

Chapter 8

27th of August, 1991

Ministry of Magic

Lucius Malfoy walked through the grand hall of the Ministry of Magic, every step radiating the confidence of a pureblood aristocrat. His platinum blonde hair, slicked back to perfection, framed a pale, almost ethereal face. His piercing gray eyes seemed to cut through the very souls of those who dared to meet his gaze. He wore impeccably tailored black velvet robes adorned with silver serpent embroidery, and his cloak flowed behind him like liquid shadow. The serpent-headed cane he carried tapped rhythmically against the polished marble floor, announcing his presence with a steady beat.

Today, Lucius was particularly pleased. Albus Dumbledore, his most formidable rival and Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, had been absent from the last two sessions. If Dumbledore missed today's session, he would lose his seat—a turn of events Lucius eagerly anticipated. It was very unlikely, but the thought alone brought a rare, satisfied smile to Lucius's lips. What was important, was that reputationally, Albus Dumbledore had undermined himself by not showing twice in a row.

As he moved through the hall, lesser employees of the Ministry nodded respectfully from a distance, not daring to approach. The more ambitious ones, his direct clients, eagerly stepped forward to curry favor.

"Good morning, Mr. Malfoy," greeted Aberforth Jigger, a minor figure in the Department of Magical Transportation. His smile was ingratiating, bordering on obsequious. "I trust your morning is as splendid as your reputation?"

Lucius offered a thin, calculated smile. "Indeed, Jigger. And how goes the work on those new international Portkey regulations?"

Jigger beamed, pleased to have Malfoy's attention. "Smoothly, sir. Very smoothly. We should have everything in place as you suggested."

"Excellent," Lucius replied, dismissing Jigger with a nod as he turned to the next sycophant. As he moved, he couldn't help but think of the true

power structures within the Ministry. It was a fragile equilibrium, a continuous power struggle beneath the veneer of institutional order.

"Mr. Malfoy, a pleasure as always," said Veronica Flint, an ambitious young witch from the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures. Her eyes sparkled with ambition. "I wanted to inform you that the new regulations on dangerous creatures you proposed are gaining support."

"Thank you, Flint," Lucius said, his tone indicating he expected no less. "Keep me informed of any opposition. They will need... persuading."

Flint's eagerness reminded Lucius of Gethsemane Prickle, the current head of her department. An opportunistic man, Prickle was adept at navigating the political landscape, often swaying with the wind. Lucius knew how to exploit that, and Flint's loyalty was just another piece in his grand design.

As Flint scurried off, Lucius noticed the clients of his rivals—Longbottom, Crouch, Bones, Diggory, and, most notably, Dumbledore. They avoided his gaze, a silent acknowledgment of his dominance within the Ministry.

"Lucius!" boomed a voice from across the hall. Cornelius Fudge, the Minister of Magic himself, approached with an exaggerated smile. "So good to see you. How are you this fine day?"

Lucius inclined his head slightly, a sign of mutual respect but also of superiority. "Minister Fudge, always a pleasure. I trust everything is well?"

"Quite well, quite well," Fudge said, almost nervously. "I wanted to thank you for your recent support in the Wizengamot. Your influence is, as always, invaluable."

"Think nothing of it," Lucius replied smoothly. "We all want what is best for our world, don't we?"

Fudge nodded eagerly, the subtext of their exchange clear to both of them. This public display was a perfectly orchestrated testament to Lucius's power, reminding everyone in the hall who truly pulled the strings. Dumbledore might be the Chief Warlock, but Lucius was the one who had the Minister of Magic in his pocket. Everyone knew the equilibrium was

fragile—the Ministry was a stage for a continuous power struggle. The true seats of power were the heads of one of the six major departments, Wizengamot seats, and a few symbolic positions like Hogwarts Board President or Supreme Mugwump.

His thoughts drifted to the heads of the six major departments. Amelia Bones, the formidable head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, was a constant thorn in his side. Her sense of "justice" - just a different brand of PR and personal interest - and incorruptibility made her a formidable rival, commanding a significant faction within the Wizengamot. Then there was Bartemius Crouch Senior, overseeing the Department of International Magical Co-operation. Once a titan in the Ministry, his influence had waned due to past scandals and his rigid principles. Lucius watched him closely, waiting for the right moment to eliminate his influence entirely.

"Mr. Malfoy," came a voice from behind, interrupting his thoughts. It was Edmund Trant, the head of the Department of Magical Transportation. A staunch supporter of Dumbledore, Trant's loyalty was an annoying but manageable obstacle in Lucius's grand design.

"Good day, Trant," Lucius said smoothly. "I trust your department is running efficiently?"

"As always, Mr. Malfoy," Trant replied, his tone polite but guarded.

Lucius's eyes flicked to Annaelle Kiths, head of Magical Games and Sports, standing across the hall. Her position was coveted by Ludovic Bagman, one of Lucius's lesser but useful clients. Bagman's easygoing charm and gambling debts made him a pliable tool.

The Department of Mysteries remained the most elusive. The identity of its head, the Head Unspeakable, was unknown to Lucius, a vexing blind spot in his otherwise meticulously mapped-out network.

Lucius's musings were shattered by a sudden, brilliant flash of fire that erupted in the middle of the hall, silencing all conversations and drawing every eye. A conflagration of gold and scarlet ignited the space, and from within the blaze emerged Albus Dumbledore, his majestic phoenix, Fawkes, perched regally on his shoulder. Unlike his usual fleeting

appearances, Fawkes remained, a symbol of Dumbledore's inherent virtue and indomitable spirit.

As the dazzling light receded, even Lucius, master of composure, found himself making a rare double-take. Gone were Dumbledore's typically eccentric robes; instead, he was clad in an impeccably tailored Italian suit of midnight blue, lined with silver thread that glinted in the light. A dark, flowing cape added to his imposing presence. Dumbledore appeared astonishingly youthful, his age seemingly rolled back to no more than sixty to seventy years. His once long, untamed beard was now neatly trimmed, and his silver hair, shorter and artfully tousled, lent him an air of effortless sophistication. A cigar smoldered between his fingers, its fragrant smoke curling lazily upwards. His frame, once frail, now hinted at muscularity—biceps straining subtly against the fabric of his suit.

Gasps and whispers cascaded through the hall as Dumbledore's piercing blue eyes, now sharper and more intense than ever, scanned the room with unyielding authority. In that electrifying moment, every soul present was jolted into the undeniable truth: this was not merely Albus Dumbledore, the genial headmaster they knew. This was Albus fucking Dumbledore, the indomitable warrior who had vanquished the Dark Lord Grindelwald and brought Voldemort himself to his knees. His presence radiated an awe-inspiring aura of sheer power and command, a force both mesmerizing and formidable, enveloping the hall in an unmistakable sense of legendary might and unassailable strength.

Dumbledore lazily took a puff from his cigar, the smoke curling around his head like a crown of ethereal mist. "I apologize for the commotion," he announced, his voice resonant and authoritative. "I was afraid of being late to the meeting." He then fixed his gaze on Lucius, eyes like twin glaciers. "I wanted to be sure to arrive early to have the chance to salute you."

Lucius scowled, still reeling from Dumbledore's astonishing transformation. What had the old man done to himself? How had he shed decades of age so effortlessly? Was it only a glamour? No, it would only be pathetic and hurt him in the long term... But if he had always possessed this power, why reveal it now? His mind churned, struggling to piece together the implications.

Drawing on every ounce of his composure, Lucius approached, his every step deliberate. He knew that all eyes were on him, and his response was crucial for maintaining his formidable image. “You look well, Chief Warlock,” he said, his voice smooth but edged with frost. “But you know the saying—stars shine brightest just before their extinction.”

A collective gasp rippled through the hall. Lucius immediately recognized his mistake. He had been too forward, too rattled by the unexpected. He drew on his occlumency skills, forcing himself to adopt an icy calm, his expression a mask of control.

Dumbledore’s laugh erupted, rich and vibrant like a summer storm. It was a sound filled with vitality, a stark contrast to his previous frail image. “Indeed, they do,” he agreed, his eyes sparkling with a challenge. “But you know, there’s a constellation called the Phoenix.”

He paused, taking another languid puff from his cigar, then exhaled the smoke directly into Lucius’s face, an act of supreme confidence and subtle insult. “And there are also stars forming the Hydra constellation. Beware when you think a one-headed hydra is declining and decide to try and cut its head. You may have a bad surprise.”

The hall was hushed, the tension thick as a storm about to break. The silence was interrupted by Amelia Bones, striding forward with her usual air of authority. She gave a respectful nod to the Chief Warlock, deliberately ignoring Lucius. “You know, for once, I have to agree with Lucius. You do look... radiant, Headmaster,” she said, her tone laced with both admiration and suspicion.

Dumbledore sighed, taking another measured puff from his cigar. As he exhaled, the smoke twisted into intricate shapes—warriors locked in combat, then morphing into a sinister snake coiled around a skull. The visual left a murmur of unease in its wake.

“Yes,” Dumbledore said, his voice resonating with calm authority. “I found it necessary to... enhance my vitality. The world has become quite chaotic, and I fear the winds of change are stirring stronger than ever.”

Both Lucius and Amelia recoiled slightly, their expressions a mixture of shock and apprehension. “Are you implying that He...?” Amelia asked, her voice edged with concern.

Dumbledore’s eyes twinkled with a mischievous light. “No, nothing specific. Just the musings of an old man,” he said, a faint smile playing on his lips. “But heed my words—uncertainty is brewing, and those unprepared may find themselves swept away by the coming storm.”

With that, he turned and walked away, his muscular back a striking contrast to the frail figure he once presented. His departure left the hall in stunned silence.

"Albus Fucking Dumbledore Indeed", whispered Gethsemane Prickle.

Lucius scowled. Of course not - it was impossible that his old Patron was back. Dumbledore only did it because he knew that, if people thought so, they would suck up to him more, seeing him as their best defense. No, he thought, he had to make sure people did not even think about the possibility of Voldemort being back.