

## Past, Meet the Present

### Lover of the Light

#### Chapter Four: Past, Meet the Present

September 1st had arrived too slowly that year, just as he's always remembered it. Though he wasn't looking for an escape, for the highlight of the day that he had to be dropped off at King's Cross Station to finally leave Privet Drive, making his way hurriedly through the people, hoping to make the seconds fly so he could find those he called best friends, Harry Potter found that he atmosphere was still thick with worry and conflict.

It'd been a few weeks since the final battle between Light and Dark, and the people had begun to try and put the pieces of their life together again, but there was still a gaping hole among them; among everyone. There were fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, friends, and other loved ones missing, making their lack of presence weigh down on the society that lost them. There was a sense of almost calm in the air, that was definite, but no one paid any attention to it because their souls were filled with grief. They were looking for peace, of course, but a er such bloodshed there was bound to be irreversible consequences.

"Good! Turn out."

He didn't know exactly what was supposed to happen a er the war. He had never really had a chance to think about what happens a er it all came to an end, all he was ever concentrated on was ending Voldemort before he sensed him. He's job had been to fight for something greater, for something made up of justice and love, all while experiencing loss, a er loss, a er loss. He'd known there was a good chance that he wouldn't have made it out alive, it was in the Prophecy a er all, so planning a future wasn't in his immediate planning back then.

"It's calm, is it not?"

It had been a little over three months since the final battle took place, three months with the future open and blank before him. His present days had been between trying to assist to rebuild the castle, which McGonagall had forbidden, declining the o er to get right into the Auror Department, all because people wanted him to finish his education, and just breathing and avoiding the obvious.

He's natural mechanism was to push people away, and he was, but this time there wasn't anger and frustration to smooth over and conquer over his conscience. His conscience was most definitely alive and awake, and it was pulling him in two di erent directions. One side wanted him to feel incredibly guilty, to flee and hide and never be seen again, because of the destruction he'd caused. Yet the other side, with doses of guilt, was almost selfish; it demanded a chance at a proper life.

"There's a bit too much security here. Personally, I think Kingsley might have exaggerated a bit. Don't you think Percy?"

Blinking away from his own thoughts for a moment, Harry finally turned to Arthur Weasley, who'd been talking since the moment they crossed the barrier onto the platform. He was standing next to his wife—who'd grown almost too quiet these days—an arm wrapped around her shoulders in that ever-constant comforting way, and there was a forced smile stretching on his kind face. He looked at those around him, and Harry couldn't miss the fact that he was the only one ever trying to gather the clutter his family was le in and fix them with what was le.

But there were consequences, damaging ones, and it had reached the Weasley family like it had the rest of the world. Percy was there with them, badge on his robes indicating his association with the Ministry, but his sompous attitude and authoritarian look was gone from his persona. He just stood there, like he was trying to bleed with the background and never be seen. There was a remane ting and taking over his brown eyes too, holding him captive in a way with all the regrets that he bore.

George was also there, practically forced out of his flat above the shop by Mrs. Weasley to accompany them to say goodbye to his siblings. The perfect excuse to rip him away from haunting memories and reflective mirrors. And because of that, Harry found that George was one of the two toughest Weasleys to look at. Just one glimpse of him and one was instantly filled with grief, despair, misery, and unsettling waves of sympathy. He wasn't even a man of almost twenty, he was just the shell of what was supposed to be.

Ron was beside Harry, standing loyally next to his best friend like always, but something had been o. The redhead had been growing more aggravated, more intense, and almost unhinged. Nothing really changed on the outside, he still talked to Harry, though the jokes were by far very limited, and he acted at times like his regular self. But it was in the night, where both shared his bedroom at the Burrow, that Harry saw his best friend slowly withering away. It was almost as if he was starting to hide within himself.

"The weath'er's perfect—" Startling him, like a wave of energy had suddenly bounced o his body and echoed around everywhere, Harry's entire senses were filled with Ginny Weasley. "I'm actually quite looking forward to this year."

Ginny Weasley was the side of his conscience which he considered selfish. He had been trying to stomp on that since the moment that he saw Fred Weasley die, because he knew that there was going to be a hole in her chest that was all his fault, but it was a struggling battle. He hadn't a clue what the future was supposed to be like, but all he knew was that he wanted her—that he needed her.

She was composed and hopeful, just like her father. Sometimes her gaze would flicker with sadness, but her beautiful eyes mostly always shone brightly; so filled with life and optimism for a brighter tomorrow. She was the epitome of a fighter, of a survivor. And if there was anything that the world needed, it was what she had to give.

"I'm really glad that the Board of Governors allowed for last year's Sixth Years to graduate this term," she continued. "Aren't you, Harry? I get to graduate with all of you."

Harry swallowed as his insides seemed to become little sources of electricity. "Yeah," he breathed in return, "should be great."

The redhead girl smiled lovingly at him for a moment before turning to her parents. "Though McGonagall approved of it, I just know she's going to demand the most of former Sixth and Seventh Years. The exams..."

As her voice became buzzing sounds of melodic music, Harry knew in that very moment that he was going to be selfish. He loved Ginny with all that he had. And during the process of finding the horcruxes to destroy Voldemort, he thought back to the moment that he did plan something with his future—it had involved her and forever.

Just as the wind blew among the Weasleys and the Chosen One, Ginny's voice filling their ears with hints of hope and faith, a page of the Daily Prophet floated away from underneath Ron Weasley's shoe when he took a step back to allow a First Year and his mother to pass by. The page flew in the soon to be autumn wind, passing overhead many people, smacked or dodged by others who were too tall, and it made it so many yards down.

A er the feeling of apparition wore o and his ears weren't buzzing, a dark-skinned boy was about to turn the other distinctive sounds of apparition when he was blinded and smacked over the face with something.

"O! Struggling for a moment as the wind became a mocking enemy for a few seconds, Blaise Zabini clawed whatever was obscuring his vision o his handsome face. And when his emerald eyes saw fig, figures of people, smoke, and the backside of the Hogwarts Express, he frowned at the o ending object. "Hm, look here, Sister. You're still in the front page of the Prophet."

Yanking her hand away from that of Allegra Zabini's, Hermione grew completely paranoid and nervous that there would be any onlookers or eavesdroppers. She didn't even hear whatever else came out of Blaise's mouth a er the word sister; she just scouted the scene and almost shrank into herself.

Yesterday night, she had declined the o er that Zabini had made about seeing her and Blaise o at Platform 9¾ during their usual, unwitting dinners. She had tried to smooth over her rejection by simply stating that her and Blaise were of age, and as such, the two could use side-long apparition to the train station without them having to worry; especially since she knew that Mister Zabini was a very busy man. But of course, like it had been in the nature of the Zabinis to squash her dreams, the patriarch of the family had waved it away, stating that when it came to seeing his children o, the businesses could wait.

They had given her such hopeful smiles that she felt gulf swim in her insides for a moment that she considered putting o the idea of convincing them that she was perfectly fine to make it to the platform on her own. Well, that moment to cave in had been squashed and set on fire when Mister Zabini had also added that her'd already going to Lucius Malfoy and both men, with their wives, weren't aware to miss watching their children board the Hogwarts Express for one last time. (A er that, she'd excused herself and gone to her new bedroom to throw a tantrum that scared Button the house-elf.)

During the short months post-war that she'd had as a Granger, Hermione had known all about the trials held for the entire Malfoy family. Though she really couldn't feel other than pity for them during those times, before she found out they were too intertwined into her life than what she'd like, Harry had asked her and Ron to testify in favor of the Malfoys. And since she'd known and seen that the family was practically held captive in their own home, that the youngest of them did not give them away to the deranged Bellatrix Lestrange when he could've, Hermione hadn't seen the damage of doing so then. But though she thought that maybe a clean slate would help the family regroup themselves, hopefully finding something new a er the war, she knew perfectly well that the rest of the Wizardry World wouldn't be as nice or somewhat understanding.

Lucius Malfoy's wand had been confiscated and would be for another five years, when he served two months in Azkaban the moment Aurors started rounding up the Death Eaters that survived. As punishment a er his release, he'd been given mandatory counseling meetings with a private Healer and mandatory Leglimency sessions with the Head Auror to monitor him. And from what Hermione knew, the Ministry was still reviewing a case to place the man in house-arrest for the next ten years.

His wife and son had their wands confiscated as well, but that had only lasted a month, she'd know it well. Their magic would be carefully watched the rest of their lives, community service for two years, and both had to serve Leglimency sessions too.

And though they had been somewhat cleared of all charges, Hermione knew perfectly well that wherever it was that that family went, attention and trouble followed. People tended to believe that once evil, always evil. And that was exactly what she was trying to avoid at the precise moment.

"Golden Trio Heads to Hogwarts" read Blaise from the page of the Daily Prophet that had smacked him across the face earlier. "The rest of the newspaper is missing, but I heard that Rita Skeeter wrote the article about you three. I bet it's as lovely as always, considering how much she loves you, Hermione."

The brunette frowned at the dark-skinned boy and his teasing eyes once she thought the coast was semi-clear. She crossed her arms over her chest. "She wouldn't dare to write any blasphemies in her usualer her career."

"Because the Brightest Witch of the Age will use her War Heroine influence to make sure she never writes for another publishing company again?" Blaise continued to tease.

Hermione kept her frown. And before the two half-siblings could argue, which would be a sight to see for him, Dean Zabini cleared his throat; demanding attention. "Behave, Blaise."

His son smirked, not dropping his joking-side. "Imagine the field day Skeeter would have if she were ever to find out that Hermione Granger was actually a Zabini." Standing a few feet from him, Blaise cast a look at Draco Malfoy that suggested mischief. "We can even tell her that you and Hermione are God-siblings, Malfoy'll be a complete riot."

"I will kill you!" Hermione snapped at her half-brother. "Both of you." And then she turned that deadly glare to the blonde boy that stood with his blank-faced parents.

"We agreed to take this slowly." Though Mrs. Zabini was speaking to her stepson, she put a settling hand on her daughter's shoulder to ease her and her panic. "When we decide it's time to reveal our secret to the public, we're going to handle it carefully. We're not going to thrust this upon everyone else like we did to you." Her honey-colored eyes looked at Hermione now, so serene. "We'll give you time to adjust before we claim you as our own before the world."

Hermione swallowed uneasily, filled with anxiety that she couldn't even fake a smile to give to the woman. She was not ready to be a Zabini in private, let alone in front of so many others. She didn't protest and stomp her foot, run and hide, but in the end it was the Zabini's secret; they could expose it without her consent and it was still going to follow her like a shadow.

It wasn't easy for her to admit defeat, especially since the Zabinis were holding on to the winning card to even get a chance to redeem herself and turn everything around in her favor. She was stuck, and with those damn, ignorant, inhumane Pureblood laws, she had to stick by the family for three years before she could flee.

"Hermione," ending the silence that Hermione had hoped would last forever among them, Mister Zabini spoke once more. "You're welcomed to tell your friends about this. We've already told McGonagall because we had to arrange legal rights from the Grangers to us. As such, I think it'd be beneficial for you to grow more accustomed if you let people know on your own accord."

The girl felt sadness seep into her chest. The Grangers no longer had legal rights to her? It was like the past eighteen years of their work in raising her had been erased in a blink of an eye. How could a damn scrap of paper or legal notions take that from them? They were her parents, blood be damned.

"...I have to pace myself considering all that's happened," she mumbled, looking down at her shoes as she felt more dread. "But, yeah...I've to let Ron and Harry know."

"I'm sure it'll be fine." Mister Zabini added in disms when the Hogwarts Express started roaring in its tracks. Steam was flowing out of it and adding to the fog in the platform, people were hurrying to the train, and goodbyes were being called out. It was time for departure.

There were goodbyes among the Zabini family, the parents telling the two teenagers to have a wonderful term and to take the time to really bond. Hermione wanted to roll her eyes, but she refrained to a blank state as she let Mister and Mrs. Zabini embrace her in farewell.

She'd taken a strong step to hurry to the train's entrance, but a hand grabbed her and kept her in her spot. She turned as saw that Blaise had been waiting for the Malfoys to finish up their own hushed up goodbyes amongst themselves. And once Narcissa Malfoy carefully caressed one of her son's cheeks, the blonde Slytherin turned with an impassive expression towards the two new siblings.

"Goodluck," Hermione heard coming from Lucius Malfoy once Blaise started pulling her away to make their way to the train.

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It had been an hour since the Hogwarts Express moved along the tracks and started heading for Hogwarts.

Everything was almost the same, just like she remembered every train ride since the first one she ever took. Whether there wasn't any toads missing, Dementors, or uproar about whether or when Voldemort had actually come back, most of the train was filled with chatter and jokes. It was almost like the mourning and pain was le back home and the students took it upon themselves to return to a time when going to Hogwarts was filled with joy and enthusiasm.

On any other occasion, it would've filled her up with happiness knowing that unity did exist and that the great fight had definitely been worth it. It would've made her feel so much peace knowing that their society was definitely filled with hope and fights; that there were fellow witches and wizards ready to move on and create a more promising tomorrow.

She would've felt all that if it hadn't been for the fact that she'd been hiding in a corner of one of the aisles of the train; away from any watchful eye. She'd been there for over forty-minutes, a er she'd ditched Blaise and Malfoy, and calculated everything there was to think through. All of it had to be carefully thought through so the outcome would be more accepting and gentle when approached.

"Screw it." she muttered under her breath to herself. With a deep inhale, she kicked o from the corner, turned it, and went straight to the entrance of the first compartment seen.

Though she was logical and always prepared, there was nothing that careful planning was going to do for her. She knew her loved ones so well a er all. And if kept in the darkness too long or spoken to like if they were children, it would all end up being a disaster. There was no other way to go but, straightforward and with a lot of determination. A er all, there could be worse things to reveal than her suddenly being a Pureblood.

With a deep breath, and a shaky hand, Hermione reached for the handle of the compartment door and slid it open.

"...All I'm saying is that you're rubbish at Wizard's Chess, Harry."

"Am not. If you see what I did just there, you'd realize that I let you—Hermioné! Whatever it was that Harry was about to get himself into with Ginny Weasley, he was spared from the redhead's outrage for such suggestion when he noticed the brunette standing by the compartment door. His green eyes lit up greatly, sparkling with joy and relief when they found her brown ones.

Turning immediately too, Ginny smiled largely and truly at the presence of the older girl. And before Harry could even get up from his seat, she pushed him down and made her way first to the other girl. "O! Well, instead of a hug that could've been expected, Hermione received a slap on the chest before any embrace could be shared.

"Where were you? You had us worried!"

Hermione didn't say anything, especially since Harry rose up and pulled the redheaded girl away to get himself a hug too. She remembered every single time she embraced him, but she never remembered him clutching her so hard and lovingly before. She could feel his grin when he squeezed her, all his love and appreciation there, but all she could do was stand there with her arms limp at her side.

And sensing her hesitation, Harry pulled back, his hands on her arms, and he raised an eyebrow at her. "Hermione? What is it?"

From his seat, on the lonesome le side of the compartment, Ron hadn't moved or given an attempt to do so when Hermione appeared. He'd been the first one to see her, and he'd been the first one to lock eyes with her before Harry and his sister stopped their game of chess. They had stared at one another, but nothing but indifference had escaped from him.

Blinking away from the redhead boy, Hermione gave a glistening glance at her other best friend. There was sadness and panic in her brown eyes, but there was also fear that she couldn't see. What if it didn't go as smoothly? What if she gave them too much credit at the moment? So much had happened since her war and all of them would need years to heal before their compassion and understanding could restore itself to the fullest.

"Hermione?" Ginny looked at the brunette cautiously too.

But before they could ask again, Hermione mustered her courage and sighed loudly. She had to do this, they deserved the truth. "...I need to talk to you lot." She closed the door behind her a er gesturing for them to take their seats.

Ironically, Ginny and Harry sat right next to Ron; all three of them lined up before her. With a shake to her head, she marched to the open compartment bench and sat herself down. Her fingers were shaking with nervousness, but before she let them win over her determination, she said, "I received some...altering news four days ago." She took another deep breath, this one to hold herself together because she felt tears about to sting her eyes. "My mum...My mum told me that I was adopted."

Two expressions of deep bewilderment and one that almost looked like it was about to show just as much surprise as the others.

"Adopted is not even the right term," she added in a whisper, continuing to explain. "I was given away to them...My birth parents came to my house that night too...get me. They decided since the war was over that it was an opportune moment to tell me the truth; so they could take me with them."

"Wait," Ginny cut across. "You...Wait." She paused again, thoroughly confused. "So, these people, your birth parents, they're wizards?"

Hermione nodded solemnly. "My birth mother gave me away two hours a er I was born, so the Grangers could take care of me, so they say. She used to be friends with my muggle mother before I was even born, and when my birth father started being hunted down by Death Eaters...They just didn't want me to grow up with—Ah! Everything's just not right!" She shouted at herself, cutting across the explanation she was trying to give her friends. No matter what way she put it, the truth was still the truth.

"My birth parents are from two ancient, pureblood families. A er they le Italy for who cares what reasons, my birth father drew attention to himself a er he befriended a Death Eater and You-Know-Who fancied the way he made his galleons multiply!" She was just ranting now. "I come from two ignorant, intolerant families! I'm a damn pureblood witch with associations to everything we fought against! I'm anything that's wrong with the world and I...I'm not even me anymore!"

At the point that her ranting turned to crying, Harry and the two Weasley siblings just stared at Hermione with changing expressions and thoughts. It was like they couldn't move at the current moment, like someone just told them that the war was back on and it was time for them to march to battle once again while they were having tea and eating biscuits. They weren't prepared to hear any of it.

"I'm a sorry," she cried into her hands, piercing the silence. "I'm so sorry."

"Hermione, stop." Harry was the first one to speak once he processed everything. The first thing he heard a er he did so was her best friend's cries, and a er hearing her sob during her tortue session with Bellatrix Lestrange, he knew that he never wanted to hear it again. He had enough nightmares about it, he didn't need the reminder.

He leaned towards her, extending an open hand in her direction. "Who cares who your real parents are, or what your real blood-status is. You're Hermione Granger, Brightest Witch of her Age."

"But I'm not," she sni led, extending her hand and reaching for his despite that. "I'm not Hermione Granger, Harry; that's not even my real name. I'm...I'm a..."

"Your name doesn't make you who you are," he told her. "I could be Barney Weasley again, but in the end I'm still what people see me as."

"He's right." Entering the conversation, Ginny joined her own hand into the ones of the two best friends. "You're still the kind, loyal, brilliant, and breathtaking girl you've always been, Hermione. It doesn't matter where you come from, what your name is, because you're our friend no matter what."

Using her free hand, Hermione used the back of it to wipe away some of her tears. "I just don't want you to hate me. There's so much that I still need to explain...so much that I don't even know yet because I didn't want to hear it." She exhaled thickly. "I've spent the last three days with a family that's not mine...that I know nothing about. This woman's there and she wants me to be her daughter but I already got a mum...I don't belong there."

With more understanding than Ginny about being in a house with relatives that you don't consider as, Harry squeezed her hand tighter. "Do they treat you badly?"

The brunette shook her head. "They're very accommodating. I'm the brat."

Ginny couldn't help the laugh that passed her lips. Hermione Granger, impolite? That would be a slight to?" "Who are they, anyway?" She asked. "Who are you related to?"

Hermione cringed at the question, not missed by any of the three friends before her. "Zabini."

"—Yes, love?" She had summoned the devil. Standing at the entrance of the compartment, Blaise Zabini and the silent, uncomfortable, hesitant, and very aggravated Draco Malfoy stood tall and alluring so the four Gry indors could see them.

Animosity and tension grew, multiplied and invaded every single person in that compartment. Harry had let go of Hermione's hand, his back tensing and a frown creasing his forehead; Ginny had slowly released the girl's hand too, and outraged flickered repeatedly in her eyes; Ron remained silent, though his own expression was battling anger as his jaw squared o. Blaise looked on in distaste the more the seconds ticked by, Malfoy was equally as angered, though one couldn't assume er whom, and Hermione could hear her heartbeat bouncing o against her eardrums.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock.

The first one to make a movement this time, a er another long minute, was Ginny. She raised a red brow inspectingly. "How exactly are you and Zabini...you know, I mean, he's your age and—"

"Same father," Blaise cut across the redhead's babble.

Hermione let out a pu of air. "Blaise," she called tensely, "why are you here?"

"I got restless," replied Zabini. "And I wanted to make sure you were alright. I wasn't quite sure on what the outcome was going to be once you told your friends the truth." Both responses were far from the truth. Though he knew Hermione was never going to let him be there when she told her friends, he was not going to miss the opportunity to show Potter and Weasley exactly who it was that she was actually tied to. He knew she loved and was bonded to them, Golden Trio and all that, but he was her brother. He deserved a spot in her heart and he was going to get it, whether Boy Wonder and the Weasel liked it or not.

The redheaded girl humped at the boy's response, letting that go. "So what's Malfoy doing here?"

At the mention of the blonde, the atmosphere might as well gone opaque with the amount of bitterness in the air. There was certainly a thick amount of strain from Malfoy and the Golden Trio, but he was far more than just childhood rivals. All four of them had shared something in it, though especially Harry and Draco, that couldn't be denied. They had stage Malfoy's life, they'd seen him and his family under Voldemort's rule, the priorities they'd known he was forced to do things against his will, and they'd known what part he played in Voldemort's defeat in return. Malfoy had spoken with them at Malfoy Manor, his mother had saved Harry's life, though riot because she was fond of him, and he'd tossed Harry his wand when he revealed that he was indeed alive despite the claims of Voldemort and his followers.

Things were much more complicated—things that were always going to remain so and unspoken.

"Malfoy's a friend," Blaise said casually. "Though, I see Hermione le out a bit of information on that."

Sending her half-brother a glare, the brunette turned to the eyes of the two she was desperate to see filled with acceptance and some sort of understanding. Harry was still very much conflicted, exactly how Ron was still very much raging in silent hatred.

"Please," she whispered to them. "Just...Say something, will you?"

"Your name doesn't define you," Harry said with a sigh. "And you don't get to choose your family. I did, Vernon Dursley would be my house-elf and not my uncle."

Tears welled up in Hermione's eyes. "Oh, Harry!" And for the first time, she did something she considered very Hermione Granger thing; she launched herself at the Boy-Who-Lived and clung on tightly.

Though it wasn't missed by everyone else, and Hermione had her moment of relief and contentment, that Ron Weasley turned away from his two best friends and looked out the window of the compartment, there was no aim of acknowledgement or acceptance coming from him.

"Brilliant," exclaimed Zabini in fake cheer. He grabbed one of Malfoy's arms and pushed him towards the open compartment bench before closing the door behind him. "Now we're all friends!"

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