big green Lady of Liberty, standing in that harbor in - what is it? – New York City? Dumbledore looks a lot like that – except stupider."

It began with a snicker from Lord Potter, and a snort from Lord Malfoy. Old Tavin McGonogall rasped that Dumbledore even had the green complexion right, and then joined with Minerva in a derisive chuckle. As Council Leader Bones summoned his wand and all other magickal objects from
Albus Dumbledore's … or, perhaps Albus Percy's … person, laughter took over the room. From the highest seats down to Amelia Bones, no one remained straight-faced and unaffected. From the old Headmaster's perspective, it was thoroughly humiliating, particularly as someone had cast a stunner at him to keep him in place and he was stuck there, frozen with one arm raised high and the other folded against his side. And he was right; he definitely made the papers the next morning.

Lords Potter, Malfoy and Zabini were captured in another photograph, which would be shown on page two of the morning’s newspapers, helplessly leaning upon each other as they laughed too hard to remain independently upright, tears streaming down three stunningly handsome faces. Many, many women and suitably inclined men would sigh longingly as they gazed at the glorious sight. The debonair Lord Zabini had a face and disposition designed for such moments as this. Most of the readers would find themselves thinking that the aloof Lord Malfoy became utterly irresistible with his normally cold eyes sparkling with laughter and a broad smile on his face as he reached up to pet the phoenix on Lord Potter's shoulder.

But what made that particular photo sizzle was the way the darkly sensual Lord Potter tipped laughter-lit emerald eyes in a handsome, smiling face downward to gaze into the upturned, silver eyes of the joyfully laughing Lord Malfoy, resting one hand on the older man's broad shoulder, as both men caressed the phoenix.

Little did the public realize, that the story had only just begun.
Can You Believe This?! 

Chapter Summary

Thieving old goats.

Chapter Notes

This & next were originally two chapters. FYI.

It took a while, but eventually, the uproarious laughter faded and a humiliated Headmaster was released from his spectacularly failed heroic pose and found himself forcefully seated and bound to the Witness Chair. Council Leader Bones had summoned and scrutinized all of the magickal items in the old man’s possession, and was somewhat shocked to realize that it appeared the old bastard was something of a kleptomaniac.

As the Lords and High Lords regained their seats and dignity, and the occupants of the Gallery Seating settled, the stoic Council Leader knocked on her table and issued a Call to Order. Nodding approvingly as the noise level fell and all attention turned to her, Amelia Bones carefully fixed her monocle in place, and maintained an imposing silence for a moment or two, before slowly raising her impasive gaze to the apprehensive man in the Witness Chair. She studied him contemptuously before speaking in a cold, emotionless tone.

"Well. That was certainly illuminating, wasn't it, Mr….well….Albus?" She watched him clench his jaw and then raise his head proudly. Personally, she thought he looked more bloated than proud.

Running her gaze over the closely observing Lords, she continued, "We have two immediate orders of business, and then we can determine precisely how we are going to go about the rest of this Session. Personally, my gut instincts are telling me that this will be considerably more than a single-day Session, and we will need to address that." There were numerous nods of agreement being repeated throughout the Hall.

"First order of business, however, is to formally document and itemize these objects, all of which I retrieved from Albus …. Percy's?... person. May I have a Clerk of Record and an Auror up front, please? Lords of the Hall, you may consider this a short break; restrictions are still in effect but the lavatories are of course accessible. We will resume this Session within twenty minutes. Thank you."

As the Lords and observers slowly stood and began to stretch and move around the Hall a bit, most gathering in small groups to discuss the startling events thus far, Amelia Bones cast a quick spell at the petulant old man in the Witness Chair before he could voice a complaint. She smirked as a startled Albus Whatever-his-name-was jumped in reaction to his bladder suddenly becoming empty, then snorted in amusement as she watched him carefully shift and eye his own robes in an effort to determine if the sudden evacuation of his bladder had been magickal or involuntary.
One has to take amusement where one can, after all.

This was interesting," mused a remarkably relaxed Lord Lucius Malfoy. Truly, he was now of the opinion that a good bout of hearty laughter was perhaps more efficacious than a nightcap of fine brandy to remove the stress and tension of a difficult day. Of course, the parting song Fawkes had offered before he flamed out of the Hall hadn't hurt, either.

He watched closely as the requested clerk and auror made their way to the Council Leader's table, upon which was arrayed a rather extensive group of objects. Feeling an elbow nudge him gently from his left, he turned to catch Harrison's … Lord Potter's… beautiful, gleeful eyes. The handsome lord leaned in closely, giving Lucius a welcome moment or two to appreciate the young man's light cologne. Beckoning to Gabriel to lean over and listen, too, a smirking Harrison murmured lowly, "This is going to be fun. Albus is something of a pickpocket, you see. I bet a bottle of Chaparral Crisp that at least half of those items he had are stolen from people right here in the Hall." He chuckled a bit at the appalled delight on the faces of the two men.

Gabriel Zabini glanced at the table in question, trying to get a good look at what was there, then turned back to his friends and whispered, "One chest of Zabini chocolates says at least one-third are items only a woman would want."

Lucius huffed a quiet laugh and added his bid, "Ten porterhouse steaks from the Malfoy ranch in Japan if at least two of those items belong to Amelia." Gabriel dropped his forehead briefly to Lucius' broad shoulder and silently laughed at the thought of the Lady's reaction.

At Harry's quiet hiss, both looked up, then followed his gaze across the room to a grinning Lord Ogden. They watched closely as the man carefully mimed his own bid, which they interpreted as being two decanters of his finest Ogden Firewhiskey if one of the items on the table belonged to either Harrison, Lucius or Gabriel. Lucius watched in open amusement as Harrison dropped his face onto his folded arms, shoulders shaking silently, when their miming of taking Ogden's bet resulted in two enthusiastic thumbs-up from the portly Lord across the Hall.

Wanting to continue the enjoyable moment – and the enchanting, close-up whispering and enticing view of a laughing, grippingly-attractive Harrison Potter – Lucius put a large hand on Harry's broad, lightly-shaking back and silently laughed at the thought of the Lady's reaction.

Wanting to continue the enjoyable moment – and the enchanting, close-up whispering and enticing view of a laughing, grippingly-attractive Harrison Potter – Lucius put a large hand on Harry's broad, lightly-shaking back and moved his mouth near the young man's ear. "What other unsavory facts to you know about the venerable Old Goat?" He risked lightly rubbing the strong back beneath his hand and raised his eyebrows challengingly as bright, green eyes emerged from their shelter and turned to him in quick reaction.

A closely-watching Gabriel hid a grin at the interaction between the two eligible Lords, and glanced quickly over to see if Lord Ogden was watching. He was. Damn, that meant he owed Ogden more chocolates; he had been certain these two would not show such obvious signs of attraction until dinner.

Harry blinked in surprise at the warm touch on his back, and shuddered in sensual response when the distinctive, deep voice murmured against his ear. Merlin, was that incredible scent aftershave or was it Lucius himself? He felt his breath catch when he turned his head to the left and found himself with a close-up view of the incomparably sexy Lucius. Wow, his eyes really were silver!

Momentarily shocked by his sudden surge of arousal, Harry took a moment to actually hear the exact phrasing of Lucius' question. When he did, however, a delightfully wicked grin crossed his face. Lucius found his own answering grin fighting to get out as he raised his eyebrows in anticipation. Clearly, Harrison had something really good to offer about the Old Goat.
Harry crooked a finger and beckoned Gabriel closer, too, and said mockingly to the Italian, "I know for a fact you don't know about this one yet, you blackmailer. I just confirmed this last week." He couldn't stop the somewhat evil laugh that burst from his throat. Glancing between the two extraordinary Lords, he reached into the inside breast pocket of his robe and removed his billfold. Opening it, he pulled out a shrunken newspaper, which he held tightly as he returned his billfold to his robe. Crooking a finger again, all three men huddled in close collusion as Harry slowly enlarged and opened the newspaper.

Those watching could not help but sigh. This was the stuff that fueled intimate fantasies! Once again, the three sexiest Lords in Wizarding Europe - debonair, bronzed Zabini; fey, magnetic Malfoy; and dark, delicious Potter – were delightfully close to each other in a pose that was worthy of a bestselling romance novel.

Unaware of their impact, Lucius and Gabriel watched in amused anticipation as Harry met their eyes with suggestively-wiggling black eyebrows over his sparkling, emerald orbs. Lucius dropped his silver gaze to intently watch Harry's well-formed lips and straight, white teeth as the younger man smiled. He felt his breath hitch at the sudden, violently vivid image of that beautiful mouth wrapped around his rigid manhood. Blinking in surprise at the inappropriate thought and forcibly ignoring his sudden, twitching erection, he sternly reminded himself to pay attention.

Oblivious to his aroused companion's inner conflict, Harry spoke in low, chuckling tones, "Funny you should call him an 'old goat', Lucius. Let's run with that for a moment. Have you ever noticed that as people age, they begin to look like their animagus forms?"

He watched them with delight as the two reached the inevitable conclusion.

Gabriel slipped a hand around Lucius to grip the back of Harry's neck and hissed eagerly, "Are you telling me that bastard is a goat animagus? Truly?"

Seeing that Lucius was amused, but wasn't really connecting the dots to get the whole implication, Harry prompted, "And now, gentleman, tell me what Aberforth is infamous for?" He gloried in the twin looks of dawning glee on the handsome faces so close to his own.

Enjoying the way the two schemers sifted through the possibilities, he laughed out loud for a moment, then sent an apologetic look at an interested Amelia Bones. Shaking his head, he returned his attention to a devilishly snickering pair of Lords.

Once again, Lucius found his shoulder playing host to a laughing Gabriel Zabini, but he couldn't blame the man. He, himself, had a gloved hand across his eyes, and a wide grin stretching his face almost intolerably. Gasping for breath and control, he peeked through his fingers at Harry and said, "Are you saying that Aberforth Dumbledore fucked his own brother, when Albus was a goat? Seriously? Did he know? Do you have proof? Oh, gods, please, I beg you, TELL me you have proof!"

Now laughing continually under his breath, Harry teased lowly, "What'll you give me if I have proof?"

He almost choked on his own spit when Lucius reached out and buried a firm hand in Harry's raven hair, pulled the young man's face close to his own, foreheads touching, and purred with clear, wicked meaning, "Absolutely anything you want."

And just that fast, the near-constant hum of sexual tension that had vibrated between the men from the moment they first shook hands ignited. The heavy aura of mounting desire spiking and flaring between them was palpable – nearly visible! - as heated emerald locked with molten silver.
Lord Gabriel Zabini, sitting closely enough to the two to feel the magic swirling around them, didn't even try to fight his own arousal. 'Why would I?' he reasoned. 'They are delicious together.' At the sight of a flushed Harry and predatory Lucius panting lightly together, his own heartbeat sped up and Gabriel felt that his leather pants were suddenly much too tight. The inevitable cascade of mental images lead from the heated exchange in front of him and culminated in erotic scenes involving Harry, Lucius, naked skin, hard bodies and silk sheets. With a wry, inner grin, Gabriel acknowledged to himself that he would in no way object to being a part of those images.

Hearing a low moan behind him, he glanced around and realized that the lovers – for Gabriel had no doubts at all that the two would soon be just that – had caught the mesmerized attention of everyone. The moan had come from the very effeminate Lord Parkinson, whose preferences for strongly masculine men easily explained why his daughter Pansy looked nothing like him. (Rumor had it that she did, however, closely resemble one of his wife's former tutors.) Gabriel was vastly amused to see that no one, with the possible exception of a sour headmaster and a talking hat, was unaffected, if the uncomfortable shifting and bright eyes were any indication.

Mischievously, Gabriel leaned in and pressed his own forehead to that of the other two and brightly asked, "Do you want to continue this later, or are you going for a really spectacular cover photo?"

Lights flashed and cameras clicked as Lucius and Harry turned amused gazes at Gabriel. The newspapers would show still another sigh-worthy photo of Lucius Malfoy aiming a wicked grin and suggestively raised eyebrows at his bronzed-god of a friend, while handsome Harrison Potter pressed a laughing kiss to the tip of the Italian's Roman nose.

Pleased to see that neither of his friends was embarrassed by their unplanned display, Gabriel refocused on the issue of old goats. "Now that I have so rudely interrupted your so-rude interruption…," he began charmingly, "...Well, Harrison? Do you have the proof for which Lucius has pledged you unlimited access to his delectable body?"

He laughed at Harry's delighted grin when Lucius said without missing a beat, "I retract the offer. Harry, you may have unlimited access to my body free of charge."

Making a visible effort to pull his mind – and blood – back above his waist, Harry shook himself a little like a dog and then held up the newspaper with a flourish. "Gentlemen, I give you the proof that Albus really is a fucking old goat."

Amidst hearty laughter, he tightened the privacy charm, and placed the newspaper on the table in front of the two Lords, still grinning madly.

Leaning over it, Lucius shook his head in revolted fascination as he realized it was the infamous newspaper clipping from roughly fifty years ago, featuring an overweight, thoroughly unattractive Aberforth Dumbledore, open pants and checkered boxers shoved to his knees, clutching a frantically-bleating goat's hips with both hands as he held the animal's ass up to his groin and happily humped away. Gabriel's succinct, "Blech!" pretty much said it all.

Raising a disgusted face to look at a sniggering Harry, Lucius quirked a moonlit eyebrow and said dryly, "And your point is …?"

Harry offered another hearty laugh as he produced his wand. Aiming it at the clipping, he cast the rune for clarity and said, "Magnificat!"

The flinching Lords watched in reluctant fascination as the image on the newspaper slowly enlarged. It was quite disconcerting to see any part of that photo seeming to appear larger, and larger, and larger…. Gabriel couldn't stand it, as was evidenced by another emphatic, "Oh, ewwwww. Blech!"
Double blech!... Damn it, Harry! What the hell?

Lucius was about to agree – quite emphatically—when he saw it.

Oh. My. Merlin!

There on the table, clear as day thanks to Harry's ten-times magnification of the image, was a large, clear, full-color close-up of the hapless – or, actually, not so hapless – goat's face. It was a narrow, white, fairly normal goat's face – with bright blue, insanely twinkling eyes. Albus's annoying, twinkling eyes.

And there, falling from the goat's panting mouth and landing to get stuck in the long, white beard on the billygoat's chin, was a bright, yellow lemon drop.

Sitting in the Witness Chair while that utter bitch Amelia sifted through his belongings – well, his now, anyway - the annoyed Headmaster was too far away to hear any of the conversation between his escaping chesspiece Harry Potter and the dangerous Lord Zabini and his Deatheater companion, Lucius Malfoy. He rather desperately wanted to know what they were plotting up there, with their heads so closely together like that. Wanting to get them to stop plotting, as he was sure it would mean nothing good for him if the past hour were any indication, the manipulative old man mentally urged Harry to look up and meet his eyes so he could launch an attack of Legilimency into the weak-minded boy.

When he suddenly got his wish, and the three lords turned malicious eyes and matching, evil grins on him, Albus abruptly changed his mind. No, having them look at him was definitely a bad thing. Very, very bad.
As the Lords re-gathered and regained their seats, Amelia Bones sighed in annoyance. The itemizing was still going on, with a long delay occurring because so far every item they had cast an identification charm on showed a different owner.

Reaching a decision, she knocked out the Call to Order and waited for the Lords and attendees of the Hall of Government to settle down.

As silence fell, Council Leader Bones spoke. "Rather than wait for this, I wish to move onto the next order of business, which I hope will make much of the upcoming discussion go more smoothly. If that is agreeable?"

As no red lights showed in objection, she nodded firmly and continued. "High Lord Potter? There seems to be an issue with what this man's name actually is. We need to know what to write on the Sentence."

Laughter rippled around the room. Albus frowned and tried to shift to a more comfortable position in his bindings. Casting a reproving glance at the unimpressed Lords, the Headmaster arranged his face in a careful mask of wounded dignity and said, "I must object to your frivolity, as well as to the implication that rendering punishment of any sort upon me is a foregone conclusion."

He ignored the disbelieving stares and eye rolls and worked to catch the eyes of those whom he knew were firmly in his pocket, for one reason or another. He was quite irritated to see that not even the weak-willed Augustus Arndstrom would meet his gaze, which precluded his intention to use Legilimency to re-enforce certain compulsions he had placed within his supporters.

"The fact that you will be receiving punishment is a foregone conclusion…'Sir'," Bones said disdainfully. "You attempted to escape Judgment from the Hall of Government. That alone is enough to earn you something remarkably uncomfortable. As I know for a fact that a fair amount of the items you had on your person do not, in fact, belong to you, I feel fairly safe in doing a little preliminary paperwork for your Sentencing, Dumble- … Albus."

Turning in irritation toward Lord Potter, she continued, "You take my point? It is essential that we know very soon what to call this man."

As many of the more smart-ass Lords opened their mouth, she added hastily, "Let me rephrase that. I'm sure many of us have suggestions on what to call him. What we need to establish right now is his legal name." She smirked smugly at the disgruntlement of the pre-empted comedians.

"Council Leader Bones, may I speak to this matter?" came a gravelly, aged voice. Startled, the lady in question turned her attention to Tavin McGonogall, seated in ragged glory on the table in front of Minerva McGonogall.
"Of course, sir. Perhaps you would be so kind as to tell us how you prefer to be addressed?"

The face on the venerable old hat seemed to smile at the question as the slow, aged voice replied, "Council Leader Bones, it has been two millennia since last I was human. I have been both Tavin McGonogall and the Sorting Hat for too many centuries to care overmuch for formalities. You may address me as you wish, but my name is simply Tavin, and that would be my preference. If that is too informal for the stuffed shirts in the room, then call me Chieftain McGonogall or just Sorting Hat." No one missed the gentle hand Minerva ran down the back of the hat.

Smiling in appreciation, Amelia Bones said simply, "I believe that we of this Hall should respect the wishes of our elders, and none here could argue that you qualify. 'Tavin' it is! And so, Tavin, what can you tell us regarding this man's true name?" with a negligent nod of her head toward the pinch-faced Headmaster.

As an apologetic afterthought, the Council Leader flicked her wand and a comfortable chair moved from the wall and slid into position behind the still-standing Deputy Headmistress. The older woman gratefully seated herself as the attentive Lords and members of the Gallery sat back to listen or leaned forward in eager attention, depending on their nature.

Pausing a moment in contemplation, the old hat seemed to draw a deep breath (a concept which flummoxed many) and began, "The man seated in the Witness Box is Albus Percy. A century and a half ago, the Percy family had died out except for the brothers Albus and Aberforth. For many generations, the Percy family had been vassals to the Ancient and Noble House of Dumbledore. The Dumbledore family had long lived in near-total isolation on their remote estate in the Swiss Alps. Their name was known, but very little about any of the recent generations of the Dumbledore family was common knowledge.'

The silence in the Hall of Government was absolute, with the attention of every living being riveted on Tavin McGonogall.

Anelia had also ensured the old bastard in the Seat of Judgment remained unobtrusive. To prevent him interrupting or otherwise disrupting the narrative, Albus Percy had been silenced. He was simply sitting there, a politely interested look on his face, apparently in an effort to look like he was intentionally attentive rather than effectively bound and gagged.

Tavin continued his tale. 'At the time of Albus' eleventh birthday, the High Lord of the Dumbledore family was Lord Wulfric Brian Dumbledore. The only other living Dumbledore was Wulfric's daughter Ariana. Such a lovely young witch!' Observers saw Albus's sneer and felt a touch of foreboding for the fate of Ariana.

"When Albus received his Hogwarts Letter of Acceptance, it was addressed to 'Albus Percy, vassal, Wulfric Brian Dumbledore.' High Lord Wulfric Dumbledore was a very, very good man. He was in truth everything that Albus Percy has pretended to emulate over the years." Another sneer marred the polite mask of the old man in the box.

"Although Wulfric had no obligation to educate either of the Percy boys, he chose to send both boys to Hogwarts. When he arrived, Albus was bullied a bit, mostly by purebloods in Slytherin House, the house I sorted him into. And that is yet another fallacy Albus has orchestrated; he was never a Gryffindor and would never, ever qualify to be a member of a House known for honor and bravery."

The old hat seemed to look upon the Peerage, his gaze heavy, and said, "Neither did he truly belong in Slytherin, a House known for the public mask of ambition and cunning, but the private face of unparalleled fealty to family. Alas, of all the Houses, the nearest fit -- however poor -- for Albus was in Slytherin."
As if whispering to himself, Tavin added, "Alas again, I should have rejected him altogether and perhaps saved such widespread heartache." The Lords watched in concern as Minerva placed a compassionate hand upon the old hat and said something in a low, soft burr.

After a moment, Tavin continued. "During his attendance, Albus -- and later Aberforth -- kept his vassalage a secret and began to research how to become a Nobleman. He soon learned it was not possible. As a vassal, the only legal ways to gain nobility would be to be knighted, which would actually require an investment of honor and effort, or to marry into a Noble House. Ariana was already betrothed, and no other pureblood would have anything to do with a vassal."

"But Albus has never been one to allow honor or law to precent him from getting his way. He found a loophole, of sorts. Not a legal one. Not a moral one. But one that worked for him."

"He discovered The Book of Names."

The engrossed listeners looked at the pure-white book sitting on the table next to Tavin. Finally, they were going to learn why it had been presented during this Session.

Drawing another unnecessary breath, Tavin elaborated, "In short, Albus learned what we explained earlier, that under certain circumstances, information in the Book can be corrected or modified with a simple letter. So, he wrote one. Now, remember, if you will, the way his Letter of Acceptance was addressed: Albus Percy, vassal, Wulfric Brian Dumbledore. Albus simply advised the letter that it had written his name incorrectly, that it was not 'Percy, vassal' but 'Percival'."

"He told the Book of Names that his name was 'Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore' – and the Book agreed."

Silent in the Witness Box, Albus Percy could not help but preen a little as looks of stunned realization swept over the listeners. No matter what else fell out of today, at the very least he would forever be known as a brilliant man. A con man, possibly. Well, probably. Still, a brilliant con man.

"From there," Tavin continued, "the rest of the Line Theft of the Dumbledore name snowballed. He returned to the Dumbledore estate over the summer, and his next letter of scores and required supplies arrived from Hogwarts. Ariana intercepted the owl and saw Albus' revised name. She tried to get to her father, but Dumbledore imperiused her in a panic. Aberforth witnessed the altercation, and was drawn into the scheme. Neither of the Percy brothers was ever troubled with fealty, honor or loyalty."

"Together, they immobilized High Lord Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, using an imperiused Ariana to trick and trap her own father." The sense of revulsion was growing in the listeners, while Harrison sat tightlipped and tense as Tavin doggedly told his tale.

"They then amplified their crimes most horribly, my children. They conducted a blood adoption using a desperate Wulfric, and then murdered the old lord in cold blood. Aberforth wanted to marry Ariana, even though she was now legally his sister – not that it mattered to either Albus or him. They attempted to force a bond, but there was a factor they did not know -- one that helped her prevent her own rape and break the Imperius. To preserve their plan, they had to kill her, too."

The horror was now showing clearly upon hundreds of faces in the majestic room. Lucius had his hand firmly resting on Harrison's back, offering what comfort he could. He and Gabriel were literally feeling the waves of pain buffeting Harrison.

"In the end, the crime was almost perfect," Tavin stated grimly. "They had the name, the House, the money, some of the family magics, etc."
Into the shocked silence spoke Lord Malfoy. "Almost perfect?"

At this, Lord Harrison Potter rose to his feet and swept a piercing, emerald gaze across the Hall before settling a cold, murderous glare upon Albus Percy.

"Yes, Lord Malfoy. It was only almost perfect – because unknown to the brothers, Ariana had gotten married a few months before they left for Hogwarts. She was widowed before they left, but she was pregnant. She had the child while Albus and Aberforth were at school. They were only vassals; there was no reason for them to know the family's business." He watched Albus flinch.

"After Wulfric and Ariana's murders, the Dumbledore house elves, although forcibly bound to Albus and Aberforth due to the blood adoption, still saved the child. They brought the baby boy to his paternal grandparents. The baby's father Henri was the son of a squib mother descended from the Chaparrals and a muggleborn father. The baby was renamed 'Kavin Wolfgang Evans.'"

"He was my great-grandfather."
Chapter Summary

About secrets, secrecy spells and stuff.

And once again, silence gripped the Hall of Government.

Council Leader Amelia Bones finally understood what it meant when people said "the Silence was deafening." It really was. This silence was ominous, heavy, alive. It seemed to have each occupant of the Hall in a stranglehold, and pressed down upon the stunned Lords and gallery in the way an avalanche buried and overwhelmed its victims.

Amelia's fixed gaze was eventually freed by a series of rapid blinks, and she began to slowly peruse the seated Lords. Taking stock of as many individuals as she could, watching as the gathered Lords began to assimilate the true extent of what this Session would reveal about the formerly-revered Albus Dumbledore, now known to all as Line-thief, con man and murderer Albus Percy, the experienced politician and auror in Amelia saw the same look settle on the face of each Lord. Over two-hundred Lords and High Lords and well-over one hundred observers in the Gallery fixed a glare of pure, unmitigated condemnation on the smug but cringing form of Albus Percy.

The always-proper Council Leader found no irony at all in the statement echoing through her mind as she, too, glared at the evil old bastard. 'He is utterly fucked.'

The vulgarity seemed entirely fitting.

Watching the pride glow in Percy's disturbingly-twinkling blue eyes, Amelia knew she was going to greatly enjoy watching him ripped to shreds.

Turning her gaze to handsome young High Lord Harrison Potter, standing tall and proud with emerald eyes burning in an expressionless face, the Council Leader realized in that moment that this was a brilliant, motivated, savvy, exceptionally dangerous wizard. It was so hard to accept that this man was only eighteen years old.

Her glance then fell to the powerful Lord Malfoy, next to Lord Potter, who even as she watched was rising to his feet and placing a supportive hand on Potter's back and leaning in a bit to look directly at the young man's face. She watched him say something in low tones to the dark-haired wizard, and saw how the younger man's jaw suddenly clenched as he turned his gaze to Malfoy's.

The Council Leader briefly stepped aside for the woman within Amelia as she spared a moment to wish the burgeoning relationship well, before she regained her vaunted self-control and rapped sharply on the table to Call to Order. It was no surprise to her that very few people took their deadly glares off of Albus Percy as she began to speak.

Harry was frozen, by his own choice. If he moved at all, he would move to kill; of this, he was certain. He had been prepared for this, but the twinkle in the old bastard's eyes made Harry
homicidal. But although none would hold him guilty, not with the proof he had to present, it was much too kind a fate for Albus Percy.

So he held his muscles rigid, his magic tightly leashed, and his gaze locked on the man that he hated more than any other on the planet, including Voldemort. As the twinkling blue gaze clashed with his own green glare, he sent a legilimentic attack directly into the old man's mind.

The smug pride on the Headmaster's face rapidly faded along with his complexion as he clearly saw, in vivid detail, what Harry was going to do to him. He could not repress the shudder of mortal terror as his lost weapon tore through his mental shields like tissue paper and the cold, emotionless voice spoke clearly into his now-defenseless mind, 'Your 'next great adventure', old man, won't begin for a very, very, very long time. I promise.'

The fact that Harry wanted to keep him alive was, quite frankly, chilling.

Harry blinked in reaction as a now-familiar warm hand pressed on his back and a concerned set of silver eyes peered into his own. He clenched his jaw and scowled slightly, trying to hold onto his control, only to close his eyes and sigh in defeat as the Malfoy Lord placed his other hand lightly on the side of Harry's face. Unable to handle his increasing loss of control, he leaned slightly into the warm hand on his cheek. "Lucius...", he whispered helplessly. "Please."

Honestly, he didn't know what he was asking for. Luckily for him, it seemed that Lucius did.

The older man slid both hands to Harry's shoulders, holding him firmly and forcing him by sheer will to look up at him. As he complied and looked into the refined, aristocratic face of his once-enemy, Harry wondered in the back of his mind how silver eyes could look so warm.

From his perspective, Lucius was fighting his instincts, which were presently demanding that he pull the young man close and not let go. 'Later,' he promised himself. 'This is not the time. But soon.'

As his muttering instincts grudgingly subsided, Lucius looked with compassion at the young man who was clearly struggling with and beginning to buckle beneath the strength of his own emotions. Even the most experienced statesman sometimes needed support; Harrison was handling stresses that would cripple most of the Lords in this Hall. Lucius would have been more concerned if cracks were not beginning to show, than that they were. Nevertheless, this was not the time for the lad to show vulnerability.

Lowering his face slightly to get a closer look into the emerald eyes, Lucius tightened the hands he held on Harry's overburdened shoulders. He spoke with quiet intensity, "Harrison, you have clearly worked very hard to get to this moment. I will not allow you to be betrayed by your feelings. Use them. They should empower you, not overpower you."

He willingly held the tortured gaze, nodding approval at Harry's impassive mask. Only the eyes betrayed the truth. Only those wounded, furious eyes. Lucius held Harry's shoulders, held Harry's gaze, and willed some of his own, impressive control into the young man who was finding that, this time, his own was not enough.

Seeing the keen intelligence seep back as the animalistic pain that had been in Harry's eyes retreated, Lucius squeezed the strong shoulders encouragingly before stepping back and returning to his seat.

For a few moments there, Harry had been very afraid that he would not have enough self-discipline to contain the rage he was feeling. To look at the old man who had once meant safety and honor and love to Harry, who had in truth cold-bloodedly destroyed his family on both sides of the tree and orchestrated and controlled every awful moment of Harry's life up until age 14....! Goddess bless,
the force of his own emotions had once destroyed the entire Dursley residence when it triggered his accidental magic, and compared to this moment, that incident had been mere playground stuff. He had not expected to lose control, he thought he was fully prepared for what was to happen this night. But he had not expected to look at Albus and see, not remorse, not regret, but pride. The son of a bitch was actually proud of himself.

Feeling his rage rise again, Harry ruthlessly forced it down and sent a brief, grateful smile to Lucius. If the man had not been here and correctly read the signs and acted accordingly, it was likely that Albus Percy would right this moment be dripping down from the ceiling and some of the walls, along with a good portion of the Hall of Government. He wondered briefly in macabre amusement if several of the Lords seated closest to Albus Percy now owed Lucius Malfoy a life debt. *Hmmmm, have to look into that,* he mused, finding the concept wonderfully ironic.

Focusing his attention forward again as Council Leader Bones rapped another *Call to Order,* Harry squared his shoulders and visibly became, once again, Lord Harrison Potter.

Council Leader Bones paused a moment to collect her thoughts as the Lords turned their attention to her. Reaching a decision, she turned to address the Hall.

"It is increasingly evident that this Session will not be resolved in a single day. It is also a factor, however, that this is a complex Petition for Judgment and that the evidence, witnesses and confidentiality of this Session must be preserved throughout the full course of the Session, howsoever long that may be. Is this much in Agreement?"

Nodding at the host of glowing blue lights, she continued. "Therefore, as Council Leader of this Session of the Hall of Government, I propose to enact *Servo Verum*, so that we can address the preliminary needs tonight and get some time to rest and assimilate what we have learned thus far. All in favor?"

Many of those watching the vote saw the normally jovial Lord Charles Ogden send a look of clear command across the room at Lord Adams, who was seated to the left of Lord Augustus Arndstrom III, whose wand was just beginning to cast an objection to the proposal. With an acknowledging nod, Adams promptly turned and slapped Arndstrom in the back of the head -- hard.

Gasp ing in outrage, Arndstrom tore his gaze from the hypnotic old man in the witness stand and turned upon Adams with indignation, only to pale in shame when Adams hissed loudly, "You fool! Have you learned nothing? That old bastard was drawing you in -- again! I told you not to meet his eyes; have you no will of your own at all?"

Shaken, Arndstrom registered his 'aye' and kept his gaze lowered, refusing to look at any of his peers. What on Earth was wrong with him? He remembered being much sharper in school, but so much since then just seemed -- confusing.

Those who witnessed the event turned grim faces toward Albus Percy, who had reeled backward when his mind was abruptly ripped from Arndstrom's. There was no mistaking the evidence before the Peerage: Albus Percy was attempting to employ Legilimency to influence and control certain members of the Hall of Government. Was there no end to this wizard's crimes? Had he no honor at all?

Immediately after Council Leader Bones announced, "Motion carried," Lord Charles Ogden was on his feet, yellow light blazing. At Bones' acknowledgment, he spoke in ringing tones.
"It has just this moment become evident that Albus Percy is employing the mind arts upon certain members of this Hall. We gave several witnesses to his most recent attack. I recommend that, in addition to Servo Verum, we also scan each Lord and participating employees of the Hall for existing compulsions and additional invasions upon an individual's will, correct any found, and place Albus Percy in Numerus Frenum cuffs immediately."

Ogden nodded in emphatic agreement to the surrounding gasps of outrage and watched as Albus Percy glared at him. He fearlessly met Percy's eyes, and took great pleasure in answering the old man's furious legilimentic attack with one of his own, self-designed, terrifying mind traps. He smirked in satisfaction as the old bastard reeled at the pain of having the magickal tendril he had extended into Ogden's mind filleted and hurled back into his own mind in raw, rare pieces.

"Stupid old sod," he muttered to the curious Lords seated nearby. "Did he really think that the Lord of Ogden, makers of Ogden's Firewhiskey and Spirits, wouldn't have the ability to protect my family's secrets? Right arrogant bastard, isn't he?"

Amelia felt her jaw clench as she witnessed the incident between Lord Ogden and Albus. She almost wished, just for a moment, that she was here in her capacity as Head of the DMLE. She would dearly love to be the one to slap the total magickal restraint cuffs on the arrogant wizard sitting insufferably smug and self-confident in the Witness Chair. Still, being Council Leader didn't preclude all of her opportunities for entertainment, did it?

"Witnesses to the incident noted by Lord Ogden, please register."

She counted all of the amethyst lights that suddenly glowed over many of the Lords seated by Lord Ogden, and took special note of Albus's reroving sneer at a pinch-faced Augustus Arndstrom and his own amethyst light. With a single knock, she intoned, "Recommendation to place Albus Percy in Numerus Frenum restraints and to scan attendees for invasion of the will is accepted. Aurors and Bailiffs, if you please."

As a stolid-faced auror removed the amber wrist cuffs, which in truth looked more like simple bracelets, from the locked cabinet behind his small counter, two bailiffs moved to the Lord's Approach doorway and tapped their wands upon the appropriate runes etched into the fine mahogany frame. Over by the Gallery, two additional bailiffs were doing the same to that entrance, as an additional precaution.

A series of thin sheets of translucent light appeared in the doorway, each of which searched for and destroyed a specific class of will-controlling compulsions, potions, spells and charms. The bailiffs checked to ensure that the parchment rolls were in place and ready to receive all of the information relayed to the dictaquill attached to the runes.

Amelia could not resist a smirk at Albus Percy's paling complexion and pinched expression; she didn't need to lift the Silencio to know that he was considerably more worried than he had been before Ogden stood up. She almost laughed aloud at the old man's offended look when the auror implacably slid the amber cuffs over the wrinkled hands and caused the amber to constrict. It was never a nice feeling, to have one's magic forcibly restrained, but in her opinion, it couldn't happen to a more deserving person.

Clearing her throat, she continued, "Once again, please. All in favor of activating Servo Verum?" An unblemished sea of blue lights glowed in row after row around the great Hall. "All opposed?" Not a single red light appeared anywhere. The motion was carried. Amelia nodded in satisfaction.

"Now, to elaborate. For those who do not know our procedures in this rare event, a Servo Verum is a procedure followed by which we ensure and protect – literally – the truth. We will have Lord
Potter briefly identify vital witnesses and items of evidentiary importance, and we will secure them so that nothing can influence or destroy that evidence. Every person attending any Session of the Hall of Government has already agreed to be subject to the rulings cast during a Session and, by that agreement, have accepted certain spells be cast upon your person. With the enacting of an Order, the appropriate spells are activated."

"In this case, they are spells and protections of secrecy. No person who is in attendance here during this Session will be able to communicate any of the events in any way to a person who was not in attendance. This includes preventing eavesdropping: attendees who are freely speaking about these events cannot have their words or intentions heard, read or mindread, in any way, by those who would eavesdrop."

She aimed an admonishing stare at the disappointed observers in the commons Gallery eating, and said sternly, "This is the combined old magic of hundreds of generations of Noble Houses working here, people; you would do well to understand and willingly comply. The magick will detect those with poor intentions and will take appropriate action. Information will be available as you exit later this evening. The Order will not be rescinded until the Session is concluded in full."

She paid no attention to the rush of excited chatter that sprang up amongst the observers in the Gallery and turned her gaze to Lord Potter, once again seated next to Malfoy and Zabini.

"High Lord Potter?" As the bright, gemlike gaze snapped to her and caught her own, Amelia found herself momentarily floundering before she quickly regained her dignity and control of her vocal chords. She steadfastly ignored Lord Malfoy's knowing smirk and Lord Zabini's cheerful wink, and addressed her remarks specifically to the clueless Lord Potter.

"Lord Potter, I realize that your case must be laid before this Session in a specific order. I do not wish to undermine the impact of the upcoming points in any way; however, if we are going to be able to grant any of us adequate rest to hear this properly, we must enact Servo Verum. To do so, however, requires that you state at least some of the main upcoming points of your case, and identify all witnesses, pieces of evidence, and other people or items whose attendance is mandatory to your Petition but whose safety is uncertain. Because you have the right to decide whether offering up this information will damage your Petition, you also have the right to refuse the Servo Verum order."

She confirmed that he nodded in understanding before issuing the formal query. "High Lord Harrison Potter, in the matter of Servo Verum before this Session, how do you rule?"

All eyes turned to the contemplative young man as he folded his arms and considered. He did not let the attention distract him, a fact which further raised the respect many had already formed for the handsome Lord. Raising his eyes to Bones, he asked, "May I have a moment to consult with my peers?"

At her nod, everyone watched as he effortlessly placed a wandless, wordless privacy screen around himself and the two striking lords to his right, and many wondered why the screen seemed to extend a bit to cover the empty space behind him. It's not like anyone was sitting there, after all.

Lucius once again was treated to Harry's subtle cologne as the young man leaned in to speak with Zabini and himself. He found himself thinking wryly that this was probably another photo-op in the making, then focused on the brief, intense byplay between the man he considered a dear friend and the young man he was beginning to believe would be much, much more.

Harry met Zabini's eyes in a moment of tense query and spoke rapidly. "We have most of what we need here already. Yeah, we lose some of the shock value, but we gain a lot more in the long run by winning the appreciation of the other Lords and letting Albus stew in his own poison. Your
Gabriel Zabini nodded in agreement and simply said, "Harrison, my friend, you know what you're doing. Your team has spent two years putting all of this together. Introduce your little friend, put Minerva and Tavin up in a suite at the Castillo, and let the rat bastard stew."

The two turned to Lucius, who suddenly found himself the singular focus of two disturbingly close, intoxicatingly handsome men. Starting to speak, he had to stop and clear his throat a moment, casting a quick, playful glare at a snickering Zabini, before he offered, "Clearly, I am not privy to the details, but I have pledged my support and I stand by it – vintage Chaparral or no! Nevertheless, I can see that the advantages of allowing this Order far outweigh the disadvantages of an early reveal of certain details."

As the two Lords started to turn back to face Amelia, he placed an admonishing hand on Harry's arm, "However, Harrison, I must insist that we still have our dinner this evening. I am not enjoying being less-informed than Gabriel, rare as such an occasion may be."

As Harry flashed a quick smile and turned away, Lucius and Gabriel both heard him mutter, "Fear not, Lucius. Gabriel doesn't know about all of my tricks and traps. He's due for a surprise or two himself."

Choosing to ignore that tempting comment for the moment, Gabriel flashed his own handsome, white-toothed smile at Lucius while Harrison turned back to face front and removed the privacy screen. As the young Lord rose to his feet to address the Session, Gabriel leaned slightly into Lucius' personal space and murmured lowly, "You already lost me one bet, you lecherous bastard."

At Lucius sharply raised eyebrows and questioning look, he nodded meaningfully at Harry and stated, "I bet Ogden you'd at least wait til dinner, but you seem to have more testosterone than even I credit you with." He shook his head ruefully at the look of pleased pride on his friend's face. "Malfoys!" he scoffed to himself. 'They always get what they want.'

Amelia watched as Lord Potter easily removed the privacy shield and turned to face her. She was fairly certain she was not alone in her recently developed fascination with watching the three, remarkably handsome Lords interact.

Harrison offered a half-grin as he gave his Ruling, "Council Leader Bones and my fellow Lords and High Lords, I Rule in favor of Servo Verum so long as certain agreements and allowances are made by this Hall."

At Amelia's slow nod, he continued, "I am afraid that the nature of what I require is fairly sensitive. I must first obtain your agreement to what I require without my specifying precisely what that is."

At the immediate dissent, he raised a calming hand, "To reassure my peers, I will offer this Wizard's Oath." He raised the now-famous holly wand before him and firmly intoned, "I, High Lord Harrison James Potter, do hereby swear on my life and my magick that the requirements I seek are honorable, will harm none save those who deserve punishment through the authority of this Session, and will be deemed by the Council Leader in all of her roles to be fitting and right. So I swear it; so mote it be."

When the flash of the vow faded, he wandlessly cast lumos, the glare of which was too bright to look directly at with the naked eye. Cancelling the lumos, he met Amelia's gaze levelly and said, "Your judgment?"

Amelia didn't even need to cast her eyes around the Hall to know that she would only see blue lights
glowing. This young Lord fairly radiated honor and strength; none would doubt him. She nodded in agreement and said, "Order is enacted. Servo Verum. Ago iam!"

Even those accustomed to the bright flash of a Wizarding Oath were surprised as the entire Hall seemed to go momentarily nova. The older and more knowledgeable wizards and witches had hastily shielded their eyes when they heard the spell begin so unexpectedly, leaving the remaining hapless few to sit blinking in shock and watching phantom images float in and out of their vision for a few moments.

Lowering his sheltering hand and blinking his eyes against the small floaters that even his meaty hand could not prevent, Lord Ogden momentarily forgot where he was as he glared at the Council Leader and shouted a deeply annoyed, "Amelia Adella Bones, what the hell were you thinking?"

The outraged chatter abruptly ceased as everyone suddenly focused on the aggravated Lord Ogden and a taken-aback Council Leader Bones. Those who still couldn't see clearly were frantically whispering to their neighbors to determine who said what.

Observing the drama with amusement, Lucius briefly wondered why it seemed Harry had leaned to his left, toward the vacant space next to his seat, as he muttered, "What I wouldn't give for some popcorn right now, eh?" Together, they watched as Amelia Bones faced a Lord Ogden who suddenly wasn't nearly as jovial as he normally was.

Lucius and Gabriel both snickered to themselves; they both knew that Lord Ogden wasn't actually the teddy bear most people saw. Having had numerous business dealing with the man, they had long ago decided that the portly whiskeymaker was not so much a teddy bear as he was a grizzly bear, with issues.

As for Amelia, she was truly chagrined. She hadn't even hesitated or stopped to think at all, she had just raised her wand and cast. Cautiously looking at all of the blinking, teary-eyed lords and observers, she winced a little in embarrassment.

She couldn't repress a truly mortifying snort of amusement when her eye fell upon the weeping, angry, brightly glowing figure of Albus Percy, still bound in his chair, who was desperately trying not to look at his own luminescent robes. Everyone now knew exactly how Albus managed to wear such eye-searing colors; apparently, he chose fabrics that were enhanced by the magic around him. At the moment, given the strength of the Servo Verum Amelia had just activated, Albus looked something like a solar version of himself.

Catching Ogden's eye, they reached an unvoiced agreement and in unison cast a "nox" at Albus's robes. It was amusing, yes, but not if everyone in the room went blind.

That done, Amelia raised reluctant eyes and met the secretly-amused glare of one Charles Ogden. Shrugging one shoulder, she offered an apologetic, "Sorry?" to the room at large.

She took the ensuing laughter with equanimity. After all, she certainly deserved it.

Shaking her head ruefully, she issued three more knocks to calm the room, then turned back to a smirking Lord Potter. Rolling her eyes at him, she said, "Yes, yes, we all have these moments, don't we, Lord I-swallowed-a-snitch-and-won-the-game?"

Once the laughter died down, she continued, "All right, back to the issue at hand. Lord Potter, please submit your requirements, your evidence, and your witnesses for protection."
Taking a moment to center himself back into his primary purpose this evening, Harry decided first to address the most immediate issues and work from there.

"To begin, I wish to state that Lady Minerva McGonogall and High Chieftain Tavin McGonogall are to be sequestered at my expense in the Lord's Suite at the Castillo. I require an assistant to escort her and aurors who are NOT sworn to the Order of the Phoenix, all of whom have passed through the Lord's Approach upon exiting this Hall this evening."

Seeing that Bones and his peers were all simply nodding in understanding as the Clerk recorded his words, he pressed on. "Next, I require that all three living members of the Percy family be arrested and placed in separate isolation cells, with all security precautions in place." He paused expectantly and waited for the inquisition. It didn't take long.

"Lord Potter? THREE members of the Percy family? Albus Percy is here, in custody. I issued the arrest order for Aberforth as soon as Tavin gave testimony, seeing as the Runes for truth remained steady. I gather from your wording that there is a third living Percy somewhere?"

As she spoke, Amelia watched Albus closely, as did many others in the Hall, and the Daily Prophet took great delight in placing a special little blurb on the back page of the newspaper explaining the photo of Albus Percy clenching and unclenching his fists as the color receded from his face again.

Lucius was lost in admiration of the young man on his left. Harrison Potter had truly come into his own. Glancing briefly at Gabriel, he saw his friend run a hand through bronze hair as he peered speculatively at Harry. Clearly, this was one of those points of which Gabriel was not yet apprised.

He turned back to Harry as the young Lord raised an amused eyebrow and said sardonically, "Yes, Council Leader Bones. This is one of those things that will explain why I had such vague requirements. I want Albus Percy's son arrested and confined under close guard." Here, Harry paused purely to torture Albus Percy, and, he secretly admitted to himself, maybe also to torture Lucius and Gabriel just a tiny bit.

"His name, Council Leader, is Peter Pettigre Percy."
"His name, Council Leader, is Peter Pettigrew Percy."

It occurred to Lucius Malfoy, in the next few moments, that he should have taken out a bet on how many times this evening Harrison Potter would be able to reduce the population of the Hall of Government to shocked silence. Really, it was just getting a little bit silly now. He ran a gloved hand over his face, then tilted his head to peek past his hand at Gabriel. He couldn't stop the bark of laughter that erupted from him.

Gabriel looked like he couldn't decide whether to be delighted, shocked, or pissed off. He would have used a word like 'angered' or 'furious', but one look at Zabini made it clear that the Lord was, in fact, just plain pissed.

Harry sneaked a glance at Gabriel when Lucius laughed. Damn, that was a bet he just lost. He was sure the Italian Lord would have been entirely ticked off, but he looked like he was vacillating between laughing and growling. The man was deceptively large, somehow misleading people with his debonair charm, but Harry had seen Gabriel enraged. That was the moment Harry's blinders came off and he saw the real Gabriel Zabini, the huge, muscular, powerful wizard. Remus would have called him an alpha wolf. Wrenching his somewhat disturbing thoughts back on track, he winked impudently at Gabriel, then focused back on Amelia, who seemed to be recovering, if her resigned look and exhausted huff were any indication. He grinned at her when she quirked an eyebrow at him and said, "And we can find him – alive – where, exactly?"

"He would be right here with me, Council Leader Bones. On my left, with a second reason for my special requirements of the Servo Verum."

He turned to his left and watched, grinning, as the air seemed to ripple and somehow fold-back on itself, revealing a dapper, well-dressed, healthy and wildly grinning Lord Sirius Black – who seemed to be holding a caged, unconscious rat with one hand as he handed a silvery, slippery cloak to Harry.

At the eruption of shocked shouts and panicked bystanders, the devilishly handsome Lord Black tipped his head back and laughed heartily. Frozen in shock – again! – Lucius Malfoy wildly noted to himself that the man's laughter didn't seem nearly as insane as his infamous capture-photo of sixteen years ago.

Harry sat down and let his godfather enjoy the moment by himself. He looked around, grinning, to see all of the reactions he could, and watched with delight as Albus's eyes rolled into the back of his head and the man slumped in his chair, robes still glowing faintly.

Glancing at Amelia Bones, Harry couldn't help but pout, a little, at the fact that she didn't even look surprised. He wondered if it was possible to burn out someone's capacity for surprise in a single night.

Turning to look at Gabriel and Lucius, however, he laughed joyfully as he realized that they, at least,
were more than capable of being shocked stupid again and again and again. Merlin, he hadn't had so much fun – ever!

Lucius' eyes suddenly focused on him, and he gave him a reproving look as he raised a gloved hand and smacked Harry on the back of the head. He smirked at Harry's feigned indignation, but when the younger man whined, "Who do you think I am? Arndstrom?" the silver eyes narrowed waringly and the gloved hand closed in his raven hair. He then took the young man's breath away when he swooped forward like the predator he was and stopped just inches from Harry's startled face.

Gripping the silky, black hair firmly, his smile was all teeth and danger as he stared into wide, green eyes and whispered intently, "You and I, young man, will be having an up-close, very personal discussion, very, very soon."

He noted Harry's widening pupils and hitching breath with arrogant satisfaction, and decided to push things just a little bit farther. Closing the last few inches between them, he pressed his mouth firmly to Harry's, forcing apart the lips when Harry gasped in surprise. 'Really, now,' he purred in his mind, 'what kind of a Malfoy would I be if I didn't take advantage of that?' He slipped his tongue just barely between Harry's parted lips and ran a line of liquid fire along the tender skin. Ending the kiss with skilled deliberation, he recaptured the darkening green gaze and gave a shark's smile, "And you, my exquisite young man, are going to enjoy every moment of it. And I am going to devour you."

With that, he slowly released his grip on Harry's hair and sat back in his chair. Glancing at Gabriel, he saw the man smiling in vicious satisfaction. It seemed that the Lord Zabini felt Harry's current complete inability to access his own higher brain functions was an adequate payback for keeping such earthshattering secrets from him.

Harry sank onto his chair and blinked a couple times, trying to summon motor skills, and scowled halfheartedly at a deeply-amused Gabriel. Carefully avoiding Lucius' eyes, he turned in his seat to look hopefully at Sirius.

Damn. Hope dashed. Sirius had seen it all.

Harry was bracing himself for the explosion, wincing in trepidation as his protective godfather's expression darkened, only to watch in shock as the light gray eyes abruptly veered from him and focused on something over his right shoulder. Turning in confusion, Harry saw Gabriel Zabini standing tall and intimidating, midnight eyes locked with Sirius' stormy glare, suddenly looking very much like the alpha male he actually was. Harry's senses, greatly enhanced since his successful animagus transformation last year -- and wouldn't that little tidbit ruin Albus's day?-- easily detected his godfather's subvocal whine.

All four men found their photo on page four of the next day's Daily Prophet to be completely hilarious. On the far left was Lord Sirius Black: darkly exotic, beautifully dressed, long, healthy black hair flowing unconfined down the man's slim, toned back, trimmed goatee making him seem equally devilish and dapper, dark grey eyes challenging those of the other standing Lord. On the far right was Lord Gabriel Zabini: six and a half feet of solid muscle seeming to tower over Lord Black's respectable 5'11", bronze, tawny, classically handsome, with every line of his powerfully masculine body declaring his dominance, midnight-black gaze locked on Sirius and staring him down.

Seated side by side between the two were Lord Harrison Potter and Lord Lucius Malfoy in identical postures, handsome heads moving in unison as they looked back and forth between the standing men as if they were at a tennis match.
And fluttering in his seat a few rows behind them was the effeminate Lord Timothy Parkinson, eagerly watching the action and sighing like a fangirl.

Although he found the interaction between his beloved godfather and his longtime friend fascinating, Harry was quite relieved to hear – yet again – Amelia Bones issue a "Call to Order." As the last knock finished echoing through the Great Hall and the people began to settle a bit, Harry rose to his feet again to answer the Council Leader's questions. He saw through his peripheral vision as Gabriel grudgingly took a step back, and decided he was going to have a lot of fun teasing Sirius, who was at the moment not looking at him with great concentration. Suppressing his grin, he focused his full attention on the matters at hand.

During their little interlude, the aurors and bailiffs had exerted control over the panicking sheeple while Amelia herself seized the opportunity to slap Albus Percy back to consciousness. If she was perhaps too enthusiastic in her efforts, no one present was going to comment. If anything, the observing Lords were cheering her on. Regrettably, he came to with little effort required, and Amelia returned to seat herself at her table. She decided she was definitely going to have to pensieve the vast majority of this evening after the Servo Verum was lifted, and she might even send out copies of her moments slapping Albus as Yule gifts this year. She could think of a number of people who would appreciate such a gift.

Turning her head, she took a moment to scan the Gallery in search of Rodney Skeeter. Finally finding him, she returned the man's broad smile and wave with a nod of her head, and couldn't repress a smile when he excitedly held up his wizard's camera and his reporter's pad with dictaquill still busily writing on it. They exchanged a smirk, each thinking uncharitably of Rita's reaction come the morrow.

With a last grin, she turned back to a waiting Lord Potter and a beaming, shockingly-healthy looking fugitive from the best her own department had to offer. She startled herself when her initial attempt to speak was interrupted by her own, unexpected ripple of laughter. Hand to her chest, she waved her other hand in rueful acknowledgment of the sympathetic grins and laughs around the Hall, then began again.

"Well, Lord Potter, if nothing else you have confirmed for us that none of us present seem to have advanced heart trouble of any kind, have you not? All right, so, clearly that gentleman," pointing an elegant finger at Sirius, "is Lord Sirius Black, who until now has been an escaped convict, fugitive from justice, and convicted mass murder. Am I right so far?"

She almost repeated Albus's mistake of continuing on without waiting, but forced her mouth to remain closed when she saw Lord Potter and Lord Black shake their heads in concert. Closing her eyes briefly, she said tiredly, "Explain, please."

Looking sympathetic, Lord Potter clarified the matter. "No, Council Leader… um, first, let me remind everyone that I, like everyone else in the Hall including Lord Black, am subject to the truth compulsions and spells cast on the Hall as well as the additional Truth spells cast specifically on me as the Petitioner and on anyone who speaks during the course of this Session. That means that Lord Black is also unable to speak anything but the truth."

He glanced around to be sure that even the panicky people understood that fact. He looked to the Council Leader, to see that she was nodding in calm agreement. Her poise seemed to soothe some of the twitchier types in the Hall.

Taking a deep breath, he placed a hand on his godfather's arm and spoke with controlled intensity. "This is my godfather, Lord Sirius Black. He was never my parents' secret keeper; that was the rat here. He did not murder those people; that was also the rat. Even IF he had done those things, he is
still not a convicted felon, because – courtesy of our 'Chief Warlock' and 'Supreme Mugwump' there," gesturing scornfully at Albus Percy, "he did not receive a trial of any type. Nothing. Therefore, he was imprisoned illegally, and cannot be considered an 'escaped criminal' or a 'fugitive from justice', as he was never legally a criminal nor did he ever obtain justice."

Again, the Hall was rendered silent as everyone watched the glow of truth hold steady and strong. There were no alerts, no alarms, no warning flares. But it was inconceivable. Slowly, very slowly, the reality of the young lord's words began to sink in. He was speaking the truth. The Hall of Government confirmed it.

Sirius Black was an innocent man.

Shaking her head in horrified denial, Amelia looked upon Sirius Black and felt deep, painful regret. This poor man had been imprisoned in the darkest, cruelest cells of Azkaban, surrounded by and subjected to fifteen years' worth of hourly torture by the most sadistic creatures known to wizardkind, and not only was he innocent, but he had been denied his chance to speak – to anyone, ever. She knew for a fact that occupants of the lower cells were denied all visitors, with the single exception of an annual, five-minute visit by the Minister of Magic to establish proof of life.

She swallowed a sob of horror at the thought of this man's torment, and then took a moment to feel awe at the clear evidence of Lord Black's sanity and good health. She knew without doubt the man was sane. He would not have gotten past any of the warded entrances into the Hall if he were insane. The Hall of Government would allow no insane person into its depths, for they had no place here, not even being charged with a crime. Everyone remembered when Sir Callum Cadogan had been brought into the Hall in 1718 to face charges of warmongering and been force-apparated directly into the mental health ward at St. Mungo's. Wizardkind did not try insane people; they institutionalized them in hospitals and care centers, in extreme cases they euthanized them, but they did not subject them to trial.

But he was here in the Hall; ergo, Lord Sirius Black, despite all expectations to the contrary, was really healthy, sane and apparently happy.

And innocent.

Amelia was not alone in either her regard or her sorrow for the gray-eyed man, but the most notable of the crowd as Lord Gabriel Zabini.

Gabriel's hands were tightly clenched in an effort to contain his own emotions. The minute … no, the second, the instant his eyes fell on the revealed Sirius Black, Gabriel had been on full alert. Every fiber of his being, every cell in his body, everything was entirely focused on one Sirius Black.

He knew what this reaction was; he had seen the same happen to his own brother and had heard his father's stories. It seemed to be a Zabini trait, some distant echo of a long-lost creature inheritance well-back in their family tree. The Zabini men did not just fall in love. They mated. They did not just marry; they bonded. Their mates were male and female, pureblood and halfblood and there was even a single muggleborn witch mated to a distant cousin. But they were always powerful, always somewhat Dark, and always submissive to the Zabini men. Looking back on his confrontation with Sirius, it seemed that his little mate didn't entirely agree with that, especially the bit about being submissive.

Gabriel smiled darkly and reflected on how much he was anticipating teaching the smaller man the difference between being a powerful wizard and being a Zabini Alpha. He hoped his little mate
didn't learn too quickly. His thoughts darkened considerably when he reflected on the ordeal that had been his mate's life so far. He was deeply enraged. That a Zabini mate had been so misused, that HIS mate had been tortured and imprisoned for a decade and a half...! Biting down on a fierce growl, he knew his eyes were glowing slightly as he considered who was going to pay... and how.

Gabriel sensed, more than he saw, Sirius flinching and leaning away from his rage, and made a conscious effort to control and contain it. He knew that his mate was deeply confused at the moment; the Zabini mate bond was instant, always. There was no record of any of his family's mates who were not initially shocked and even traumatized by the sudden power of the bond snapping into place, locking them forever to a person they didn't even know. The bond was an instantaneous connection, a channel between the two mates; through it, emotions and sometimes even thoughts passed freely. He knew that Sirius had to be able to focus on the Petition, and he also knew that the man would be unable to concentrate unless he, Gabriel, took immediate action.

Standing suddenly, he stepped behind Lucius and Harry and stopped on Sirius' far side. He knew his mate had tracked his progress, as much by the tensing of his shoulders and flinching of his posture as by the emotions rippling through the bond. Casting a quick but powerful privacy shield, he placed his hand on Sirius' back and soothingly rubbed against the man's deep shudders. Wrapping his magic around Sirius like a warm, velvet cloak, he concentrated on sending comfort and love through the bond. Feeling his mate resisting desperately, Gabriel growled low and placed a large hand on Sirius' jaw, tilting his face up and forcing his mate to meet his warm gaze.

Sirius drew a deep, shocked breath, a look of fear in his eyes, and tried to back away. Gabriel would not let him. Locking eyes, he spoke with confidence and love to the confused wizard who was now — suddenly and forever — Gabriel's first priority.

"I know. Sirius, I know you're confused and frightened, and that this is not the time to address this. Just understand and accept this much; the bond is real and is permanent. What you feel is real; what you sense from me is real. This bond exists. You are my mate! You now have more than Harry on your side; you have me, and with me, you have the entire Zabini network. I swear to you, my mate, you are now safe. No matter what happens here tonight, you are safe, you are treasured, you are wanted, you are loved. Hold tight to that for a little while longer, va bene, amato?"

Gabriel stared fiercely into shocked gray eyes, willing Sirius to believe him. "We'll finish this Session, and go find a quiet place with Harry and Lucius to talk and settle down. Can you do that?" He stayed pressed tightly up to his smaller mate's side as he spoke, one hand pressed to the man's face and the other continuing to rub soothing circles on his toned back. He felt the shudders ease; he felt his mate calm and his fear recede.

Sirius stared deeply into his eyes for a few moments after he stopped talking. Although Gabriel lowered his mental shields to allow the man access, Sirius never entered his mind. Rather, he seemed to be — absorbing — Gabriel's intent. It was as if the bigger man could feel his little mate brushing up against the very essence of what made Gabriel - Gabriel. It was deeply intimate, sensual, and perhaps the most honest moments Gabriel had ever experienced. Whatever the smaller man was doing, he seemed content with the results, as finally he drew a deep, shuddering sigh and lowered his gaze thoughtfully for a few, endless moments.

Shaking his head in confusion, he again raised troubled gray eyes to Gabriel and said quietly, "I don't understand and I don't accept your claim. But you're right that we have no time for this. Only because Harry trusts you, I'll also trust you — for now."

He had added the caveat with a clear warning and challenge in his smoky eyes, and Gabriel's arousal rose with his need to establish dominance. He exerted self-control with an iron will and promised the
smaller man darkly, "That will suffice – for now." He felt Sirius shiver at the unspoken promise.

Releasing his mate's face reluctantly, he dropped the privacy ward and turned Sirius to face forward as he remained standing by his side. He ignored the questioning looks aimed at him, although he did send a reassuring look at the clearly concerned Harry. Gabriel did not move away but remained pressed against Sirius's slim back. He had found his mate, and the man needed him. He wasn't going anywhere.

Sirius offered his own reassuring, slightly tremulous smile at his godson and then tried to turn his attention back to the whole, original point of this night. As 'melia spoke from the front of the Hall, his thoughts abruptly clarified and he straightened his spine, both ignoring and welcoming the strong, warm presence on his left. Sirius remembered 'melia from his auror training and knew she was a formidable woman, forever labeled in his mind with a great big, flashing 'Do Not Cross' sign.

He hoped she would employ that incredible will of hers in his behalf. He was doing his best, he really was, but honestly, he was just so tired of fighting.

As if in response to his thoughts, his big mate's hand on his back moved to his waist for a moment and squeezed reassuringly before returning to the constant, soothing, utterly addicting rubbing on his back. Closing his eyes briefly in denial, he realized that he had already mentally labeled the man 'his big mate.' 'That can't be good!' he thought dryly. Gritting his teeth, he forced himself to concentrate on the Session.

"Lord Black. Although we all understand that the greater body of details will emerge in later days of this Petition, the nature of the Hall of Governments, as well as Lord Potter's Wizarding Oath, have clearly established that he has spoken the truth and you are, in fact, not only innocent of all charges but a victim of fifteen years of illegal imprisonment and torture."

At the Council Leader's words, the listeners shifted restlessly. Although it was a common fact, none of them really liked to consider that they were part of a system that routinely tortured its prisoners. There was no denying the effects of Dementors, however.

Ignoring their queasy reaction, the Council Leader continued, "For the Record, Lord Black, please formally declare your innocence for the crimes thought of you."

One could have heard a feather as it floated through the air as the Lords and Gallery listened for Sirius Blacks first, trembling words to the Hall.

"I, Lord Sirius Orion Black, swear on my life and my magick that I was not the Potters' Secret Keeper. I have never murdered anyone. I did not receive a trial or even an explanation before I was given to Azkaban. I witnessed Albus Percy perform the Fidelius that made his son, Peter Pettigrew Percy, the Potters' Secret Keeper. I had Harry in my arms after James and Lily died. I removed him from his crib and was bringing him to Mungo's for treatment when Albus ordered Hagrid to take Harry from me. He said I was too unstable to care for Harry just then, and had Hagrid convinced I was a danger to my own godson. I couldn't fight a half-giant without endangering the baby I was sworn to protect. So, I allowed Hagrid to have him temporarily after ge swore to get Harry medical help. I then went hunting a rat. I saw Peter's Dark Mark on his arm that night, but it just confirmed what I had already surmised. I .... I witnessed P-Peter murder those poor people." His hushed voice broke on the last word.

Gabriel leaned in and murmured softly in his ear for a moment, then Sirius drew a quavering breath and continued, "I am innocent, but nobody ever asked! So I swear it; so mote it be."

The magick of the vow flared around him. He stood, silent and trembling, struggling for control. The
agonized witnesses watched as he slowly lost the battle. A tear rolled painfully down his face, briefly witnessed by the grieving Lords and a stony-faced Harry, before the now-fearsomely scowling Lord Zabini turned the smaller man and pulled him protectively into his arms.

The witnesses continued to watch, reluctantly. Most truly did not want to further intrude on the trembling man and Lord who was comforting him. But they could not look away. They were not allowed to; Magic required that those who witnessed a vow had to also witness Magic's answer.

Gabriel Zabini murmured a quiet direction into Sirius' ear, and without pulling away or even turning his head, Sirius raised his wand and cast lumos. As soon as the wand tip lit, Sirius cancelled the spell and returned to clutching Gabriel's robes, grateful for the safety the big man meant even though he did not understand it. He couldn't stand that everyone was watching him. He had known he had to do this, but Merlin, this was just so hard. Clinging to his mate, he let himself acknowledge that the big, protective man holding him made the public scrutiny infinitely more bearable.

As he re-claimed his control, he turned his face to look at Amelia, but he did not step out of his mate's sheltering arms and aura. He refused to care about the proprieties. With very few exceptions, most notably his godson and Gabriel, who he knew through talking with Harry had only recently come to England from his villa in Italy, these people had all betrayed him.

He owed them nothing.

Amelia respectfully redirected her gaze to the Lords at large and started the first of many efforts she would make on behalf of Lord Sirius Black. "

First, let's take care of the most pressing business. I move to immediately formally confirm Sirius Black's innocence and status as a free person, and to broadcast this information in such a manner as to educate the public and ensure Lord Black's continuing safety and welcome within our world." Her troubled gaze travelled over the sea of blue lights, and she knocked once. "So moved; Motion is carried. Clerk, take action."

She turned abruptly and looked over to the Gallery. "Rodney Skeeter, please stand." As the startled reporter rose to his feet, she stated without pause, "Mr. Skeeter, I wish to meet with you immediately after this day's portion of the Session is concluded. I am assigning you the task and authority of publishing this information and disseminating it in every possible way. Do you accept this trust?"

As Skeeter stammered out an affirmative, she gestured him back into his seat and then turned back the still-standing Lords Black and Potter … and Zabini. Deep in her thoughts, she mused 'We should have Malfoy stand up, then we'd all have a view we can fully appreciate.'

"Lord Potter and Lord Black, you have requested the arrest and imprisonment of the wizard Peter Pettigrew Percy, whom you have stated under weight of Truth Spell and Vow is the son of Albus Percy, being tried under Lord Potter's Petition for Judgment. You have each referred to him as 'a rat'; you also provided the rat encaged on the table in front of you and implied that said rat is, in fact, Peter Pettigrew Percy. Is this assumption fact?"

Harry and Sirius replied as one voice, "Yes."

The Council Leader gestured to the approaching aurors and spoke with confident authority, "Take the rat into custody. Cast Hominum Revelio on him and place him in Numerus Frenum restraints, then place him in a maximum-security isolation cell. Place Albus Percy in a maximum-security isolation cell. Upon retrieval of Aberforth Percy, arrest him, place him in Numerus Frenum restraints, and then place him in a maximum-security isolation cell."
She looked around with a slightly exhausted expression, and then asked tartly, "Anyone else?"

At the sympathetic laughter from the equally shell-shocked Lords and Gallery, she offered a tired smile and simply waved her hand in acknowledgment when Lord Malfoy's Inquiry light glowed above his head.

Rising to his feet, the imposing Lord offered Amelia a surprisingly sympathetic smile and said calmly, "Based on evidence to which I have recently become party, I would recommend the aurors also cast *homonym revelio* and animagus bindment spells as they search for and secure Aberforth Dumbledore. We know for certain the ability is a Percy Family trait."

The Council Leader stared, hard-eyed, at the now openly-scowling Albus Percy and ordered, "Aurors, make it so."

She then turned to look briefly at the still-seated and patiently observing Minerva and Tavin McGonogall. Looking to Lord Potter, Amelia asked, "Lord Potter, is there any reason why I cannot release these two and send them to a much-needed rest as you specified earlier?"

Harry sent the woman a warm, deeply appreciative smile that seemed to go right into her overwhelmed soul. "Council Leader Bones, I see no reason why you should not do so and I would be grateful if you would. With all due respect for my elders," with a teasing, sideways grin at the two, "I think they could use the rest and the privacy…. and maybe a nice glass of Ogden's, eh, Minerva?"

The quiet laughter became more vigorous at Lord Ogden's jovial, "I'll send over a barrel; based on today, you'll need it!"

Amelia sent a clerk over to accompany the aging Deputy Headmistress and assist her in carrying the Book of Names and Tavin the Sorting Hat. As a former student of the formidable Transfiguration Master, the clerk was understandably hesitant, but relaxed at the older woman's warm smile and lightly amused smirk as she regally accepted his offered arm.

"We cannot cast magic on the Book, lad, so I will entrust you to carry it for me. Damage it in any way and I will transfigure you into a wand and send you into Albus's sweaty grasp," Minerva said. At the clerk's look of disgusted horror, she offered a trill of laughter and then placed Tavin on the hapless clerk's head. Her only explanation was, "You're taller than me and Tavin likes a good view."

Deciding to simply endure with dignity, the clerk then picked up the heavy book and escorted the straightbacked older woman out of the Hall through the Lord's Approach, old Tavin rambling on as they passed through the shields that scanned them for signs of mental tampering. They were watched with fondness by most of those seated in the Hall, who broke into laughter at Minerva's tart, "If he dared even consider setting a single magical finger in my mind, I'll give him a Wellington straight up his withered, old arse!"

As decorum returned, Amelia raised a hand briefly to halt the Aurors who had approached Albus Percy. "Wait a moment, please. Lord Potter? As Percy is the subject of *Petition for Judgment*, he has the right to hear anything further you have to say this night. Are there any more items or persons of evidence to apprehend or protect?"

Harry could almost feel everyone in the room holding their collective breath. He wondered if they were hoping that he would add something, or would not. Probably half and half.

Stifling a half-laugh, he cast an amused, emerald gaze around the vast room and said, "While there
are definitely more twists and turns to go through in the coming days, I believe that the remaining witnesses are entirely safe and that the additional evidence is very well-protected. I return the floor to you, Council Leader." He sat down with a sigh of relief, and welcomed the return of Lucius' hand on his lower back. 'Really, why is it so hard to just stand in one place?' he mused.

His sigh of relief was echoed throughout the Hall of Government as Amelia Bones waved the Aurors back to their task of removing and incarcerating a glaring, pathetically defiant, infuriatingly smug former-Headmaster. His progress out of the Hall was followed by a large number of hateful glances. He kept his head high and minced a bit from the effects of sitting still for such a long time.

He looked constipated, actually.

Three loud, echoing knocks reverberated through the Hall of Government. "All persons presently within this Hall shall be dismissed momentarily, under the constraints and parameters earlier set forth within this Petition, and shall return to this Hall and be seated within for this Session to re-commence promptly at eleven o'clock tomorrow morning. The time now is seven p.m. This session has lasted four hours. All Witnesses and Participants thus far are recorded in the Files of Record and will be granted all amenities and tithes as required by the established standards of this body. This concludes Day One of High Lord Harrison James Potter's Petition for Judgment against Albus Percy and the Percy Family. This Twenty-Four-Hundred-and-Thirty-Second Session, Day One, of the Hall of Government is now concluded and the Lords and Gallery released. So Mote It Be."

Three more knocks echoed through the room, and the doors on either side of the massive Hall slowly opened. Both doorways were glittering with the rune-activated scanning spells.

Harry wanted nothing more than to drop his head forward onto the table in sheer relief, but managed to maintain his 'lordly demeanor', as Sirius called it, with will power alone. He did allow himself to raise his arms overhead and stretch slightly, then emitted an embarassingly timid "meep!" as he turned and found himself pressed nose to neck in a pseudo-hug with Lucius Malfoy. Damn, the man was quiet!

His attempt to take a step back was thwarted as Lucius wrapped strong around him and tugged him firmly into a warm, immensely comfortable embrace. "Really, Harry," Lucius purred into his ear, "you only ever had to ask." If anyone noticed that, despite the half-hearted head-butt Harry delivered to the broad chest on which he was resting, Harry stayed snugly encased in Lucius' arms, they were kind enough not to mention it.

Sirius couldn't have mentioned it, even if he had noticed. But, as he was presently wrapped in a strong, warm embrace of his own, he remained blissfully unaware of the Malfoy Lord's conquest. Since he had escaped Azkaban, there had been hours, sometimes even whole days, when he felt reasonably safe, somewhat whole, kind of okay. But here, held closely against Lord Gabriel Zabini's fairly massive chest (if Sirius did say so himself) and listening to the strong heart that the handsome Lord inexplicably claimed now belonged entirely to him, Sirius was undone by the all-encompassing sense of safety and love and acceptance he was experiencing. It was wrapped firmly around him and was pulsing through this brand-new bond that had sprung to life so quickly he was left utterly bewildered. One moment he was Sirius Black, survivor of Azkaban, finding his greatest happiness in the paternal love he felt for his incredible godson. The very next moment, he was whole. Rendered complete as the open spaces in his soul were healed and filled through this bizarrely perfect bond with his dominating, all-encompassing, incredibly, passionately sexy and handsome – oh, my Merlin – MATE, Lord Gabriel Zabini.

In mutual accord, the four waited for the press of the crowds to ease before making their own departure, after a brief visit with Lord Ogden. As the four Lords moved slowly through the Lord's
Approach, on their way to a dinner and a night none of them would ever forget, their progress was tracked avidly by a now-devoted group that would eventually become known as the "FourLords Fanclub".

Throughout the Session, one specific thought had crossed the mind of literally everyone in attendance. At one point or another, almost every person who present had wondered if they were actually awake, or was this all just a very vivid dream.

For the four, handsome Lords who departed together, the certainty that this was real was a heartwarming thought, indeed.

oooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo
The First Night

Chapter Summary

Dinner with Harrison, Lucius, Gabriel, Sirius -- and one very unexpected guest. Or two.

Chapter Notes

A/N: Here it is, folks, the eagerly-awaited (if the PMs I've been getting are accurate) 'First Dinner' and 'First Night' of this story. I'm not going to mark lemons and limes in text; the fact that this is rated "M" should be enough. Many of you have expressed equal parts delight with the Sirius/Gabriel pairing and sorrow at the supposedly missed opportunity of a triad. Well, this fic isn't known for surprises for nothing, you know! I can't help but wonder what ya'll will think by the end of this chapter. Mwaa-haha-hahah-hahaa!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

oooooooooooooooooooo

CHAPTER 6

At Session End, Day One

Lord Charles Ogden watched as two of his oldest friends and most profitable business partners, Lords Lucius Malfoy and Gabriel Zabini, guided the men of the hour over to meet him rather than attempt to beat the crowds out of the slowly-emptying Hall of Government. It was a wise move. There was a bottleneck of Lords slowly filing through the Lord's Approach and its visibly shimmering series of wards and scans, activated at Ogden's own suggestion due to the clear evidence that Albus Percy had been playing fast and loose with mind magic.

Ogden watched with interest, joined by the four Lords he had been watching, as Augustus Arndstrom was escorted into a side hallway as soon as he passed through the shimmering scans.

Catching the eye of the attending Bailiff, he raised his eyebrows in inquiry as he glanced significantly after the distressed Arndstrom.

In response, the Bailiff gestured to the roll of parchment and dictaquill that automatically recorded the name of the person leaving through the doorway and listed the results of the scan. So far, several of those departing had been redirected down the side hallway, which lead directly to the small healers' clinic that served the needs of the employees of the Hall of Government. Ogden nodded somewhat impatiently at the Bailiff, as it was already clearly evident that Arndstrom's scan showed tampering.

The Bailiff was unaffected, having spent long years in the presence of the powerful men and women who kept their government running. Catching Ogden's attention, the uniformed man then glanced after Arndstrom, looked back to Ogden, glanced at the parchment and held up his hands to show the relative length of the information given on the weak-willed lord. Ogden's bristled eyebrows shot to
his hairline in surprise as the Bailiff indicated the printout had been several inches long.

"Well, that certainly explains a lot about how Brigadier General Arndstrom's heir is apparently such a milquetoast failure as a Lord. A printout of that length has to list at least ten, perhaps fifteen separate spells. Even if they are simple obliviations, there is little chance of anyone not being dramatically damaged by such a high number of mental invasions."

Ogden turned in surprise at the unfamiliar voice, and realized that the speaker was Lord Sirius Black, who now stood a meter or so away.

Meeting the somber gray eyes of the dapper lord, Ogden took a moment to study the man. Apart from the fashionable clothing and lithe build, he took special note of the infamous escapee's clear eyes and skin, lustrous black hair that flowed in soft curls to the small of the man's back, and overall look of good health. Liking how the man met his own eagle's-stare fearlessly, Ogden offered a slow smile and extended his hand in welcome. As the slim, devilishly attractive man accepted his hand and shook it firmly, Ogden said with genuine warmth.

"Lord Black, I am honored to meet you, and am genuinely happy to see your apparent good health. If there is anything I can do to assist you, please let me know."

Releasing the older man's strong grip, Sirius nodded and smiled dashingly. "I appreciate that, Ogden, almost as much as I appreciate that you haven't offered any ridiculous apologies."

He felt Gabriel's hand, which was placed proprietorially on his lower back, tense in disapproval. Sirius ignored the Zabini lord entirely, refusing to allow anyone to direct his words or behavior ever again. He was done being anyone's bitch, thank you very much, and if Gabriel Zabini felt he had any right to direct or control Sirius, he was going to be very much disillusioned.

Ogden raised his eyebrows as he met the challenge in the gray gaze. "Lord Black, if I felt I was in any way accountable for the crimes against you, I assure you I would do more than simply apologize. I still intend to do everything I possibly can to help rectify this horror that was committed against you, regardless of accountability. As it is, you know very well that the Supreme Mugwump, he spit the title with extreme scorn, "made damn sure that everyone believed that you had openly confessed and waived trial in favor of a quick, direct judgment. Fudge is going to have a conniption! If Bagshot were still alive, I'm sure she would be under investigation right now for authorizing your imprisonment without proof of conviction – I wonder if she was in on it with the old goat, or if he fooled her, too." He added musingly, "I do sincerely hope that the old goat gets to spend quite a bit of time in your old cell."

He looked at the four in confusion at their reaction to his words, considering he wasn't actually talking about anything amusing. Vengeful, yes, but hardly chuckle-worthy or otherwise meriting the reaction he was presently witnessing.

Gabriel had visibly shuddered even as a malicious grin crossed his handsome face. Sirius Black offered a barking laugh with sparkling gray eyes turning in amusement to his godson, Harrison Potter. That young man, in turn, was grinning broadly as he turned bright green eyes to look up at Lucius Malfoy, who stood proudly with his distinctive cane in one hand while the other rested on the younger man's broad shoulder.

Malfoy snorted softly at the glee on Harrison's face, an amused twinkle in the metallic eyes that put Albus Percy's renowned (somewhat psychotic) twinkle to shame, and replied to Ogden's unspoken puzzlement by tapping his cane lightly on Lord Potter's chest, right where most gentlemen kept their billfolds. As Harrison grinned and extracted his billfold and removed what appeared to be a shrunken newspaper, Malfoy raised silver eyes to Ogden and drawled in that distinctive, Malfoy-way, "Tell
me, my friend, what is it worth to you to learn why the three of us were laughing so hard earlier, just after we placed our bets on Albus's – 'acquisitions' – hmm?"

Charles took a moment to analyze the four men, trying to judge just how valuable the information they seemed to have truly was. He had witnessed Zabini, Malfoy and Potter leaning over the opened newspaper earlier and had been exceedingly curious as to the source of the somewhat horrified hilarity that Lucius and Gabriel had displayed – a public display utterly unlike the normally self-controlled Malfoy and well-mannered Zabini. He glanced at Sirius Black and noted that the man seemed to be quite eager to watch Ogden's reaction to whatever they had to reveal. He quirked a grin at the dapper man and asked, "Were you under a silencing spell while hiding next to Potter? I can't imagine you weren't guffawing with the rest of these jokers while they were discussing this – whatever 'this' is - earlier."

Sirius laughed outright, a happy, lighthearted sound that had an attentive Gabriel pressing closer and running his hand approvingly across Sirius' back. "Yes, of course. If not, I'd have been exposed a hundred times over." He swallowed hard when Gabriel leaned down and lowly murmured in his ear, "That would never do, >mi cuore. You will only ever expose yourself to me, >capisci?" He returned his smaller mate's indignant glare with an unrepentant, white-toothed smile, and turned to address the amused Charles, who was watching their interaction with an indulgent grin.

"Well, Charles? What is it worth to you to have even more ammunition of a most-amusing – and, frankly, revolting – variety against 'the old goat'?" The imposing Italian Lord rewarded Sirius' involuntary snort of laughter with another caressing run of his large hand across the man's toned back, and smugly noted the responsive shiver his delectable little mate could not suppress. Even without their bond, Gabriel would have known simply by the fire in those beautiful gray eyes that his mate was going to test him and push the boundaries of independence, and he could honestly say that he appreciated and enjoyed Sirius' feisty refusal to surrender control. With a surge of lust that he immediately directed down their bond, the Italian lord admitted to himself that the upcoming bedroom battles were going to become treasured memories, but they would not change the inevitable result. His little Sirius already knew that Gabriel was the dominant partner; he just had to be … encouraged… to admit it.

When Sirius felt the lust Gabriel had sent down the bond, he willfully ignored his body's response and instead reacted by trying to shrug off Gabriel's hand as he tried to set up a wall to block off his side of the bond. The gray eyes widened in alarm as he sensed Gabriel's immediate urge to bite a claiming mark on that elegant neck and mount Sirius right then and there in a forceful declaration of domination.

Once again controlling his arousal, a feat that became more difficult with every challenge his mate sent his way, Gabriel caught the frightened but defiant gray gaze with his own piercing, midnight glare filled with domination and dark desire, and sent a pulse of pure, Zabini Alpha warning down their new bond. The muscular lord implacably held the smoky gray eyes as they darkened with combined resistance and desire as Sirius felt the warning growl from Gabriel rumble through their bond, and only lightened the intensity of his regard when the smaller male shifted uncomfortably and lowered his gaze in reluctant submission, subconsciously baring his throat briefly to his dominant mate.

Hearing the barest whisper of another subvocal whine, Gabriel had sudden insight into one of the younger man's magickal abilities, and barely contained the urge to bare his teeth in an amused snarl. He knew that Sirius probably hoped to use his animagi form of a black wolfhound, what some suspicious wizards might view as a Grim, to avoid Gabriel. He could almost taste his little mate's upcoming shocked arousal when, in future response to Sirius shifting to a wolfhound, Gabriel transformed into his own form of an alpha Dire Wolf. Uttering a dark laugh of wicked anticipation,
he bared his strong, white teeth in pure dominance as he felt Sirius' unwilling but intense arousal.

Feeling that he had witnessed something unbearably intimate, Ogden glanced away from the two and turned to look at Potter and Malfoy. He huffed a genuinely amused laugh as the youngest lord wiggled straight, black eyebrows over sparkling green eyes and temptingly waved the paper in his hand. Whatever was going on between Zabini and Black was not distracting young Lord Potter from the topic at hand. Whatever these men knew, it had to be incredibly funny to have generated such open amusement from the normally controlled and reserved Lucius Malfoy.

Making up his mind, he cast a strong privacy charm and said decisively, "How about this? Include me on this apparently incendiary information, and keep me apprised of anything political or financial that may affect my holdings or my standing, and I will extend the same courtesy to each of you, as well as offering my official support where appropriate."

Expecting either the politically-experienced Malfoy or Zabini to grasp the significance of his offer first, Ogden was impressed when it was Harrison Potter who narrowed his eyes and swiftly summarized, "So, you are offering an alliance."

Nodding in agreement, the three older lords watched fascinated as Sirius and Harrison held a nonverbal discussion, complete with small head shakes and quirked eyebrows, before nodding in unison. Ogden was secretly amused at the slightly-miffed expressions of Gabriel and Lucius, certain that each was annoyed at not being consulted, when Black and Potter turned back to him and said simply, "Agreed."

Catching the very slight smile on Sirius Black's face and the knowing glint in the youngest lord's eye, Ogden deduced that these two had intentionally displayed their independence by not even glancing at their more experienced companions, and thought to himself that these relationships would be sources of great entertainment for a long time to come. He was jarred back to the present when Harrison Potter added with a grin, "But that doesn't get you this bit of information about our 'old goat' – that's extra. Now, what's your offer?"

Surrendering to the inevitable, Ogden simply asked, "What do you think is fair?" He knew he was leaving himself open to some rather extreme gouging, but hoped that whatever this secret was, it was worth the cost.

He was pleasantly surprised, albeit confused, when Harrison said, "I want you to take care of Minnie for us." At Ogden's blank expression, both Harry and Sirius chuckled. "It was our intention to meet up with Minnie and Tavin after Session, but plans have … changed, apparently," Harry said dryly, with a significant glance upwards at a smirking Lucius. "There aren't many people that Min and Tavin would find convivial, but I'm sure you qualify. So, if you bring her that firewhiskey you promised personally and share a decent dinner and conversation with her and Tavin, I'll hand over the source of our amusement."

Ogden got a speculative look that seemed out of place on his normally jovial face, before he asked suspiciously, "Are you trying to set us up?" He wouldn't have been surprised; he had been widowed for nearly twenty years and was often the focus of well-meaning matchmaking efforts from people who wanted to see a loved one in a stable, secure relationship with a wealthy, honorable, relatively not-ugly gentleman. Clearly, this young man was very fond of the Deputy Headmistress and she of him. After all, he had placed the Scotswoman in the finest suite of the finest hotel in the entire city; clearly, he held her in great regard and wanted her to be happy.

He wasn't expecting Harrison's appalled expression as he yelped, "Merlin, >NO, and don't you ever even THINK of suggesting to her that I did! She'd have my guts for garters!" He looked so terrified that the others broke into hearty laughter.
Nodding in agreement as he calmed, Ogden gestured at the cleared Hall of Government and said, "Gentlemen, we are the last to leave. Apparently, we each have dinner engagements to attend. So, I will bring Lady McGonogall the promised barrel of firewhiskey and share dinner and conversation with her and Tavin. I assume you are mostly just concerned that she is alone and possibly worried for you? Shall I fill her and Tavin in on what I know thus far?"

At Harrison's nod of confirmation, Ogden continued, "And the big secret of the evening – er, well, I suppose the latest big secret of the evening, rather – is…?" He trailed off leadingly, peering interestingly at the newspaper in Harrison's hand.

Harry turned to Lucius and quirked an eyebrow. "You want to do the honors, >my lord?" Unaware of the fact that he had just sent the Malfoy Lord's libido into overdrive with the honorific, he blinked in reaction when Lucius turned that shark's smile down at him and ran the back of his fingers down Harry's cheek, leaning close to murmur darkly, ">You play with fire, my Lion," before running his gloved hand down Harry's arm to his hand, from which he plucked the newspaper.

Turning intelligent silver eyes to Charles, the Malfoy Lord chuckled darkly as he said, "First, Charles, you will agree to copy this newspaper and return the original to Harry in Session tomorrow, yes?"

At Ogden's ready agreement, he drawled, "Excellent. We will be taking our leave. Charles, I think your offer of an alliance deserves a little reward, so we will allow you to handle this information and – disseminate it – as you see fit."

He handed the enlarged newspaper to Charles and directed, "Inside cover. Enlarge the photo ten times magnification – you will know which photo, trust me. And do remember what Harry said to Gabriel and I earlier – that people look like their animagus forms the more they age."

As the four handsome lords moved toward the Lord's Approach, Lucius called back over his shoulder, "Perhaps you should discuss with Minerva and Tavin the best methods of – pardon the visual here, gentlemen – 'sticking it' to the 'old goat', hmm?" He smirked at their pained groans and Gabriel's faint look of nausea.

Leaving Lord Ogden bent curiously over the newspaper, Sirius, Gabriel, Lucius and Harry passed one by one through the Lord's Approach and the various scans curtained across the doorway. None of them showed active mental invasion, although both Harry and Sirius registered strong evidence of past attempts and of broken or removed bindings and blocks. Gabriel and Lucius glared in fury at the parchment, each pulling their younger man closer protectively. Sirius and Harry exchanged bemused looks as Harry said to the two fuming Lords, "Look, this is nothing we didn't already know. It's all documented, and healed, and we'll explain later, all right? Let's just GO; I need to eat, and so does Sirius. We were both a little too stressed earlier to keep much down."

Lucius immediately turned to look closely at Harry, concerned silver eyes carefully scanning his features and softening as he noted the weariness beginning to show on the handsome, younger man's face. Glancing at Gabriel, he saw the Zabini Lord doing much the same with Sirius. With the ease of longtime friendship, both of the older men realized that the stories of neglect and abuse experienced by both Sirius and Harry during their childhoods, not to mention the extreme damage Sirius had to have sustained during his time at Azkaban, would probably make nutrition an ongoing issue for their partners. Words weren't necessary as the two protective gentlemen ushered their younger companions down the grand hallway, although they shared in deeply amused laughter as they heard Lord Charles Ogden's loud, horrified, "Auggghh! Oh, Morgana, that's DISGUSTING!", followed by the slightly maniacal laughter of a revolted but happily plotting whiskeymaker.
Elsewhere in the building, sitting alone in a barren cell, Albus Percy’s attention was pulled from his painstakingly careful study of the amber cuffs on his wrists by a sudden shudder of dread running down his spine. Sighing in resignation, he wondered with some trepidation what fresh hell had just been unleashed upon him. He really could do with some of Ogden's finest right about now.

He would not have enjoyed knowing that Ogden himself was already working on just that.

HARRISON'S HOME

Rather than risk the certainty of publicity that would accompany dining out in a public restaurant— even one of the exclusive variety favored by the Malfoys and the Zabinis— Harry offered to have everyone join him for dinner and drinks at his home.

Gabriel had been to Harrison's small apartment many times over the past year or so, and acquiesced with the invitation although he privately questioned whether it might not be a bit crowded with the four of them in the tiny dining nook. Having agreed simply because a private dinner was much more conducive to their respective after-dinner plans, Lucius and Gabriel were both very pleasantly surprised to find themselves standing in what an elegantly-appointed sign on the wall indicated was the “Far-room” of Potter Manor.

Before they could even ask, Sirius stepped away from Gabriel and chortled at Harry, "I never get tired of that, kid! For you newbies, Harry named this the 'Far-room' because it takes too long to say 'Floo & Apparation Room'."

He chuckled again at the twin looks of amused appreciation on their guests' faces. All four of them removed their formal outer robes and left them in the care of a female house elf who had appeared to greet them.

Determinedly ignoring the new, improved view of Gabriel Zabini's powerfully-built body, Sirius nervously stepped back and beckoned to the two older men to follow Harry out into the Main Foyer of Potter Manor.

Lucius immediately followed after the young Lord of the Manor, but Gabriel earned an irritable huff from his smoky-eyed mate when he insisted that Sirius precede him from the room. Stalking ahead of the much-larger man, Sirius did his best to get distance between them without actually looking like he was running away.

Gabriel, with his longer legs and powerful stride, kept up with the younger man easily, maintaining just enough space that he could keep an appreciative eye on the tempting form. He smirked as he eyed Sirius' firm, toned ass, nicely displayed in the tight leather trousers that he could appreciate now that the fashionable overrobe was removed. Based on Sirius' tense shoulders and slight glare, the Black Lord was fully cognizant of Gabriel's heated stare. Gabriel was fairly sure that Sirius did not realize that the graceful to-and-fro of his beautifully-formed behind swayed even more temptingly when he tried to walk quickly. Of course, awareness was ensured by the images and feelings Gabriel sent unrelentingly down the bond to his blushing mate.

Lucius followed Harry into a beautifully-appointed study decorated in the deep blue of a brilliant, summer sky and rich mahogany. They were closely followed by a flushed, fuming Sirius and suavely-amused Gabriel. As Harry summoned a house elf, who Gabriel and Lucius were surprised to note was wearing a neat uniform with the Potter crest on the lapel, Lucius headed directly to the
Harry spoke briefly with the servant, ordering dinner and briefly discussing the requirements for the next day's Session, before dismissing the elf and turning with a sigh to join Lucius. He hesitated only slightly when the older man held a welcoming arm out for him, then slipped under the arm and leaned gratefully on the hard chest as Lucius wrapped his arm around Harry's shoulders and pulled him closer. Once again treated to that distinctive, masculine aftershave that Harry would forevermore associate with the silver-eyed Lord, he closed his eyes with a long, tired sigh and let himself drift. When Lucius wrapped his other arm around him and dropped his cheek to rest on Harry's raven hair, they were both, finally, content.

On the other side of the room, Sirius had made a beeline for his favorite chair. Attempting to fling himself into its familiar comfort, he found himself blinking in surprise as he was suddenly lifted from his feet, turned and then settled firmly upon the rock-hard but oddly comfortable lap of one Lord Gabriel Zabini. Gasping in surprised indignation, Sirius ignored how perfectly he fit on Gabriel's lap and immediately began to struggle to his feet, only to find that Gabriel was not cooperating. Refusing to relax into the larger man's grip, Sirius went from astonished affront at the high-handed circumvention of his favorite chair to increasing anger at the fact that — no matter how hard he struggled and twisted — his efforts had absolutely no effect on the Zabini lord.

Gabriel had seen his independent new mate heading for the large chair near the fireplace, and had immediately discerned his intentions. Sirius thought that he could maintain distance from Gabriel by sitting by himself, rather than on one of the comfortable couches where Gabriel would certainly have sat next to him. Rather than force his rebellious mate to join him on a couch, Gabriel decided to make the point that he would be with Sirius no matter where the younger man chose to sit. As Sirius launched himself into the chair, Gabriel caught the dark-haired man's waist and simply turned them both as he lowered himself into the wonderful chair that carried his mate's scent and settled the smaller man on his lap.

He was fairly certain Sirius was not paying much attention to their bond, as Gabriel made no effort at all to conceal the effect the younger man's struggling and wriggling had on the lap he was trying so hard to leave. Wrapping strong arms around that slim waist, Gabriel linked his hands and allowed the arm in front to rest on his mate's thighs and the arm in back to brush and rub against the firm ass. Tightening his arms in delight, he relaxed in the comfortable chair and allowed Sirius to struggle all he wanted.

Feeling Sirius's conflicted confusion through the bond, Gabriel lowered his head and murmured quietly but firmly into his mate's ear, "I spoke fact, my mate. You and I are bonded, and on this our mating night, I will not -- can not -- allow you to retreat from me. It is my first concern to ensure you are close to me, safe, comfortable, fed and healthy; to keep you safe; to convince you of my love for you and the power and permanence if our bond."

Apart from a lessening in his struggles as he listened to Gabriel's words, Gabriel knew that his mate had suddenly awakened to the sensitivity of his situation when an emphatic wiggle brought Gabriel's hard, unmistakably aroused length snugly up against that teasing, wiggling, perfect rear. Gabriel moaned lowly when Sirius abruptly stilled, allowing Gabriel's painfully-hard erection to settle in the slight valley of his mate's leather-clad cheeks. As Sirius froze in conflicted panic, Gabriel dropped his head onto the silk-clad shoulder and took deep, careful breaths, trying to control the overwhelming urge to thrust against the absolutely PERFECT ass that cradled his rigid arousal.

He lost the battle when the arm he had wrapped around Sirius and resting on the flexing thighs felt the unmistakable impression of his mate's own hardness. Hearing the smaller man's uneven breaths
and seeing the flushed face and darkening gaze as Sirius' erection pressed against his arm, Gabe surrendered to the need that was consuming him. Moving his arm so that it rubbed against the dark-haired man's hard manhood in the tight leather pants, Gabriel allowed his hips to thrust slightly upward into the oh-so-tempting arse snugged against him, causing both of them to gasp slightly.

Gabriel was vaguely aware that Lucius and Harry were still in the room, but he didn't care. He was fairly certain that they were in a similar predicament, though admittedly without the strength of the Zabini mate bond driving them. No, he wasn't worried about his friends, but there was something else niggling at him … something he should remember … something ….

A deep, warm baritone suddenly broke into his aroused fog. "Gabriel, my friend, I see you've met Sirius. And Harry, you have a guest as well, with whom you seem – comfortable. Anything you all would like to tell me?"

And just like that, Gabriel remembered. 'Oh, yes,' he thought vaguely. 'Wulfric!'

Lucius had been lost in his own erotic haze, utterly oblivious to the activities of his best friend and Sirius Black. From the instant he saw the darkly-handsome young lord enter the Hall of Government with Zabini, Lucius had been intensely aware of Harrison Potter. Everything about the young man drew Lucius like a unicorn to a virgin: Harry's smile, his brilliant eyes, his intelligence, his honor, his humor, his features, his form, his scent – it seemed to Lucius that all of it was crafted specifically to entice and capture one High Lord Lucius Malfoy. He had been interested at first glance, and aroused at first touch. In later years, he would shake his head in bemused remembrance at the fact that he had needed to force himself to release Harry's hand when they exchanged their first handshake, and he would laugh at the fact that he had participated in what was widely known as the most-memorable Hall of Government Session in nine centuries with a constant, increasingly painful erection. Thank Merlin for the longer-cut of formal wizarding robes!

Tonight, when Harrison joined him by the bar in his manor, all Lucius could think about was drawing the young man into his arms and holding on. When Harry willingly went to him and welcomed his embrace, Lucius realized that single action by Harry had settled many decisions for the older man. He did not worry over his choices, and did not fret over the reactions he knew would be forthcoming. Narcissa was of no concern, considering how happy she was with Severus these days. Draco – well, his son was due a bit of a wake-up call, particularly in light of the new light Severus had shed on several of Draco's explanations about his years at Hogwarts. In fact, Lucius felt that it would be interesting to get Minerva's take on some of those events, as well. He did not even let himself consider the possibility that Harry would not be his; Lucius knew that he and Harry would be together. They belonged in each other's arms; it was just that simple. Lucius was a Malfoy, and could easily have fallen back on the fact that, while the family motto was 'Family First', the Malfoy slogan was 'What a Malfoy wants, a Malfoy gets.' He could have, but he didn't, because it didn't matter. He didn't need a reason, or an excuse. He just needed Harry. And he knew, with a certainty in the soul that only comes once in a person's life if they are very, very blessed, that Harry needed Lucius just as much.

They would always remember this embrace in Harry's study; it was earthshattering for them both. It lasted just a few minutes, but it lasted forever. They rested together in a moment of perfection: their souls and bodies were equally content, equally aroused, equally needy, equally needed. Words didn't matter. It was perhaps fortunate that magick requires a great deal of faith, because neither of them needed to be reassured, or to talk the situation to death. They could have done so, and it would have ended the same. But they didn't have to, so instead they simply held to each other, lost in a moment
of deep contentment and light arousal. They knew Sirius and Gabriel were in the room with them, somewhere, but neither Harry nor Lucius particularly cared. Odds were better than good that their two companions were even farther gone than they were.

As for Harry, he was as lost to the moment as Lucius. Securely wrapped in powerful, impossibly strong arms, resting against a silk-clad vest that covered a masculine chest that was so firm Harry suspected he would be lost in aroused admiration when he finally saw it uncovered, he held Lucius and let Lucius hold him and he simply – was. Breathing in the distinctive scent of the Malfoy Lord, Harry was aware of the fact that his thought processes had changed, and that everything that he would ever do now took the man holding him into account. It was a perfect, priceless moment. But something was niggling at him… something he had forgotten…something…

A deep, warm baritone suddenly broke into his aroused fog. "Gabriel, my friend, I see you've met Sirius. And Harry, you have a guest as well, with whom you seem – comfortable. Anything you all would like to tell me?"

And just like that, Harry remembered. 'Oh, yes,' he thought vaguely. 'Wulfric!'

Although he would never, ever admit it, when the portrait of Wulfric Dumbledore entered the room and interrupted them to bring him out of his aroused fugue, Sirius uttered a distinctly pathetic whimper. He was mortified at the sound, and promptly turned and buried his face in the handy chest and protective arms of his mate. And even though he shook his head in reflexive denial every time he thought of the large, powerful Zabini as 'his mate', he continued to think of the man as his.

He heard Harry clear his throat, and was surprised that his godson did not sound either embarrassed or apologetic when he spoke up. He did, however, laugh somewhat ruefully before he said in a slightly huskier tone than normal, "Grandfather! Yes, you're right, of course. I should explain." The younger man tilted his head up to look into startled silver eyes, eyes that warmed and shone with a bit of mirth when Harry said with no lack of irony, "Lucius, ready for a surprise?"

Lucius stared into the sparkling green eyes that were mere inches from his own, and sighed dramatically. "A surprise? Oh, good! Life around you is usually so dull."

They turned and moved together further into the room, smiling in amused sympathy at the two seated in Sirius' favorite chair. It looked like neither of them were particularly happy about the interruption, either. Harry raised fond eyes to the ensouled portrait of his several-times great grandfather, and said, "Lord Lucius Malfoy, I'd like to introduce you to Lord Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, my great-great-great grandfather. Grandfather, this is Lord Lucius Malfoy, the friend Gabriel spoke of."

Both Lucius and Sirius turned sharply to glare at Gabriel Zabini, who grinned unrepentantly at Lucius as he ran a caressing hand beneath Sirius' untucked shirt. "Lucius, I told you we had much to discuss! And Sirius, you need not look at me like that; do remember that I have been working with Harry and Wulfric for over two years now and never heard even a whisper about you!"

Sirius took a moment to consider Gabriel's words, stretching it out as long as he could to enjoy that warm hand on the naked skin of his back, before he turned to glare instead at his godson. Harry instantly put up his hands and said defensively, "What are you glaring at me for? I didn't keep any secrets from you! Hell, I would have introduced you to Gabriel months ago if you hadn't forbidden me from telling anyone but Wulfric, Minnie and Tavin!"
Gabriel cast a glare of his own at Lucius for daring to chide his mate, although he admitted to himself that the man was entirely right. Sirius had no room to be irritated with anyone, and Gabriel suspected that both Harry and Lucius were actually fairly close to the truth – that Sirius was probably regretting the decisions he had made that kept him from meeting Gabriel sooner. Gabriel didn't particularly mind his mate's unreasonableness about this, however, as he found the resulting pout to be utterly delicious. He stared at those pouty, tempting lips, lightly petting the dark goatee of his mate consideringly, and decided that he would not allow much more time to pass before he introduced Sirius to the first of many, many kisses to come and gave him a whole new definition of sensation through creative use of their mating bond. Feeling his mate begin to tremble as deep sensuality flooded the bond between them, Gabriel's throaty chuckle held both promise and threat.

"Master? Dinner be ready. In which dining room does you want it served?" Lucius looked in renewed surprise at Harry's house elf, who seemed to be considerably better-spoken and more intelligent than the average house elf. He made a note to ask Harry about it sometime.

Harry hesitated a moment, before turning to the others and saying tentatively, "We have a few places to dine in the manor, but if we just settle in right here, Wulfric can explain a few things while we eat. I know that's not necessarily proper, but...." Lucius interrupted him with a firm, "That is an excellent idea. Besides, I do believe that we are all probably fairly weary and rather tired of formality. For myself, I would not mind a more relaxed environment in the least." He realized that both Harry and Sirius were looking at him in surprise and added with some humor, "Really, gentlemen, is it so hard to believe that I could prefer to sit back in comfort and enjoy an informal meal in good company – particularly in this company?"

He narrowed his eyes in mock affront at Harry's emphatic nod and reached to tap the younger man on the head, only to have Harry rapidly duck and grin tauntingly. "Lucius, my ... friend..., you can't possibly expect me to spend several hours with you and not pick up on the fact that you like to smack me in the head, can you? What is that, anyway? Is it a Lord thing?" Emerald eyes glittered at him mockingly. Lucius watched as Harry turned his head to grin at Sirius, who had finally managed to get himself off of Gabriel's lap and onto his own two feet, only to turn in pretend shock as Lucius promptly smacked him in the back of the head. Grinning at each other, it took a while before everyone settled down on the couches and comfortable chairs for dinner and conversation. Lucius could not remember ever having a more enjoyable meal, with his best friend hand-feeding the man who had literally appeared from nowhere and settled Gabriel's soul, the large selection of delicious foods spread across the wide coffee table, the best wine Lucius had ever tasted filling their glasses, the ensouled portrait of a fascinating elder happily chattering away, and the surprising, delightful man he had fallen in love with tucked warmly against his side.

Hard to believe that the night would only get better.

Later that night, after enjoying a wonderful dinner in the best company Lucius had enjoyed in several years, the Malfoy Lord returned from a visit to the guest bathroom and joined Harry out on the balcony. The handsome young lord of the manor was alone as he waited for Lucius, as the dinner had concluded with a wide-eyed Sirius gasping in reaction to the image Gabriel had sent down their bond, featuring Sirius' long, black hair grasped tightly in the grip of a fiercely aroused Zabini Alpha as he bent a naked Sirius over the side of his favorite chair. The message was shockingly clear: play time was over, Gabriel was done waiting. Sirius backed away from the dark, intensely focused gaze of the man who was undeniably his mate, and then, surrendering to the instincts of predator and prey, turned and fled from the room, followed without a backward glance by the passionate, prowling
Gabriel Zabini.

Taking a moment to wish his longtime friend well with his new mate, Lucius turned to focus all of his attention on the young man who had inexplicably captured his well-guarded heart and his complete devotion in the matter of just a few hours. Harry seemed almost ethereal in the deep shadows and moonlight. The stars were out and there was a nip in the air that sneaked past the warming charms cast around the comfortable outdoor seating, a chill which was incentive enough for Lucius to pull Harry into his arms. They stood together comfortably for several moments, Harry's back to Lucius's chest, simply enjoying each other's warmth and looking upward at the plethora of stars glittering on a black velvet canopy.

The deep, comfortable silence and the late hour surrounded them like a cloak. Soaking up the quiet of the night, Lucius reflected on what he had learned earlier this evening from and about Wulfric Dumbledore and Harry Potter. There was so much to be revealed during Session in the coming days, and Lucius was going to enjoy watching the reactions of his peers as truth after surprising truth was revealed. The one truth that Lucius found most interesting at present was the fact that Harry Potter was not, in fact, eighteen years old. Through imaginative use of portrait magic and time-turners, the young Lord Potter was, in fact, a twenty-five year old man. Sirius had also taken advantage of the added years to recuperate and regain his vitality, so both he and Harry were both older and healthier than they would have been otherwise. Although he had refused to allow it to concern him unduly, Lucius found that he was greatly comforted by the fact that his paramour was seven years closer to his own age than he had previously believed. At forty-two years old, Lucius was a wizard in the prime of life and in excellent health and condition. Considering the double-century lifespans of most healthy wizards, he and Harry could conceivably share the next 180 years or so together. He smiled again in reflection, grateful to Wulfric for interrupting Lucius as he crossed the study to join Harry on the balcony, insisting that he wait long enough to hear the true Dumbledore Lord confirm that what had formed so suddenly between Harry and Lucius was as pure and powerful as Sirius and Gabriel's mate-bond.

He couldn't wait for Albus Percy to find out! It would be especially enjoyable to watch the old bastard when it was revealed that Harrison Potter had spent the better part of his last ten years living with, learning from and being trained by the very man whose life and line he had stolen a century and a half ago.

It would be even better when Wulfric appeared personally in Session to testify.

Lucius grinned savagely for a moment, but his thoughts did not linger long on the coming Session. They returned, instead, to the wonderfully desirable young man in his arms.

Lowering his face to rub his cheek against the silken, raven hair, Lucius felt Harry shiver. Lucius tightened his arms, and leaned down to run his lips in delicate, nipping kisses along the tender skin below Harry's ear. He felt Harry's breathing speed slightly, and knew the young man's heart would now be thudding faster in the toned chest.

Just thinking about it made Lucius tighten in pure want of the young man who was turning in his arms to look up into his face. Lucius could see Harry's inexperience shining from the uncertain, emerald eyes, and it only made the young man he held that much more desirable in Lucius' eyes. He raised his hands to rest on Harry's face, framing the ivory skin against the darker tone. He gazed in a moment of sheer appreciation, because this young man was simply beautiful. He was unquestionably masculine, but not overwhelmingly so. Straight, black eyebrows and thick, black lashes caused his gemlike green eyes to stand out in startling contrast. Creamy skin was flawless and silken, interrupted only by the delicately-outlined, faintly-silver lightning-bolt scar on the proud forehead. A straight, strong nose led to a perfect, red mouth, with a full lower lip and an adorable, sideways grin that made
the viridian eyes sparkle with delight. Perfect bone structure from Lilly Potter gave his younger love a strong jawline and cheekbones many would pay good galleons for. Reaching around, Lucius removed the silver hair band, and let long, silken hair that was so black it was almost blue flow in haphazard disorder over his crown and fall in refined waves to Harry's shoulder blades.

He was right. Harrison was simply beautiful.

Bending down slightly, Lucius placed tiny, delicate kisses atop each eye, delighting in the delicate whisper of the dark lashes as they fluttered closed. He ran a tender line of the lightest touches of his lips along the silken cheek, down the strong jaw, and up the delicately-shaped chin. Smiling gently, Lucius pressed tender kisses onto each corner of the tempting mouth, and watched the plump, red lips part slightly as the tiny tip of a pink tongue emerged to moisten that bottom lip that was rapidly driving Lucius mad. Darting forward, Lucius pressed his mouth to Harry's, softly testing those impossible lips, breathing with him, before he could not wait any longer and he deepened the kiss with controlled, ferocious desire. Sliding his hands through that indescribable, sensual hair, Lucius tightened his grip on Harry's head and allowed himself to release his formidable self-control a little more. With a deep, aching moan, Lucius pushed his tongue past the parted lips, slipping past the teeth and into the tempting, delicious space that was Lucius' new definition of nirvana.

Harry felt himself being consumed, feeling much like a phoenix that burned and was renewed from the combustion. Lucius was everywhere, his hands gripping Harry's head and guiding it where he wanted it, tilting this way and tightening in his hair, and his tongue was in his mouth, demanding Harry's response, slicking against his own and sliding over his teeth and his gums, and goddess! he was so strong, and so warm, and so demanding, and Harry was lost to it all, lost in Lucius, lost in desire, lost in lust, lost…

Forced to part, gasping for breath, hearts thudding and bodies thrumming, they clung together, exchanging quick, nipping kisses, and long, drugging kisses, and pressed as tightly together as they could get and still be clothed. Lucius pressed another hard, needy kiss onto Harry's swollen lips and held the younger man close, wrapping strong arms around the trembling beauty. Pressing his forehead onto Harry's, once again molten silver eyes gazed into emerald flames. Lucius' voice was deep and husky as he ran desperate hands over Harry's back and hips. "You realize that I cannot walk away, don't you, love? I simply cannot. The very best I can do if you say 'no' is stay right where we are, all night. Harry, I…. please, love.... "

Unable to stop and unwilling to coerce the young man who was suddenly, inescapably in his heart, Lucius faltered to a halt and closed his eyes, holding Harry tightly and hoping the young man in his arms understood what Lucius was trying to say. Feeling calloused, tender hands cupping his face, Lucius found the courage to open his eyes and see whether he was to be condemned to hell or invited into heaven. He watched as Harry reached up and pressed his reddened lips to Lucius' own, copying their first kiss and running his tongue in a slick line of fiery moisture along the tender skin inside Lucius' lip. Lucius body was clenched tight with arousal, and he was so focused on his sheer want that he almost missed Harry's softly whispered, "Stay, Lucius. I want you. Please…stay."

He would have sworn his heart actually skipped a few beats, before the meaning of the shyly whispered words registered in his mind. Lucius reached for his crumbling control with both metaphorical hands and held tight as he pressed a desperate, passionate kiss to Harry's passion-swollen lips and roughly whispered, "Where? Now, Harrison! Where?" He barely registered the fact that the young man he held crushed tightly to his chest had wrapped his strong arms around Lucius' waist and apparated them both directly into the candlelit, luxurious master suite of Potter Manor.

He did register the fact that there was a bed. And that was all the Malfoy Lord needed to lose control.
Swooping down on the willing young man in his arms, Lucius lost himself in the sheer lust of open-mouthed kisses and needy moans and breathy gasps that pulled air into starved lungs. Unable to even consider separating long enough to remove clothing, Lucius wordlessly and wandlessly stripped them both. The sudden, unbearably wonderful contact of bare skin to bare skin caused them both to gasp and shudder violently, before Lucius lifted the young man in his muscular arms and brought them both crashing down in a sweaty tangle of naked limbs and pure need upon the velvet-covered bed.

Harry arched up in sudden, shocked sensation when Lucius ran a trail of blazing kisses and bites down his chest and swirled his tongue around an erect nipple before pulling it into his mouth and hotly suckling the sensitive bud. Strong fingers rolled his other nipple between them, sending bursts of sensation arcing through his body and straight into his straining, turgid cock. He could not have stopped his hips from rolling against Lucius if the room had been suddenly moved to the Session floor. The only sounds in the room were panting gasps, breathy moans and whispered, urgent words of love and need.

Lucius wanted to worship this young man, wanted to stretch him out on the bed and taste every centimeter, but that slow, careful journey would have to wait. Right now, their desire was urgent, their bodies following the press of fingers and lips in compulsive stretches and urgent shudders of need. They could not pause, could not wait, everything was more, and now, and faster, and harder.

"Lucius, please!" What did he want? Harry didn't even know, he just knew he had to ask and beg and somehow Lucius would figure it out. His faith in the man with blazing silver eyes was perfectly placed, as hard hands pushed his hips into the bed and a skilled, hot mouth descended on his tortured erection and forced a scream of ecstasy from Harry's throat. Harry fought those hands, desperate to move his hips, to thrust against the moist heat and the wonderful suction. He moaned a bitter denial when the talented mouth left him and the hands briefly released him before they returned to grip his straining thighs and push them upthis way and apart that way.... "Good, baby. Very good. Trust me, love," Lucius' deep voice purred, and suddenly there was a whisper of spellwork, and an odd, empty feeling, and then the impossible swipe of a warm, wet, talented tongue there and oh, merlin, how had he ever thought this was not going to be wonderful?

Thinking carefully, Harry finally remembered how to turn his head and slowly, his gaze fell and his breath caught at the painfully erotic sight of moonlight hair between his open thighs, silver eyes blazing heat up at him as an agile, talented tongue swiped and teased and tortured his twitching hole. He could not possibly have been harder, and yet when a long, slick finger circled the quivering rosebud and joined with the wet, absolutely fucking wonderful tongue in stretching and teasing him, Harry actually began to feel dizzy as the last of his blood seemed to flee from his brain and head directly south. He barely registered the second finger or the third, as the first finger had found the bundle of nerves Harry had only heard about and began to send repeated shocks of violent pleasure through his overloaded system. He heard a voice pleading, moaning, gasping, and was vaguely aware of the possibility that the voice belonged to him, but he simply couldn't care. His world had narrowed to naked skin and hard muscle and Lucius... Lucius... Lucius.

He moaned in deep distress when the fingers and tongue stopped their beautiful torture, but obediently raised his eyes at the gentle command and locked gazes with his lover when Lucius draped his silk over steel body on top of him, murmuring, "Look at me, Love. Trust me," before frantically capturing his succulent mouth in a passionate duel of teeth and tongues as a hot, rigid length of silk and steel probed at his center and slowly, inexorably pushed past the ring of twitching muscle and slid a little further with each rigidly-controlled thrust, retreat, thrust of agile hips and phenomenal muscle control.

Finally, the powerful body on top of him rested, lungs heaving, allowing Harry time he did not want
to adjust to the beloved invasion. Harry rolled his hips impatiently, wrapping long legs around his lover and digging his heels into the muscled buttocks of his own personal Viking. Clenching his muscles tightly around Lucius' turgid erection, he watched in heavy-lidded satisfaction as the controlled Lord Malfoy flung his head back in sharp reaction, long, flaxen hair whipping through the air. He celebrated his triumph with guttural gasps and moans as Lucius surrendered all control and thrust into Harry as his body willed it, ruthlessly pounding against Harry's prostate with his engorged cock and reveling in the burn of muscles as the mounting pleasure seized control of their bodies and their wills and sent them into a timeless, pagan dance of passion and pleasure.

When the sharpening thrill of desire and pleasure and pain swelled and rose and eventually peaked in an indescribable crescendo of pure sensation, they clung together, momentarily frozen in a rictus of ecstasy, before Lucius arms gave way and he collapsed atop his exhausted lover. They continued to shudder together, hips stuttering in erratic pulses of leftover pleasure, as their heartbeats slowed and they regained their breath. As he slowly regained awareness, Harry realized that he was running caressing fingers through Lucius long, moonlit hair and that Lucius had continued to support much of his own weight on his bent arms rather than collapse entirely on his younger lover. With a groan of mutual regret, Lucius slowly pulled himself from Harry's welcoming body and dropped to the side of the softly smiling young man, pulling Harry into his arms and guiding the raven head to rest upon his sweat-slick, broad shoulder as Lucius ran a soothing hand up and down Harry's toned, trembling arms.

Exhausted, Lucius fought off sleep for a few more moments as he dropped a loving kiss on the damp forehead of his new, yet somehow forever, love, and felt his heart warm as an answering kiss was pressed against his chest by a very sleepy young man. As the two drifted off into a deep, restful sleep, they were each aware of a new, bright rope of magic that seemed to be wrapped around them both, tying them together in a way that deeply comforted them.

And as their breathing slowed and deepened, dimly, they were aware of dropping into the aethyr and the spirit realm, and looking across a small distance at two other beings who had their own, bright rope of magic binding them to each other.

Deep in his subconscious, Lucius wondered if he was imagining the long, delicate rope of magic that seemed to extend across the distance between the two pairs of lovers, lightly but inexorably connecting them to each other. As he settled into dreams, his subconscious mind decided that it didn't really matter at the moment.

Downstairs, in the study, the ensouled image of Wulfric Dumbledore raised a goblet of wine in toast to the handsome, dignified figure who joined him in his painting. Raising his glass in response, Wulfric's guest smiled slightly as his blood-red eyes examined the new magical bonds stretching between the occupants of the manor.

Tomorrow ought to be an interesting day, indeed.

Chapter End Notes

Reading recs: seriously, there are so many great writers out there, but for slash HP I highly recommend slayer of destiny, MarksMom, Athy (Athey on FFN), IBegtoDream&Differ, Pikachumomma, WindSeeker2305, Zeledeus, Danyealle, Elpin,
tstop, Midnight Ember, Keikokin and many others. If curious, check out my Favorites pages on FFN, since I haven't found everyone here on AO3 yet.
DINNER IN POTTER MANNER: THE SIRIUS SIDE

Reluctantly seated next to Gabriel Zabini on one of the long couches in the study, Sirius stubbornly kept his eyes fixed on the plate in his lap, aimlessly stirring the food, and pretended to listen as Wulfric Dumbledore related much of the events of the past several years to a fascinated Lucius Malfoy. Glancing upward through long, dark hair, the handsome Lord of Black took a few moments to covertly observe the interactions between the two men seated across from him, and found himself happy for the silver-eyed wizard and Sirius's own personal miracle, his godson Harry Potter.

Harry. That young man was the sole reason Sirius was alive today. It was only the thought of Harry, left alone and vulnerable in the manipulative grasp of Dumbledore, that had fueled Sirius' survival.

It had taken him less than a day in Azkaban before he pieced most of the recent events together and correctly identified the real villain of the show as Bloody Albus-fucking-Dumbledore. Of course, at the time, he'd had no idea of the true machinations of the treacherous old bastard; he had only deduced the fact of Dumbledore's puppeteering from the time the Marauders first entered Hogwarts to the time he maneuvered Sirius into false murder charges and Azkaban without trial.

Frankly, that had been quite enough to chew on for the decade plus of his incarceration. That, and his torment over the unknown fate of his godson, Harry.

He learned an interesting fact about Dementors during that time. It seemed that Dementors fed on the positive emotions of their victims, but were utterly repulsed by righteous anger and justified rage. They did their fair share of damage to Sirius, no mistaking that, but he did his own share of damage to them, too. After about eight years, they seemed to have conceded the battle, acknowledging that
the prisoner in cell 21 on the Northward-facing side of the Kedavra-Corridor of Azkaban would not surrender his rage, ever. They retreated, passing by but never stopping again to torment Sirius. They even seemed to have a grudging respect for him and his stubborn will to survive. Somewhere past the decade-mark, his food rations improved somewhat, he began to receive clean water in his allotment bucket, he found a second blanket on his "cot", and the iron slab across his window to the sea inexplicably began to rust and weaken.

Sometime after Fudge's last annual visit, in which Sirius stole the newspaper that had the Weasley Clan featured on the cover with a certain rodent, Sirius felt his fury and his sanity re-introduce themselves, and suddenly he was clear-minded and supremely focused. On that day, the iron slab at the window fell to his floor, nearly breaking his muzzle as he sat on the dirty stone below, and allowed the weak sunlight to bathe him in renewed hope. He heard the rising whimpers and moans of other prisoners in the Corridor, and knew that the Dementor guards were patrolling again.

For the first time in years, one of the emaciated creatures paused at his doorway, and as he turned to face it, he was astonished to see a skeletal hand extending through the small pass-through of the iron door and drop something before it retreated. Rising to all fours and padding across to cautiously inspect the item by the door, he heard the scratching cant of the Dementor as it uttered a single phrase that he still sometimes heard in his dreams: "Full moon. Low tide."

He had sniffed suspiciously at the small, swirling orb of dark colors and odd magic, sneezing at the odd tingle it emitted. Changing back into his human form, Sirius had reached a thin, shaking hand and touched the Dementor's gift. The instant his finger touched the orb, magic poured from the tiny thing and flooded his system, reawakening and healing the starved magical passageways that ran throughout every magickal creature. He remembered crouching in the dirt as his magick burned again, feeling tears running down his face. He placed a shaking hand on the iron door as he felt the Dementor's regard upon him, and as the mystifying creature began to retreat, it said one more thing that still puzzled Sirius.

It said, "Black Blood Riddles."

That same night, a partly-renewed Sirius Black slipped his thin frame through the portal of his cell and plunged fifty-seven meters into the icy Northern Sea. Just before he hit the water, he used a small burst of the gifted magic to soften the impact and warm his body. Still, the shock was … profound. Gaining the surface, the gasping wizard called forth his animagi form, and began a long, frozen swim through the icy sea, following the current to the mainland, accompanied by the light of a full moon and the long gaze of his Dementor accomplices. He learned later that news of his escape was reported by a human guard, nearly eight days after he actually dove into freedom to save his godson.

Gabriel Zabini was a very, very smart man. The already formidable family fortunes of the Zabini House had doubled upon Gabriel's rise to its Lordship. Politically, the family was better-positioned than arguably any other House, having allies and even friends in every quarter. He was a likable wizard. He was shockingly handsome. Virile. Popular with witches and wizards alike. His bed remained empty only when he wanted it so. In his younger days, that had been very rarely. Lately, however, his bed had remained without company, as the Lord of the House of Zabini finally accepted that the calling of his magick and the ache within his soul could not be assuaged by a procession of bedpartners who were not his own, true mate. He had almost resigned himself to the likelihood of a life alone, and was considering naming his nephew, Blaise, as heir to the house.

The past couple of years had done much to pull him from the malaise he felt gathering within him. Being introduced to a pissed-off fifteen-year-old Harry Potter by a goblin and a talking hat had done
wonders for his growing ennui! Suddenly, Gabriel had a mystery, and a mission, and an eye-opening
couple of years spent investigating, training, maneuvering – all with the goal that was now being
realized in this Session of the Hall of Government. He had not lied to Lucius; he had spent the past
couple of months specifically training Harry in the Rules of Becoming Conduct for a High Lord
participating in a Session. Gabriel had worked tirelessly on behalf of the young Lord Potter and of
the British Wizarding World. He had entered the Hall of Government today prepared for almost
anything.

Almost.

He was a betting man, and yet he would never have bet on the likelihood of having his yearned-for
true mate appear from thin air standing next to a smirking Harry Potter. He wasn't sure if he owed
young Potter a dozen roses or a kick in the trousers. Probably both.

That young man was a remarkable person, indeed. He was glad, now, considering that his truemate
was Harry's godfather, that he had only flirted with Harrison and had resisted the urge to lure him to
bed. He wished Lucius all the luck in the world in dealing with him; Harry was not a restful person
to know. 'Probably just what Lucius needs,' he mused thoughtfully.

Gabriel had been certain that Harrison and Lucius would not long remain apart; he had even bet
Charles Ogden on the number of hours between re-introduction and overtly-expressed interest.
Wincing slightly, he recalled that he owed Ogden more chocolates for that; shrewd old politician that
he is. One late night last year, Harrison had somewhat drunkenly confessed that he was very
attracted to Gabriel's best friend, one Lucius Malfoy. Gabriel knew his best friend's tastes – the two
had even spent a single, memorable week exploring each other quite thoroughly before settling into
their present friendship – and was certain that a twenty-five-year-old Harrison Potter was going to
send Lucius reeling. He also knew that there was some history between the two from Harry's
younger years at Hogwart's; Lucius had laughed for weeks about 'the Dobby incident.'

It would be interesting to be around when Harrison finally learned that Lucius had carefully
orchestrated that situation in order to provide young Harrison with the assistance and unusual abilities
of one of his better house elves. Dobby's hero-worship of the Boy-Who-Lived had helped that
greatly; otherwise, nothing could have convinced the loyal little bugger to pretend to turn on his own
family in that manner. But Lucius had been adamant, already furious at the rumors about the boy's
childhood and the muggles with whom he was housed. Dobby had watched over the young Harry
Potter since then. It had been he who pulled the young wizard from the path of the Knight Bus the
day he inflated his bitch of an aunt. Well, supposed aunt. It had been Dobby who healed young
Harry's hurts in his sleep, and who had followed the young wizard through the damn TriWizard
Tournament, even into the graveyard.

Fucking Albus Percy and his rat progeny! Gabriel spent a moment in amused contemplation of what
the newspapers would say when the truth of that night was revealed. It was going to be riotous, of
that he was sure. After all, not everyone would easily accept the fact that the "Leader of the Light",
even soiled as he would now be, was a would-be necromancer, attempting to resurrect his beloved
Grindelwald through the blood of Harry Potter and the bone of the father of his greatest enemy.
Harder still for them to learn the truth of Voldemort. Not to mention of Thomas Riddle!

Gabriel's attention was caught by a covert movement of his dark-haired mate. He smiled faintly as he
watched Sirius watch Harrison and Lucius through the veil of his own, black hair. Honestly, Gabriel
was somewhat surprised that Sirius had apparently accepted Lucius' presence with equanimity; after
all, to hear Severus tell it, Sirius was a slavering, loud, pro-Gryffindor/anti-Slytherin joke of a man.

Gabriel scowled and felt a growl within his chest; he was going to have a little – heart-to-heart – with
Severus Snape sometime soon. Very soon, if the snarky professor launched into another of his patented rants on Harry, Sirius, Remus or the late James. He made a mental note to get Sirius’ version of the incident at the Shrieking Shack; he suspected Percy had something to do with that, as well. Gabriel shook his head ruefully. He had never heard Harrison even whisper about Sirius, and simply presumed that there had been no interaction of any kind between the two.

So much for brash Gryffindors! It seemed two of the sneakiest people Gabriel now knew were renowned as being consummate Lions, and yet, here were Sirius and Harrison, having pulled off the longest, most covert, absolutely brilliant subterfuge he had ever heard of!

Gabriel frowned suddenly as his inner-growled growled in anxious concern that his mate wasn't being properly attended. Looking closely, he realized that Sirius had not yet actually eaten more than a bite or two from his plate; rather, he was carefully moving food around in the appearance of eating. Leaning forward abruptly, Gabriel reached a long arm over and removed the plate from his startled mate's lap, before pulling the resisting younger wizard firmly to his side on the couch. Wrapping his muscular arm around the slim shoulders, he tucked Sirius into his side and tapped a long, admonishing finger on the tempting mouth that had just opened indignantly to protest his treatment. Meeting the angry gray glare with calm, midnight eyes, Gabriel held a forkful of perfectly-prepared roast beef to the tightly-compressed lips of his resistant mate and said uncompromisingly, "Eat."

As Sirius tried to move his head aside, refusing to open his lips as Gabriel would most certainly have inserted the bite whether he wanted it or not, he felt a long-fingered hand lift from his shoulder and grasp the back of his head with delightful … err… aggravating strength. He glanced pleadingly over at Harry and Lucius, to find them lost in each other's company and carefully ignoring the unbelievably arrogant behavior of the Zabini lord. The roast beef touched his lips as Gabriel's hand kept Sirius' head firmly in place, the bigger male easily withstanding Sirius' scrabbling hands and attempts to get away. Just as Sirius began to dig his fingernails into the larger man's wrist, the hand in his hair tightened warningly into an almost-punishing grip and the handsome jaw clenched briefly. Startled, Sirius met the black eyes that were suddenly mere inches from his own and found himself fighting not to flinch when Gabriel said with smooth confidence, "You may resist, Sirius, but I will prevail. It is my main purpose in life to see that you are healthy, happy and safe. You are not eating, even though I can both see and sense that you are shaky from lack of food. I cannot allow you to harm yourself. You will eat, or I will make you eat. This bond tells me more than simply your emotional wellbeing, my mate."

Wondering wildly what that meant, and just how much the powerful man who had suddenly declared Sirius to be his own personal property actually knew about him, Sirius stubbornly resisted for another few seconds before succumbing to the implacable Lord and reluctantly opening his mouth to accept the bite of meat. Gabriel did not release his head until he had chewed and swallowed, scowling at the bigger man the entire time.

Deciding to ignore the fact that he felt a deep, contented rumble within himself for Gabriel's care and, admittedly, dominance, Sirius figured he'd best remind both of them that he was far from helpless. Reaching for his wand, the Black lord froze at the deep growl coming at him from the throat of the man holding him, who once again suddenly seemed to switch from suave Italian aristocrat to powerful, intimidating Alpha. Cautiously returning his hands to his lap, Sirius glared at the bronzed man before him when Gabriel's grip turned from uncompromising to soothing, refusing to acknowledge the burst of warmth he felt at the approving look in the dark eyes. Carefully retreating one slow inch at a time, Sirius huffed in exasperated irritation as another forkful of food was presented to him. He scowled when his attempt to seize the fork was easily avoided, and glared furiously at the food held insistently in front of his mouth. He had the feeling Gabriel would hold that damn fork forever if he didn't cooperate. With a furious sigh of exasperation, he again opened his
mouth and accepted the food, pointedly refusing to meet the dark eyes focused so intently upon him.

Covertly glancing at Harry and Lucius, he spared a moment to appreciate their tact as they carefully did not notice the interactions between him and the far-too-handsome son of a bitch forcefeeding him. He was also trying to ignore the rising levels of magic that had begun to gently swirl around and circle he and Gabriel.

Chewing as long as he could, he concentrated on subtle evasion of the overwhelming male next to him, hissing like an angry cat when his slow retreat was overridden by a strong arm pulling him back into the territory he had just escaped. He opened his mouth to unleash a vituperative stream of abuse, only to find himself angrily chewing and swallowing yet another forkful of food. And that was how Sirius Black, despite his best efforts, reluctantly consumed an entire dinner the night of his re-emergence into Wizarding Society.

oooooooooooooooooooo

Wulfric was deeply amused. He had entered the portrait in the Study with the intention of debriefing his grandson and surrogate grandson on the first salvo at the Hall of Government this day. Being confronted with not one, but two romantic pairings, was entirely unexpected.

His eyes softened as he observed young Harrison in the arms of none other than Lucius Malfoy. He had always liked young Lucius, actually. His interactions with Riddle had given him ample room to observe the man's followers, and Lucius Malfoy had impressed him with his sheer quality. He was very much the son of Abraxas Malfoy, another wizard Wulfric had cause to admire.

Frowning briefly, Wulfric hoped that Lucius' own son, Draco, managed to grow up and begin to emulate his grandfather and his father. And Lucius was truly a man worth emulating. The wizard lived and breathed the Malfoy House motto, 'Family First', and he included his dear friends as family. Sometimes he even reached beyond friends and family, quietly seeing to the needs of wizarding children or displaced nobles while careful to preserve the carefully-engineered reputation of arrogant, snobbish pureblood. If Lucius Malfoy decided that his grandson Harrison was family, then Wulfric truly had no more need to worry about the boy. Lucius would see him safe, always.

Wulfric smiled faintly, feeling the affirmative pulse of magick through the portraiting portals that indicated the entrance of his dear friend and companion. Riddle would be greatly pleased at the evening's developments.

Seeing the way his fiercely independent grandson Harry leaned into the comfort of the strong arms around him, and the tender manner in which Lucius held the young man, would have been enough for Wulfric to make a determination on how he felt about this joining. However, Wulfric was not a Dumbledore – 'a true Dumbledore', he amended sourly – for nothing. He could see the auras and magical ropes swirling around the four men in the room, and had no reason to condemn either pairing.

As he spoke to a fascinated Lucius, he quietly observed the interactions of his surrogate-grandson Sirius and Gabriel Zabini. He had personally known Gabriel for two years now – a little longer if one considered the effects of time turners and portrait magic, but that was the way headaches formed. He held Gabriel in the highest regard, and felt deep affinity for the powerful Wizard. In truth, Gabriel was very much like Wulfric himself. He had deep respect for the bronzed Italian who had taken up his grandson's cause with such a will. Gabriel Zabini was a remarkable man and a powerful wizard. It had troubled Wulfric to see the seeking tendrils in the man's aura, and to know the pain the Lord lived with every moment of every day.

Wulfric had been around a long, long time now, and knew everything there was to know about his
family's special magic. There was nothing that remained secret to him regarding magickal signatures, and he had known from the first moment of meeting that Gabriel Zabini was the bearer of a torturous, unresolved soulmate bond. Wulfric had kept his eyes open ever since, stalking through paintings and portraits in thousands of locations in the Wizarding World, seeking to find Zabini's match and help resolve the man's suffering.

He was astonished to discover, on entering the Study, that Zabini's aura had wrapped around and fully embraced his own beloved surrogate grandson, Sirius Black. Wulfric had known Sirius for over twenty-five years now, although he had not seen him during the years in Azkaban. Not once had Wulfric had a hint that Sirius Black was Gabriel Zabini's mate. Fascinated, the old lord studied the magickal tendrils and folds as they surrounded the two lords, and he came to a startling conclusion. Gabriel Zabini's aura had somehow – cleansed? purged? – the aura of Sirius Black, changing it from a deep grape, so dark it looked black, to a clean, royal purple.

The fine mind worked busily on the problem as Wulfric split his attention and continued to explain events to Lucius Malfoy. During a pause in the conversation, as Harrison accepted a glass of the deep purple 1852 vintage from Lucius, Wulfric's attention was caught by the swirling colors in the wineglass. As light reflected upon the liquid, the color swirled and lightened… as light reflected …

Turning to look closely at Sirius and Gabriel, Wulfric suddenly understood. Sirius' magick had been partly borrowed. His aura had not been entirely his own. Apparently, whatever creature occupied that distant branch on the Zabini family tree, it had the ability to find, secure, diagnose and heal its counterpart. When Gabriel found Sirius, his magick had cleansed the younger lord of the remnants of the Dementor's gift.

Wulfric studied Sirius carefully, and realized that the younger man was lighter, somehow. He seemed softer, younger – whole. Despite his visible annoyance at being so dominantly fed and cared for by Gabriel, Wulfric could clearly see in the younger Wizard's aura that he was -- despite resistance, confusion and a touch of fear -- very pleased to receive Gabriel's attentions.

And, looking at Gabriel, Wulfric was delighted to note that there were no more lonely tendrils reaching entreatingly into the aethyr. Gabriel Zabini's aura was wrapped firmly, protectively, around a blushing, bewildered Sirius Black – and was not letting go.

Wulfric watched with amusement as Gabriel fed an unwilling, resistant Sirius, recognizing the behavior of a dominant creature caring for its mate. Now, if Gabriel's nature truly follows the patterns of dominant magickal creatures, the next phase of this courtship should involve … ahh! And there it is!

Chuckling to himself, Wulfric settled back to watch as Gabriel Zabini turned from provider to predator in front of – and upon - a shocked Sirius Black.

This was going to be fun.

oooooooooooooooooooooo

RETREAT!

Grumpily chewing and swallowing the final bite forced upon him by an increasingly intent Gabriel, Sirius huffed exasperatedly as he was once more tugged to sit snugly against the much larger man. He watched as the now-empty plate was set on the side table, refusing to meet the focused, midnight gaze. He chose instead to watch as Harry accepted a glass of the 1852 from Lucius. Sirius loved that vintage; it was richly-bodied yet crisp, and he frankly adored the color. Hell, he would wear the color
His gaze wandered over to the portrait of Wulfric, who was suddenly looking at him and Gabriel as if they were a magickal experiment with faulty results. Sirius barely had time to register the wizard's perplexed look before it morphed into a look of dawning understanding. Watching curiously, Sirius saw Wulfric's expression change to a kind of darkly-amused anticipation, and barely had time to wonder why he felt a shiver of anxiety when he was literally blindsided by a sudden mental image forced down the new bond between Gabriel and him.

Gaspering in shock, Sirius felt the strong arm tighten around him as he was suddenly confronted by the overwhelming vision of himself, completely naked, being bent face first over his favorite chair by a rampantly-aroused Gabriel Zabini. The vision was so real that Sirius could almost feel the pull on his hair as Gabriel gripped it to pull his head back, and he knew damn well he had never once felt the fabric of that chair against his naked thighs – especially the front of his naked thighs! - so why the HELL could he feel it now?

Leaping from the couch in panicked reaction, Sirius whipped around to stare wide-eyed and gasping at Gabriel, stepping back instinctively as he saw the last vestige of civilized Lord leave the tall, powerfully-built Italian.

Struggling for breath, momentarily frozen, Sirius realized that this very large, very muscular, very virile male who was slowly rising from the couch, power and grace in every line of his body, was not Gabriel. Not really. No, this was a hunter, a predator, a terrifying magickal creature who wanted his mate. This was the dominant male who had shown himself on and off throughout the past few hours.

This was the Zabini Alpha Predator. And his gaze was locked on Sirius Black, his trembling, terrified prey. The magic rising around them had now crystallized into a single purpose -- one that Sirius had no idea why he recognized it, but he did. This was now a mating hunt. And Sirius was not the hunter.

Sirius ran.

Cursing himself vehemently under his breath, Sirius ducked into the doorway of the Far-room and frantically tried once again to access his magick. It was the first thing he had thought of as he fled the stalking male who was tracking him through the manor. Swearing as the door slammed shut with a bang, clearly announcing his location, he pushed against the barrier to his magick desperately and swore again as it remained locked. 'Fuck!' he swore to himself. It was the bond. The damn, cursed bond he had not asked for, had not given permission for and was currently at the mercy of. And at the other end of the Merlin-damned thing was the suddenly-terrifying Gabriel Zabini.

He did not need the sound of deliberate footsteps pacing toward the Far-room door to know that his mate had found him. The bond itself did that quite well; pulsing in triumph as the muscular wizard approached the door.

Darting forward, Sirius frantically grabbed at the container of floo powder and shrieked in alarm as the door behind him exploded inward. Rather than try to take a handful, Sirius tossed the entire container on the fire and leaped forward into the floo, only to be hooked and spun about in the same move that had prevented him solo access to his chair in the Study earlier. Flailing wildly, Sirius was pulled forcefully into the powerful grip of his growling mate.

Panicking, Sirius fought. He kicked and punched, bit and scratched, throwing himself against the restraining arms, breath bursting from his lungs in sobbing, frightened gasps. All he knew, at this moment, was that he had to get away from the overwhelming predator who had him in its grasp.
Slowly, inexorably, Sirius lost the fight. Not once did Gabriel harm him, but neither did he relent. This was non-negotiable; Sirius was his mate and he would submit. Lifting the smaller man with ease, Gabriel pulled Sirius against his chest in a brides' hold, easily securing the kicking legs with one strong arm and pinning the flailing arms with the other. He let Sirius struggle for a while, pushing himself into exhaustion, as Gabriel held him tightly against his powerful chest. He had to admire the smaller wizard; he fought like a wild thing, battling long beyond the point at which most people would have lost to exhaustion. Even when his little mate stopped fighting, he did not surrender. Panting, trembling and terrified, Sirius continued to glare, openly defying Gabriel as the larger male controlled and confined him.

The Zabini Alpha felt a swelling of pride in his mate. This man was worthy of his devotion. The spirit that refused to succumb to Azkaban showed clearly in the defiant gray eyes that challenged him. Leaning down to run his face and chin soothingly over the wild, black hair, Gabriel purred deep in his chest in approval and calmly walked back through the Manor, easily following his little mate's scent and aura trail through the large, elegant structure to the younger man's private rooms. He ignored Sirius' renewed attempts at escape, and simply willed the door to open before them and shut behind them. Wordlessly locking the door and casting a powerful silencing charm, he looked briefly around the room, currently lit only by the flickering flames in the elegant fireplace, and headed inexorably toward the large bed tucked against the far wall. He rumbled a throaty reassurance at his frightened mate and leaned down to gently deposit his precious burden atop the soft, golden covering.

Deep within his mind, Gabriel felt compassion for Sirius. There were few families like the Zabinis, and stories of fated-mates had mostly occupied the realm of myths and fantasies in the Wizarding World. Most wizards and witches viewed such rumors the same way muggles viewed fairy tales – charming, but not real. The Zabinis knew otherwise. As he rose to his full height and looked down at the beautiful, frightened man on the bed, Gabriel knew what his mate was going through. There were extensive histories in the Zabini library, personal journals of mates who had out-of-nowhere found themselves bound to a Zabini Alpha who was a complete stranger to them, to be suddenly the focus of intense caregiving by their new mate regardless of their sensibilities by an aggressive, dominant male. Faced with this situation, almost every one of the Zabini mates had reacted as Sirius did tonight. He would possibly have relented, looking down upon the panting, perfect man now crouched before him on the bed, if he did not already know how every single one of those bondings turned out. Because there was no Zabini Lord who was not Dominant. And there was no Zabini mate who was not Submissive.

Gabriel knew that Sirius, despite his "cover persona" of strong defiance, was a submissive. Not just a standard 'bottom', but a true submissive; one whose very soul and magick cried out for someone very strong and protective and dominant. It deeply grieved Gabriel to know that his beloved mate was also wounded in spirit, so hurt and afraid from the betrayals life had given him that he literally could not reach for and accept what he needed when it was finally offered. He could not trust his own instincts.

And so, Gabriel would take the decision from him, as was his duty and privilege as Sirius's Alpha. It might seem harsh to some, but every Zabini -- every creature -- knew this was right and that Sirius would only be harmed if his alpha backed away and let the submissive think and worry. It was best for Sirius to simply go through the display, and learn for himself -- as every Zabini Submissive does -- that this was what he wanted and needed.

Studying the glaring eyes of his mate as the younger man prepared to launch himself away from Gabriel, the larger male smirked and amended his one if last statements. There was no Zabini mate who was not Submissive to the Zabini Lord…eventually.
Chuckling in delight, he reached out long arms and easily caught Sirius as he leaped from the bed, swinging him down to press flat on the mattress as his little mate howled and cursed in frightened rage. Forcing the struggling arms over the wildly-tossing black hair, he pushed them into the bed and cast a small body bind, pinning Sirius' arms in place. As the gray eyes widened in horror, Gabriel cast the same charm upon the long legs, before slowly rising to his feet to admire the result of his efforts. Truly, there was much to admire.

Beautiful gray eyes lined with black, curling lashes nearly glowed back at him in anger and defiance. Lightly golden skin seemed luminous against the darker gold of the bedspread. A small, straight nose perfectly fit the slightly-fey look Sirius wore, and beautiful, tempting lips parted in harsh pants to show straight, white teeth. The neatly-trimmed goatee emphasized the otherworldly, Dark appeal of the smaller wizard. Long, silken black hair splayed over the bedspread and curled against the long, graceful throat. Still clad, a fact which made Gabriel scowl slightly, Sirius had the graceful, toned, slim body of a dancer, a thought Gabriel knew would incense his little mate should it be voiced. Pinned to the bed, arms locked over his head and legs somewhat apart, Sirius looked to Gabriel like sex waiting to happen.

With that thought in mind, Gabriel raised his hands and began to strip. Playtime was over.

Pinned to his bed, Gabriel standing above him like a conquering hero (which, in a way, he probably was), Sirius found himself locked in a furious battle of wills – with himself. One part of him, the part that had pulled him through a life that would have defeated most people, railed in fury and fear at his present situation. *This must not happen!* that part of him screamed. But the other part of him, the one that he had rarely acknowledged, the one that wanted to be protected and loved and accepted, watched Gabriel Zabini with shining eyes. *This is a worthy mate,* that part of him whispered.

As Gabriel's clothes fell away and he was faced with the overwhelming masculinity that was a naked, fully-aroused Gabriel Zabini, it was that second part of Sirius that won the battle. It was the Zabini Mate who submitted with a sigh as Gabriel gently removed Sirius' boots, who cooperated by lifting his head as his shirt was pulled up his waist and over his still-pinned arms.

But, when Gabriel Zabini straddled Sirius' leather-clad thighs and leaned over to gaze at his lithe, beautiful mate, it was neither the Azkaban survivor nor the Zabini Mate who gazed back and surrendered. It was Sirius, who looked upon his aroused mate, who felt the love and desire and protectiveness humming through their bond, and who sent his own willing surrender and desire and love back. Not to Lord Zabini. Not to the Zabini Alpha. He returned it to Gabriel.

Because, with Gabriel, Sirius was healed and whole.

And with Sirius, Gabriel was healed and whole.

Finally.

As he recognized the surrender in the soft, gray eyes, Gabriel's heart clenched. This, then, was the joy he had read of so many times in the family journals. It was indescribable.

Sweeping heated, black eyes down the nearly nude form he straddled, Gabriel watched Sirius' eyes narrow at his slow, sly smile. Leaning over his bound, beautiful mate, powerful shoulders rippling in the firelight, Gabriel placed his mouth near a delicate ear and chuckled deeply. He chuckled again as he felt his mate's body stirring in response between his thighs, and as he pressed his groin down into Sirius' awakening erection, he purred lazily, "I won't be releasing you for a while, mio piccolo lupo. You will be enjoying those bonds for a bit longer." He licked a long, lazy stripe down the elegant throat, and lifted his face to watch the darkening eyes with satisfaction as Sirius hardened beneath him.
Running his nose caressingly down Sirius's face, gathering the scent and sense of the tempting man beneath him, Gabriel watched for a moment from a distance of mere inches before descending with a growl to take that panting mouth in a deep, ravenous kiss. He had no need for finesse, as Sirius' mouth opened willingly beneath him and welcomed Gabriel's tongue with his own. Breath was dismissed as unimportant as Gabriel conquered and Sirius battled in a teasing, passionate duel. Tongues twined and caressed each other, exploring each other's mouths and sharing gasps and whispered words with equal need.

Straining against his pinned arms, Sirius whined desperately and pleaded with Gabriel to release him. His cock hardened impossibly at Gabriel's deep chuckle and admonishing bite on a tightening nipple. Gazing at the ceiling with wide eyes, Sirius could barely form a coherent thought as the sinful, full lips and talented tongue of his mate – yes, HIS MATE – tortured and tormented his nipples until they were tightly pebbled, reddened points of pure sensation amidst the shivering skin of his toned chest. He flinched as the agile tongue quested over his body, dipping into his navel, exploring the curves of his arms and the indentations of his ribs, documenting and anointing each scar that marred him, soothing and exciting him as Gabriel willed. Gasping in relief, Sirius felt Gabriel release his wrists, and he immediately dropped his arms to wrap them around the broad back of his mate.

He did not realize that his legs, too, were free until the leather trousers were roughly stripped from his body and Gabriel's hot breath ghosted over his erection before Sirius uttered a startled shout as his hard cock was encased in a hot, wet mouth. Nearly jackknifing at the pure sensation slashing through him in waves, Sirius locked his shocked gaze on Gabriel and moaned at the sight of those full lips wrapped around his cock, sucking and licking and tormenting him.

Pulling himself to a sitting position, legs wide apart, Sirius wrapped his arms around Gabriel's back as the older wizard settled between his thighs and hummed and growled around the engorged manhood that twitched and leaked upon his delighted tongue. Gabriel did not stop until he felt Sirius' oncoming release, when he abruptly pulled the hard cock from his mouth with a vulgar pop and pushed Sirius back upon the bed. Trying to pull Gabriel down upon him, Sirius got a sharp nip on the nipple for his efforts before the muscular arms flipped him to his stomach. A strong, calloused hand forced his buttocks apart and spells were whispered harshly upon his quivering hole.

Shocked at the intense arousal created by the layering of powerful cleansing, stretching and lubrication charms, Sirius simply obeyed as he was pulled demandingly to his knees. He barely understood that Gabriel was behind him before he was mounted and entered, his body welcoming Gabriel's huge, turgid cock pushing fully into him as a powerful chest was laid upon his back and the muscular arms wrapped around him and held him in position.

This was mating, powerful and primal. Locked in place by his domineering mate, Sirius could only pant and mewl as strong, sharp teeth fastened where shoulder met neck and powerful hips pistoned behind him, forcing his mate's erect member deep into his hole as the heavy testicles slapped an obscene rhythm against his buttocks. Gabriel easily controlled his smaller mate, holding the slim hips in place as the alpha's engorged cock repeatedly pounded into the sensitive bundle of nerves deep within Sirius' ass.

Sirius's breath burned in his throat, mouth gaping as he dragged air in with harsh pants of magic-laden air. He felt Gabriel's sweaty skin seemingly glued along Sirius's back, hips moving steadily against his buttocks as Gabriel's engorged manhood deep moved within his pinned mate's core in a confident claiming.

Pleasure tightened and twisted within them, pulling muscles taut and forcing sweat from their pores as the two mates labored together. When Sirius' climax seized him, his spasming hole and channel rapidly brought about Gabriel's completion. As the Zabini Alpha felt his mate's entrance clasp and
flutter around him, he forced Sirius flat to the mattress and thrust twice more into his quivering body before locking his teeth upon that beautiful shoulder and roaring his release into the golden skin, filling his mate's body come that would forevermore lay Gabriel's scent upon his submissive. He did not remove his teeth until the last spasms of pleasure had shuddered through them both and he had sucked the sweet blood to the skin beneath his bite. Drawing back to look at his mark, he felt deep pride and satisfaction of the proof of his mating, of his dominance, of his love.

Dropping a gentle kiss upon his mark, aware that it would be somewhat painful, he could not find it within himself to regret the savagery with which he had declared and claimed Sirius as his own. Slowly and carefully pulling himself from within his mate, he ran soothing hands upon the quivering muscles and pulled the smaller man into his arms. Gabriel knew that Sirius would be feeling utterly overwhelmed at this moment, and he allowed his submissive the time to recover his breath and his thoughts somewhat.

Summoning a basin of warm water and a soft flannel cloth, Gabriel tenderly bathed the quivering, lithe form of his beloved. Feeling the questioning flavor on Sirius' end of their bond, he smiled softly as he met gray eyes and simply said, "It is more personal than a cleaning charm. A better way to say that I love you and will care for you." He smiled down at the beautiful features and welcomed his mate's tears. This had been an intensely emotional day; tears were necessary.

Banishing the basin, he cleaned the bed and pulled back the golden bedcoverings, tucking Sirius onto the cool sheets and sliding in beside him. As he pulled the slim form into his arms, he pressed gentle kisses onto each tear as it fell. Feeling Sirius slowly relax into sleep, Gabriel quietly offered a prayer of gratitude to the Lady Gaia and joined his mate in slumber.

As the two new beloved slept in each other's arms, they journeyed together into the aethyr. Uncertain whether this was dream or spirit quest, they looked with awe upon the golden and silver bonds that roped around them and tied them together. In the distance, they could just barely perceive the glowing shapes of two other lovers, united in love with their own tendrils of magick wrapped about them.

As he surrendered into full sleep, Gabriel had a brief moment to wonder if what he saw was real, because he thought he had observed a slim, glowing rope extending between the pair in the distance and themselves. Feeling Sirius's gentle breaths upon his chest, he decided it was a matter for another day.

For now, all that mattered was in his arms.

oooooooooooooo Family

Raising his glass in acknowledgment to his longtime friend and companion, Lord Thomas Marvolo Riddle studied the magicks running throughout the Manor. It had been quite a surprise to see Lucius Malfoy bond this night with Harrison Potter. A happy surprise, but a surprise nonetheless. He wished them both the very best, even as his busy mind sorted through the possibilities.

As another powerful glow manifested within the Manor, the dignified wizard could not keep a reluctant smile from crossing his handsome face. How odd to know that a child of his blood was bonding to the Zabini Lord. He could not have asked for a better guardian for his precious heir.

As he studied the new bonding threads, he noted the connection between the now-mated pairs and nodded in confirmation. Meeting Wulfric's affectionate gaze, his crimson eyes warmed in response. Joining his longtime companion, the two settled into comfortable conversation as they watched over
their family together.
Safe in His Arms

Chapter Summary

From midnight to dawn -- we learn more of the Riddle. And his family.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is really a snapshot of the hours between midnight and dawn in Potter Manor. It does advance the plot, but we aren't back in the Hall of Government yet. That resumes with the next chapter. I should still be obsessively proofing this, but I can't actually see it anymore, and I think y'all would be pissed if I held it captive while I fixed typos. Yes? No?

Your reviews really, truly, mean the absolute world to me. I can't begin to tell you how much I appreciate them. I try to reply, but given my life of late, please believe that if I fail to reply, I have still sent you fervent thanks.

This chapter is dedicated to Marksmom, whose own fics helped teach me how to write about trauma and the impact of love.

Blessed Be!

WyrdSmith

00000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000}
Gazing down on the beautiful, raven-haired wizard in his arms, Lucius lost himself in the all-encompassing pleasure of being with Harry and within Harry. He let their bond and their bodies set the rhythms they shared in this quiet bed. Each time he thrust into the responsive body beneath him, he felt a sense of homecoming. This was where he belonged. Each time he withdrew, Harry's nearly inaudible moan of loss drew him back again. And as he felt Harry's pleasure begin to crest, he withheld his own release long enough to watch this beloved man surrender to ecstasy. The sheer beauty of his lover as Harry pushed his head back into the pillow, exposing the long lines of his throat as he was overtaken by orgasm, left Lucius awed at the love and trust he was given. Though he tried to resist, the spasming of Harry's body around his own pulled him over the edge as well. And Lucius was watched by Harry with the same wonder, the same joy, the same love.

Afterward, they stayed close together in the large bed, Harry held comfortably in Lucius' arms as he rested his head on the broad shoulder of his very own Viking. Gentle caresses and sweet, soft kisses and whispered words meant only for their ears sent them drifting together into a nap until the sun was fully risen and the day begun.

Yet, through the remaining hours of sleep, just as throughout the previous hours, Lucius remained protective of the young man he held. There would be no nightmares to plague the younger wizard, now that Lucius held the young man in his arms, in his bed, in his heart.

oooooooooooooooooo

MORNING – THE SIRIUS SIDE

Gabriel awoke first. He had stayed awake long into the night, simply watching his little mate, running gentle fingers over the smooth side, lightly kissing the slim hands and beloved face, watching, memorizing, protecting, vowing.

Even as he slept, he kept Sirius close. When his little mate turned, Gabriel turned with him. If Sirius made a sound, Gabriel surfaced from sleep long enough to assess the reason and ensure his mate was safe and well before allowing himself to slumber again. And when Sirius moaned in his sleep around 3 a.m., shocked into confused half-consciousness by the pain in his spine, Gabriel had immediately fully awoken as well.

It was fortunate that their bond was not a simple spousal-joining. Such an inadequate bond would never have allowed Gabriel to know the details that his embarrassed little mate tried to conceal. Within moments, Gabriel had risen and carried his naked, protesting beloved into the bathroom, placing the mortified wizard on the toilet to relieve himself while Gabriel filled the huge tub and had a house elf bring scented, healing oils from the potions storeroom. Sirius had been deeply embarrassed by the fact that his mate saw and personally took care of the simple functions of his body, and Gabriel gained further insight into yet another aspect of the torment his little mate had endured in Azkaban. Modesty and imprisonment were not comfortable companions.

Gabriel's matter-of-fact handling of Sirius' needs made the younger man more able to endure the intensely personal care he was given. And when Sirius was lifted from the toilet into impossibly strong arms of his mate, his ability to bury his flushed face into Gabriel's chest helped matters further. From there, Gabriel had simply stepped down into the deep, sunken bathtub with Sirius in his arms, showing his incredible strength by sinking easily into a reclining position without ever using his arms or setting Sirius down. He settled the slim, toned back against his chest, tucked the dark head under his chin, and allowed the heat of the water and the properties of the oils to soothe his mate's pain. He explained quietly to Sirius that healing potions would not aid the younger man until the next moon dark. It was just another aspect of the mysterious, forgotten magical creature in the Zabini line. Until moon dark, Sirius' magic would need to be sheltered, protected from any outside magical interference.
such as potions as his mate settled into the bond with his alpha.

Amused as the endless feistiness that personified Sirius surfaced again, Gabriel quelled the rising indignation with a swift, powerful, toe-curving kiss that left Sirius with swollen lips and scattered thoughts. Taking advantage of his little mate's distraction, Gabriel carefully turned him so that they rested chest to chest and sent his hands in long, soothing strokes down the tense muscles of the toned back. Settling a strong hand over Sirius' lower back and tailbone, Gabriel began to gently massage the skin and manipulate the muscles to ease the pain caused by the fierce manner in which he had taken his mate just hours before. Even as Sirius flinched and stifled a whimper, Gabriel did not regret it. The beast within him purred with contentment, and the dark, claiming bite on the slim shoulder filled Gabriel with possessive pride. By moon dark, the bite would be a tattoo in the color of their aura. Zabini truemates shared one color, and he had never known what his color was. Wulfric had not told him, and Gabriel suspected that something had happened to either his or Sirius' aura recently to cause them to match; otherwise, Wulfric would have identified Sirius as Gabriel's mate long ago. He wondered what color the mark would be, and made a mental note to ask Wulfric about it when next they met. Sirius' bonding cuff would need to reflect their aura, as would Gabriel's ring.

Considering Sirius' pain, Gabriel was unsurprised. Their mating had been fierce, Gabriel was much larger than Sirius, and it had clearly been a while since Sirius' last lover. It was even possible that his little mate had never bottomed before, considering the younger man's feisty attitude and strong desire to control his own life. Gabriel certainly couldn't blame him for that wish, particularly in light of the horrors Sirius had endured under the control of others. Thinking of Albus Percy's culpability for the decade plus of Azkaban served by Sirius, he felt his rage rise. He knew that Harrison would obtain punishment of Percy on behalf of his godfather, but Gabriel wanted some of the man's blood, as well. He resolved to talk to Harry in the morning, before Session, and see if Lord Potter would concede some of his Judgment of Percy over to Gabriel. Knowing the young man as he did, he felt Harry would agree.

Once again, Sirius stifled a moan when Gabriel's steady massaging brought his hands over the slim buttocks. Had Gabriel been another man, he would have thought Sirius was moaning in desire, but Gabriel was Sirius' alpha. He would always know how his mate felt. Focusing closely, he realized with a pang that their mating had bruised his smaller mate's rectum and possibly even caused a small tear in his anus. Sirius was very slim, and Gabriel was a very large man in more aspects than simply height and muscle mass. He frowned briefly as he ran soothing hands over Sirius' body and considered the reasons beyond size for the slight damage he had caused his mate. At his inevitable conclusion, his arms tightened around the smaller man and he dropped dozens of kisses, gentle and strong, onto the dark head resting on his chest. Quieting a little, he felt Sirius look up at him in puzzlement and smiled in delight at the flavor of curiosity questing up the bond. Dropping a tender kiss on the upraised lips and one on his nose just for fun, Gabriel rumbled in contentment deep within his chest and said quietly, "I am simply happy to know that you were willing to share your body with me and that I gave you pleasure, as you went far too long without lovers." Sirius froze and the emotions Gabriel had expected – and several he did not - began to pulse through the bond. Surprise. Embarrassment. Shock. Shame. The urge to flee.

None of those feelings were acceptable to the alpha, but the last caused his arms to tighten firmly as he growled warningly into his mate's ear. Never would he allow Sirius to flee from him except in play, and definitely not from shock or shame or any other of the dark, damaging emotions that currently swirled within the younger man. Gabriel's response to the emotional pain and confusion of his mate was swift and certain, as he bent down and sank his teeth lightly into the claiming mark. Like a wolf pup picked up by the scruff of his neck, Sirius instantly went limp and relaxed. Gabriel almost laughed at the indignation his mate sent raging through their bond, but he held his bite until even his little mate's emotions succumbed to the enforced calming. Only when he sensed nothing more damaging than confusion did the alpha release his teeth and lick soothingly over the tender
Resuming the careful massage of the long, graceful back and tempting buttocks that lay naked and silken beneath his hands, Gabriel strengthened the calm he had forced on his mate and then said gently, "I want you to tell me about your past lovers. Tell me of your sexual experiences, large and small." He sensed Sirius trying to tense up again, and reinforced his control. Once again, Sirius settled, but Gabriel could tell that panic was roiling just beneath the surface of his touch. He frowned in concern and said again, "Tell me." Sirius' breathing sped up. His mate's mind and body wanted to panic, but Gabriel would not let them. This was important. This was necessary. Something was very wrong with his mate's past, beyond the horrors that he already knew about. He gripped the long, black hair in a firm but gentle hold and employed a power he knew Zabini Alphas had with their mates. It would be the first time he had ever used it, or even had access to it. He twisted the hair very lightly, just enough to cause a pull but not enough for pain, and infused his voice and the bond with Command. "Tell me, mia anima gemella. Talk to me." And, surrendering, Sirius talked.

"I… well, in school everyone thought I was a player. I was supposed to be, you know? And so I let them think that. And I bragged and… And, after a while, even if I'd wanted to… be with someone… who could I pick? Everyone thought I was experienced and… well, I wouldn't have wanted a stranger… and…well, I didn't want to… I….!" He trailed off miserably, utterly humiliated. Gabriel listened closely, and after a moment of thought in which he continued to caress and comfort Sirius, he quietly asked, "Have you ever had a lover at all, my heart?" His breath caught and his heart stopped beating for a moment at the barely visible, negative shake of his beloved's head. Once again, his arms tightened around the slim body lying so trustingly in his arms, and he lowered his head to rest his chin atop the dark silk of Sirius' hair. A few moments later, he gently prompted, "Who has touched you with love, caro? Besides Harry." In Sirius' lack of response, Gabriel got his answer. He closed his eyes in pain, feeling his heart twist and ache for the loneliness that his mate had endured. Sending love and reassurance and acceptance through their bond in long, comforting waves, he again carefully considered before asking, "And has anyone touched you without love, my heart? Has anyone ever forced their touch upon you?"

And this time, the silence was deafening.

Gabriel seized control of his rage and his pain before it could touch his vulnerable mate. Forcing it down and controlling his breathing, he never ceased the gentle caresses and loving kisses he pressed upon Sirius. After a moment, the roar of blood in his ears slowed enough that he could hear his mate's nervous breaths and felt the twitching of his hands and legs, as if Sirius wanted desperately to run but was fighting the urge. Gabriel drew a deep, careful breath and nudged the temperature of the bathwater up a few degrees, hoping to further relax both his and Sirius' tensing muscles. A few moments later, and Sirius haltingly offered, "I wasn't raped, Gabriel. Nothing like that. Honestly. I just…. had to deal with some unwelcome interest when I was younger, that's all." And then, feeling Gabriel's rage rise, Sirius' need to reassure his mate worked faster than his resolve to never speak of this topic, and he blurted out, "But it was okay! I ran away when I was fifteen to the Potter's and it was done and over with!"

Gabriel's hands abruptly stilled upon his back, and then Sirius, in sheer horror, replayed what he had just said. He was struggling to get out of the bath and out of the room and just… away… before he even really processed the fact that he had just revealed a secret he had kept locked tightly in the darkest corner of his mind. His body reacted in purest panic, sending enough adrenaline to leap away and flee.

He got about thirteen inches before he was yanked firmly back against the powerful chest and wrapped tightly in the strong arms and powerful love of his very own Zabini Alpha. The shame, the
secrecy, the panic – it was all swept away beneath the overwhelming force that was Gabriel Zabini's love for Sirius Black. And, this time, it was Sirius himself who tucked his head beneath Gabriel's chin and purred. They reclined together in the steamy bath for several more, long minutes of comforting each other before Sirius hesitantly began to talk. He explained in hushed tones how he had first sensed something odd in his mother's touch when he was eight years old. How her touch lingered uncomfortably and her slightly crazed stare would darken. Those moments were always followed by her anger, an unstable outpouring of self-hate that resulted in her oldest son's bruises, cuts and occasional broken bones. Fearing that his mother's dark attention would turn to his little brother if he took steps to stop her, Sirius endured. When he went off to Hogwarts at age eleven, he took Regulus aside and told him what to expect and where to hide. He enlisted Kreacher's aid in protecting his little brother, forcing the house elf to take a vow that he would betray his mistress to protect the little master. He did not realize he was causing the elf's eventual insanity, and he would not have changed his actions even if he had known. Reggie was all that mattered. When Sirius was thirteen, Reggie joined him at Hogwarts and for the first time Sirius felt safe enough to ask someone for help.

Unfortunately, that someone had been Albus Percy.

The Headmaster's dismissive attitude and chastisement of Sirius for making such false claims against his 'lovely mother' drove Sirius back into hiding, and it was another two years before he found the courage to seek help again. This time, it was freely given, by James Potter and his parents. Asylum was offered to Regulus as well, but by then the younger brother had already been poisoned against Sirius by their mother's vitriol and was convinced that Sirius had made the whole thing up to lure Reggie away from the traditions and culture that made up the House of Black. Their father, Orion, remained uninvolved, preferring long business trips and a string of mistresses to the needs of his family. Sirius doubted the man ever knew the extent of Walburga's depravity, because even now, after all Sirius had endured, he maintained that his father had been a good man, even if he was a terrible family man. Listening to his little mate discuss his father, Gabriel was amazed at the man's ability to forgive his father, and knew that he would never feel the same generosity of spirit toward the elder Black. It did not matter that the man had been forced into marriage with a woman he detested. That union had still produced two children who had needed him. To abandon them, especially to the care and attention of a woman he despised, was unforgivable.

When Sirius had said all he needed to, they again sank into a comfortable quiet, simply enjoying the heat of the bath and the press of skin to skin. Sirius dozed lightly, neither asleep nor truly awake, and it was then that Gabriel asked gently, "Was there ever anyone you particularly wanted to love, my heart? Was there anyone who stirred your passions?" And Sirius, with no defenses left at all, sleepily murmured against Gabriel's chest, "Yes, but you were always only a dream. I looked for you everywhere, but you were just a dream."

In silence, Gabriel lifted his little mate from the bath, once again showing his incredible strength by simply gathering Sirius to his chest and standing up. He placed Sirius on the fainting couch and gently dried him with the soft, fresh towels that awaited them. Quickly doing the same for himself, careful to keep his magic to a minimum around his newly-bonded, he smiled into the sleepy gray eyes and again picked Sirius up, ignoring the slurred protests, and carried him into their bedroom. Placing Sirius back into the freshly-made bed, he slid in beside him and pulled the smaller male back into his arms. He had awoken with little inclination for any distance between them at all. After the revelations in the bath, even that small chance had dwindled to nothing.

They slipped back into sleep, Gabriel remaining watchful and protective, even as he dreamed.

oooooooooooooooooo
Gabriel and Sirius were not entirely alone. As they slept, they were guarded by Thomas Riddle, who had been joined in the portrait near the fainting couch by Wulfric as soon as he detected the waves of pain and fury that rippled through the portraits in Potter Manor. He had entered the painting swiftly, to find his crimson-eyed friend standing unnaturally still as his unique magic boiled around them. Wulfric had immediately pulled Thomas into a tight embrace, using his own unique magic to calm the turbulence in the magic of his longtime companion.

Finally, as dawn began to creep into the room, Thomas was controlled enough to leave the room of his grandson and his new mate and follow Wulfric into their private sanctuary, which was a floor to ceiling mural that wrapped around all four walls of a private room Harrison had set aside for their use. The mural included everything that two Lords would need to live in comfort and luxury, from a lovely garden to an comfortable study, a comprehensive library, and an opulent bedroom.

It was to the last room that Wulfric escorted Thomas, efficiently stripping the man of his formal attire and then shedding his own clothes as well. Pushing and pulling, he managed to get the tense and silent man into the luxurious bed, falling in beside him and pulling him close. It was then, as Thomas allowed Wulfric to comfort him, that he told Wulfric what he had overheard about Sirius and his childhood. Thomas raged, and Thomas wept, and finally, Thomas slept, secure in the strong embrace of Wulfric Dumbledore.

And now, it was Wulfric's turn to guard the sleep of a loved one. Quietly stroking the salt and pepper hair of his dearest companion, Wulfric reflected on the vagaries of fate and the machinations of Albus Percy. The bastard had hurt so many people, including Wulfric and his entire family. Fortunately, his daughter Ariana had all of the family magics in abundance as well, and was able to pass between the spirit realm and here with some impunity. Wulfric may well have surrendered to despair if his beloved daughter had not helped him slowly but surely regain control of their Line and its children over the past century. Once all of this was resolved, he was going to find a way to repay Tavin McGonogall; without that old man … hat … whatever!... the Dumbledore line would have been lost to the progeny of that detestable little rat Pettigrew. Repugnant thought.

Soothing another nightmare away from Thomas with the gentle carding of his hand through the crisp hair, Wulfric considered his companion. His was another remarkable story. And, once again, Percy's busy fingers had twisted the truth. Documents had already been sent to Council Leader Bones, asking that she read through everything provided and then ensure that complete copies were given to every attending member of the Hall of Government Session, Day Two. The Session started at eleven a.m., but Bones had agreed to allow Harrison and Sirius, and now Gabriel and Lucius as well, to join them at 3 p.m. The hours between would be spent by the Lords and the Council Leader reading, and absorbing, the shocking information contained in the documents. Among those papers was the true explanation of just who Lord Thomas Marvolo Riddle really was. The truth was nothing like what Dumbledore had publicized.

Lord Thomas Angus Riddle Sr. was, in fact, a wizard. Like Wulfric himself, he chose to live in relative obscurity, keeping his family and himself well away from the majority of the Wizarding World, although his manor was, in fact, located in Little Hangleton. The Riddles and the Gaunts were the only magical families in the area, both living under strong wards and privacy screens. The Gaunts, while not as well off as the Riddles, were nothing like the disgusting creatures Albus Percy pretended them to be. They were just people, the last heirs to Salazar Slytherin's Line. Although not in love, Thomas Riddle Senior and Merope Gaunt had married with the express purpose of joining the families and producing an heir to both. They had achieved that purpose. And then Percy and his lover Gellert found out their secret. Furious to have discovered that the powerful Line of one of the Founders had been rejuvenated, Albus and Gellert killed the Gaunts and obliterated young Thomas's
family. They could not kill the Riddles at that time, having been seen frequently visiting them at their Manor and having already made it known to too many people that he was the only wizard they trusted in their home. In this, at least, the old bastard had outwitted himself.

He did not want Salazar's line reborn, though. In the Charter of the Founders, it was clearly noted that if the lines died out, then the Headmaster could claim the vaults on behalf of Hogwarts itself. Percy and Grindelwald wanted those vaults. They knew that Slytherin had within his family possessions the renowned Resurrection Stone, among other valuable pieces. It was crucial to their plans that they obtain that stone. Cassandra Trelawney, a talented seer had made a prophecy that Gellert would die before his dreams could see reality. Immediately, the two lovers – Gellert and Albus – had begun to plan his resurrection. Fortunately for Wulfric's companion Thomas, the two madmen had discovered through their research that they would need Thomas's assistance to resurrect Gellert when the time came. Thus, they hid the baby, sending him to the muggle orphanage that to this day provided his cherished friend and lover with far too many nightmares.

Wulfric continued to pet Thomas's hair, smiling slightly at the younger wizard's contented sigh. It annoyed Thomas immensely when Wulfric thought of him as a younger man, but compared to Wulfric's age from birth past death to the present time, Thomas was still and would always be 'the younger man.' As if hearing Wulfric's thoughts, Thomas hissed in his sleep, causing Wulfric to chuckle silently and tug lightly on the hair beneath his fingers before he resumed his gentle caresses. Thomas settled back into a deeper sleep. As his breathing evened out once more, Wulfric considered the revelations that had distressed his Thomas so badly this night.

Poor Sirius. That young man had gone through hell as much as, if not more than, Harrison and Thomas. His spirit was strong; that much was certain. Of course, how could it be anything less? He was Thomas's grandson. Wulfric smirked, thinking of how that particular bit of information would be received at the Hall of Government tomorrow. Thomas had followed in the footsteps of his own parents, having a brief marriage when he was just sixteen years old with a young woman of a powerful family with the purpose of producing an heir. Having ensured that his heir was born legitimately, the marriage contract was fulfilled and the couple divorced. Around that time, Thomas realized that he was the target of Percy and Grindelwald, and that his daughter would never survive if the two learned of her. He had then sent her off with her mother and erased all traces of his ties to them.

Even now, his Thomas could not talk about that time. It had wounded his companion terribly, to finally have a family and be forced to send them away.

Wulfric wondered, in light of recent information, how Sirius would respond in learning that Walburga was not his natural mother. Orion had married – and been widowed – before his marriage to Walburga. He had loved his first wife passionately, which was understandable. Charlemagne Riddle was a beautiful woman, talented, powerful, and vastly intelligent.

'And she was my Thomas's daughter,' Wulfric thought sadly. Her death had come during an attack on Diagon Alley by Grindelwald and his forces. As far as they could determine, she had purely been collateral damage, simply another victim of the war. Grindelwald never knew that he had killed one of the heirs of Slytherin. In fact, had he known she existed, he would certainly have kidnapped her and held her in custody somewhere to ensure that the blood of Slytherin was available for his own Resurrection.

The man was insane, but he could certainly plan.

Wulfric issued a tired sigh, and settled more comfortably into the bed. He drew Thomas close to him, knowing that they would keep each other safe and hold the vast supply of nightmares at bay. That
was the original reason they had begun to share a bed, after all. For the true Dumbledores and for true Slytherins, death was less of an adjustment than for most. Both families had certain magics that allowed them to live more fully as spirits, to enjoy life beyond death much more richly than the average ghost. They could eat, they touch and feel, they have sex, and they could directly effect the natural world. While a normal ghost could not even touch objects in the living world, any member of the Dumbledores or the Slytherins had those abilities and more.

Running a loving hand through the familiar hair of his dear one, Wulfric began to wonder if the action was more comforting to Thomas or to himself. Joining his lover in sleep, his last coherent thought was to decide that it didn't matter, so long as comfort was given.

And for a few hours, all of the wizards of Potter Manor slept safely in the arms of the one they loved the most.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!