Lover of the Light	
Chapter Ten: The Worst Is Yet To Come Some days he was angry, incredibly so, and some days he was sad. It	đ
was never quite a surprise anymore—he knew that either staggering emotion was going to fill his head and run with his blood the moment his eyes blinked to life a er a night's sleep filled with terrorizing memories. It was repetitive, it had been so for ages that he didn't really know if any other emotions existed beside the two that defined him nowadays.	
When he was angry everything blurred into red and dust. He saw blood on the walls, saw powder of broken down plaster invading the air and becoming like fog through the corridors as he attempted to head to class or sit still during a lecture. When he was angry, nothing could stop him; nothing was safe. His fingers were always tingling at	
the tips with an itch to punch something, to destroy something, or to grab his wand and blow the walls around him. His heart beat more tensely, a little faster than usual, and it caused him pain. When he was angry, his mind filled with rage and he swore he saw black and nothing more. The background disappeared, along with himself for however long that flash of fury lasted.	
When he was sad everything was still blurred into red and dust, but it all moved too slowly. He walked through the corridors, bumping into fellow students without knowing since all that displayed in front of him were walls painted with blood and corpses littered on the floor. When he was sad, he lived that day with a knot stuck in his throat, bubbling guilt in the pit of his stomach that rivaled the hole in his heart. His eyes stung with tears that were weak, that were his truth, and that were never-ending. When he was sad, he felt like there was	
no escape, not in the present nor in his sleep. Memories followed him like ghosts.	a
He told himself every night, when the dormitory was dark and the heavy breathing of his roommates filled the space, that he was going to try to move on. He told himself every night, repeated and repeated like he was writing lines on parchment that it wouldn't hurt the next day, that he wasn't going to remember. But every morning when his ears perked up from movement going on outside his four-poster and the light of the sun flashed against his thin lids, it was still there. He	
remembered it all. There were moments when he told himself that he needed help, that maybe he'd gone absolutely mad and everything that he was feeling, everything he continued to remember, were just the signs that he needed to be locked up. He'd find some resolution, a push to make	
his feet move and lead him towards one of the three that he cared for, but he never made it to them. Who was he to ruin everything they were trying to accomplish?	
Hermione was one of his best friends, a girl he'd been harboring feelings for since Second Year—but that didn't matter now; it hadn't for a while. His memories and refusal to see the light at the end of the tunnel squashed what could've been between them, and on the days that he punched walls and roared like a monster, he was glad to have cut the string of possibilities with her. He'd already caused her pain, he didn't need to add more. He knew that she'd be there for him always, to listen and soothe, but life was never easy for the Golden	D,
Ginny was a dierent story. Whenever his feet would try to lead him towards her he'd stop the movement before he made it to the third step. His sister had been there already; she had cried and yelled and su ered just like him. But unlike him, Ginny was strong-willed and	a
more determined than he's ever been. Ginny got tired of hurting, Ginny got tired of having nightmares, and Ginny got tired of wasting her life in mourning. His sister woke up one day in the summer—one where he spent all night sitting underneath a tree and staring at the onesome grave that invaded the Burrow's backyard—and she decided to move on. He wasn't going to dampen her progress.	
Forever the loyal one, Harry never le him alone. The nights he stayed awake, crying his grief out, he knew that Harry was wide	
awake too; listening and su ering with him. He did it at the Burrow, night a er night, and he continued to do it now in their dormitory. They never said anything, but he knew that words didn't matter in their friendship; they both knew of their love for one another. The problem was that no one had su ered more loss and more pain than Harry Potter, the Boy-Who-LivedNo one knew more death than his best friend, no one had more nightmares than him, and no one else deserves the freedom of guilt more than him. And he knew that Harry	
blamed himself for his torment—but the real enemy had been the consequences of war. And that was just it, Fred had been just a repercussion of battle. And	a
that was the hardest thing to grasp: his brother's death was a tiny	đ
back of it hitting the wall where its hinges were connected, Ron was startled out of his gloom. In a flash of dark robes, emerald and silver tie, Pansy Parkinson entered the secluded classroom with a chaotic feel to her. "Why the hell are you here?! Are you just bloody	ď
The Gry indor remained silent as the witch's yells echoed around the classroom. In a dierent circumstance, maybe one where he wasn't caught in a stormy shade of grief, he'd have various insults to bark back at the Slytherin, but things were so odd now. Besides, he understood her comment. He just had a dierent version: shewas everywhere.	
He didn't know how that was, but he was always in the same room as she. He hadn't noticed at the beginning of term, but apparently she was in every single one of his classes, and for some reason they were paired as permanent partners in a few of them. Then there was the ordeal with her blasted owl still taking her mail to him, causing them	
to see each other every morning during breakfast. As if that wasn't enough, there was something about her blue eyes that threw him o balance. He didn't know how to define it, but it was intense. It was like she was waiting for him; like she was waiting to get something from him that she'd already claimed as hers.	ъ.
And it was those blue eyes of Pansy Parkinson that made him remain silent. Though this time they weren't digging into his with a demanding of something, they were narrowed into angry slits and glazed over by tears. Her usual pale face was blotchy and pu y with red, traces of tear tracks down her cheeks.	
The tears automatically set o signals in his brain to get out of the classroom. With an awkward cough, he looked away from her and proceeded to make his way towards the exit. But it was the steps that he was taking that sent the already-angry girl into another spiraling tantrum.	
'Do you think you have it worse than everyone else?!" She was still shouting, sounding shrill and high-pitched in the way he's heard girls do when they get infuriated and try to control their crying. "Do you think that because you were on the run with Potter that you su er more?!" She took loud stomping steps towards him, gripping his arm and spinning him around so he could face her. "Well, newsflash,	
Bad idea. She should've known that her yelling was a terrible choice,	ໍ່ສໍ
especially since she somehow knew that he was easily set o	

especially since she somehow knew that he was easily set o nowadays. He tore his arm away from her hold, sadness in his being turning into fast paced anger, and he looked her dead on. "And you do?" His voice was equally as venomous as his stare. "The daughter and accomplice of murderers has it worse?"

She'd been crying when she had marched through the door, but the redheaded boy couldn't really have expected Pansy Parkinson to take a hit like a fragile, little girl. The witch matched his fury, expanding it on her pale complexion and even daring to take another step towards him. "You're not the only victim, Weasley," she hissed. "You're not the only one in this fucking place that lives with grief and misery every day. The only di erence between you and the rest of us is that we don't dwell too much on that pain and become pathetic beings."

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"You don't get to include yourself with the victims of war," he hissed back just the same. His own blue eyes were navy, narrowing and staring at her with accusing emotions. "You don't know anything about pain, Parkinson. And I suggest you piss o before I turn you into the cow we know you are!"	ł
Infuriated flashes took over her expression, changing as she clenched	đ
her jaw and tighten her hands into fists. The blotchiness on her cheeks from crying previously mixed in with her current fury, and it took a long minute before she settled all her emotions and decided to speak. "You really can't be that narrowed minded, can you? I surely thought you would've learned a few things from the war—or from righteous and all-forgiving Granger." She paused to take a breath and then released it as an airy chuckle. "Open your eyes, Weasley. Not	
only to notice that the world is moving on without you, but that you're losing them too. You don't want to find yourself alone one day. It's not the loveliest of sensations."	
For the first time Ron felt something else that wasn't in the ranges of sadness and anger—he felt confused. He dropped his dark stare and	
knitted his brows together. Not only had her comment come out so , resigned, and like advice, but it'd also been raw and personal. And for the first time, he looked at her; reallylooked at her.	
Her features weren't as strong when they weren't filled with disgust, they were actually simple. The redness on her cheeks faded, going back to her natural white coloring, but her skin looked so smooth over those high cheekbones. Her eyelashes were thick and they rimmed her cloudless, blue eyes. Her nose could still be argued to resemble that of a pug's, but it wasn't as ridiculous as he'd made it out to be all these years. Her mouth was perfect for her face, yet her	
bottom lip was bigger than the top. She was actually some sort of—	ਕੈ ਰ
"Oi. What's this?" Before Ron could come to a conclusion of	đ
something he rather never get into, the classroom gained more students. "Ron?" Pushing her way past the set of Slytherin students, Hermione	đ
appeared in front of her fellow Gry indor. She glanced at the girl behind him briefly before setting her worried gaze on him. "You okay?"	
The redheaded boy nodded, but he wasn't given a chance to respond when one of the Slytherins decided it was his turn to input. "Well, now that we know that the Weasel—I mean Weasley—is doing dandy, can he proceeded to get out? We do have a study session and he's wasting my valuable— OW" Turning around to face the one that dared to smack him beside the head like he was a dog, Blaise was outraged. "What was that for?!"	
outraged. "What was that for?!" "Be nice," Hermione snapped at him, smacking him again and	
making one of his house-mates laugh behind him. "That's right, Zabini; be nice." Coming out from the shadows, where he le the Slytherin Prince and Goyle, Theodore Nott placed himself right beside the brunette girl. He threw a charming smile at her	đ
before casually putting an arm around her shoulders, as if they'd been friends for ages. "I say Weasley should stay and study with us." Everyone turned to look at the dark-haired boy, an eyebrow raised. "Come on. It's about time we all started getting along, isn't it?"	47
Giving Nott a suspicious stare, adding to the irate one Zabini was giving him and even the surprisingly threatening one Malfoy was mixing in too, Ron wasn't allowed the chance to indirectly tell the	70 70
Slytherin to shove o when a new intruder entered the room. Looking momentarily sidetracked by the other students, Zacharias Smith managed to find the one he was looking for. "Weasley," he spoke, ignoring the eye-roll and scrunched nose Zabini gave him that showed his distaste for the Hu lepu , "we've been waiting for you.	a
Everything's set up and now we're waiting to pick teams."	
"Oh, tell me you're not playing Quidditch in this weather!" Ever the concerned one, Hermione made herself noticed, all eyes on her now as her parental scowl took over her beautiful face. "It's pouring outside, Ronald! How many broken bones have I had to mend for you and Harry because of it? Theo is right, you should join us for our	
study session. Bring Harry, too." "As much as I'd like to spend my last day in Hogwarts studying before	
the holidays, Harry and I did promise the blokes we'd have a game with them," Ron explained as he noticed that Smith was now glaring at Nott's mocking smile. "You have fun with yourfriends." Seeing as the brunette looked deflated that her o er to mingle was rejected, Nott decided to amp his points with her by saying, "how about you join us a er your game, Weasley? We'll be here for a while; Hermione's going to try and teach Goyle all of his subjects starting	
from First Year." As the Weasel and the Hu lepuglanced over at Goyle blushing pink	a⁴
from his sudden embarrassment and shyness, Malfoy and Blaise connected their eyes for a moment. It was untrusting from the blonde's part and annoyed by Zabini's, but as their gazes dri ed from one another to collide at the side of Nott's face, it was a mutual form	
of dislike. Neither of them missed the fact that Nott was crawling his way disturbingly towards Hermione, except only one of them knew whythat was.	ే
"Should you really be inviting people, Nott? You weren't even invited," Blaise said coldly. "In fact, why don't you run along with Weasley and what's-his-face and be their bludger? I'm sure they'd enjoy hitting you with a bat. I know I would."	
enjoy nitting you with a bat. I know I would." Instead of reacting badly, which Hermione expected, Nott just grinned at her half-brother and said nothing more. Sighing to herself, she first threw Blaise a warning stare before turning back to her	đ
fellow Gry indor. "We'll be here if you change your mind, Ron—you too, Zacharias. You're all welcomed."	
The Hu lepu frowned in return and replied nothing as Ron just gave his best friend a strange wave and the two proceeded to dodge their way around the Slytherins and out the room. Clearing her throat, not allowing herself to think that having her	
friends mix with Blaise was going to be rather di icult, Hermione whipped out her wand from her pocket and flicked it towards the	
desks. One by one, all in an orderly and clean fashion, the tables began to form a circle. "Are you joining us, Parkinson?" She placed her schoolbag on the nearest table, eying the girl that stayed in the background. "I'd really like not to be the only girl." Raising a brow, the Slytherin girl eyed the brunette carefully.	
Raising a brow, the Slytherin girl eyed the brunette carefully. Eventually, she nodded. "I suppose I can use the help with Transfiguration."	a
Blaise couldn't help the proud and satisfied smile stretching on his face at the e ort that Hermione was giving to integrate herself into his life. And grudgingly, he supposed at a point he was going to have to stop his nasty retorts and accept her life and its people too.	đ
As Zabini and Goyle headed towards a table of their own in the circle, the two Slytherins lingering behind noticed that there was one open seat on the right of the Gry indor. Simultaneously, the two moved forward—except, always the cheat, Malfoy managed to elbow Nott	
sharply in the ribs as he slid his schoolbag o his shoulder. Once again, though none noticed as they faced away from him, Nott	ືສ
grinned instead of reacting harshly. He watched the fallen Slytherin Prince take the seat next to Hermione, both tensing like their auras collided and shocked one another. "Interesting," Nott whispered to himself, grin transforming into a	ď
devious smirk.	10°

She didn't know if things were actually becoming easier for her or she was just becoming a phenomenal liar.

Time had swept by rather quickly, and before she knew it the holidays had rolled around. Usually when she thought of the holidays she'd get a fluttering sensation all over her body, a warmness that was definitely consisting of cheer and love when she thought that she'd soon be able to spend time with her parents and do their usual holiday traditions together. She was the only child and never really had any friends, her being a little too odd for the other children, so she'd grown an impeccable relationship with her parents and being at Hogwarts every year had always made her nostalgic. She missed them terribly, especially with all the madness that surrounded her life in those previous years, but she always had the holidays to claim with them. It was their time and it had never been taken for granted.

Things were di erent now, however. This year there weren't going to be any Granger traditions because she wasn't a Granger at all. No, this year Hermione was a Zabini. So when it was time to have her trunk packed for the holidays, knowing that she was going to be missing the faces of Jennifer and Richard Granger, Hermione had surprisingly not sulked for long. She had cried of course, she wanted to be with her muggle parents, but she'd also been somewhat compelled by Blaise's excitement to have a holiday with a complete family. ď⁵ The boy had talked for a good hour the night before departure of the things he wanted to do-things that surprisingly consisted of many muggle traditions, which she thinks he suggested in tribute to her history in the muggle world—and Hermione hadn't missed the simple and uncovered happiness in his emerald eyes. It was ironic that she started o incredibly reluctant, secluding herself from him, but she couldn't help but to realize that she truly cared for Blaise. Though he was a few months older than her, she thought of him as a little brother. And as annoying as those are said to be, Hermione was glad that she'd gotten to that point with him. It started making everything else feel possible. a "...but we can change it if you'd like. What do you think, Hermione?" Fluttering her eyelids for a moment, light, setting and expressions suddenly appearing in her peripheral vision, Hermione noticed that those several faces were looking at her. She was sitting in a circular table, a cup of steaming tea in front of her. She didn't know exactly when lunch had ended, or what she'd eaten truthfully, but she was now in the west end of the garden of the Zabini mansion. She cleared her throat, elbowing Blaise passively as he chuckled at her disorientation, and then she looked full-on at the honey-colored eyes staring at her so ly. "I'm sorry, you were saying?" Beautiful and radiant, even in the chilly and grayish gloom of that November day, Allegra Zabini smiled calmly as her stepson chuckled once again and the brunette sitting next to him scowled at him. "I was saying that I'm planning a trip to Milan soon, sweetheart," the woman went ahead to repeat the story the girl had missed. "There's a clothing store there that I've invested in with one of Milan's top designers, and they have just sent notice of the arrival of their newest collections. If you'd like, we can go there to choose the dress-robes you forgot to purchase for the party. There are gorgeous cashmere and silk designs and a variety of cuts, all in your liking, I'm sure." a⁴ "Doubt it," Blaise teased before he casually took a sip of his tea. Resisting the urge to elbow him again, this time rougher than before, Hermione sat taller on her seat and acted like the proper, educated girl the Grangers had raised. "To be perfectly honest, Mrs. Zabini, I don't know much of designers and clothing." "No problem, cara Narcissa will be accompanying me on this trip as well, and she's always had a true taste for fashion. I'm sure she'd love to help to find you the perfect dress. Won't you, Cissy?" ď All eyes shi ed from Allegra, including Hermione's as she turned to the opposite side of the garden-table. There was the family of blondes that were said to be thick as thieves with the Zabinis; all three of them dressed in dark colors and perfectly poised as they enjoyed their tea. Mister Malfoy sat closest to the Zabini patriarch, files in between them as they took the opportunity to talk business; Mrs. Malfoy sat on her husband's right, looking elegant as she kept her hands folded perfectly over the table; and next to his mother, on the le side of the only brunette, silent and only speaking when spoken to, was Draco. đ "Of course," Mrs. Malfoy replied steadily. And throwing Hermione o slightly, the blonde woman moved her blue eyes in a fluid motion towards her; appearing light and friendly. "If you'd allow, Hermione, I'd be delighted to assist. It'd be nice to pick out clothing for someone else than Draco for a change." Malfoy narrowed his eyes at his mother. "...It was just once," he grumbled as Blaise snorted in amusement. ď If she squinted, Hermione could see Mrs. Malfoy grin teasingly at her son, and for some reason that made an odd thought pop into her head. She'd seen the Malfoys before, endured their presence in hostile times, but she'd never really thought of them as a family. She had viewed them as ignorant, cruel purebloods, but when that was stripped away they were something else. Mrs. Malfoy was a mother, Draco's motherand she loved him. She had to, didn't she? She had risked so much during the war just to get to him, just to see him once more. It was bizarre to see the woman in a di erent light, to even thinkthat there was something more than the distant and refined woman she posed for the world to see. a And if there was more to the Malfoys, then there had to be more to the Zabinis. Reluctantly, she knew that was more than true when she stopped fighting and let Blaise in. She had tied him to being a bigoted pureblood, and he had been, but he'd changed. So, if Deon and Allegra Zabini had decided to step back into her life, to find their daughter and spend time with her despite the fact that she already had a di erent life away from them, then...they couldn't be just that, could they? They had to be more than the resentment she felt. They were two people with a past she knew nothing of, that had explanations she needed to understand the story-the story where they were her biological parents. She wasn't going to start referring to them as 'Mum and Dad', they were far from that, but Hermione had allowed them a little closer. If she could accept Blaise, if she could love him as a brother, then she could use that process to understand Deon and Allegra. "Sure," Hermione breathed a er a moment of finding resolution. "I'd like that, thank you." Silence rang in the table, Blaise even stopped his mockery towards Malfoy to look at her with surprised eyes. Hermione had to resist the urge to roll hers at them. She wasn't that stubborn. "What are the formalities for this party?" She asked, making conversation. "I still haven't been told what it's for." Allegra Zabini looked over the moon. "It'll be a Christmas party," the woman explained happily. "The Malfoys usually host one, but this year we're taking over. It'll be formal attire, of course, but it'll be mellow. We don't want to bore with uptight, ball traditions." "Sounds fun," responded Hermione in a not-too-sure tone. "Does it?" Though she'd been looking at the dark-haired woman in the table, Mister Zabini had taken the chance to talk to his daughter. The man pushed the files of important papers away from him, his kind, tanned face pulling on a gentle smile. "I was thinking we could spend part of the holidays in the Isle of Hydra, and then maybe the rest of Greece. Lucius and I've to tend to a few meetings there for the resort we're building, but it won't be for long. I'm sure you, Blaise and Draco would enjoy it a er being in Hogwarts these past months." a Assuming that the two families would look at least slightly interested to spend the holidays away from London's terrible weather, no one looked intrigued by the idea. Mrs. Zabini glared at her husband, looking defiant in a way, and Blaise looked astounded at his father's comment. "Deon," Allegra called her husband tensely, "you know perfectly well that the party must proceed as planned. We've discussed this many times before." "And we both discussed that Hermione's first holiday with us shouldn't be spent in old traditions." "The old traditions is why we're having that party," stressed the woman. Hermione raised a brow as the couple appeared to be arguing. She threw a quick glance at her brother for any sense of what this was about, but the boy was now frowning at his stepmother. "I'm following your requests." "We both conceded to those traditions, amore Yet, we both agreed that canceling them would be a better option." đ "And we both know what the consequences will be if we do so. I'm not allowing that; I'm not running anymore." At the final comment Mrs. Zabini had to say to her husband, her honey-colored eyes and his emerald digging into each others, passing a secret language between them, a silence fell upon the tensed atmosphere. She didn't know much about the foundation of Deon and Allegra's marriage, but from what Hermione had observed since the moment the Zabini mansion became her home was that the two were constantly in love. The man was always rather a ectionate with his wife, breaking her speculation that pureblood marriages were cold and uncaring. The woman was always attentive to her husband, she was his strength in some way, and her love for her husband glittered in her eyes every moment they were together. Hermione knew that not every relationship was perfect, the Grangers' was as perfect as she could assume a marriage could get, yet her muggle parents had rows here and there. But to witness Mister and Mrs. Zabini arguing was a bit unnerving; especially because of what they weren'tsaying. Always being the voice of reason, Hermione wasn't allowed to

smooth her way into the couple's hostility when Jovi—the main house-elf at front of the Zabini mansion; an elf that reminded Hermione of Kreacher due to the devoted dedication and obsession for its masters—started approaching hurriedly with people trailing a er him.

"Master Zabini," Jovi bowed a er he practically ran to the garden table, "yous got visitors. Jovi tells them they weren't allowed to interrupt Masters and guests tea-time, but theys insisted, Master." "Surely they could've waited—Regina." A bearded frown took over

Turning in her seat, Hermione saw who those people upsetting Deon	
were. It was two people to be exact, and one of them was a woman. She was tall and full, looking rougher by nature than the average	
woman. She had sandy-colored hair that was pulled and tied back into an elegant bun. Her face was pale, alike the visible skin that was showing from her grey robes, and she had a hard expression that	
could cause intimidation. Her eyes were almost translucent, and Hermione couldn't tell if they were extremely light blue or grey, and	
they were ragged. The entire woman's persona vibrated with firmness, with power and cold poise. The only thing around the woman that eased Hermione was the	a
person standing next to her—Theodore Nott. "Good a ernoon," the woman greeted in a voice that dripped	ď
animosity. "Regina," Mrs. Zabini smiled, though it didn't reach her eyes that were	đ
cool, "how nice to see you." The woman smiled dimly in return, however, it was already	
concluded by everyone else that that's as nice the interaction was going to get. "I hate to interrupt your day with the Malfoys, but I've got matters to discuss with you and Deon. And they're very important." The woman blinked and suddenly her narrowed gaze was	
on Hermione. Hermione stared back, but from the corner of her eye she could see	
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With her unmoving gaze still upon her, Mrs. Nott said, "pleasure finally meeting you, darling. It's been a long time waiting." As soon as the young witch looked confused, the woman added, "but what better time than the present, right? It's not every day the dead rises	
from the ground—don't you agree, Aria?" With eyes wide open now, Hermione turned to her biological parents.	a
"The Notts know?!" She hissed at them. "You promised you wouldn't tell anyone!" "It's complicated, cara" Allegra responded quickly as her husband	
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Mister Zabini rose from his chair, severity taking over his tanned features. "That's enough, Regina," he practically growled. "We're not handling this right now. Leave my property and await for our owl."	5
"We're handling this now, actually," the woman contradicted, causing her son to roll his dark eyes behind her. "I'm not allowing the Zabinis to deceit my family any longer. We gave you our trust for eighteen	
years and you treated us as fools. I'm here to see that you honor the contract that's been resurrected." Bang "We're not having this conversation now, do I make myself clear?" Keeping his fist on the table, a er having rattled the expensive	đ
teacups all around, Deon looked lethal. Clearing his throat, feeling embarrassed and shunned at the same time, Theodore took a step towards the woman next to him. "Mother	
—" "Silence, Theodore," his mother snapped, shutting him up with a	
scowl. "I'm doing what's right for our family. I'm collecting our debt." She aimed her infuriated stare at the Zabini patriarch. "She's alive, Deon, and I expect your family to honor our agreement."	
Hermione rose from the table too. "What agreement?"	
"This doesn't pertain to you, sweet—"	a
"It obviously does," the girl interjected Mrs. Zabini's attempt of distraction. Hermione was smart, she was the Brightest Witch of the Age for heaven's sake! Yet, they thought they could pull one over	a
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