Letting Go

Lover of the Light

Chapter Five: Letting Go

A month had passed since that eventful train ride on the Hogwarts Express. Nothing revolutionary or eventful had happened a er Blaise and Malfoy took seats in the compartment with the Golden Trio and Ginny Weasley. For the most part, they had sat in the awkward, tension-filled atmosphere; occasionally broken when Ginny had something to say about the upcoming year that was waiting for all of them. Neither of them attempted to add to anything the redheaded girl had to say then, Ron and Malfoy silent and looking away from everything, and Hermione had just taken a seat eventually next to her half-brother.

When given the chance, Hermione had sprung herself right out of the compartment, Ginny following her trail, and the two girls had gone o to change into their robes. As they were doing so, the younger witch had a lot to ask, allowing herself a moment to gasp dramatically and express her bewilderment over the fact that Hermione Granger was actually a Zabini. And though Hermione could understand Ginny's curiosity, the brunette had refrained from saying anything to ease it and just asked about the latter's summer. Taking the hint, Ginny had gone in a very detailed explanation about all those weeks of the summer holidays, taking up the forty-five minutes that had been le of the train ride until it came to a stop. Hermione had been very grateful for Ginny's indirect stalling.

The two girls had waited almost another half hour before they fled the side of the train that they were in. Hermione had ducked her head down, making her way through the crowd of students, Ginny glued to one of her hands, and then they had proceeded to the castle. Hermione had said goodbye to the redhead as soon as they reached the portrait of the Fat Lady. A er she had practically sprint to her dormitory, she had stayed there in hiding; not even going to the welcome feast that Parvati Patil had insisted the two go down together for.

She knew that perhaps she was being a bit paranoid, but she honestly felt like people would know the truth as soon as they spotted her. She'd almost had a mini heart-attack when having been hiding in her closed-o four-poster and heard a serious 'Hermione Granger', finding Parvati standing at the entrance of the dormitory looking thoroughly calculating. To her relief, however, Parvati seemed to have been having some sort of emotional moment and heartbreaking thoughts because the girl had then tossed herself towards Hermione, tears in her eyes; crying about how she couldn't believe that out of the four girls sharing that dormitory, they'd been the only ones to survive. Hermione had proceeded to distract herself of her own issues by listening to Parvati grieve over the deceased Lavender Brown.

The point was that Hermione knew she was being a coward, too. The truth was the truth, she tried to understand that, but she couldn't really accept it. She was terrified that at any given minute someone would call out for Aria Zabini, a girl she was supposed to be since the moment she was born. But Hermione Granger's life hadn't made her a pureblood girl, had it? Nor had it given her a biological brother named Blaise Zabini. No, she *had* a brother—Harry—and though he was not tied down by blood to her, she knew him, felt him like you do family. If she accepted the truth, if she let others know the truth, all that would go away. She wouldn't be Hermione Granger, Harry Potter and Ron Weasley's best friend; she'd be a Zabini, the daughter of a man once associated with Voldemort.

Apart from feeling like a coward and terribly paranoid, she started feeling guilt since the first day of lessons when she began to dodge through people, hide in corners, and spend less time out in the grounds every time she saw a flash of the Slytherin crest. Blaise didn't deserve the shame and misery she felt, but it was also another thing she couldn't help. She was terrified to just think that he would declare her his half-sister if she ever gave him even a moment to spend together...

BANG.

Having had been attempting to work on her Potions project, through her thoughts and mind dri ing o to non-academic issues, Hermione's fast reflexes, developed and uncanny from her time at war, made her whip out her wand from her robes and crouch in a stance of battle when a loud noise ricocheted o the walls of the dungeon.

CRASH. CRASH.

Startled and gaping, Hermione became background as she watched Ron thrash about the classroom. He had stormed in, banging the door open, and he hadn't seen anything else but the stacked cauldrons for the next lesson that had been laid out by Professor Slughorn.

He was shouting, but she couldn't really make out anything, most of it sounding like grunts as he kicked and threw anything he could get a hold of. He was yelling and cursing with so much emotion, so much frustration, that it dug and stuck in her eardrums.

Though a month had passed since the term started, Ron had not made any inclination that he was going to start talking to Hermione like he had before. He talked to her, yes, he did, but it was nothing of importance, nothing that mattered, nothing that she'd been looking forward to hearing since a particular moment that they shared during the war. It was almost like he was closing in, shutting her out, and keeping her at a distance. It hurt her, to the point that she could say her heart broke—she just didn't know what had changed.

She could have simplified it and said that he was angry at her because of the revelation that she gave him a month ago, her being a Zabini and all, but she'd be lying to herself. Though he hadn't said anything, only showing his aggravated expressions and silent denial, his hostility towards her had developed ages ago. She remembered a week a er the war ended, when she'd been ready to leave the Burrow to go to Australia to find the Grangers, Harry following, that he had practically shut the door in her face. She had gone to his bedroom to say goodbye, and hopefully get something she'd been waiting with anticipation for, but she had just been shunned.

CRASH. CRASH.

As shreds of glass had almost graced her face, Hermione's reflexes came alive again. "Ronald!" With a protecting bubble illuminating out of her wand, she shouted to get the redhead's attention.

Because he had fought in the same war, because he'd been the famous Blood Traitor that many had been a er, Ron's reflexes were almost as good as hers. He had his wand whipped out in less than a second, pointing it straight towards where the unsuspecting voice had sounded from; his fingers tight in hold but his arm shook greatly. He was breathing heavily, eyes ablaze, and face red with his anger.

He hadn't lowered his wand, not a er Hermione had hers, nor a er half a minute of staring right into each others' eyes. "Ron," she said shakily, suddenly nervous. Swallowing roughly, she took a careful step towards her, her le hand rising gently; intended to grab his wand.

And because she had been intending in taking his wand, he held tighter; raising it higher. Hermione's brown eyes widened, but he didn't falter or pay attention to her surprise. There was something almost mad about the way he was looking at her, something completely o and that she hadn't seen in awhile. It was the same look he'd worn when he'd had the horcrux locket around his neck; it was irritated, unstable, and full of pain.

"It's me, Ron," she breathed, taking another probably unsafe step towards him. "It's Hermione. Lower your wand."

"I know it's you," he hissed under his breath, sounding annoyed.

But since he kept his wand pointed at her, the tip of it glowing with the faintest hint of a spell, she was not convinced that he was entirely there. "Please, Ron, lower your wand."

A long moment a er, he did, but she wasn't sure if it was because of the scared look on her face or the annoyance that he'd started sporting on his freckled complexion.

She took a deep breath. "What's wrong with you?"

"Nothing," he snapped. He had his arms lowered at his side, but he was still clutching his wand between his fingers like he was preparing himself to curse something into smithereens. "Why should anything be wrong?"

Hermione furrowed her brows—like the disastrous mess behind him that he'd made with the supplies of the Potions classroom was not a tell-tale sign of his foul mood the past weeks. "At least have the courtesy not to lie to me, Ronald." It came out a lot harsher than what she had expected, but she couldn't shake out the frustration that was also mixing in with the heartache he caused her. "Look, I understand that everything is still a bit hard to adjust to, but—"

"You don't understand anything!" He yelled at her. He took a furious step towards her, his blue eyes igniting into an almost navy with his anger. "And you don't know anything, so shut your mouth, Hermione!"

"Then *tell* me!" She shouted back. "Quit keeping me in the dark, quit pushing me away, and tell me what's wrong! I'm not stupid, Ron, I can see that's something is not right with you! All I want to do is be there for you—to help you!"

"I don't want your help!" He screamed, turned around and kicked the table where vials and potion ingredients were arranged for the next class too. All of it tipped over, crashing on the floor with a loud commotion. "I don't need your help! Leave me alone!"

Horrified was how she watched him for a few seconds as he thrashed about. She felt scared, nervous, and appalled watching him lose control the way that he was doing. He was kicking everything again, shouting like a maniac, and she just didn't know what to do. She wanted to help him, wanted to ease him of whatever burden he was carrying.

"Ron, please!" She cried, launching herself forward and grabbing him from behind; her arms gripping his waist with whatever strength she had. "Stop!"

"Let go, Hermione!" He roared. At her refusal to do so, he turned around and gripped her shoulders, shoving her backwards onto the table that was there. The supplies on it had fallen from her body hitting their stable surface, the edge of the table digging and bruising her back instantly. They looked each other dead in the eyes, blue and brown, infuriated and terrified.

But in the instant that he saw that look of complete terror and pain in her eyes, he released the iron grip his hands had on her shoulders. He swallowed roughly, feeling a headache coming on; even nausea at the way he had reacted.

"...I'm sorry," he murmured.

The fury had simmered down in his eyes, turning into a glistening of unshed tears. She saw the pain more than ever, raw and thick. "I just want to help you," she whispered back, her throat in a knot of emotions.

His right hand squeezed her shoulder roughly, but he hadn't seemed to notice that he was doing so. "I don't want your help," repeated Ron. "There's nothing to fix."

"That's not true," she said quickly. "Look at yourself, Ron...you're gone. I just want you back." The tears that had been welling up in her eyes fell, leaving a wet trail down her cheeks. "I want my best friend back...I want that boy that I...That I lo—"

Whatever it was that Hermione was finally going to say was silenced and interrupted when a growl echoed around the Potions classroom. Both Gry indors turned their heads to the door of the classroom, and standing there were two Slytherins that Hermione had been avoiding since day one.

"Let go of my sister, Weasley!" Blaise hissed, stomping his way towards them, his wand pointed at the redheaded Gry indor.

Malfoy, ever the silent one, slowly stepped inside the classroom; his eyes scanning the surroundings. He noticed everything, the broken and smashed vials, the cracked cauldrons, the ingredients useless and mixed with each other and fragments of glass on the floor. There was a table overturned too, and he spotted Granger's schoolbag and books littered too. By the evidence of such destruction toll, it was safe for him to assume that the Weasel and the Bookworm were having troubles in paradise.

He had told Zabini just that when they heard their yelling from two corridors down. The two Slytherins had been heading to the Potions classroom, on Zabini's demand a er he scared a little Gry indor into telling him where the Golden Girl was hiding today. He hadn't wanted to tag along, as always, but as always Zabini had a method of convincing him to go along with whatever he wanted—blackmail, using secrets that Malfoy had wished he had never told the git in the first place.

Eyes burning with fury again at the sight of the two Slytherins, Ron pushed away from Hermione and swi ly bent down to pick up his schoolbag that he'd been kicking back and forth between all the unconscious commotion he'd been making. He shoved Zabini backwards since the dark-skinned boy was stepping on the strap. And once he threw it over his shoulder, Hermione tore her back away from the table she'd been tossed to.

"Don't go, Ron," she said hurriedly, also pushing the Slytherin aside before the redhead could march out the classroom. "Please, Ron, just...Tell me what I can do." Her voice cracked, her hands started shaking, and she knew she should've kept her guard up because of the two unwanted boys in the room, but she couldn't. In an excusing manner, she was just a girl with a broken heart. "Let me be there for you."

Ron kept his back turned, his shoulders squared o in tension. "You didn't do anything," he told her simply, but sincerity was there. And it was the truth, it wasn't her fault.

But not catching that, only remembering the way that he didn't seek some one-on-one time with her, that he didn't smile at her, that he didn't absentmindedly put his arm around her shoulders anymore said a lot more to her than his previous statement.

And it was because of that, because of the way she felt rejected, like she was being ignored, like she was *unwanted* by him, that she took a careful step towards him; forgetting in that moment that Blaise and Malfoy were in the room. "Remember during the war what we...what we shared, Ron? Doesn't that matter?"

The redhead did not turn still.

"Do you love me, Ron?" Tears dripped down her face again.

This time, Ron did turn. His blue eyes were still filled with pain, slight aggravation, but there was also regret in that ocean-colored gaze. The intense regret she'd seen in his eyes before, when he returned back to her and Harry a er he had taken o on them, but this one was worse. It was far more agonizing, more exposed, and more sincere.

"Look at me, Hermione," murmured the Gry indor boy. "Do you love me?" The answer was obvious, she loved him with all her heart, but that's not what Ron was referring too. He knew that she cared too much, that he had a certain a ection from her that no other boy did—but it was all going to go away. The more he was that unstable person, the more he was going to end up hurting her; making her resent him for everything that he knew he might not even bother to fight for.

He was letting her go, that was the regret in his eyes. And because that clicked in that brilliant mind of hers, the pieces of her heart that were still holding on with hope that they'd pick up a er the kiss they shared in battle broke completely. More tears rushed down her cheeks, a wrenching pain rippling in her chest, but she didn't say anything.

This was about him, that was clear now.

Ron didn't bother to give her an apologetic smile, the regret in his eyes said it all; so he headed towards the door of the classroom without a look back at his best friend.

Silenced loomed now, both Slytherins looking quite uncomfortable by the way that the Gry indor's eyes were dripping tears. They had never really seen anyone cry before—well, other than tortured victims in Malfoy's case, which the brunette was on the list of too—especially a girl, and now both shared the same urge not to be in that room. There was too much emotion in the air, too much heartbreak and achiness for their liking.

Hermione was oblivious to the background now, all her focus was on the empty trail Ron had le behind. She didn't know how she couldn't see what he had been doing before, the weeks he spent keeping her at a distance. He didn't want to keep her around while he battled his demons, and she had to remind herself over and over in her head that second that the reason he was pushing away, letting go of what she had assumed would happen a er their kiss, was so she wouldn't be used as target-practice. He loved her, respected her enough to let her go.

Her bottom lip quivered as a sob crawled its way up her throat, stopping at the tip of her tongue for a second. There was no guarantee, a er he was done with his phase, that they would pick up where they le o . That had been clear in the way that he looked at her; he wasn't sure if there was going to be any love le to give her when he started going back to the Ron Weasley she knew. And that, the fact that he didn't think he would still be in love with her, hurt more.

It pained her a lot more because she was losing everything swi ly, like the wind passing through the leaves of the trees out in the grounds on a Fall day. She had lost her muggle parents, in a sense, lost her history, lost who she had been for almost eighteen years, and now Ron. It was like everything that had been certain about Hermione Granger was slowly dying. And she was scared— petrified—that Aria Zabini was going to become her life.

That's when she let the sob at the tip of her tongue come out. It rippled out, starting from her chest, shaking her shoulders, and stinging her eyes. She put a palm over her mouth to try and mu le it but it was no use, she was losing grasp over everything she had held so dear.

During the month of finally being able to think aloud to himself that Hermione Granger was actually Aria Zabini, his half-sister, Blaise forgot that the Gry indor was many things, and emotional was one of them. Personally, he really wasn't for tears and the whole thing about the heart, especially in girls. But he didn't really have a choice to endure this, right? The crying girl was his *sister*, he was going to have to learn to work with these things.

He took a very careful and unsure step towards her, the first of his life as a very confident and strong-willed boy. "Hermione?" Okay, so he had called out for her; now what? What the hell was he supposed to tell her now? The girl was obviously crying tears of heartbreak over the redhead Gry indor—why exactly she would was beyond him, it was the *Weasel*, for fuck sakes—and he didn't know comforting words to help heal those wounds. Was there some sort of spell for this? A potion in the very least?

From the distance, with a blank expression that was hiding his uneasiness about this entire situation, even the slight amusement at the attempt Zabini was going to do to help comfort the brunette, Malfoy noticed that the latter hadn't heard her Slytherin brother. She just kept her eyes cast down on the littered floor, a hand over her mouth, and her shoulders shaking with her cries. He didn't know how someone like Granger, someone who had already gone through so much, could still find it in herself to shed so many tears. He assumed, that a er winning the war and all that, that the Golden Trio would be nothing but smiles and posing for covers of every newspaper and magazines imaginable.

"Don't...cry," spoke Blaise with uncertainty, the confusion in his emerald eyes as he took another cautious step to the girl. In all honesty, he was afraid she'd dissolve into a puddle of tears if he stepped to close or something. "Don't cry for him, Her—"

"'Mione?" From the distance, Malfoy was the first to spot the next intruder of the wrecked Potions classroom.

Looking up instantly, her mind picking up that familiar voice, Hermione found emerald eyes staring at her with deep concern—Harry's. Their eyes met as he walked deeper into the room, stepping over cracked items and ignoring the two Slytherins in the room. "I bumped into Ron," Harry began so ly. "He told me...He told me what happened."