# The Ending of a Story

## No one was breathing.

Actually, shewasn't breathing.

Hermione could not feel her lungs fill with the warped, tensed air solidifying in the room. Any form of protest, plead, or incantation had died at the base of her throat when her mother said something completely impossible.

Your real parents.

No. None of this was right. Hermione knew that much. She was about to take a step forward and inspect her mother for any sign of the Imperius Curse, but the unknown woman—this Allegra Zabini moved first. She extended a hand out to her, intent on touching Hermione's wrist.

"Don't," Hermione hissed, stumbling back and onto the last step of the staircase.

Although her lungs had seemed keen on not working moments before, now they were heading for an overload.

Your real parents.

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She heaved, clutching at her chest as every inhale brought on a sharp pain to her bones.

"Sweetheart, please," Jennifer Granger begged through a sob of her own. She moved the woman aside, reaching out for Hermione, but the latter recoiled from her touch, too. "You have to calm down. You have to let me explain—"

"Where's Dad?" Hermione demanded in a loud, shrill shout. "What did you do to him?"

"Richard stepped out, sweetheart," Mrs. Granger told her, tears dripping down her cheeks. "He couldn't be here. He couldn't stand to lose you again."

"I'm right here. I'm not going anywhere," Hermione cried. "Bring my Dad back, Mum. Bring him back. Please"

Mrs. Granger pressed her lips into a tight line, swallowing down another cry and a promise she could not fulfill. Slowly, she turned back to the two figures standing in the background.

"I am sorry, Hermione," said Deon Zabini with a low, regretful tone. He reached for his wife's hand, squeezing it tightly before moving both of them a step forward, aligning with Mrs. Granger. "I know it might not seem like it right now, but we are not here to cause you pain. We just wanted to share our truth—yourtruth a er so many years."

Hermione shook her head as to toss out the words from inside her eardrums before they carved themselves into her brilliant braincells. She covered her face with her palms, crying into them.

# Your real parents.

With a deep breath of her own, Allegra pulled on every bit of courage she owned. She released her husband's hand, taking a calculated but determined step toward the crying girl. The sight and sound almost knocked her down flat on her backside, too, but she managed to balance herself as she knelt before Hermione.

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"Do you want to know our story?"

Hermione looked past the gaps in her fingers, sti ening at the proximity of the elegant woman. She tried to settle the sobs rattling her bones. She needed to think clearly. Her brain was shouting at her, telling her to stand, to wipe her cheeks and look these people in the eye and scream I don't believe your get out of my homebut she was exhausted.

Had she really just survived a war only to have her reality blown to pieces like this?

The woman took her silence as an invitation to speak: "Our story starts in Italy, where Deon and I are from. There were wars there— Guerre di sangueAncient, pureblood families fought each other for fortunes and territories. We hid behind giant castles, never leaving our grounds in fear that an enemy would take us from the streets, holding us for ransom until our family gave up what they demanded, only to return us back in pieces even if they did pay. It was dangerous even existing there, so the moment I found out about being pregnant with you, Deon and I fled. We came to Britain hoping for a better life." 🤿

Hermione removed her hands from her face only to better see the man's twisted emerald gaze. It reminded her so vividly of Harry's—a look that brimmed with regret, self-loathing, and complete agony. Briefly, past the chants of this is not real, I'm Hermione Grangeshe wondered what caused Deon Zabini to carry such weight on his shoulders.

"We were completely consumed by the wars at home we never thought the world was on fire somewhere else, too," Allegra continued. "But we soon found out when purebloods learnt that a Zabini and a Vivaldi had moved to the country. You can imagine the attention it brought, two separate, rich, powerful, and pureblood heirs in a time that needed servants for a Dark Lord."

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Hermione felt sick to her stomach. She reached for the rail of the staircase, pulling herself up.

"I will not pretend we come from righteous and kind families, Hermione." Deon had approached, something new in his eyes when he caught her silent disgust loud and clear. "Our families have done atrocious things long before we knew of Dark Lords and Grindelwalds, but we did not come to this country for blood and power. We came to make sure youhad a chance at a better life."

Allegra reached for his hand again, pulling herself up, too. "We made some mistakes, that is true, but our goal was always your well-being.

"No," Deon said through his teeth, a frown beginning to crease between his brows when he looked at his wife. There was something else, some unspoken words that passed between them that Hermione had no idea how to decipher. Still, whatever it was, it made the man say, "Imade the mistakes. I associated myself with Death Eaters when the whispers started about my recruitment. Allegra begged me not to, but I knew the Dark Lord would not accept my rejection. I knew they would come one day, so I put one foot inside the door because Ithought it was what was best for you both."

"We had a compromise," Allegra said, turning to Hermione with a small, complicated smile. "I would continue to work in Muggle London through my pregnancy. I needed it, really. I needed an escape from wars and madmen. And I found a little safe haven at Jenny's clothing shop."

"It was my mother's shop," Mrs. Granger finally spoke a er allowing the Zabinis to address Hermione without interruption from her part. There was also a small smile on her lips; just as complicated and sad as Allegra's had been. "That's where Ally and I met."

"That's where I met Richard, too," Allegra said, extending her free hand out to Jennifer. "He used to come in every day, bringing flowers for Jenny just before he headed o to his internship at the dentistry. They were the best of people. I knew that deep in my heart. That was why I told them who I really was— what really was. They never panicked or judged me. They just listened."

"I made her take advantage of their kindness," Deon then said, his dark expression void of all emotions. Hermione knew that to be the go-to of those who felt guilty or vulnerable. "The Death Eaters were coming for me and we could not stomach the idea of our child growing in the same hate we had endured early in our lives. I made Allegra ask Jennifer and Richard to take you before the Dark Mark was on our skin."

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"A friend warned us of the day the Dark Lord was planning to come for us," Allegra whispered. "The stress and fear sent me into an early labor. But as fate would have it, so did Jenny.'

"You see, Ally and I were pregnant at the same time," Mrs. Granger turned back to Hermione, tears welling up in her eyes again. Hermione noticed how Allegra Zabini squeezed her mother's hand, letting go of her husband's so she could then wrap an arm around her shoulders. Hermione could not make sense of the a ection and pain between the two women, let alone what she was hearing. "My boy was a stillborn. His name was going to be Ares. I felt myself drowning in my grief until Ally walked in with you wrapped in a bundle in her arms. All I could remember was the promise I had made her, that I would protect you when she couldn't. So I took you from her warm embrace, Hermione, and let her disappear through that door."

"All I le behind was a false birth certificate and a slightly Imperius-ed doctor to verify that Jennifer and Richard Granger had a beautiful little girl," Allegra now looked at Hermione. "I took Ares with a promise of my own, that I would give him a proper burial and give him the grief of a mother. "

"My friend let it slip that Allegra had gone into an early labor," Deon then added, still holding on to an icy exterior that wanted to melt at the self-loathing in his eyes. "He told them she had given birth to the stillborn."

A sob echoed around that small space between them and it came from Mrs. Granger. "The pain of losing your child is unbearable, Hermione. It broke my heart to lose my baby boy. Just as it broke Allegra's to give you up."

Just as Allegra rubbed comforting circles on Mrs. Granger's back, Deon muttered low and tensed, "No one would ever expect purebloods to hand their child to Muggles for safekeeping. Let alone to be raised as a Muggle-born. It was the perfect plan."

Hermione looked away from the adults, her tears blurring everything out. Her chest was still rattling with her silent sobbing at the thought that maybe all of it was true.

## Your real parents.

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How could it be, though? She was Hermione Jean GrangerShe was the only child to Jennifer and Richard Granger, two dentists who resided near Cambridge in a modest house with a wooden fort in the backyard their daughter would hide away to read.

All the beautiful, warm memories of her childhood starting slipping out of her head. Hermione gasped, trying to reach for them before they crashed on the wooden floor beneath her feet.

"Why?" she demanded, blinking away her tears to glare at the three adults. "Why are you telling me this now? What do you want from me?"

"Because it is finally safe now," Deon told her. "No one truly believed the Dark Lord was gone the first time he fell. We knew he would be back, so we could not risk pulling you out of the shadows. We had to make yet another tough choice—we had to put a Glamour Charm on you strong enough to withstand time and let you go."

"Glamour Charm?" The sound that came out of Hermione's mouth was an a ronted squeak. "No. That's not possible. I would have noticed."

"It is possible for me, darling. I have always excelled at my spellwork," said Allegra Zabini with a grin tugging at her red lips that faded too son. "I thought it would be easier. Not just to shield you from any danger, but to not seek you out. I gave you every good feature Jenny and Rich had so you would be all theirs. I erased Deon and I from you so it would be easier for me not to go and find out just how much you truly resembled us." a

"It was the hardest thing we had to do, Hermione, but we did it," Deon then continued. "We did not see you again until eleven years a er. Fate was cunning that day of your First Year. We recognized the Grangers at the platform, you bouncing on your feet, eager to board. You were so small. We could not think of anything else but what you were like as a growing person. We could not stand not knowing, so we allowed ourselves to get intel through other means."

#### "You spied on me?"

"Your brother did not spy. He watched overyou."

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Hermione gaped at them like they had sprouted three heads.

Deon cleared his throat, frowning at his wife's smirk before looking back at Hermione. "Our history is complicated and long, but before Allegra, I was engaged to another woman. She gave me a son shortly before Allegra and I fled for Britain."

"It is not as complicated as Deon is making it sound," Allegra said with a laugh that stunned Hermione. "He was best friends with Loren, but they were not in love. She encouraged him to flee with me, but only wanted a child of her own in return. It would secure her protection from the Zabinis in Italy, as well as give her an heir for a fortune. Deon visited him o en, you must know that, but he and his mother moved to Britain when he turned eleven so he, too, could attend Hogwarts." a

"His mother was killed in the war," Deon said, that darkness brighter than ever in his eyes. "Tortured and murdered when she refused to give him up to the Dark Lord."

More tears fell down Hermione's cheeks. Tears for the boy who had lost his mother so horribly, a boy they said was her brother

"When the Dark Lord was truly defeated, Allegra and I knew it was time to seek you out."

"We had lost eighteen years, Hermione. We did not want to lose another one."

"I'm an adult" Hermione reminded both Deon and Allegra Zabini. "You realize this, right? In the Wizarding world and in the Muggle world. You just cannot reclaim custody on me and—"

"It does not work that way in our families, Hermione," Allegra interrupted her with an apologetic undertone. "Vivaldis do not give adulthood to the women of the family until they are twenty-one. I wish it was not true, believe me she insisted when Hermione let out a loud, outraged grunt, "but it is binding. It is a blood spell." a

"You're forcing me!" Hermione yelled. "You're taking me against my will!"

Allegra grimaced at the accusation, but Deon did not let it steer him away from the choice he had made before he stepped foot inside the Granger home.

"Again, I know it does not seem that way right now, but we are not here to cause you any pain," he told her, emerald gaze narrowing. "Far from it, actually. We want to give you a family and a home—"

"I already have that," Hermione hissed. "The Grangers are my family and my home."

"Enough, Hermione. Please." Mrs. Granger marched right up to her daughter, a reflection of a scolding glint taking up her features that Hermione had molded hers a er. "I love you with all of my being, sweetheart, but you are not hearing what Ally or Deon are saying. I know it cannot be easy to process, but all they want is to know you. You're their daughter Hermione."

"I'm yourdaughter," she insisted. "What are you even saying, Mum? You want me to leave?"

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Mrs. Granger's eyes mirrored Hermione's brown ones overflowing with tears. She closed the distance between them, her hands shaking as she cupped her cheeks. "Listen, we love you—your father and I. More than you can possibly understand. You may not belong to us by blood, but you areour daughter. But you are also a Zabini. Deon and Allegra gave you to us to protect you and they have lived with that choice every day. They deserve the chance to get to know the amazing person that you have grown to be."

"But..I...I'm Hermione" she said through gasps. "I don't know how to be someone else."

"You are still her. That doesn't change. Your heart and soul are the same."

Hermione threw her arms around Mrs. Granger. She held on tightly to her, burying her face into the crook of her neck like she always did. She clung on like in her childhood, when she was terrified she would not come back every time she le through the door for her errands.

Mrs. Granger was trying to be strong for her daughter, but her own tears soaked into Hermione's jumper. She knew one day she would have to give her back to Deon and Allegra Zabini, but she did not know it would hurt like it did.

Yet, this was Hermione's story. A er eighteen years of being hidden in plain sight, she was about to take her rightful place in a pureblood family and society that had chased her down for fighting against everything they stood for.

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