

The Ties That Bind

by JackieJLH

"Whatever you do, they will love you; even if they don't love you, they are connected to you 'til you die." ~Deborah Moggach

One

Chapter 1 of 6

"Whatever you do, they will love you; even if they don't love you, they are connected to you 'til you die." ~Deborah Moggach

Author's Notes: This story will be told in a series of 100-word drabbles. I'll be posting them five at a time. They've been inspired by a wonderful manip by wicked_visions, located at the top of this page: <http://wicked-visions.livejournal.com/117414.html#cutid1>. You should definitely check it out; it's awesome!

Many thanks to Christev for beta-reading these!

The chaotic bustle of activity ceases almost entirely as she walks across the grounds. Voices stop mid-spell, everyone watching her cautiously, clutching their wands. Only Pomona's presence at her side seems to be keeping them from hexing her. Never in her life has Andromeda hated her resemblance to her sister as much as she does right now.

With a huff of frustration, she jerks the hood of her cloak up to conceal her face.

"They're in the Great Hall," Pomona says as they step inside the school, sympathy in her tone. Andromeda nods, heading in that direction without a word.

~

People are tiptoeing around George Weasley, treating him—quite accurately—as if his world is ending around him.

No one even warns Andromeda that she's to suffer the same pain. She goes to Hogwarts to retrieve the bodies of her only child and her son-in-law and is confronted with the sight of her twin sister's corpse lying fifteen feet away. Her breath catches in her throat, and she chokes back a sob.

She learned to live without Bellatrix, feeling as though she'd lost half her soul, many years ago. The fact that Bella is actually dead this time shouldn't matter. But ~~it~~ does.

~

They weren't identical, but may as well have been. Bella's eyes were narrower, Andromeda's hair a shade lighter, but at first glance they were nearly impossible to tell apart. They were the same height, had the same face, wore their hair the same way.

And they both were gifted with magic so strong and so powerful that when they were angry, even their mother eyed them warily.

Their first year at Hogwarts, word quickly spread around that they were to be respected and, even at that age, feared. They didn't mind—they were Blacks. Respect and fear were theirs by birthright.

~

When she sees Bellatrix, she doesn't think of the last time they spoke—the hexes thrown, the angry words, the heartbreak that came from losing her twin sister and best friend in the same moment.

Instead, she thinks of the year they were fourteen—two years before she knew Ted as anything but the Mudblood Hufflepuff who kept ruining Slytherin's chances of winning the Quidditch Cup.

"That boy's staring at you," she remembers eleven-year-old Narcissa whispering through a giggle.

Bellatrix had looked over her shoulder and smiled her brilliant, radiant smile at the boy before turning back to her sisters. "That's Rodolphus."

~

"Don't tell me you fancy *him*," Andromeda had groaned in disgust. "Lestrange is an idiot."

"He's not," Bellatrix had said with a roll of her eyes. "He knows how to cast the Cruciatus, you know. That's not easy—especially if you aren't angry."

"*Bella!*" Andromeda hissed, quickly glancing around to make sure no one else had heard.

Bellatrix just laughed. "No one cares what we're talking about. Besides, it's not as if he casts it on people. Just animals in the Forest."

"Where'd he learn to do it?" Narcissa asked, more excitement in her expression than Andromeda was really comfortable seeing.

Two

Chapter 2 of 6

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Author's Notes: Many thanks to Christev for her wonderful beta work!

"Some man."

"A student?" Andromeda pressed, a little hurt that she'd not heard about any of this sooner. They usually told each other everything.

"No, a friend of their dad's. It all sounds ridiculous—a bunch of people getting together in the woods to torture rabbits or something."

Narcissa grimaced. "*Why?*"

"I don't know. Suppose I'll find out, though.... He wants me to go with him to their next meeting."

"You're not actually *going*, are you?" Andromeda asked.

Bellatrix shrugged again. "Maybe. I might as well see what all the fuss is about, right? Besides, what harm can one meeting do?"

~

Someone bumps into her as they hurry past, dragging Andromeda out of her memories. Forcing her eyes away from Bellatrix, she instead focuses on carefully stepping between the dozens of bodies lying in rows to one side of the Hall, not stopping until she reaches her daughter's side. No one pays her much mind; some people are eating, some celebrating, some crying, all of them otherwise occupied.

When she reaches her family, she carefully crouches down, balancing in the small space between Nymphadora and Remus. Andromeda gently reaches out to stroke her daughter's cheek, tears welling up in her eyes.

~

Blacks don't cry, she hears inside her head, her mother's words echoing through the years, and despite the fact that she hasn't claimed that name in decades, she closes her eyes and takes a slow, deep breath, willing the tears to stop. She's only partly successful.

Removing her cloak, she magically splits it in two and Transfigures the pieces into large sheets, draping one over Nymphadora and the other over Remus. Rising to her feet, she moves to levitate them into the air, but a sudden tap on her shoulder makes her pause.

A Ministry employee is standing over her.

~

"Ma'am, you can't do that," he says without preamble, and her eyes narrow dangerously.

"I beg your pardon?" The words are the right ones, she thinks, but her tone is icy and anything but polite.

He shifts uncomfortably at her obvious anger. "It's just that we're still identifying the bodies, you see," he explains. "Minister Shacklebolt's asked that none be removed until we're finished. It'll just be a little longer. An hour... two at most."

"I'll identify them. They're my family," she insists. She doesn't want to stand among all these reminders of loss for a second longer than necessary.

~

"That'd certainly speed things up, ma'am, but I still can't let you take them just yet." She glares at him, and he takes an unconscious step back, nearly stumbling over one of the bodies behind him. "Minister's orders," he tries again, and she relents, albeit reluctantly.

"Fine. I'll wait," she says, staring at him expectantly until he takes the hint and walks away. Rolling her eyes, she glances around and sees Minerva McGonagall watching her.

"He's doing his job, Andromeda," McGonagall says in a chastising tone when Andromeda makes her way over to her former professor.

"I know," she answers.

Three

Chapter 3 of 6

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Even after all these years, Professor McGonagall can still make her feel like a misbehaving child, she notes, blushing. "I don't want to be here," she admits.

McGonagall gives her a grim look of agreement. "You're not the only one." She sighs, looking around. "Where's the baby?" she asks, obviously not wanting to think about the impossible, heart-breaking work that lies ahead for all of them.

"He's safe," Andromeda answers. The war may be over, but there's not a person in the world who could drag Teddy's whereabouts from her right now.

McGonagall simply nods. Andromeda suspects she understands perfectly.

~

"He's really dead?" Andromeda asks, knowing what she's been told, but still wanting to hear it repeated by someone she trusts to be absolutely certain of the fact.

McGonagall nods. "We put him in there," she says, pointing toward a door that Andromeda knows leads to a small room off the Hall. "No one really wanted to have him out here, so close to his victims."

Hesitating for only a moment, Andromeda asks, "Can I see him?" At McGonagall's quizzical look, she goes on, "He has a bad habit of not actually dying. I'd like to see him for myself..."

~

Considering the request for a long moment, McGonagall says, "I really do have a million things I should be doing right now," but it seems to be more of a complaint at herself than Andromeda, and she leads the way to the door without another protest.

Voldemort is lying in the centre of the floor, red eyes staring at the ceiling. Andromeda takes a cautious step toward him, nudging his hand with her foot. When he doesn't move, she steps closer, using her wand to illuminate the small room.

"He's not nearly so impressive now, is he?" McGonagall asks bitterly.

~

"You should have met him *before* the war," Andromeda says softly, and McGonagall raises one eyebrow in question.

"I did," she finally says when Andromeda doesn't volunteer further information. "He was a year behind me at school. He could have talked a unicorn out of its horn back then."

Andromeda nods silently in agreement. This snake-like, hideous creature on the floor doesn't look a thing like the man who'd captured the loyalty of so many, all those years ago.

She can still recall, almost as if it were yesterday, the night Bellatrix came home from her first Death Eater meeting.

~

Bella'd had stars in her eyes, tales of a handsome, powerful man with a noble cause rolling off her tongue. "He's amazing," she'd concluded. Andromeda had never seen her sister so enamored with anyone before.

They were lying like they always did when they were in the same bed—Bella curled against Andromeda's side, her head resting on Andromeda's shoulder. Bella hadn't been able to stop talking. "You should have been there, Andy. If you had heard him..."

"Had a lot to say, did he?" Andromeda had asked wryly. She'd doubted anyone associated with the Lestranges could've been all that interesting.

Four

Chapter 4 of 6

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Bellatrix'd nodded fervently, her hair brushing against Andromeda's cheek with the movement. "You have to come with me next time. Please—I can't even describe him properly. Say you'll come with me?"

Certain that she'd find the entire thing dreadfully boring, Andromeda'd declined. For nearly two years, Bella had snuck away from home or Hogwarts with Rodolphus and his friends and come back literally trembling with excitement. Finally, unable to deny her sister any longer (and feeling more than a little curious), Andromeda'd found herself slipping out of the window one night and climbing onto the back of Rabastan Lestrange's broom.

~

The first thing Andromeda had noticed when they landed was that there were so many people there. It'd seemed like half of the Slytherins in her year and above were in the clearing in the middle of the woods, along with most of their parents.

"Ms Black," a tall—and admittedly, quite handsome—man had said in greeting, taking Bella's hand briefly in his, and Bellatrix's eyes had lit up at the touch. "I see you've brought a guest."

Turning to Andromeda, he'd continued, "You must be Bella's sister. Andromeda, is it?" She'd nodded, suddenly breathless. "I'm glad you could join us."

~

During the first two meetings, Andromeda had nodded along with the other attendees as Lord Voldemort, his eyes ablaze with power and determination and confidence, spoke of a world without Mudblood influence, safe from contamination by filthy outside blood. His passion had been contagious, seeping into Andromeda's very soul.

"To ensure the continued survival of our people," he'd said one night, seeming to stare directly at her, "we must take action. We cannot allow our world to be destroyed by those unworthy of magic. It's our *duty* to defend it!"

Andromeda had wholeheartedly agreed, hanging on every word he'd said.

~

"He's not so great as all that," Rodolphus had grumbled one night as the four of them lingered on the roof of the Black home, all still energetic and alert after the meeting. There was just a hint of jealousy in his voice, as Bellatrix had (once again) been talking about Lord Voldemort in an awed tone. "He wears glammers—his face is all... *melted*. Must've had some accident or something."

Bellatrix had just rolled her eyes, her disbelief obvious.

"No, really—we've seen it. Back when he first came around looking for Dad a couple years ago," Rabastan had added quickly.

~

Rabastan had shifted closer to Andromeda as he talked. She'd glared at him.

"I don't care," Bella'd insisted. "He's still amazing."

Rodolphus had sighed, obviously very much regretting his suggestion that Bellatrix accompany him to the meetings in the first place.

"Dad thinks Lord Voldemort will end up the next Minister," Rabastan had said, trying to change the subject. Then he'd attempted to lay his hand over Andromeda's, and she'd pulled away, disgusted.

"You can't possibly be serious?" she'd sniffed. Bellatrix dissolved into cruel laughter, and Rabastan turned red. The topic of Lord Voldemort had been dropped for a time.

Five

Chapter 5 of 6

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Andromeda had changed her mind about Lord Voldemort the day that he'd invited Abraxas Malfoy into his inner circle, with the condition that Malfoy prove himself. *Proving himself* meant, it turned out, torturing and killing a Muggle woman for having dared to dirty the magical lines by birthing a Mudblood.

It'd terrified Andromeda to watch her sister's eyes gleam with excitement as the Muggle woman screamed and thrashed around on the ground, pleading for mercy.

Andromeda had stayed silent and kept a straight face, but she'd insisted that they leave the minute the meeting ended, claiming that she was tired.

~

"He's *psychotic!*" Andromeda had shouted at Bellatrix when they got home. "That woman didn't deserve to *die*, Muggle or not!"

"People die in war," her sister had argued back. "And *this* is a war, Andy. Haven't you been paying attention? What did you think he was going to do, ask them to go home and forget the wizarding world exists?"

Andromeda's voice had shaken with incredulity and rage when she'd answered. "That wasn't an act of war, Bella, that was *murder*. Murder of a helpless woman who hadn't done anything wrong! How can you just stand there and defend him?!"

~

"It's them or us; would you have our world destroyed?!" Bellatrix had snapped. "Talking isn't solving anything. You were there, you heard him—we need to take action!"

"He can't just kill everyone who disagrees with him!" Andromeda'd exclaimed. "Laws can be changed; they can be forced out! They can be denied wands, refused a place at Hogwarts! There are other options, Bella!"

They had fought nearly the entire night, shouts muffled by silencing charms on the walls so that their parents and Narcissa wouldn't hear. It was the first real fight they'd ever had and somehow, it had changed everything.

~

She'd heard that with the start of the second war, Voldemort's meetings had changed—everything had suddenly been about him and his power, his immortality, and of course, destroying young Harry Potter. His followers weren't drawn in with impressive speeches or flattery, but with fear and threats of death if they should choose a path other than Voldemort's own.

But back then, so many had joined him.... So many, like Bella, had thrown themselves into the beginnings of a war, Unforgivables spilling from their wands without regret, zealous in their beliefs that they were saving the world with their brutal actions.

~

McGonagall clears her throat, and Andromeda realizes the other woman has been watching her curiously.

"I'm sorry, I was..." she starts to say, but can't really think of the right words to finish the sentence, and she waves her hand vaguely toward the continuous din of voices coming from the Hall.

McGonagall nods sympathetically. This day has left many people lost in thoughts of the past. "I do need to get back," she says, motioning for Andromeda to leave the room. "I have to reset the wards."

With one last look at Voldemort's body, Andromeda steps back into the Hall.

Six

Chapter 6 of 6

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The hall is still full of people, though the conversations seem more subdued now. Some are still celebrating, and others are mourning, but they all seem focused on trying to do something productive—more bodies are being carried in, damaged walls are being repaired, and a full dozen Ministry employees are walking among the dead, taking photographs and carefully recording names.

Andromeda nearly decides to see if she can possibly help in the Hospital Wing while she waits—assuming its still in one piece, the badly injured have probably been brought there—but pauses when she catches sight of a painfully familiar face.

~

From across the hall, she can see Narcissa, who's staring at her as though she can't believe her eyes. Lucius is there also, his arm wrapped protectively around his wife's shoulders in the same way that Narcissa is holding Draco tightly against her. They all look unsure of themselves. If she didn't know better, Andromeda would even say they looked afraid.

And thin. Too thin. Tired. Not as well-kept as they usually appear. She supposes this war has not been as kind to them as the last one, and can't bring herself to feel anything but satisfaction at the thought.

~

"Andromeda," she hears at her side, and she finds herself staring into Kingsley's exhausted, but calm and reassuringly determined, face. "I'm sorry for your losses," he says when he has her attention, and she wonders how many times he's had to utter those words in the last few hours.

"Thank you. Am I free to take my daughter home now?" she asks, desperately wanting to leave.

"That's what I came to talk to you about. This is going to take a while. We're making arrangements to have all of the victims delivered wherever their family would prefer,

once we're finished."

~

Trying to conceal her anger, she gives him a weak smile. "And the Minister himself came to tell me? I would have thought you'd have more important things to tend to today."

"My employees are terrified of you, for some reason. Especially Penders—he seems to think you're going to hex him if he talks to you again," he answers with a pointed look. She blushes. "While it's becoming abundantly clear to me that I really will need to look into the hiring decisions of the... *previous Minister*, I can't have what staff I do have being hexed by my friends."

~

"Have them brought to my house, please," she concedes reluctantly, and he nods, looking grateful that she didn't argue further—he must be tired; he isn't the least bit afraid of her. He hadn't been even when they were young, when she'd approached him and Ted in the library. Bellatrix'd been with Rodolphus and Narcissa had been studying. Andromeda'd waited until the two seventh-year boys were the only ones around, then boldly walked up to their table. Normally, she'd never have even acknowledged either of them—*Mudbloods*, and a Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw at that—but she hadn't seen any other option just then.