

Something Old, Something New

by dresswithout sleeves

He asks, "Did you think I was guilty?" And she says, "Don't make me answer that."
Sirius and Andromeda after Azkaban.

One-shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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The first place he goes is the little house on Greyhound Corner. It's like he remembers it—not quite shabby, but definitely worn in, thatched roof drooping over the edges of the walls and one shutter hanging precariously on one hinge. The *L* has rubbed off the mat outside the front door and now reads "we come." There's a faint smell of orchids surrounding the house, despite the fact that they haven't been grown in the garden for years. It's all sunflowers and tulips now with a single fire lily tucked gently into the back corner, near the window.

Someone is singing. He would know the voice anywhere; he'd heard it often enough growing up. She still has a pleasant voice, light and sweet, and for a moment Sirius closes his eyes and lets it wash over him. It brings a wave of sweeping nostalgia and ache, a longing for all the days that came before.

The tune fades and he opens his eyes. She's leaning out the window, an amused little smile on her face. "Well, aren't you going to come in?" she asks, her eyes crinkled at the edges.

She's glad to see him. He had worried that she wouldn't be, though he doesn't know why.

He lets himself in through the front door and follows her voice. He steps into the kitchen hesitantly, mindful of the dirt on his shoes. She has her back turned to him, folding a shirt with one hand and scrambling eggs with the other. "They're almost finished," Andromeda tells him without turning round. "I know they're your favorite."

His throat tightens and he nods, even knowing she can't see him. Ted had introduced him to the recipe the summer before his seventh year of Hogwarts. He takes a seat at the table and leans his chin on his hand, drinking in the sight of her. She hasn't changed. He knows that his cheeks are sunken in and his ribs can be seen through his skin, but it's as if she has been frozen in time, trapped in this magical little house on this magical little corner, simply waiting for him to come back. Everything is as he remembers it—plates still stacked dangerously by the sink, a half-darned sock hanging on the back of one of the chairs, laundry basket overflowing on the back patio.

"Ted's at work until six," Andromeda tells him, scooping the eggs onto a plate and setting it in front of him. "You should stay until then. He'll be sorry if he misses you."

Sirius nods again, looking down at the eggs and gripping the fork she's handed him with unnecessary force. He tries to make himself eat, but suddenly the idea of putting the fluffy, steaming food into his mouth seems wrong, like it will taste differently and break the spell that's preserved this house and all its inhabitants.

Andromeda puts her hand gently over his own. "Eat, Sirius. You need it."

It's suddenly important that he asks, that he knows, that he has the smallest mercy of steadfast family never forgetting who he is, was, had been. "Did you think I was guilty?"

He puts the fork down. He cannot eat until she answers. He cannot eat, no matter how delicious and achingly familiar the food is, the plate is, the woman at his side is.

"Don't make me answer that."

He grabs her wrist and holds it tight, not threatening, simply clinging to something that's solid. "I have to know. You understand why I have to know."

Andromeda sighs gently. She brushes a stray lock of hair out of his face and then stands, moving over to the kitchen counter. No one speaks. A robin twitters on a tree branch outside and for a moment he has the ridiculous fantasy of the bird whispering to him: no, no, of course not you, no.

"Of course I did," she says at last, turning to face him. "Yes. I thought you were guilty. You won't find anyone who didn't, except the dead."

The words are spoken quickly in Andromeda's soft voice. She has always been the gentlest of them, but still somehow made of steel, still cut from the same block as her sisters and her cousins. There is more of Bellatrix in both of them than they are willing to admit.

He looks away. Of course. She is used to betrayal, they both are. Why shouldn't she have thought him guilty? He was a Black, after all, capable of all that the name entails. And she, too. She has always been the gentlest of them, yes, the softest, the most pleasant—but at the heart of things, she is a Black, and like any of them, she would kill a thousand times over for what she believes. Why shouldn't she think that he had simply done what they had been born to do?

"All the same," she adds, kneeling in front of him so that he must look at her, "I went to visit you every week. They never let me in, of course, but still I went." She cups his cheek in her hand. She is only a few years older, but suddenly he realizes that the hand on his face has lived a thousand years, has known a thousand pains.

The house is the same, the picture is the same, but the people in it are not. She doesn't look a day older, but she is. He is. They are both a hundred miles away from where they started, even if they're still sitting at her kitchen table, surrounded by sunflowers and tulips and just one fire lily.

"Why?" he asks, panting, out of breath. He clings to her hand.

"You are my family," she murmurs. "You could betray me a hundred times over, and still you would be my family."

Gently, she releases him. And then, with a small smile, offers him his fork. Her eyes are twinkling, and in them he can see that she has forgiven him a thousand times over for what he did not do, and somehow that means more to him than if she had never believed his wrongs in the first place.

He takes it.

The eggs taste just the same.