

From a Different Angle

Lover of the Light

Chapter Nineteen: From a Different Angle

Everything he's ever loved has always been wrong in the eyes of his father.

When he was five, he loved a boy named Lorenzo. He stumbled upon him a fateful day when it rained and he snuck out of the illustrious mansion to roam the gardens while twelve-year-old Stefano took business lessons from the Zabini patriarch. Mister Zabini had insisted that he joined the teachings of the day, but Mrs. Zabini had managed to have her youngest child set free for the first time in his lifetime. Finally getting to be a kid, he explored the gardens, seeing it with new eyes, and loved the liberty in the air to run wild, laugh, and imagine. Deon created a wonderland, a child's kingdom, and he wanted to share it. That was enough for him to set o to the cages where the guard dogs were kept.

Lorenzo was, at the time, an eight-year-old boy: tall, lanky, and with hair the color and texture of a haystack. He'd been serving the dogs water and food when Deon stumbled upon him. Being five, Deon's curious mind had been frizzed to find an unknown boy in his property and handling the aggressive dogs with such care and respect that they returned to him. A er loads of rambling questions, Deon learned that Lorenzo was the cook's son and he worked for the Zabini's while he was not at school. Happy to know that Stefano and him weren't the only children in the massive home, Deon clung on to Lorenzo and befriended him.

For almost two years Deon took his etiquette lessons, endured tutoring sessions and his father's speeches of superiority and family values, and then he hurried o to the gardens to play with Lorenzo. He'd been so captivated by the older boy: Lorenzo knew how to tame the dogs, how to build things, how to play Quiditch, where the sweets were hidden in the kitchens, how to climb the towers of the mansion to overlook the river, and how deep into the surrounding forest they could find centaurs. Lorenzo wasn't just his best friend and his role model, he was his brother, too.

For almost two years, Lorenzo was the only true friend Deon had—until Stefano found out. Deon was meant to be in his room, reading a massive history textbook for that week's lesson, and when Stefano was ordered to fetch his brother for dinner, he found the room empty. Stefano, being the oldest, felt like he was meant to always achieve his tasks perfectly and keep order. A er his discovery, he marched right back to his father and informed him of Deon's secret friendship. Deon assumed that the beating he received that night was for not studying. Of course, he'd been corrected the following day when he found that the cook, la signora Sofiahad been sacked along with her son Lorenzo from the Zabini mansion before the sun came out that morning. When he demanded for an answer, tears in his eyes, Mister Zabini simply declared that a boy with Deon's stature did not befriend the help. He had the family's honor to withhold and it was time for Deon to make it proud.

The summer he turned thirteen, Deon was allowed to accompany Stefano to Rome for a day of leisure and freedom. Stefano had wandered into a pub that belonged to the university that he attended: giving his younger brother a handful of money and telling him to piss o and not return for three hours. Glad to be free of his twenty-year-old brother and his lack of personality, Deon took to explore. Romaand see a beauty to Italy that he'd never been allowed to see from inside the walls of his boarding school, his room, or his father's company. It was the first time he ever really heard music. He was fascinated by the intense rhythm the group created, filling his eardrums and making him feel liberated. A er that, he scouted the grand city for a music shop and bought himself a guitar with Stefano's money.

By the time he was fourteen, he was arrogant enough to think himself an excellent guitar player. In boarding school he was hardly seen without the instrument; always playing away in his dormitory, out in the field, in the library with a surrounding Silencing Charm, before class, and the days he set out to woo girls. One of his many admirers was the school's music teacher. One day, without Deon's consent, she owled the Zabini patriarch to suggest that Deon was better o in a proper music school where he could expand his talents. La professoressa Maranenever received a reply. That year's Christmas holiday, however, Deon knew exactly what his father thought about his talent when he watched him use his prized guitar as a log in the fireplace of his oice. Music was never the same a er that.

Action was something that the Zabini children grew up without. They didn't know of family dinners with laughter, public kisses to the cheek from their mother, words of praise or gestures of an embrace from their father, nor a sweet word from one another. At fifteen, Deon tried to change that with twelve-year-old Jenoah and nine-year-old Bianca. He was cool on the outside, chin raised high, but he was always there for his younger siblings. He wanted to protect them, guide them—something that Stefano never did for him.

Too young to have been molded the way Stefano and he were at their older age, Jenoah and Bianca had warmer hearts. They befriended who ever smiled at them—muggle-borns, half-bloods, and muggles included—and didn't know the value of their pedigree. Deon warned them countless of times about mixing with those inferior to them, but they never listened. One a ernoon in their school, a friend of his ran up to him and informed him that a Seventh Year gang of boys were beating Jenoah for his intrusion on a hazing of a mudblood. Skilled with his wand, Deon saved his younger brother and had the Seventh Years hanging by their underwear from the trees surrounding them.

In the oice of the direttore di la scuolaDeon defended Jenoah from their father's wrath. Mister Zabini had been ashamed that the Headmaster had called, that his children had acted like barbarians, and that they would even consider befriending trash. Before their father's heavy hand smacked Jenoah across the face, Deon stood between them and received the blow. That same night, Deon received a letter with a set of orders from his father. The next day, he shoved Jenoah into an empty classroom and gave him the beating Deon saved him from the Seventh Years and their father, all while Bianca watched. A er that, Deon never spoke more than five minutes with his younger siblings.

He'd known from the age of six that Silvana Rosso was going to be the next Mrs. Zabini. He knew that betrothals happened: it was a part of their history, it was a duty, it kept their legacy pure, and it carried on the surname. The one thing he never understood was why it was him. Out of Stefano, who was the oldest by seven years, why was he the one to be handed the tradition of an arranged marriage? He asked once, of course, but he never received an answer. He just knew that he had to accept reality.

He was thirteen the first time he was face to face with Silvana, but it wasn't until he was seventeen that the wedding plans began. In between those four years since their first real encounter, Silvana dated under the radar, as did Deon, and both became close friends. They recognized the beauty the other held, but they'd known from the beginning that physical attraction and romance would never arise between them. So when the irritating and righteous Allegra Vivaldi refused to leave Deon's thoughts the year he turned seventeen, Silvana was not surprised that the tragedy of true love had turned Deon's sense of obligation into complete rubbish.

He'd been stupid to assume that requesting to terminate the betrothal was going to work. Allegra Vivaldi came from a pureblood family that dated as far back as the Zabini's, she had immense wealth, was third to that fortune, and was highly respected and praised for her marketing abilities at just seventeen. She would've been a jewel for the Zabini family-tree. Mister Zabini had agreed to do that—well—except, Allegra's family lacked what Silvana's had to o. And that was an entire fortune solely under Silvana's name that would become Deon's the moment they said "I do." And just as the Zabini patriarch had heard of Allegra's capabilities, he'd also heard of her work with the Fontanas; a mudblood family that stood in the way of the Zabini's entire hold of Rome.

At seventeen, Deon was used to nodding his head and accepting whatever it was that his father demanded, but at that point in his life, how deep Allegra sunk her nails into his skin and bones, the knew that she was the one thing that he would not give up. He told his father that he loved her, that Allegra was the one for him, and that he wanted to spend the rest of his life with her. With the world's most profound, independent black eyes, his father had commanded that he was to forget about the Vivaldi girl and fulfill his obligations to their family.

That same night, a er he was told to excuse himself from his father's presence, Deon fled from inside the walls of the original Zabini Estate. Now eighteen years later, he was back. And he felt just as young, just as foolish, and just as desperate as that last time.

"Deon?" Turning away from the fireplace where he once watched his beloved guitar turn to ash, he found a set of green eyes belonging to his youngest sibling staring at him with surprise.

"Mio fratello!" Ushering past Bianca, Jenoah marched in with an aura about him that resembled the essence of peace and light. He laughed; the sound booming around their father's oice that shook the portraits awake. "E bello vederlo!"

In eighteen years, that was the first time Deon was in the presence of his youngest brother. A part of him wanted to smile just as big, look just as pleased—but the hole in his chest forbade him from forgetting why he was really there. There was no time for pleasantries, no time for reminiscing of what once was or what will never be again.

Before Jenoah could take more steps to go in for a foreign hug, Bianca placed a hand on his shoulder and held the muscular man in place. She had the same kind and sincere glitter in her eyes that Deon remembered her having since she was a child.

"The house-elf informed us you were here—" Before his sister could begin to question his presence, the rest of the Zabini family appeared by the doorway. They were led by the old and grey patriarch. "I don't take it you're here for tea."

The sarcasm was apparent, but Deon didn't see a trace of emotion on his father's face. The man was constant in that sense, never showing and never unrattled. However, he did notice his mother's glistening eyes, longing for the son she lost so long ago, and Stefano's piercing, glowing black gaze on him.

Deon did not reply.

Domenico Zabini slowly strolled with all this power deeper into his extensive oice. Instead of heading for the desk that added more to the image of his control, he took a seat on a leather armchair by the fireplace. It was the same chair Deon remembered him sitting on when he tried to marry him o to Blaise's mother. His gaze was just as unmovable, and it frightened him.

"Parla!" Speak, he commanded; like he was talking to a dog. Oense would have balled his blood, but Deon knew that the old man wanted to know the reason why his shunned son was inside the home he was no longer welcomed to.

Taking a deep breath, Deon summoned courage to look directly at his father. "Someone took my daughter." The words came out and they cut him like he coughed up razorblades. The hole in his chest ached more, the guilt on his shoulders multiplied, and his sockets burned with tears he hadn't shed in his father's presence since he was seven.

"Cosa?" Jenoah's voice echoed in the oice once more. "What happened to your daughter, Deon?"

Deon didn't turn to his brother. "For months someone has been a er her," he continued to explain to his father. "They've attacked her inside Hogwarts, they've attacked her on the street, they've almost killed her and hurt Blaise this past Christmas, and now... They've taken her. Someone has my daughter and I want her back."

The white-haired man remained expressionless. Deon had to will himself to keep on acting and explaining; he reached into the pocket of his trousers and pulled out the ransom letter he received a week ago. As he robotically handed it to his father, Deon felt self-loathing for realizing that it'd been nine days since they took Hermione, eight since he received the letter, and that he had just willed himself to go to Italy and find his family. He loved his daughter with all his heart, but the pride that Domenico had installed in him as a child had blinded him from seeing that there was no other option than the one he was taking at the moment.

Domenico unfolded the letter with thin fingers and read. He did not blink once. A short, yet the longest minute of his life later, Deon's green eyes met his father's dark ones.

"The culprits want my money." It wasn't a question. And the next words to come out of Domenico's mouth were, however, "And they were laced with controlled indignation." "You dare come into my home and expect me to give up seven centuries worth of a fortune and the ties I've built in exchange for your daughter?"

"You're mad!" With a loud roar, with the breaking of the rules they'd been taught as children, Stefano stalked towards his brother and father in a rage. He tore the letter from his father's hand and crumbled it. "You're not taking everything we've built!"

"This is my daughter's life!" Deon ignored his eldest sibling. "I wouldn't ask if it wasn't dire. I will pay you back the very last coin. I will give you everything I've built on my own for your assistance. Padre, ti prego!"

Stefano didn't give his father a chance to respond. "Your money is worthless to us. We're not going to hand over everything this family has stopped for centuries. That fortune is reserved for Zabini's, and you should be the one the second you le us for that woman!"

"Che diavolo è il tuo problema!" Finally getting to move, Jenoah's friendly face transformed into that of fury. All Zabini sons tall and well built made Jenoah's approach to Stefano not only look odd, but dangerous, too. With wands or without, irreversible damage could be caused. "Someone took Deon's daughter! Someone has our niece and you're worried about money, Stefano?!"

"Money that I've made! Money that your career as a child's Healer does not contribute a dime to, Jenoah! Of course I'm not going to give it up! It's mine!"

That must've sparked something inside of the youngest of the Zabini children. With wide, appalled eyes, Bianca le her mother's side and stomped right in front of her older brother. "You selfish, spoiled brat!" She drilled her index finger into his massive chest. "This is about family! This is about someone's life!"

As the ruckus continued amongst his siblings, Deon did not remove his eyes from his father. The fear that he felt by the man's unstrident demeanor was enough to make the guilt he'd been carrying for years to finally make his legs give out. He sunk to his knees, and with tears in his eyes he muttered, "please help me. I need to get my daughter back. I need to save her."

The cold room went silent.

"From the moment I fled Italy with Allegra I've damned her to suffer. I stole her from her family, from her only sister, and I submitted her to a life under the rule of the Dark Lord. I broke her, and our family. I made her give up our daughter once, I can't... I can't do that to her again. So please... Padron my Hermione, either. I'm not losing her again. So please... Padron my knees, I beg you to help me get my daughter back."

Domenico could see the tears tracing down his son's cheeks. He saw his pain, his heartbreak, his hate, his desperation—all of his weaknesses. As Deon knelt before him, he perceived everything he taught him not to show displaying loudly in front of him. It disappointed him. A er eighteen years, he was still disappointed. "Carry your mistakes like a man, Deon," the old man said to his son as he stood from the armchair, "and embrace the consequences of them."

XXXXXXXXXXXX

In all of her thirty-six years of life, Allegra only regretted one thing.

When she was younger, as far back to when she was four, she remembered loving the human race for exactly as it was. It did not matter to her how much money a person had, how much education they'd received, what the color of their skin was, what background they had, or if they had magic in their blood. What truly mattered, what truly held beauty, was the deeds they did to improve the world and themselves. She loved their genuine smiles, their true embraces, their laughter, and their kindness. She was a four-year-old girl, and she believed that people made the world glitter.

By the time she was twelve she learned about the horrors created by man. The beautiful country of Italy, her homeland, was being destroyed by ancient, magical families that believed they had every right to tear it apart. They were at war with one another for power; murdering people, sabotaging companies, kidnapping children, and forcing people under their command as humiliation. It was said they were fighting for peace and restoration, but Allegra never saw it.

Every day she argued the brutality of the wars, of the deluded ideals that someone was better than another person because of their ancestors and the amount of gold in their vaults. She frowned at her father every day at the diner table, judging him loudly or silently with her disapproving golden eyes for his participation in the process. More o en than not, he would smile condescendingly at her, waving o her rants as a child that had yet to see the magnitude of their family and their power. On other occasions, on the nights that the battle for territory or clients didn't go in the Vivaldi favor, he would slam his fist onto the table and scream for her silence. He would then go o in detailed speeches about her pure blood, the importance and power that her name had, how she should strive to honor that, and how she should follow her older sister's example.

The Vivaldis wanted her to be exactly like Sienna. It was ridiculous to assume that a twelve-year-old girl could accomplish everything a sixteen-year-old had in that point of their lives, yet they still demanded it from Allegra. She was used to being seen as the nuttier of the family, as the one with an absurdly kind heart that was not going to get her anywhere, that was just slowing up her own path towards greatness. And they thought that following Sienna footsteps would help shape her.

It was her mother's favorite hobby, telling Allegra how better Sienna was at upholding their traditions and their pride.

At sixteen, Sienna was at the top of her class, was set to marry the heir of an upcoming wealthy family by the name of Angelo Neri, was held in high regards in their posh society, and had attributes that complimented the Vivaldi family. Sienna was filled with the same prejudices and sense of family duty like all the ignorant people that Allegra loathed and pitied.

Despite their clear differences, however, they still loved each other dearly. Whenever Allegra went out her sister's head and change the subject; when their mother was too hard on her, Sienna rescued her sister from the lectures and wiped her tears; when their father died in the wars of Italy, Sienna convinced their relatives to let Allegra give a heartfelt speech and scatter his ashes by the ocean. Sienna was even there to help when Allegra's all-consuming passion caused her troubles; the major one coming in form of one of the Zabini heirs.

Falling in love and leaving a behind. She fell far too deep for Allegra: it was ruining Sienna's wedding. She did not want Allegra regretting: it was leaving Allegra and her family for him, that she didn't realize the things she'd be losing. Neither had Sienna. The oldest Vivaldi girl rolled her eyes when she found out about Deon and Allegra's relationship, called love something for children, and just teased her for the fit she was going to make their great-grandfather and mother go into. Allegra knew Sienna was secretly upset that she was going to throw everything away for Deon, but Sienna was always willing to take on the Vivaldi duties for both of them without regret.

Two months into her escape, a letter from her mother found its way into Allegra and Deon's home in Britain. They had a relationship like most pureblood girls and their mothers—hardly any affection, interactions solely based on lessons on being a proper lady—so she had no rush read what the woman had to say. The letter went unattended for three nights. When Allegra finally opened it, her heart broke and she hated herself all in one go. Her mother's letter stated that Sienna had been kidnapped for ransom by the De Carlo family and the Vivaldis le her to die. They sacrificed their modeled heir to keep their hold on Verona without contemplating rescue.

Sienna's death overshadowed her love for Deon and the blessing of her pregnancy for several weeks. A er ages, what felt like a lifetime later, Allegra received something else from her mother: a magical portrait. It was a gateway for Sienna to return to her sister. It was the only great thing Mrs. Vivaldi ever did for her youngest daughter; something that earned her Allegra's respect until the day she died seven years later.

Life restarted when Sienna appeared in the portrait. For eighteen years, Allegra kept her sister with her. She had more portraits created, placed in every worthy corner of her home, allowing for Sienna to move freely to find Allegra whenever they needed each other. For eighteen years, like they'd done all their life, Allegra cried, laughed, and shared everything with Sienna. She was the one person aside from Deon that knew her to the core. And when Deon needed to be alone with his miseries, when she needed strength and advice, Allegra found refuge in her sister.

A sister that's been missing for ten days now.

"Allegra?"

She heard him, his voice raspy and constricted. He filled the room with his despair, adding to the anguish she was already producing and drowning herself in.

She didn't turn to Blaise. He just watched her carefully as she looked at an empty portrait, her hand resting in the middle of it like she was trying to get something from it.

He was about to turn on heels, but she stopped him when her broken voice formed broken words. "I never regretted giving her up." Her nails pierced the canvas of the portrait. "I wanted her to be with me, of course. I wanted to raise her, I wanted to be there the first time she walked, the first time she said a word... I wanted to hear her say 'mum' for the first time and see my face... But I don't regret giving her up. It was for her survival."

Eighteen years a er, I thought we were finally capable of having her, that it was safe for her to come back to us, but I was wrong. We doomed her, Blaise... I made this happen."

All of Blaise's senses were trying to make his feet move and make him flee quickly out of that room. His customs, the way he was so used to running away from emotions and everything implicated with his heart, were trying to make him leave his stepmother alone with her own fucked-up thoughts while he hid from them in his dark bedroom. He wanted to leave, Merlin he really wanted to, but he'd never seen her toeing the line of a complete breakdown before. It scared him just as much as it pained him. She was always so composed and seemingly satisfied; he never even knew she could show misery as she was showing it in that moment.

"You weren't wrong." The words that slipped from his mouth came from a place inside of him that he didn't know was so accessible and tender. He didn't know a part of him existed that could attempt to comfort someone for selfless reasons. "She needed to come back to us, Allegra. You weren't wrong. We are safe. We're her family. There's no better place in the world for Hermione than with us."

Allegra shook her head, her back still facing her stepson. "I ruined her life, Blaise. I was the one that told your father to get her back. I was the one that planned everything. I saw the Dark Lord's fall coming before anyone did and I started arranging for Hermione to come back to us. I didn't care that she was going to feel lost, nor did I care about the impending betrothal to Theodore that was going to resurface. I ruined her life because I hoped she'd create a new one with us. Now look what my... what my selfishness caused."

"She's your daughter—she's my sister, for fuck's sake!" She was that was missing to make our family complete. Allegra. Do you think Father or I gave a damn about how she was going to feel, either? We were all selfish enough to turn our heads from her pain for the chance that she'd see how much we loved her and how happy she could be with us. All these months with her only happened because you made the choice to bring her back. There's nothing wrong about that."

"Everything's wrong about it!" She finally turned to him. Her golden eyes were rimmed red, less bright and more tortured than they've ever been. "I ruined her life! I should've le her alone!"

Without a warning, coming as a surprise, not only for Blaise but for herself as well, Allegra crumbled. Her legs gave out and she fell onto her knees. Her shoulders shook; her bones rattling with the cries shooting up her throat and out her lips. Neither had ever heard cries so pitiful and thundering.

Blaise took a step back in fear from the anguish echoing in every corner of the sitting room. He had just entered to inform his stepmother that the Malfoys were on their way over for an update on Hermione's case; he wasn't ready for that amount of misery. He knew it was there, he'd seen it on his parents' faces and reflected back at him when he looked into the mirror, but it still daunted him. He just couldn't understand how much something could hurt.

Whatever the answer was to that, Blaise didn't want to be in the company of another person who felt the same way. For nine days he'd done his best to steer clear from Allegra and his father without it was for an update on Hermione's whereabouts, and now he found himself caught in the mixture of his pain and theirs. And as much as he wanted to turn away, his feet were more gallant than his brain could ever willingly be.

He wrapped his arms around his stepmother's shaking shoulders. He'd never hugged her before, especially since he went from hating her as a child to being an independent teenager, but he now found that she felt like home. She felt like the rare comfort he received from his biological mother when she was still alive. She felt like acceptance and an everlasting bond of family—she'd become his mother at a point in life and he'd never noticed. He cared for her; loved her as much as he loved his father and his half-sister.

A knot formed in his throat. Allegra's despair had now become his, too.

"I keep losing her." Allegra cried, her face buried against his le shoulder. "All I've ever wanted was to have my daughter with me and... and... I just wanted to love her. I just wanted..." Sobs conquered her words again.

Unwillingly, hated by him, Blaise's eyes filled with sympathizing tears and blurred his vision for a moment. Once he decided to blink and let them fall, he saw the fireplace ignite with flames. He expected the Malfoys to appear, but the flames did not burn green and tall from the Floo Network being activated. Bodies did not emerge, but a face did. "BLAISE!"

It all happened quickly. They heard that haunting and missed voice ring throughout the sitting room and pierce their eardrums with shrill intensity and a rush of nervous adrenaline. For a moment they swore it was a projection of the walls, echoing from the times in the past, but then it rung again. It was just as loud and just as gut-wrenching. Allegra and her stepson both went rigid for a split second before they launched themselves quickly towards the fireplace.

"Hermione!" Blaise had to pull his stepmother back before she tossed herself into the flames. His heart was pounding loudly, he could even feel it banging against the bones of his chest and bruising them. He was sure he looked just as terrified, relieved, hopeful, and miserable as Allegra in that moment.

"HELP ME!"

"Where are you, darling?!" Sobbed Mrs. Zabini as she stared into the distorted eyes of her lost daughter. "Where are you?!"

"I don't know," suddenly whispered Hermione. Through the fire creating her facial expression, Blaise and Allegra saw that the girl seemed coherent and thoughtful. Nervousness still very much apparent, however. "But you have to help me."

Hermione stopped believing, but that did not make Blaise hush his voice. "Come on, Hermione! You have to know where you are! Give us a clue! Help us find you!"

"I don't know where I'm being kept, Blaise," hissed Hermione through the flames with deep frustration. "All I know is who took me. Allegra, your—"

Her face was gone from the flames.

"Hermione!" Both Allegra and Blaise yelled.

"TELL THEO THEY HAVE BENJAMINI!" She came back for another moment. She was blurring, her expression showing pain and fight. Someone was pulling her from the Floo. "SAVE US!" She was gone again. And all she le behind was an echo of her cry for Allegra to imitate in strong and never-ending waves.