One Small Step Forward

Lover of the Light Chapter Seven: One Small Step Forward

He'd been sitting there for a while, not really processing much. He just remembered the pounding of his heart—the way it mixed and tangled with strings of utter hatred and pure fury against the world. It started with a thought, just a tiny one at that. He'd been putting on

his shoes quietly, a er he'd awaken uncharacteristically early and before his other roommates, when he noticed that he had accidentally put on maroon-colored socks. And that's how he'd been blinded by resentment and venom. Hand-me-down, maroon-colored, ripped-at-the-toe socks that once belonged to Fred. He had to race out of the dormitory before he destroyed it; before that monster inside of him could come out and just create a bigger mess. He had gone on rampages before, had kicked and broken so many things that he was starting to think himself crazy. But he just couldn't contain that monster most of the time, and when that happened, nothing was safe. He hated everything and everyone in those moments. The world, the people he loved in it, blurred out and he could only focus on the flash of memory that watched his brother

crumble down to the floor during battle. It was agonizing for him, physically and mentally, having to remember Fred as cold and dead instead of what he'd been... The war had indeed le its a ects on people, he knew that; knew of their pain, too. He knew that many people had lost people important to them, but it had hit him a lot worse than anyone expected or than he'd been letting on. He had seen so many horrible things from such a young age that the war had just been the tipping point. The war had brought out the worst in him, and it seemed like Life had found a way to make him pay for those dark thoughts and unloyal actions.

Despite feeling so angry all the time, he also saw so many things around him. He was becoming more aware of people and their behaviors. And he saw the way people began to put distance between him: in classrooms, in the common room, or when he walked down the corridors. He was scaring them and he knew that it was justified. He was scaring himself. If that monster that lived o his nightmares didn't die soon, if he didn't learn to move on, he knew something bad was going to happen. And it almost always did... It started o as breaking things when he couldn't contain his

emotions, his frustration and hatred whenever he heard whisperings or he passed the memorial of the deceased in the room of trophies. But then it escalated—it turned to uncontrolled spasms and lashes. He had point his wand at Hermione that day he'd let her go; and he didn't want to lower it, even a er a second of realizing that it was her. He had then shoved her, pushed her against a table when she got too close. And a night not too long ago, he shoved Ginny to the ground when she had been scolding him about something that he can't even remember. That's when he knew he needed to try to get over his grief. He tossed

his sister on the ground like trash, like she was the enemy. He had contemplated on whipping out his wand too, giving her a good scare, giving her a good hex to get her to piss o —but who does that? Ginny was his little sister and he loved her. He didn't want to hurt her. For fuck sakes, his brothers—Fred especially, if he were still alivewould've butchered him in an instant if he ever did so. But the thing was that he was hurting her by just grieving and losing himself in that misery. He just needed something. He just needed a wake up call, something grand and luminous to shake up his life; to make him see through the

"Do you mind?" Waving away that fog that was clouding his head, Ron blinked and came back to the focus. As such, his senses reactivated and he found that his ears had perked up with chatter, clanking of plates, scraping of knives and forks, owls hooting; his mouth had been chewing on something crunchy and sweet, toast with jam; and his sight had been taken over by the golden light of the sun streaming through the windows of the Great Hall and by a pair of blue eyes. He took out the piece of toast he had absentmindedly been holding near his lips. "Errm...what?"

in strawberry jam and picking at the flap of the envelope beneath them. "I thought it was weird that you had a subscription to Witch Weekly" Removing his le hand from over the mail beneath it, Ron was a little surprised to find that Harry had been sitting beside him. "Then again, Padma Patil has been saying your fashion sense has improved since Fourth Year. Thought it was all sort of related, mind you. Not that I would judge you if that was the case, mate." The redhead scrunched his eyebrows, not answering back to his best eating breakfast, and taken someone else's mail without even

noticing it? purpose." one beside him.

thing to do; like she was a friend. It was unsettling for Ron to witness it. "Though owls have their job, they're also proud creatures, you know." The girl hu ed again, crossing her arms over her chest as her blue eyes inspected the bird. "I didn't do anything to it," she responded, "but Goyle did take a poke at it a few weeks ago. He was trying to get Lyla to mate with his owl Burt." "Explains why the thing is o ended, then. I've seen Goyle's owl; it looks like a fat rat with wings and a crooked beak," o ered the redheaded Gry indor to the conversation.

mail. "We're being nice to Parkinson now?" A er quickly gathering his belongings, the redhead was out of his seat and walking alongside his best friend; both heading out of the Great Hall and taking the shortest path to the library. "She did try to hand you over to You-Know-Who, remember?" His fists clenched automatically; memories trying to poke their way into his current thoughts. Fred's face especially. A frown appeared on Harry's face. "Doesn't matter, Ron." "She practically wanted you dead mate."

"Not another petrified cat, please," Harry said o handedly, rubbing his forehead when he felt a sudden headache come on. It was just his body's natural reaction now when someone hinted at danger or more troubles for him. The Headmistress paid no mind to his comment. "We found Miss Granger abandoned in one of the higher levels of the castle yesterday, Mister Potter. She was attacked." "—What'd you mean she was attacked?!" Harry had definitely conjured up the devil, except he came with company and a little late upon mention. Quiet and with guarded

"They're nobodies!" McGonagall and Harry looked at one another while Ron glared at Zabini, his palms were still clenched into fists. Harry was thoroughly aggravated by Zabini's comment, but he also knew that there was some truth in what he'd said. And McGonagall did, too. The woman received a rather importune visit from Deon and Allegra Zabini a month before Hogwarts reopened its doors to its students. She hadn't been too sure why they were in her o ice that evening, and frankly, she figured that it possibly had to do with the fact that all parents of Slytherin students weren't too sure if the doors were going to be open for their children. She hadn't really known much of Blaise

Zabini; just that he was an arrogant boy with Pureblood ideologies like the rest of his house-mates and that his mother had passed away

So it was to her great surprise that neither of the Zabinis were there to talk about Blaise, but about their long-lost, hushed-up daughter Aria Zabini—or should one say, Hermione Granger. McGonagall processed the news as respectably as she could and professionally accepted all the legal transfers that the Grangers were giving to the Zabinis over Hermione. A er the brief explanation of how this was,

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and all legal rights rested with Deon Zabini.

and her vow to keep the secret silent until Hermione was ready to let the world know, Mister and Mrs. Zabini departed; leaving McGonagall to frown disapprovingly at a certain portrait in the Head O ice. Twinkling blue eyes covered by half-moon spectacles had just stared at her casually, already knowing the secret that had just been revealed to the new Headmistress of Hogwarts. (Not that she'd been surprised there; nothing ever passed over Albus Dumbledore.) "Very well, Mister Zabini," the woman added hastily. "You, Potter and Weasley can come along. Now hurry." As Harry and Ron walked quickly alongside McGonagall, practically racing past her to get to the Hospital Wing, Blaise and Draco shared a fleeting look before the dark-skinned boy marched o to find his sister. It wasn't informative or meant to portray anything, but Malfoy was thoroughly impressed by the fact that Zabini actually felt

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adoration for someone else that wasn't himself.

Only if the Golden Girl returned the a ection.

You have blood of the enemy in your veins.

You're a lie, Hermione Granger. You don't exist.

Panting with a great rush, her heart thumping wildly, Hermione's eyes opened from the flecks of something dark and twisted only to find it washed away by white light. It hurt her eyes, giving her a slight

Aria.

Thrash.

Kick.

Groan.

Pain.

Sweat.

Light.

You're a lie.

Aria Zabini.

I know your secret.

and instant headache. Adding to the discomfort, she found that she had also bolted into a semi-sitting position; an action that caused her body to ache from head to toe. Taking a deep inhale, filling her lungs with clean air and feeding her mind the idea that there was no danger or darkness lurking, she looked at her surroundings. She was in the Hospital Wing, tangled into white bedsheets with sweat dripping from her hairline and down her neck. There was no one inside the Hospital Wing, not even Madam Pomfrey was in her o ice. "Goodness," she breathed to herself, lowering her back against the mattress since she couldn't really bear the soreness she was feeling. "What happened?" Honestly, that was the question, wasn't it? But before she could even attempt to answer it, the doors opened and her ears heard a stampede and her eyes saw flashes of black and red hair. "Hermione!"

At the distinctive and familiar voices echoing around the room, Hermione was instantly bombarded by Ron and Harry at her bedside. She smiled instantly at their presence, at their loving faces—except that smile didn't last long when she noticed that McGonagall and

"What happened?!" Harry was the first one to bombard her with the

Harry grabbed both of her hands from the right side of her bedside as Ron stood on the le. The redhead smiled at her, a caring sort of smile, but she didn't let it melt her heart in any other way than a

"I don't know," she responded with an exasperated sigh. "I just...I was heading back to Gry indor Tower. There was no one in the corridor, but I felt this presence...It felt like someone was watching me. And then there were voices...Someone was calling out for me...for the...for

"Someone knows my secret," the brunette cut across the comfort Harry was trying to give her; tears in her eyes that were a second away from being shed. "Someone knows...I just...I can't even

remember anything! There was just a flash of purple and it just hurt.

Harry and Ron didn't have to look at one another to know that they

Blaise had also followed her best friends into the room.

platonic friendship and of true concern.

obvious question.

the realme..."

"Hermione--"

It hurt so much."

were both sporting the same look of dangerous determination. There was no way they were going to let this slide—both had been tormented by the sound of Hermione getting tortured by Bellatrix Lestrange during the war, and both had made a promise to themselves to never let anyone ever hurt her again. "We're going to find who did this, 'Mione," Harry once again was the one to speak. Ron was completely still on the le side of the girl's hospital bed; his easily-ignited anger bubbling already. "I swear it." "That's enough." With her firm gaze narrowed, Professor McGonagall took a step forward to the bed; making herself known again. "I assure you, Mister Potter, that we're going to find whoever attacked Miss Granger. You will have nothing to do with it." The Chosen One was about to protest but the scolding expression that took over the

professor's face shut him up. "Now, I'll escort you to your lessons. Say

Saying their goodbyes to their best friend—Harry giving her a kiss on

the forehead and Ron giving her another caring smile—the Headmistress was quick to shoo them out the door. And as she assumed that she had gathered all the students visiting Hermione, she had forgotten about the one that was lurking in the background during the intimate and fast interaction between the Golden Trio.

Hermione had looked sadly at the retreating figures of her two friends and clutched onto her white sheets. She closed her eyelids, the headache still throbbing at the sides of her skull. She was tempted to sleep, to relieve herself of the discomfort naturally since Madam Pomfrey was nowhere in sight so she could ask for a potion, but that action was interrupted as a voice echoed in the lonely

"You could look less ashamed to be related to me." It started o slow, almost indi erent and cold, but Blaise knew it was not going to stay that way for long. He felt frustration stir underneath his skin, making his fists tingle with a longing to punch something until it was bruised

Her eyes opened immediately. And like the previous weeks, she really wished she was not looking at the Slytherin's face; though this time it was for a completely dierent reason. She had been avoiding him since the first night back to the castle because she was afraid of what being around him might bring, but now she saw another outcome of

He was hurt, she could see that much in his green eyes. He was trying his hardest to hide it, to maintain that Slytherin mask that they all sported so people wouldn't know that they felt. But they did, and

"Yes it is!" And that was his boiling point. "You hate being a Zabini. You look like someone is ripping your heart out every time you think about it! I knew it wasn't going to be easy to accept it, but I didn't

She cringed. Her headache was not going to be smoothed over any

"You said you were going to try, Hermione, but all you've done is

"Yes you have!" He was not going to take any of her sugarcoating. Blaise always knew the truth. No one ever got one over him, and she

your goodbyes; Miss Granger needs to rest."

Hospital Wing.

or in powder.

what was brought up by avoiding him.

Blaise felt. He felt rejected.

"Blaise, it's not...it's not like that—"

expect you to be a fucking liar!"

time soon.

avoid me!

"I haven't—"

was going to lose it soon.

Hermione's"

of sensitive girls.

onto her aching shoulders.

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wouldn't be the first. "I'm not da! I know you're afraid that I'll out you, but I wouldn't bloody well do that! You're my sister for Slytherin's fucking sake! "And then you get hurt, and the first people that old hag McGonagall goes to are Potter and the Weasel?! And they're the only ones you bother to see in a room! Well, open your eyes, Hermione, I'm here, too! I care, too! I'm your brother! Not Boy Wonder! I'myour family!" If someone was to look at this situation from a distant point, one would see that the boy was practically shaking with his aggravation; that his emerald-colored gaze was wide and roaring with things he usually hid behind walls of defense; that his chest was heaving for the

air that he released when he was shouting. From her hospital bed, the girl looked completely terrified and guilty. Her brown eyes were filled with tears, and her bottom lip quivered with the indication that she

Both new-found siblings stared directly into each others eyes and felt the tension in the room thicken. The fact was that Blaise had lost his cool, that he'd dropped down his cool exterior to release all the uncharacteristic feelings the brunette caused in him. And the next truth was that Hermione didfeel horrible; that she didn't, in fact, have anything to excuse her behavior with. The resentment she felt for being tied to the Zabinis was not rested upon Blaise but on his

parents. He hadn't a choice over this like she did.

And he was her brother. He was her biological brother...

"I'm sorry," she was the first to break the silence, her voice cracking as she did so. "I'm sorry, Blaise. It's just that I'm scared, alright. You can't expect...I can't just get over this...over me not being Hermione Granger in such a short time. And, yes, I'm guilty for holding on to my old life, and I...You have to understand that I can't lose that, Blaise. I can't. That's mine...That's not Aria's, that's not yours, it's mine; it's

The Slytherin crossed his arms over his chest. His overwhelmed expression had gone from being that to slowly freezing into nothing.

With a cringe, the soreness all over her body reacting, she managed to push herself onto a full sitting position. She worked on her

breathing for a few seconds, passing the oxygen through her teeth as

the pain simmered down before she spoke again.

"Harry and Ron are mine, too, Blaise. They're my family, from the very beginning," she said to him straightforwardly. "Nothing will ever change that, not you or your parents. But you're right...You're absolutely right. You're my brother; by blood and all. And I should've never...It's not your fault. I'm sorry. I didn't want to hurt you, Blaise...I just..." She had to stop, those tears finally fell down her cheeks. Making a disgusted face as the girl on the hospital bed buried her face between her palms, shoulders shaking with her guilty cries, Blaise rolled his eyes to himself as he took unwilling steps forward. He hated emotions, honestly; and he really hated sobbing more. But like he'd said to himself before, this just wasn't any annoying witch crying her eyes out. No, this was his annoying witch-of-a-sister crying her eyes out. And because she was tied to him, because she

was a part of him, he had to try to get over his disgust at the reactions

And honestly, though he was mad at her, he couldn't stay so for very long. He wanted to curse her, yes, but someone else already had. And that was not okay in his books. His sister had been attacked by someone—someone who was good as dead once Blaise and his father found out who it was—and she didn't need more stress added

"I don't really like you right now, Hermione," he said flatly as he walked over to her side. Hesitantly, like if he was afraid he'd break

her, he put a hand on her shaking shoulders, "but despite the rumours that circle this school, I can actually feel concern for something other than my appearance. And I feel it for you at the current moment." There was a pause, and then with the same hesitation like how he'd touched her, he said: "and I was scared when I heard McGonagall say you'd been hurt...I care about you; even if you Sni ling, Hermione looked up with crying eyes to stare at the boy beside her. "I care, Blaise." "No, Hermione, you don't." "I do, though," she continued. "I don't like what your surname represents for me, but I care about you, Blaise. You're my brother; it's automatic." Blaise narrowed his eyes at her. "It's forced for you, not automatic. I

had an entire year a er I found out the truth to learn to care about

Another round of tears fell through the girl's lashes. "I want to try, Blaise. I want...I want us to be proper siblings. I want to accept that

you. That's true and honest, yours is just guilt."

you're my brother."

"We'll see," was what he responded to her. And even though his response was more of a resenting brush-o, he felt the oddest surge of something bubbly poke at his heart. It sent an amusing, silly thought to his brain—it told him there was still a chance to get what he wanted. There was still hope that his sister was somewhere inside the brunette; not just the annoying, goody-too-shoes bookworm that refused to accept him as her sibling. Without giving himself a moment to think it through, Blaise copied an action straight from Potter and used it for himself. He grabbed one of Hermione's hands, lacing his fingers through hers, and he sat himself at the little space le at the side of her bed. And to his slight surprise, Hermione squeezed his fingers a er a silent second; even scooting to the side to give him more room. If someone would see the scene from a distant point in that moment,

cuddling into Blaise's side; her eyelids closing and her breathing rough from the ache in her bones as the boy hummed something

It was awkward and foreign, but it was the first attempt of comfort

Continue reading next part □

unimportant under his breath.

between brother and sister.

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friend. How the hell had he even gotten to the Great Hall, started "Barmy owl," Parkinson hu ed almost casually. "Its been delivering my mail to random people all month. I swear the thing is doing it on Again, Ron blinked and noticed another thing that he hadn't before. Instead of Pig, his little grey, annoying owl, there was a flu y brown "Have you done anything to upset it?" Harry asked, continuing on the interaction with the Slytherin witch like it was the most nonchalant At the words that slipped out of his mouth, Ron noticed that Harry and Parkinson went dead silent. Harry looked to be almost surprised, slightly amused, and even calm by hearing his voice. Parkinson, however, stared almost too deeply. Those blue eyes of hers were burning him, making him feel like they were studying him. It made him uncomfortable. And it stirred up some bad emotions. "Well, if Lyla brings any more of your mail, we'll send it right back," Harry broke the silence as he stood up from the table once his plate was completely clean. "Ron, we should go to the library before Potions starts. Maybe we'll find Hermione there, too. Merlin knows I haven't seen her in a while." Ron looked into Parkinson's eyes one more time before giving her a nod. She did nothing—her blue eyes just narrowed in distaste, losing a hint of a sparkle, and then she turned on her heels and le with her "It doesn't matter, Ron," Harry repeated with a tone that suggested he was speaking to a stubborn child that wasn't listening to its parent. "And frankly, I don't care. I just want to get through Seventh Year without any trouble. Hell, if Malfoy decided to start being decent then—" "Potter. Weasley." Stopping his next step with a jerk, Harry and Ron's path was suddenly impeded by a woman with a constant serious expression on her

elderly face. McGonagall let some of the crowd heading in dierent directions fade away before she took a careful step towards the two Gry indors. And as expected, though he didn't much like it, Harry found that the Headmistress was speaking with a grave tone. "While doing the early rounds around the castle, Mister Filch came across...a problem." silver eyes, Malfoy stood beside Blaise Zabini as the latter looked lit up with outrage. "What happened?!" Zabini continued to hiss at the professor. McGonagall narrowed her beady eyes disapprovingly at the Slytherin. "That is not a conversation to have in the open, Mister Zabini," she told him coldly. "And I suggest you watch your tone." "Where is she?" Bringing back the fact that Harry and Ron had been le like someone had just chucked a cauldron of ice-water over their heads, the Boy-Who-Lived wasted no more precious time to figure out where his best friend was. "Where's Hermione, Professor?"

fog that was plaguing his mind. Those blue eyes grew annoyed. Those blue eyes that belonged to Pansy Parkinson. "Can you hand me that letter you're mucking up with your sticky fingers?" Ron looked down at the surface of his house-table. His le hand was resting upon a package of mail, and indeed, his fingers were covered "She's in the Hospital Wing," the Headmistress responded quickly. "You and Mister Weasley come with me. I'll take you to her." Blaise was not amused at the words that passed through the old bat's lips. "If anyone gets to see her, it's me," he snapped; getting in the way before the two Gry indors and the Headmistress could leave. "Potter and Weasley should've not been informed before I was." "Mister Potter and Mister Weasley are Miss Granger's—" "I'm her brother!" The Slytherin was no longer using his inside-voice. ď

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a they would've seen that Hermione rested her back onto the mattress, ä å