

The Life and Times of Perseus

by Rose of the West

He gave up the Muggle world and his family and entered the world of magic. She would have to give up her family and social status. Together they just might have something altogether different.

An Unobvious Hero

Chapter 1 of 19

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Perseus was the son of Jupiter and Danaë. His grandfather, Acrisius, alarmed by an oracle which had told him that his daughter's child would be the instrument of his death, caused the mother and child to be shut up in a chest and set adrift on the sea. (Bulfinch's Mythology, Book XV)

August 12, 1964

Theodore Tonks was born into a normal post-war family. He had both an older brother and an older sister. His dad was a middle manager for a company that manufactured parts that were used by some other company to make various machines. His mum was a housewife who occasionally taught at the local school when a substitute was needed. He was therefore the son of neither a god nor a king's daughter.

Neither was his appearance likely to inspire thoughts of heroes and great deeds. He was an average-looking child of the suburbs. His hair and eyes were brown, and his face, although friendly, rarely inspired a second look. He was on the short side of average, a bit portly, and wore glasses. And yet sometimes those who looked at him did go back for a second look. Sometimes, by trick of the light or some witchery, his eyes gleamed a different color, his hair looked curlier or straighter, or his nose took on a different shape. By the time the observer looked again, whatever had happened reversed itself and the observer would shrug. After all, Ted was just a regular boy.

It turned out that he wasn't just a regular boy, however. On the eleventh birthday of Theodore Tonks, an odd visitor came to the family's house. He showed up out of nowhere and wore a coat cut in a style not seen since 1947. He walked down the street, looking at the neighborhood as though he had never seen houses before. As cars drove past, he would stop and look, his face shining with excitement.

When he arrived at the Tonks house, this personage stood for several minutes, staring at the little button next to the door with an odd smile. Finally he pushed it. The little man's name was William Morgan, and he stayed at the Tonks house for exactly twenty six and a half minutes. When he left the Tonks house, whistling and smiling to those he passed, he left two very stunned people in the house behind him.

The Mother Tonks and Father Tonks looked at each other, trying to assess their thoughts, for a long minute. Finally she said it. "We always knew..."

They always knew that she put the stuffed bears and ducks properly away when she put baby Teddy in the baby cot at night. They always knew that the strange lights under Ted's door weren't lightning, playing with the lamp, or a torch. They always knew there was a reason they found mice in the house, tossed the mice into the garden and later found their teacups among the marigolds. They always knew there was something about the way his face would change for an instant of time now and again.

They had been discussing options for school in the coming year, and Professor Morgan had presented them with another option. Before he left, they had known they would have to choose it. Ted had met Professor Morgan and spent a rapt ten minutes telling him about the odd things he could do. The wizard had explained that they were all perfectly normal, but now Ted must avoid doing that sort of magic until he was a grown-up wizard. When he came to Hogwarts, he would learn to use magic properly.

Ted sat on the couch between his parents, looking from one to the other hopefully. Father looked down upon him and sighed. "You want to go to this school, then, Ted? To leave your mum and me?"

He lifted earnest eyes to his father and said, "Well, Dad, I don't want to leave you, but I don't fit in with the kids in school. I try not to do the magic an' all, but it does itself sometimes an' then they look at me funny. I don't really have any friends. Even Tommy and Sue like each other better'n me. I might like a place where ev'ryone's all the same."

Mother gasped, her heart suddenly broken. "You never said. Do the children treat you different because of the magic? Why wouldn't you tell us?"

The boy shrugged. "What good was it? I thought I was just strange, like they said. I didn't want to be a crybaby."

If they had wondered what to do about his education before, they now knew. If Ted had this all-too-real ability, he should have the opportunity to learn how to use it and make friends with similar skills. So at the ages of forty-three and forty-one, Father and Mother Tonks traveled to a part of London they had never known existed: Diagon Alley.

The succeeding four hours was a wonder-filled, exciting and thoroughly frightening experience. Their first stop was the bank, where small green strangely human-like creatures exchanged their hard-earned currency for gold and silver coins that were too big for the Tonks family pockets. Mother put the bag they had been given into her purse, which was large and now was heavy.

Following the suggestions Professor Morgan had noted for them, they stopped first at the Wandmaker's shop. Mr. Ollivander was an interesting wizard, who never stopped moving. First he started measuring Ted and then he started looking through the long skinny boxes on his shelves. Back and forth the boxes went until the wizard found one he wanted. He took a wand out of it and handed to Ted, telling him to wave it around a bit. A puff of smoke came from the wand and then nothing. More boxes went back and forth, and Ted was given more wands to try. Finally there was one that slid into his hand like two magnets sliding together. He waved it, and golden sparks flew from the end of the wand. "There you are, young wizard. That's the wand for you." His parents settled the bill, and they continued on to the next bit of shopping.

They stopped at the second-hand robe shop and purchased some robes that were his size and then went to Madam Malkin's for the others that were just a bit large, hoping they would fit for the entire school year. Mother and Father would never have found the small door on Charing Cross Road without him, and it was doubtful that they would be able to obtain new robes if he suddenly needed them.

From there, the shopping was a bit more straightforward. They bought all of his books at Flourish and Blott's bookstore. Then they stopped at the stationery store, where several little girls squealed over a selection of pink quills. Then they stopped at the apothecary for his Potions class supplies. Following Professor Morgan's recommendations, the family backtracked to Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlor and had ice cream.

While savoring his hickory nut and butterbeer ice cream, Ted watched some of the little girls he had seen earlier come into the ice cream shop. The leader of the girls was a pretty, dark haired girl of thirteen or fourteen. She walked in as though she owned the place. The next girl looked like she was about Ted's age. She looked very much like the big girl, who must be her sister, except that her hair and eyes were lighter and brighter in color. The smallest girl was only seven or eight. She was very blond and had blue eyes. Although her features were identical to those of her sisters, they were much more delicate in size. Ted couldn't take his eyes from the girls and watched them as they ordered their ice cream and sat far away from the Tonks family.

The big girl sniffed. "Don't breathe too deeply, Cissy. You might choke on the smell of Mudblood!"

The littlest girl giggled while the middle one looked around. "You shouldn't talk like that, Trixie. You might offend someone..." Ted couldn't help staring. Her hair was brown, just like his own, but there was so much of it, and it seemed alive. He couldn't stop looking at her face. Her little sister was definitely prettier, but there was something about the middle sister that kept his eyes on her.

"What can they do to me, Andie? They're Muggles."

"You never know, Trixie. They might be from the Ministry, dressed up or something. Uncle Alphard says..."

"You know our parents hate Uncle Alphard. You better not go 'round quoting him." The big girl must have thought about what her sister said, however, because she bent her head toward her sisters when she spoke with them next. Every so often, all three girls giggled.

Ted looked at his parents and wondered what they had heard. He hoped nothing. He didn't know what the girls were talking about, but sensed it was not complimentary and he didn't want anything to interrupt his chance to go to Hogwarts. He had never heard of the place a fortnight before, but now he couldn't wait to get there. He couldn't believe it would still be a week and a half yet before he could go. Fortunately, Mum and Dad were too busy trying each other's ice cream and deciding which they liked better.

On the way back to the Leaky Cauldron and reality, the Tonks family stopped at Eeylops Owl Emporium. They looked in the window a long moment while they tried to decide if Ted wanted an Owl for school. Since the boy kept flinching whenever one of the animals in the window flexed and flapped its wings, Mother decided that was something that could wait until the following summer. They wandered back out into the London world of buses and automobiles, the child with excitement and anticipation and the adults with worry and apprehension.

It was all too soon, in Mother Tonks's opinion, that the first of September came along. Tommy and Sue were already in their schools, so Mother, Father, and Ted traveled to King's Cross Station in London together. They stood between platforms nine and ten and wondered what to do. As they waited and watched to see if something would present itself, a pair of red-haired youths came up to the small family.

"Are you trying to find Platform Nine and Three-Quarters, then?" one of the boys asked. "What you do is walk directly at that barrier, and there it will be."

As Ted watched, the other boy pushed his cart of luggage at the barrier...and disappeared. "Whoa!"

"See you on the train, then," said the boy, following his brother.

"Well, I suppose we need to try it," said Father. Together the three of them pushed the luggage cart toward the barrier, and somehow never hit it. The next thing they knew, they were standing at a platform they never imagined could exist.

The platform was a mixture of odd and normal. The people were all dressed oddly in robes and cloaks, yet the parents were bidding their children farewell just as any parents would. The train was a bit old-fashioned, but it still looked like a train. Boys were running up and down the platform as mothers bestowed last-minute kisses and directions to be good. Girls were waving from windows on the train as little sisters and brothers waved back.

Ted's dad helped him lift his trunk up the stairs into the rail car and then hugged him quickly goodbye. Mum held him as though she would never see him again. A small pocketful of coins was transferred from the parents to the boy with directions to spend it wisely, since there was no way to send more. Ted took his trunk and worked his way toward the compartments on the train.

On the platform, Mother and Father watched as the conductors gently pushed the kids toward the compartments and the parents away from the rails. The doors were shut and the whistle blew. The Hogwarts Express slowly moved away from the platform and then gained speed as it left the station.

As Mother Tonks watched the train carry her boy away from her, she worried that she was setting him adrift, somehow. The thought was foolish. If anything, he would be

adrift in her world, since he didn't really belong. Still, he was her boy, and she knew that he would not come back the same. Things would go back to normal over the summer, but really they wouldn't and another school year would go by and Ted would come back even more different. Within about seventy seconds, Mother lived the next seven years, imagining what it would be like as her son slowly grew away from her. She knew from experience with the older two that this was inevitable, yet this case seemed a bit more of a break and a bit more permanent. She sighed and put her hand in Father's. Together they walked back out into the regular train station and on toward the trains that would take them home.

The two red-headed boys introduced Ted to some other kids. Together they all sat in a compartment and shared sandwiches, biscuits from home, and treats from the food cart. He saw two of those sisters from Florean Fortescue's. The younger one opened the door of their compartment and peeked in. Ted didn't recognize her at first; the glorious hair was tightly pulled into braids. The other one loudly said, "Heavens, no, Andie, can't you tell they're all Mudbloods and blood traitors?" The one called Andie made a face and pulled the door quickly shut behind her.

"There's another one of those awful Black girls, I guess," said one of the red-haired boys. Ted had learned his name was Gideon. Maybe it was Fabian. He wasn't sure.

"Oh? Who are the Blacks?" asked a boy on the opposite seat. His name was Todd.

"Pure blood royalty," said the other one. Fabian, unless it was Gideon. "The older one is Bellatrix Black. She rules Slytherin House and tries to rule the rest of us.

"What's a 'Mudblood'?" asked Ted.

"It's an ugly name for Muggle-born," responded one of the brothers, whom Ted was sure was Fabian. "The amount of magic a person has doesn't seem to depend on how many magical relatives one has. They say that even Dumbledore is a Half-blood, and he's about the most powerful wizard alive. Do you have any magical relatives?"

"Not that I know of," responded Ted.

"We're pure-blooded," said Gideon. "It's a bit of a curse, I think."

"Well, our other problem is that we're so handsome," said his brother. "No one can stand it."

"That's true," was the answer. "We get mobbed by the girls and can never get our work done."

The other resident of the compartment, a quiet fourth-year boy whom Ted had met by his last name, Shackbolt, rolled his eyes and shook his head quietly.

"So why does it matter?" asked Ted.

"It really doesn't," responded Shackbolt. "Some of the pure-bloods think it matters, so they try to enact certain laws and to make it hard for Muggle-born witches and wizards to mingle in Wizarding society. The Ministry won't let it go on forever, though."

"You're such an idealist, Kingsley," responded Gideon.

"Maybe I am," he responded, "but maybe I intend to do my share to help."

Ted learned that the brothers, whose last name was Prewitt, were in Gryffindor House while Kingsley Shackbolt was in Hufflepuff. All three tried to impress him and Todd with the virtues of their own houses and warned the boys away from Slytherin. The consensus of the upperclassmen was that Ravenclaw would also be a good choice as long as they didn't end up in Slytherin.

The evening passed Ted by in a blur. He met a man who was simply enormous, who led boatloads full of the first-year students to the school across a lake. He and his classmates were faced by a rather stern woman who explained the house system to them. They then waited in a room where Ted met his first ghost. Actually he met several of them. Of the whole group he most liked the Fat Friar, who seemed pretty jolly. The ghost with his head mostly cut off was a bit strange, and the Bloody Baron gave him the creeps. The Gray Lady seemed a bit offish. She kept her distance from the three male ghosts.

Having been catechized in the differences between houses, Ted had thought perhaps Hufflepuff would be his first choice. When the first years went into the Great Hall, he could hardly take in all the sights and sounds. He watched as first the girl named Andie was sent to Slytherin. She sat next to her sister, who didn't hug or greet her but smiled in satisfaction. Todd was sorted to Ravenclaw. A while later Ted was summoned to the chair and told by the hat that he would do very well in Hufflepuff. Ted agreed and took his place at the table. Further down, Kingsley Shackbolt smiled and waved to him. Thus the young man cast adrift on so fragile a crate as a steam train found a safe landing.

A/N: This story was written during the month of November 2009 for the Nanoship competition on The Dark Mark archive. Special thanks go to Trickle Woo for beta reading for me.

Avoiding the Gorgon

Chapter 2 of 19

"Why are you smiling?"

"Because you're the prettiest witch I've ever spoken with."

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

When Perseus was grown up, Polydectes sent him to attempt the conquest of Medusa, a terrible monster who had laid waste the country. (Bullfinch's Mythology, Book XV)

Theodore Tonks spent the next seven years of his life learning about magic. If he were destined to be a hero, he would receive top grades in every class, his skill on the Quidditch field would be legendary, and witches and wizards alike would sing his praises whenever anyone asked. The fact of the matter was that it was only by the work of several older students that he managed to pass his O.W.L.s (3 A's, two O's, and an E in Muggle Studies), he was an adequate but indifferent flier on a broom, and few students outside those who lived in his dormitory could pick him out in a picture.

As he prepared to take the N.E.W.T. exams in Charms, Transfiguration, and Muggle Studies, he discovered a job opening at the Ministry in the Transportation Department. It was a great deal of paper-sorting, but occasionally, he would be required to go out into the field and sort out tracks and switches. In cases where the tracks were common

to the Muggle and Magical train lines, he might have to coordinate with and even Obliviate Muggle officials. All he needed was an E level N.E.W.T. in Charms and A or higher in Transfiguration and Muggle Studies.

This being the case, Ted spent most of his time during the last month and a half of school studying for those particular tests. As his mother had foreseen, he had slowly withdrawn from the family over the years until he rarely came home on Holidays. During the last Easter break, he claimed it was because he needed to study, and Mother agreed that it was so, but she wasn't fooled. She and Father missed Ted greatly, but life had rewarded them with grandchildren in the past few years. It was as if the magical and non-magical portions of the family had each gone their own ways.

Ted's favorite method of studying was to sit on the bank of the lake and practice the spells in his books. There wasn't much he could hurt out there and a great deal of imaginative props to use for his spells. He was practicing silent Summoning and Banishing Charms when he heard the noise of someone crying. It came from behind a nearby tree. He got up and walked over to see Andromeda Black sitting there with a letter in one hand and a handkerchief in another.

He had never quite gotten over the enchantment of the first witch who caught his eye. Today she was in pale gray robes and her hair was in a tangle all around her. He walked over and sat near her.

"Did you get bad news?"

She shook her head. "It's just my sister."

"Is she hurt?"

"I don't know how to describe it. She's just gotten married."

"Isn't that good? She's in love and she's going to have her own family. My brother and sister are both married and have kids..." He trailed off when he saw this wasn't good news to the witch in front of him.

Andromeda looked up at him for the first time. "You're a Mudblood, aren't you? In our family, we have to marry whomever is approved for us to marry."

"Oh."

"My sister is now married to this great brute of a man. When she wasn't very interested in the engagement, our parents let him take her away for a weekend. When she got back, she didn't have a choice if she wanted keep her place in society. So she went through with the wedding last week, and now she says she can't wait until I get married and we can be miserable together."

"Why didn't you go to the wedding?"

"It was hardly something my sister wanted to celebrate."

"Maybe you will fall in love and marry someone you can be happy with."

She sighed. "What do they call you? Tonks?"

"You can call me Ted, or Teddy if you like." He handed her his dry handkerchief.

She took it and wiped her eyes and then peered up at him. "Why are you smiling?"

"Because you're the prettiest witch I've ever spoken with."

She couldn't stop the laugh that burst forth. It was the oddest comment she'd ever heard, and certainly the strangest compliment she could imagine receiving. His face shone in response, as if she had given him a prize in that laugh. She shook her head.

"There's nothing you can do for me, Tonks. We pure-bloods do things differently. I have to marry the wizard my parents choose. It doesn't matter if I like him or not, just how pure the family lines are on both sides. You should have figured it out by now."

He could see why something like that would be difficult to live with. He wondered if he could distract her from her troubles, at least. "It's dinner time. May I see you to the Great Hall?"

She sighed, a bit exasperated. "Look, Mudblood, I can't be seen with you. You go your way, and I'll go mine. Just get away from me."

He looked at her, confused.

"Go!" She made shooing gestures.

He went back to where his books were piled and picked them up. After all this time, she actually talked to him today, and it was more than, "Please pass the flobberworms." Maybe next time... Who was he fooling? Perhaps someday he would have a pretty witch in a home of his own, but the Black family would never allow their daughter to be that witch, and she would never leave them. The hurdle of getting her to actually notice him was even higher.

"Hey, Ted, wait up!"

He turned and groaned. A short witch was walking toward him as quickly as her rather short legs would carry her. She had somehow managed to become portly although she had to climb up and down the same stairs as the rest of them. Ted was not particularly tall, but this witch came only to his nose.

"What is it, Dolores?"

"I was just wondering... I hear you're going to work at the Ministry. What section?"

For one of the few times in his life, Ted wished he had some skill at lying. "I'll be in Transportation, pending my N.E.W.T.s, of course."

She simpered. "I'm going into administrative management. Maybe we'll work in the same office! Wouldn't that be wonderful?"

"Um, yeah, sure, Dolores." Ted wondered if there were any way to get rid of her before they got to the castle.

"I can't wait to be done with school and working at the Ministry." On her face, a dreamy look was pretty creepy. She looked like the man on the moon, and didn't carry it off. "I bet we'll see each other all the time, Ted, just like we do now."

"Oh, well, maybe." It was hardly the stuff of brilliant conversation, but Ted refused to encourage her. Apparently she saw those four syllables as encouragement, because she took his arm and the dreamy look became... meaningful... if that was the right word. Ted resigned himself to walking with her, but drew the line at sitting next to her at the table. He'd never developed a knack for extricating himself from such situations. It was pretty rare that a witch attached herself to him with the tenacity of bubblegum on the bottom of one's shoe on a hot summer day. He wasn't the sort of boy to attract witches.

Ted racked his brain for a way to slip away without giving offense. Dolores, for reasons no one in the student body understood, was a prefect. When she took offense, she was also known for taking a pound of flesh by the most painful means possible. Dealing with her took the utmost diplomacy.

He looked over at the dark-haired witch who was also making her way toward the building. The wind was blowing through the curls around her head. He wished he could find an excuse that would let him talk to her again. She noticed his glance and gave him a withering glare. He appreciated her attention and smiled.

Andromeda wanted to stamp her foot. There was no way to shut this boy down! He even acted as though her anger was a gift to him. How did one cope with such attention? She decided she would have to avoid his notice and not notice him, if at all possible.

Dolores watched the exchange with narrowed eyes. Ted Tonks belonged to her! If Black wanted the Mudblood, she should have sorted to Hufflepuff, too. One way or another she would manage to get his attention and his heart, too. An idea occurred to her. If not his heart, then his gratitude, and if not his gratitude, a little extortion might work.

A few days later, Dolores ran, if one could call it that, down to the spot by the lake where Ted Tonks was again practicing for his N.E.W.T.s. Black was nowhere in the vicinity. Perhaps she wasn't a problem, after all. Dolores had watched very carefully over the past day and a half. Tonks occasionally looked over at the Slytherin table during meals, but no one at Slytherin ever looked back.

When Dolores got close enough to see that Tonks was practicing silent Summoning skills, she spoke to get his attention. "Hey, Ted!"

He immediately stopped what he was doing and stood respectfully. "Good morning, Dolores. Is there anything I can do for you?"

She simpered in delight. "Oh, Ted, I'm sure I can think of some things. I just wanted to give you a gift." She handed him a large, sealed envelope.

"What is this?"

"It's the Transfiguration N.E.W.T., complete with answers. Now you can study better."

Ted was aghast. "I can't take this! It's cheating!"

"You won't get caught, Ted, and I thought, since we were *special* friends..."

"Dolores, I can't be your special friend. I'm just not interested that way. I'm not interested in anyone right now." At least not anyone who would be interested back.

The young witch scoffed. "Ha! You have that envelope now, Tonks. You had better think about that means. I'm a prefect, you know, and I'm charged with helping to maintain the school's standards. I think that in a day or two you will see things differently."

He looked pained but didn't respond. She saw that she had made her point. An excessively pink fingernail reached up to caress the line of his clenched jaw. "We can be very good friends... *Teddy*. Just wait. You'll see."

She looked and saw the glower in his eye and decided not to press her point too hard. She smiled one last time and flounced back up to the castle. Ted Tonks, who usually had a kind word for those who came past him, glared at her until she went over the rise of the hill and he no longer saw her.

Ted now had a problem. He had no intention of breaking the seal of that envelope, but just the fact that it was in a pile with his books and class notes was damning. He didn't want to be in bondage to Dolores, but he didn't want to get in trouble. In just a few short months, he planned to be living his adult life, doing something that would matter more than endless changing of rocks to hedgehogs or Summoning bricks from one side of the classroom to the other. Something like this could ruin that forever.

Ted puzzled it out all through the morning as he practiced the blocks he needed for his Defense Against the Dark Arts N.E.W.T. He had not intended to take it, but his House Head, Professor Morgan, insisted that most of the Wizarding population would need these skills, especially those with a future at the Ministry. He wished it were as easy to block Dolores's machinations. It never worked. Whenever he looked, there she was, smiling at him as though they shared a delicious joke. After lunch he went to the library to study for the written portion of his exams, hoping he could avoid her just long enough to figure out what to do.

Late in the afternoon, Ted found that he was alone in the library. He could hear that one or two other students were present, but he couldn't see them. He was just aware of the scratch of quill on parchment or the sound of pages flipping. He couldn't see the student who seemed to be stalking him, and he doubted that she was one of those studying. This would give him a chance to think without her breathing down his neck.

If he went along with her just enough to get out of this jam, Dolores would no doubt figure out a way to tie him up again, and again, until he didn't recognize his own principles and until she had tied him up for life. If he did nothing, she would stage some sort of event that would lead to the "discovery" of the illicit material in his possession. Either way, his life would be ruined by that cow. A third option needed to come to mind.

Just as Ted's head was starting to ache, the library doors opened and Professors McGonagall and Morgan came in laughing together. They headed to the Restricted Section. Ted realized the answer lay in calling the cow's bluff. He almost laughed himself.

During lunch the next day, Dolores was eating her lunch and enjoying her plan. Ted was looking pretty worried, and she knew that she would have him. There was no way he would allow his future with the Ministry to be ruined. She smiled in delight.

Lunch was drawing to a close, and the professors were making their way out. As she walked to the door, the Deputy Headmistress stopped by the Hufflepuff table. "I wonder if I might have a word with you, Miss Umbridge."

Dolores nodded her assent and skipped behind Professor McGonagall. It was probably about her prefect duties. There was always some troublesome spot in the castle that needed a little extra attention. She pulled up short when the Transfiguration teacher led her into her classroom and she also saw her House Head leaning against a window.

"Good afternoon, Miss Umbridge. Why don't you have a seat?" said Professor Morgan.

After she was seated, Dolores saw the envelope in McGonagall's hand and went white.

"I was given this by another student and it traced back to you," the teacher said.

"I'm not sure what it is," said Dolores.

"You know very well that it's the Transfiguration N.E.W.T.," answered the teacher.

"That sneaking Tonks! He'll do anything to discredit me!" Her voice rose an octave as both teachers shook their heads.

"Actually, we couldn't get Mr. Tonks to tell us who put the envelope in his hands. There are other ways to discover what happened. We've become accustomed to students not wanting to actually work for their good marks," said McGonagall acerbically.

Dolores's next gambit was to smile brightly. "Oh, yes, of course! I found it and showed it to Ted. He told me he would take care of it."

McGonagall smiled grimly. "Somehow I knew that was the story that would eventually come out. Very well, Dolores. We'll call this a fortunate retrieval of the document in question. However, in the future, if you should come upon any testing materials that should not be at large, I would appreciate your bringing them directly to one of the Professors. Is that understood?"

"Of course, Professor."

"William? Do you have anything to add?"

"Just that I'm grateful that no real damage was done. I'm pleased that Hufflepuff House's reputation for honesty is being maintained." Professor Morgan's tone of voice indicated that he knew exactly how honest the Hufflepuff standing before him really was.

The student in question somehow missed the insinuation and skipped off to her common room. Minerva sighed and sat down at her desk. William conjured a chair nearby for himself.

"I don't understand how Albus could select her as a prefect," he said.

"His choices are a bit odd from time to time."

"Has he been distracted by the other project he's working on?"

"It is taking a toll, but I don't think it's distracting him from things here at Hogwarts. He always felt the school was at the center of that struggle."

"Then what could he have been thinking?"

"Perhaps he feels it's better to put the girl in a position where he can keep a closer eye on her? If she's working with the teachers as part of her prefect duties, she's more in our line of vision."

"Is it working?"

"Who can tell? I do know the same strategy did nothing in a similar case thirty years ago when Armando Dippet was Headmaster. Or...terrifying thought...perhaps it did help."

Thank you, Trickie Woo, for beta reading!

Removing the Gorgon's Head

Chapter 3 of 19

Ted inadvertently uncovers and foils a plot.

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Perseus, favoured by Minerva and Mercury, the former of whom lent him her shield and the latter his winged shoes, approached Medusa while she slept and taking care not to look directly at her, but guided by her image reflected in the bright shield which he bore, he cut off her head and gave it to Minerva, who fixed it in the middle of her Aegis. Bullfinch's Mythology, Book XV.

Ted didn't expect working for the Ministry to be a world of excitement. He was not expecting an adventure every day. He was therefore not disappointed when the job turned out to be mostly drudgery. After a month of training, the wizard he replaced retired and Ted was adrift in an ocean of passing reports and memos along to other offices, Wizard and Muggle. There were lists of late trains, weekly summaries of misplaced luggage, and a register of every train journey. Then there were memos on proposed additions or deletions from the schedule and recommendations of new rail lines to be built.

Occasionally, there was a missed switch or a flaw in a rail. Ted then went into the field where he would find the defective spot in the line and repair it with specific spells. It was rarely difficult, and he could usually extend his time out of the office with lunch or at least coffee. He made the most of such moments because, once he returned to the Ministry, there would be an inevitable report to write about the repair work and it would need to be included in several of the weekly and monthly reports.

There were days when his job was mind-numbing and the thought of doing the same thing, day after day, for perhaps seventy or eighty years, was physically painful. Ted couldn't stand the thought of that. When he took a minute and thought of such a career as the means to start a family of his own, with his own home, a nice witch to share his life with, and perhaps some children, the job seemed like a dream come true. The struggle at hand was to find the witch.

He knew several nice witches. Some of them were attractive and others were capable. A few were both. He knew that there were witches who were interested and that at any time he wished he could start dating. Some mornings, he even decided that there was one or another from the secretarial pool that he would ask out that day. Then he would take a certain handkerchief out of the Ollivanders box that had once held his wand.

He would hold it to his face and smell it. Of course it smelled of the Hogwarts laundry. It had been put into the laundry by the person who borrowed it. The house-elves had taken it and washed it as they did all the student clothes. Since it was his it came back to him. Still, it once had been in her possession and had once soaked up her tears. It was a sacred item to him, and when he took it out, he couldn't think of the girls at work. None of them could be to him what the unattainable witch had become.

Within a month of starting to work for the Ministry, Theodore Tonks was asked to become part of a special team of Ministry employees. When he arrived for the first meeting, he discovered that the group was expected to be a committee to foster better relations between Muggles and wizards from a grass-roots standpoint. He almost wasn't surprised to see that Dolores Umbridge was sitting across the table from him. He thought, not for the first time, that she looked a bit like a toad watching a fly whenever she looked at him. It was not a particularly comfortable sensation.

The wizard at the head of the table was the Minister himself, Cornelius Fudge. He called the meeting to order and explained what the committee would be doing. "I'm sure you all want to know why we've formed this committee when there's a whole department assigned to this, but it was the idea of Dolores, here." The Minister nodded in her direction. "She thought it might be good to have members of various departments give some input to the Department of Magical and Non-magical Cooperation."

Here Dolores cleared her throat. The Minister gave her the floor. She smiled brightly around the table and especially at Ted. "My idea was to start by interviewing members of the Magical community who are either mu...that is Muggle-born, or the product of one Muggle and one wizard or witch. I think we should find out how magic comes into their lives and how they cope with it. Then we should be able to assess how to best assist such families in the future."

Ted looked at her warily. There was always a hidden meaning in Dolores's words, and he didn't doubt that there was today, too, but he let it go for the time being. She was handing out assignments. There was a questionnaire for each of the people in the committee to fill out; then there was a list of wizards and witches to interview. Everyone

groaned at the size of the booklet before they all headed either back to work or to the Atrium because they were done for the day.

Ted took the booklet back to his flat and started filling it out while eating his take-out dinner. He filled in his name, address, and place of employment and then started to read the next few questions. There was quite a bit concerning how many relatives a magical person had. There were spaces for parents, grandparents and great-grandparents, with directions to attach additional parchment at the back if necessary. Ted didn't see that it was the Ministry's business, but he filled it out in the interest of improving Magical-Muggle relations.

The next set of questions roused his concern. They asked how the families were informed of magical ability. Fair enough. Then they asked as a sub-question whether Muggle-born children had exhibited any magical ability before being notified. Again, this question wasn't so bad. The next question asked how the magical wand was obtained and whether it was stolen from a pure blood wizard or witch. Ted found this question insulting and put the questionnaire away, intending to ask Dolores about it the next morning.

There was a serious situation requiring several Transportation employees just outside London the next day. Nearly Ted's entire office was sent to sort out the mess in which a magical train had somehow attached itself to a Muggle one. "Splinch" was the only word Ted could use to properly describe it. It took all morning, but eventually the trains were separated, the rail lines fixed, and about a hundred Muggles were Obliviated. The reports filed on the situation took all afternoon, and before Ted knew it, he was on his way to the Atrium without having looked at Dolores's questionnaire.

One day a week, Ted Tonks usually ate at a fish and chips place on a corner of Diagon Alley. It was quick and gave him the feeling that he was still connected with the world at large. Since it was summer, he sat at a patio seat and occasionally exchanged a smile or wave with people he knew as they passed him by. After the day he had, it seemed like this would be a good evening for his weekly treat.

After getting settled, Ted opened up the questionnaire again. He decided to skip over the wand question. Perhaps there was a rash of wand larceny he didn't know about. "Who really performs the magic you claim to do?" was the next question. Ted stood up and pulled out his wand, pointing it at the table as he glared at the questionnaire. Really, this was insulting. The hidden meaning behind the comments at the meeting started to come into focus. He would tell Dolores that he couldn't be part of this committee. Not only could he not answer these questions, but he was sure that he couldn't ask them of other witches and wizards.

"Problem, Tonks?"

Ted turned around and saw his old prefect, Kingsley Shacklebolt standing near him. He had seen Kingsley around the Ministry a few times. As he recalled, Shacklebolt had become an Auror when he finished at Hogwarts.

"It's this survey that Dolores Umbridge wants some of us to do. It's insulting to those of us with less-pure blood." He handed over the offensive booklet and sat back down. Kingsley joined him at the table and read the first several pages of questions.

"Who knows about this survey?" asked the Auror.

"I guess those of us on the committee, plus the Minister."

"The Minister knows about this?"

"He was there when we were given our assignments."

The older wizard thought for a minute. "Do you mind if I take this to show someone? It's offensive in and of itself, but when taken in the light of certain things, it's pretty bad."

Ted shrugged. "I will probably need to give it back at some point, but please, if you think it will help, show it to the other person."

"Albus Dumbledore, you interfering old dog!" screamed the Minister of Magic.

"Cornelius, you should know better," answered the taller wizard affably. "I warned you about Miss Umbridge, and this is what comes of it."

"The questions are valid," Fudge maintained.

"As asked?" rejoined Dumbledore.

The response was a sigh. "No, I suppose not."

"Don't you see, Cornelius, that this questionnaire will be used to create a second and third class amongst the Wizarding citizenry? I know it exists to some extent already, but this will codify it, and if the danger we suspect is coming does actually come..." he allowed the rest of the sentence to say itself.

The Minister of Magic understood fully what wasn't said. "Why did you ever have to tell that boy about Hogwarts in the first place, Albus?"

"It was his birthright, Cornelius, just as it is of every magical child, regardless of his or her heritage."

"I'm not sure I agree. Had there been a line drawn such that Half-blood wizards were not allowed, then none of this might have happened."

"Perhaps it would have been worse, if he had developed his magic on his own."

Cornelius sat back in his leather chair and thought about it. "Very well, we'll scrap the committee."

"Now you're making sense, Cornelius. If you want my advice, you'll remove Dolores Umbridge from the Ministry, too. Her type tends to find ways to cause trouble. She nearly got another student expelled this past spring through her machinations."

"Was the student expelled?"

"No, Minerva and William saw through what she was doing."

"I trust that I'll be able to see whatever she can do around here, too."

"I'll leave it up to you, then, Cornelius." The Headmaster stood and made his way to the door.

"Thank you, Albus. As always, this has been an enjoyable chat."

Cornelius Fudge waited until the steps down the hallway faded and then went over to peak out his door. When he saw that the other wizard was indeed gone, he shut his door and cast a Stunning Spell at the potted plant in the corner. The pot broke in several large pieces, and the Minister then had to cast a Repairing Spell. He told himself, as he did almost every day, that Albus Dumbledore might run things at Hogwarts, but he could keep his elegant fingers off the Ministry.

Ted didn't hear about the questionnaire again, nor the committee, and truthfully he didn't miss it. He did hear that Dolores Umbridge had been reassigned to the secretarial pool and sighed a breath of relief that he wouldn't see quite so much of her. He did see Kingsley Shacklebolt quite a bit, and one week when eating his fish and chips, he found that the Prewitt brothers were there ahead of him.

During the first week of August, he was met by Kingsley, Fabian, and Gideon. This seemed a bit suspicious to him. He wondered if they had been watching him. Thinking back, maybe they had been sizing him up.

"Is there something I can do for you?" he asked. "I'm starting to feel as though you've been following me around."

Fabian laughed. "It's no wonder, since we've been following you around."

"Well, there's been a bit of looking after, too, but that has mostly been Kingsley, here," added Gideon.

"It was no big deal," answered that wizard. "Just the foolish attempt of a jealous witch. Anyone would have caught it."

"Anyone would have caught what?" asked Ted.

"Dolores Umbridge tried to get you fired by telling Anderson that you cheated on your Transfiguration N.E.W.T. He asked me about it and I suggested he contact the school. McGonagall put him straight."

Ted let out a breath he didn't realize he was holding. "That was the worst two days of my life. What is it with that witch, or witches in general?"

Gideon slapped him on the shoulder. "If we knew the answer to that, we'd be happily married men, ourselves."

Fabian tapped his watch. "Not to rush or anything, but we need to rush."

"Right, indeed."

"What's going on?"

"Tonks, can you keep a secret?"

"Yes, I suppose I can."

"Brilliant! You're coming with us."

Seconds later, Tonks found himself in a dingy basement sort of room. The four that had been sitting at a patio restaurant were now joined by the Headmaster of Hogwarts, and a rather frightening-looking man. Dumbledore looked the way he always did, but the other man looked as though he had come off badly in a wrestling match with a Hippogriff.

Kingsley made the introduction. "Alastor Moody, this is Theodore Tonks. Ted is the one who discovered that survey and showed it to me. Ted, Auror Moody is the head of my section and a Master Auror."

"I'm always glad to meet a youngster who knows how to keep 'is eyes open."

Ted objected. "I just didn't like it, and showed it to Kingsley when he asked."

"Ye showed good judgment in doin' so," answered Moody. "Can't have too much vigilance."

After they were all seated, Dumbledore looked through his glasses and began. "Ted, I won't sugar coat this, nor will I make it worse than I think it is..." He proceeded to describe a wizard of great power who was starting to prey upon the Wizarding world. He had started with the pure blood wizards and witches, telling them that anyone having Muggle blood was considered a problem.

Dumbledore wasn't sure, yet, what this other wizard's plans were, but he thought that there was a plan to overthrow the Ministry and perhaps to overthrow Muggle forms of governance as well. He held up the survey Ted had nearly Blasted at the restaurant and explained that it might have been used to find out the blood status of all the wizards and witches in England. Using that information, the group that was starting to be called Death Eaters would know whom to target.

"We cannot allow that to happen, Ted, and so I have put together a small band of people who keep their eyes open for possible problems caused by that wizard and his followers. You kept your eyes open for a possible problem and now it has been made to go away. Do you think you could continue to do just what you did in that case and report to me from time to time?"

"Who is this wizard?"

"Long ago he had a real name, but now he prefers to use the term Lord Voldemort."

Ted tried to think about what it all meant. It was a frightening tale. All of the pleasant dreams he had for his future seemed to hang in the balance. It seemed horrible to think that the Wizarding population, which he had found to be generally kind and good natured, could divide into two groups that could fight each other. He looked up and noticed that the other wizard was still studying him intently.

"Did I do something wrong?" Ted looked worriedly at the Headmaster, who looked at the other older wizard.

"Alastor, is something the matter?"

"Do ye see the way his eyes shift color from time to time, and sometimes his nose seems a bit longer? I think he has certain skills, Albus. He should be trained."

The Headmaster looked at Ted intently. "Yes, I see what you mean. I don't think the ability is strong, but it could be useful."

"I can have Tanner train 'im."

"That might be a good idea, but perhaps we're putting the carriage before the Thestral."

"So, boy, will ye be joinin' us? There's plenty of work to go around."

Ted looked up and said, "I'm no one special. I didn't know what I was looking at when that questionnaire was handed to me. However, if you think I can truly be helpful, I will do it."

A/N: Thank you to Trickie Woo for beta reading, to Writermerrin for her help and kind support, and to Apisa_b who I hear is promoting this story. You ladies are wonderful!

The Tribulations of the Maiden

Chapter 4 of 19

...When her sister said that he wanted her for his organization, she only felt a shudder caused by an oppressive premonition. It was as though chains were slowly snaking around her body, chains that would hold her fast to a danger just outside of her senses...

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

A note on the Black Family Tree: Walburga is the older sister of Cygnus. She married her second cousin, Orion, and they are Sirius and Regulus's parents. Cygnus and the former Druella Rosier are the parents of Bellatrix, Andromeda, and Narcissa.

Perseus, continuing his flight, arrived at the country of the Æthiopians, of which Cephus was king. Cassiopeia his queen, proud of her beauty, had dared to compare herself to the Sea-Nymphs, which roused their indignation to such a degree that they sent a prodigious sea-monster to ravage the coast. To appease the deities, Cepheus was directed by the oracle to expose his daughter Andromeda to be devoured by the monster. Bulfinch's Mythology, Book XV.

Many who knew of the Black family thought that the three daughters of Cygnus and Druella had a charmed life. There was no question of their pure-blood status. They were supported by a series of trust funds, of which only the goblins at Gringott's knew the full extent. Their family was sought after in Wizarding social gatherings both in England and on the Continent.

Such a family with three such fortunate daughters had only one problem. They were required, by a tradition that exceeded the force of any law, to make good pure-blood marriages. It was an unfortunate fact of the girls' lives that their greatest value lay in the pure-blood children they were expected to produce.

Andromeda Black's best consolation came from being the second daughter. Most of the pressure was on Bellatrix to marry well and produce heirs for her family and that of her husband. Once Trixie took care of that business, Andie would be given some leeway in choosing her own husband... from the proper social group, of course.

The initial plan went off without a hitch. Cygnus and Druella negotiated a brilliant contract with the Lestrangle family. Bellatrix was a bit put off by the coarse manners of her fiancé and his family. A weekend spent in their home convinced the young witch that her best option lay in proceeding with the marriage. A girl should have had recourse through her mother in such a situation, but the former Druella Rosier had been convinced to marry Cygnus through similar means. She didn't see any reason for her daughter to be afforded comforts she herself had to do without.

The wedding was performed quietly with simply the principals and their parents. The sisters of the bride stayed at their school when it took place. The brother of the groom was away on other business. It was written up in the Daily Prophet as though it were the social event of the year. The photograph showed a happy groom and beautiful bride. If the bride's face looked a bit stunned, and the groom appeared overly possessive, most readers wouldn't notice it on the first glance, and they wouldn't bother to look at it a second time.

After the brilliant marriage was accomplished, the next task was to produce an equally brilliant wizard or witch of the next generation. For Druella Black, the task had been blessedly easy. She was never sure when, exactly, Bellatrix had been conceived, but it happened essentially at the same time as her wedding. The two further attempts for a son went quickly as well. Neither ended as they had hoped, but three beautiful and magically talented girls was not a bad product for a marriage. They were well positioned to be of use to the Black family due to their potential use in other families.

With the oldest daughter married well, the family could look at its options for the second. There were a few families whose blood was not quite up to the same standard, but the young man in question had financial resources or political power. The addition of a Black to their family trees would be worth quite a bit to such families. Then there were a few distant cousins with sons who were Squibs or near to it. A witch such as Andromeda might be just the stimulation those parts of the family needed.

Therefore, once Bellatrix was married to Rudolphus Lestrangle, the entire family held its collective breath, waiting for news of the first child. It didn't come. Spring passed into Summer and was followed all too quickly by the rest of the year. Both families started hissing whispers of perfidy at each other, and a stray comment made its way into the newspapers. The last straw was an expose in the *Quibbler* that stated certain pure-blood families were doomed to become Muggles because of a scientific discovery indicating that magic only stayed in a family for twenty-five generations. Xenon Lovegood didn't mention the Blacks specifically, but he didn't need to. The situation was well known by anyone who traveled in certain circles.

Cygnus had his sister and brother-in-law over to discuss the matter. Walburga clucked and crowed. "The girl should be made to do her duty to this family. If our forefathers could see her..."

Cygnus glowered. "It's not as though she's actively preventing pregnancy. Meanwhile, what do you suppose our forefathers would say about your son's sorting, dear sister?"

Orion pounded the table. "It wasn't his fault! Dumbledore did something to that hat. Regulus sorted properly, after all."

As the parents argued in the dining room, the children listened from the drawing room. "What will you do, Trixie?" asked Andie.

"They brought a healer from St. Mungo's. He said I can't have children. He told us that I was cursed."

"Cursed? Who would curse you?" Andie's eyes were wide.

Walburga's voice broke in on the girls' whispers. "Alphard? That good for nothing blood traitor did this?"

Her brother's voice answered quietly. "It's not just the girls. When they said it was a curse, I went to him myself and he smiled. During an argument with Father about blood politics, Alphard cursed both of us, Walburga. He said neither of us would live to see our grandchildren."

"I'll kill him!" she shrieked in response.

"No children?" asked Cissy. "How can he do that?"

"Not exactly," said Andie. "If Father is quoting Uncle Alphard exactly, he said that Father and Aunt Walburga wouldn't live to see their grandchildren. That's a bit different."

"So we're supposed to wait until they're dead?" asked Cissy.

"Cissy, it's not as though you're planning to have children right now, are you?" laughed Andie. "You're barely sixteen."

"Well, no," she said quietly. She did, however, know whom she hoped to marry. She was fairly certain his family wouldn't allow him to marry her once the curse was known. She sighed. "What do we do?"

"Killing Father is definitely an option," said Trixie with an evil grin. "We might have to kill our dear Auntie, too. That wouldn't be such a terrible thing, would it?"

Seeing that Cissy was all too interested in something Trixie couldn't possibly mean, Andie spoke up. "Of course you won't actually do that, Trixie. You might get children,

but you'd also get Azkaban."

"I suppose," she answered, "but you've no idea how closely the two situations compare right now."

A week or two after the curse was discovered and discussed within the family, Trixie came to visit Andie. "It's all sorted out," she announced.

She bounced across the couch to sit by her sister. "Did they remove the curse?"

"No, I still can't have any kids, but the Lestranges think it's possible that you can."

"That doesn't make any sense, if the curse worked so well on you. It doesn't make any real difference for you, though, does it?" Andie sounded more confident than she felt. Trixie's smile was anything but comforting.

"They have a younger son, you know. Rabastan has said he finds you very...well, he meant he wouldn't mind taking you to bed."

Andie's face went completely white. "I'm supposed to provide an heir?"

Trixie smiled smugly. "Oh, you'd be married to him, of course. Mother and Father are due some consideration. However, the Lestranges consider that we owe them grandchildren, so if I can't provide them, you must."

"I...I can't."

"Of course you will, just like I tried to do. It's for the good of the family."

Andie decided not to think about it until their parents broached the subject, knowing she would think about it, anyway. She looked for a different subject. "What about you Trixie? What will you do, now?"

She watched her older sister's face. First it became dreamy, then happy, and something else was there that was beyond definition. Trixie sighed with pleasure and said, "I've met someone who says I can help the cause of pure-blood wizards and witches even if I can't have children."

"There's a cause about us? Why do we need a cause?"

Trixie's expression became matter of fact. "Of course, Andie. We're being overrun by the Mudbloods and the Half-bloods. But this man I met..."

"You're not doing anything...wrong...are you?"

"In answer to the question you're so delicately not asking, Rudolphus has been with me whenever we met this wonderful man. We were over at Uncle Orion and Aunt Walburga's the other night, and he had dinner with all of us. Aunt told him how very pretty, eligible, and talented you were, and he said that he couldn't wait to meet you. He thinks you'll be a wonderful addition to his organization."

What Trixie didn't say, because she didn't notice, was that the man had listened as Walburga had bragged about her family. He had looked at the house and admired the luxuries there, including the many items of dark magic. He had smiled and determined that he would see this family brought low, to the point where it almost worshiped him. Using their own conceits and prejudices, he would bring all the pure-blood families under his own control. Bellatrix Lestrange had only seen a very appealing and attractive man. This is the only thing she would see, until it no longer mattered what she saw in him.

Andie, not having seen the man nor felt the spell of his attention, didn't understand what her sister found so appealing. When her sister said that he wanted her for his organization, she only felt a shudder caused by an oppressive premonition. It was as though chains were slowly snaking around her body, chains that would hold her fast to a danger just outside of her senses.

Mother had come into the room, then, all smiles and happiness. She was especially fond of Andie just then, telling her what a grand thing she was to the family. She didn't mention Rabastan, or marriage, but when she went out of the room, Andie recalled that she was holding a parchment with the Lestrange family crest on it the whole time.

Andromeda spent much of the next several days pondering the situation. It wasn't as though she had many choices. Her education had fitted her for something, but she hadn't bothered to look into an actual career, and she didn't know the first thing about how to start. She didn't understand why the women of her set were stuck with finding an "appropriate" man, nor why the men of that set were such brutes.

A year before she had spent a quarter hour with one young man, a young man who wanted to listen to her worries, who wished to find a way to comfort her, and who offered her his handkerchief. He had called her pretty, something that never happened when either of her sisters was around, and he meant it. He had smiled at her, and she had known, with an absolute clarity that hit her in that moment, that had she indicated the slightest interest, he would have asked her out. Maybe he would have held her hand, or kissed her. There was something so manly about the kind and considerate way he behaved too. He wasn't obsequious like the fop that her little sister favored, yet even Lucius would be a major improvement over Rabastan Lestrange. Why couldn't any of the pure-blood wizards she knew be like Theodore Tonks?

She avoided her parents, hoping the issue wouldn't come up, but it wouldn't last forever. Trixie, when she stopped by, looked uplifted but a little strange. Cissy kept coming to her, clearly hoping she would do as their parents wanted because she had a brilliant future of her own lined up and wanted a chance to actually have that future.

Finally, the shoe dropped. Mother and Father summoned her into the study. One stormy half hour later, Andromeda walked out of the room, vowing that somehow she would find a way out of it. She stomped up to her bedroom, holding the tears in by sheer force of will. She looked around her room, trying to decide the best way out of her predicament. There wasn't one readily available. Deciding that at least she would get away from the house of her forebears for an hour or two, she grabbed a small purse and went down to the kitchen. From there she tossed Floo powder into the fireplace and left the house.

A/N: This story has been beta read by Trickie Woo. Thank you for reading! Let me know what you think!

The Maiden's Dilemma

Chapter 5 of 19

"Is there anything I can do to help?"

"Not unless you can get my sister pregnant."

As Perseus looked down from his aerial height he beheld the virgin chained to a rock, and waiting the approach of the serpent. She was so pale and motionless that if it had not been for her flowing tears and her hair that moved in the breeze, he would have taken her for a marble statue. Bullfinch's Mythology, Chapter XV.

Andromeda stepped out of the fireplace at the Leaky Cauldron and continued into Diagon Alley. She passed Madame Malkin's and watched a young witch being fitted with dress robes for her wedding. The other witch looked beautiful as she chatted happily with the other women with her. It was a Ravenclaw who had been out of Hogwarts for a few years. Andromeda sighed. It seemed, from what she was seeing, that the Ravenclaw was at least not unhappy with her situation. What would it be like next week when she was the bride in the window?

As she made her way further down the street, she saw families milling around together. The couples held hands and exchanged stolen kisses. The children ran along and danced around their parents. Could life with Rabastan Lestrangle ever be like that? If she couldn't have children, what would happen? Would she be expected to follow that man who had enthralled her older sister? She didn't like the sound of him and wasn't sure she ever could. She didn't want a life like the one that her sister had worked out. She wanted what the women she saw here had.

She eventually worked her way down to Florean Fortescue's and got a bowl of dark chocolate ice cream. She sat down in a dark corner and looked at the table. Somewhat mechanically, she scooped a little ice cream and brought it to her mouth. It was creamy and cool, which was a pleasant sensation on a summer day. The soothing sensation of the chocolate started to take effect after the third or fourth spoonful. She sat and quietly ate, confident that she was all but invisible. It surprised her, then, that someone came and stood by her table.

She saw the handkerchief he held out and asked herself why. That's when she realized that the tears she refused to allow in the presence of her parents or in her parents' house had finally started to flow. She had held them in all the way down the street, but for some reason, she felt comfortable enough in her corner of the ice cream parlor to cry. The second question was why he had to be the one to see her tears again. Why was this wizard the one to see her at her weak moments?

Ted hadn't been watching her, exactly. He had seen her wandering through the area and thought that there was something unhappy about her demeanor. He had kept an eye on her and followed at a distance. When he noticed the tears, he had to do something.

She mustered every ounce of sarcasm and contempt, although she took the square of cotton. "What do you want, Mudblood?"

"Who says I want anything?"

She let out a tired sigh. "Everyone wants something from me these days."

"Is there anything I can do to help?"

She snorted. "Not unless you can get my sister pregnant."

"I can't imagine you mean that the way it sounds."

"What?" She looked at him and comprehended what she said. "Oh! No, I guess not." Her face flamed red and then faded. She sat quietly, the scoop of ice cream slowly disappearing.

"Is it something you can talk about?"

She dabbed at her eye again. "I was supposed to be allowed to look around, to pick someone I might actually want. I was going to get my choice among several young wizards. Trixie got the brother who was half-way nice, but she can't have a baby. She was cursed by my uncle, and I probably was, too."

"What does any of that mean?"

She sighed. "That was all a bit of a jumble, I suppose. It's all about my sister. Her husband's family thinks she's worthless because she can't have a child."

"Her worth is measured by her children?"

"I tell you that you don't understand, Mudblood. Every pure-blood witch is measured by her pure-blood children."

"And you?"

"The same thing."

He crossed his arms and looked at her assessingly. "I could never measure you. Certainly not by that standard. I would count the number of smiles we share... or perhaps the sighs in our bedroom at night."

She went pink. He could see that he had embarrassed her, so he went back to the subject that distressed her. "So you're worried about your sister."

"Not just my sister. Her husband's family thinks I need to fulfill the portion of the contract that she cannot."

He felt nauseated. "Since your sister has been proven unable, now you're supposed to provide the grandchild. How is that supposed to happen?" He couldn't stand any of the thoughts running through his mind but some were far worse than others.

She understood, having had the same misgivings. "Oh, I'm supposed to marry the brother, but yes, they expect me to provide a grandchild since my sister cannot."

"And you don't want to marry the brother?"

She gave a delicate shudder. "No, but I have to. If I don't agree, then they'll do what they did with Bellatrix and make me stay at their house for a weekend. I'll be ruined."

"What will they do?"

"Not they, he, and I'd rather not go into it."

He digested this bit of information, but it didn't settle his stomach. "Is it better to simply agree to the marriage, then?"

"I'm not sure it makes a difference. I don't know what happens when I'm unable to have a child, because of the curse."

"What is this curse?"

She waved her hand and shook her head. "There isn't one, actually. It turns out that Uncle Alphard was yanking Father and Aunt Walburga's chain when he claimed that. Trixie just can't have kids, and if she can't maybe I can't either. Maybe whatever it is runs in families."

"You have more value than that. You're a beautiful and talented witch."

"All of a sudden Trixie thinks she does, too."

"See? She's coming around."

Andromeda fixed him with a distressed look. "No, it's this other wizard she met. I don't think it's right. He's filled her head with stories about how she can still help pure-blood witches and wizards. Somehow he expects her to help him rid the world of the Mudbloods and half-bloods. She's convinced that she will help him rule in glory when that happens."

"I've heard of a wizard like that. His name is Voldemort."

The spoon clattered into the bowl. The invisible chains she had felt when her sister mentioned him suddenly seemed to tighten. Chatter at nearby tables stopped as people looked and then turned back to their own business. "You know him?" she whispered.

"I know of him. There are some who don't want him to gain power."

"Trixie thinks that I should be a follower of his and help realize his plans."

"I hope you don't do that."

She shook her head. "Not that your opinion matters, but I don't think I can."

He let out the breath he didn't realize he was holding. She played with her napkin.

"Why don't you marry someone else, then, if you don't want to marry the Lestrangle brother?"

"There's no one else for me to marry."

It was one of those moments when a chance comes. Ted was an ordinary young man, but he knew when to take advantage of an opportunity. "I would marry you," he said quietly.

It hung between them for a moment as she opened and closed her mouth several times, searching for something to say. "That can't be a serious offer?"

"Why not?"

"You're a Mudblood."

"If I was not already aware of that fact, I would be made so by your use of that word at least three times so far in our conversation."

She squirmed at having it pointed out that she was rude. "Why should I have to get married, anyway?" she asked a bit peevishly. "Why can't I just stay single?"

He sat back in his chair and shrugged with a look of nonchalance that she suspected was feigned. "You're right; you shouldn't have to. Nevertheless, if it would get you out of this jam and if you would rather, we could marry in name only until you found the wizard you would rather be with, or until you found another solution to your problem." He made the mistake of looking up and she saw his face.

"Do you always have to smile at me like that?"

"Yes." He was quite emphatic on that point.

"Why on earth do you feel the need?"

"There's no need. It just does itself. You're the prettiest witch I've ever spoken with. I'm happy to be in your company."

"How can that be true? I didn't believe it when you said that a year ago. Surely you've met even prettier witches since then."

"Miss Black, I could speak to every witch in England, and I would still think you were the prettiest."

"I don't believe you." It was the first thing to come out of her mouth, but it didn't convey the shock she felt, nor the surprising warmth.

"I don't suppose there's any law or regulation that requires you to believe me."

She sighed and fidgeted. He watched her, wishing there was something he could do.

"It was an honest offer."

"What was?"

"Marriage, between you and me."

"You can't be serious."

"Why not?"

"Have you any idea what I would have to give up to marry someone like you? There's a tapestry in the house my Aunt and Uncle live in. It's the house she and my father grew up in. It lists everyone in the family and goes back not years, but centuries. There is no Muggle in the entire direct line. If I married a Mudblood, I would have to give up my parents, my sisters, and my place in this world. I would have to reconstruct my whole belief system and the way I was taught to think since I was born. I would cease to exist as I even know myself, and I would have to start everything completely over. You just don't know what it would be like."

He looked a little annoyed. "How can you be so sure? My family was perfectly normal, as far as we knew. Then Professor Morgan turned up. He told us that what we were trying to ignore was really happening. I was really a wizard, and there was a whole world that I belonged to, but my parents and family do not. I had to rearrange everything I knew in my mind, and then I had to leave my family at the age of eleven. Over the past eight years I've slowly been growing apart from my family. We still love each other, but I don't belong to their world anymore, and they don't belong to mine. My parents have my sister and brother and grandchildren, so maybe they don't miss me very much. I haven't seen them since my mother hugged me goodbye at King's Cross a year and a half ago."

"Oh. I didn't realize." She was embarrassed.

"If you wanted, I would marry you, and I would consider the loss of my family a small cost. I have a job that's not important, but it's enough. It's sufficient to get a cottage and support a witch and maybe some children if we had them. You could be that witch." His face went a little pink. "Actually, I want you to be that witch."

"Without love?"

"Who says it would be without love? I've been smitten by you since I first saw you over there in this shop, more than eight years ago. I've been interested ever since. I stole glances of you at school whenever I could. The day you spoke to me for those few minutes was my best day ever at Hogwarts. I'm more than a little in love with you now, and I'm sure I could fall utterly within hours." His face had been sweet but now it became intense as he leaned across the table. "I should apologize for this: I have dreamed of running my hands through your amazing hair, and of kissing you, and... It doesn't stop there. I long to do with you what any husband would do with his wife."

She went pink as her mouth opened and closed. Something in her tummy flipped completely over.

She considered his offer. Was it for real? She thought maybe it was. Could she trust him? Whatever her parents had always told her about Mudbloods, she sensed this Theodore Tonks was honorable and honest. He would do everything he said because he had some affection for her, but also because it appealed to his sense of what was right. He was absolutely a Hufflepuff. Could she be his wife? That thing in her tummy that was doing flip-flops said she could become his wife in every sense of the word. It would be better to leave that train of thought to the side for now. Was she willing to give up everything for the sake of escaping the horror of what would be otherwise?

Theodore watched the witch in front of him. It wasn't hard because he could look at her forever. He could tell she was thinking as she looked at him. He took off his glasses so she could get a good look. She frowned when she realized she had been caught staring and looked down. She continued to think and looked up again. He told himself that he saw the beginnings of a smile around the edges of her face when suddenly her eyes went wide. There was a look of panic followed by a look of dismay, and then she stood and slapped him... hard.

"How dare you, Mudblood! How dare you to sit down at my table and make such comments to me!"

Before Ted could do anything, he heard a high pitched shrieking laugh. "Good job, little sister. Put the filthy Muggle in his place." Bellatrix Lestrange dismissed Tonks with a turn of her head and a sniff. She took Andromeda's arm and started tugging. "Mother wants you to come home. There is much to discuss."

Ted stood as Andromeda passed him with a look of wistful sadness in her face. As he did, her free hand passed something wet to him, and she breathed out, "So sorry..." By the time he realized he was holding his handkerchief, the Black sisters were long gone.

He cleared the table and left the restaurant. Gideon Prewett was standing near the Quidditch shop, gazing at the brooms. He spoke without turning. "My sister has a little boy. Maybe he'll want one of these, soon." He looked at Ted. "Do you have any news?"

Tonks paused. Perhaps some of what he heard would be useful, but he didn't want to expose Andromeda and her troubles to the world at large. "I have heard that the Lestranges and part of the Black family have become friends with the wizard we're tracking."

"I'll pass that along. What are you doing this evening?"

"I'm working with Tanner."

"Keep it up, the ability to change one's appearance could be mighty useful sometime. Wish I could do it."

What he wanted to do was go to his flat and eat his dinner while thinking over everything that had been said between himself and Andromeda Black. He wanted to commit every word, every facial expression to his memory. Instead, he went to a secret meeting place to work on a skill he didn't realize he possessed until a couple of weeks ago. Perhaps there would be a way to use it for her. He took a deep breath as he walked down a side street. Those all-too-brief moments had been all that was needed to convert a strong fancy into a real passion. He would need to somehow push the feelings back into his heart and close them in until a time when they would be better used.

A/N: Did you find yourself talking to your computer monitor while reading this chapter? You're not alone if you did!

Thanks to Trickie Woo for beta reading!

The Approach of the Serpent

Chapter 6 of 19

"I wonder..." he began with a smile that was all charm and no warmth. "I have found ways to make myself useful to many of the people in your family. I wonder what I can help you obtain."

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Caution: There is some light non-consensual physical contact in this chapter.

Alighting on a rock which rose above the waves, and holding on by a projecting fragment, as the monster floated near he gave him a death stroke. Bulfinch's Mythology, Book XV.

Andromeda went unfeelingly through the next week, certain that it wouldn't matter what she did. She was right. It was a complicated multiple choice exam for which she had studied her whole life. Her mother and father made all of the plans and steered her through things that required her participation. The day of her fate was fixed a month away, and she saw no way to avoid it. Bellatrix moved back into her family home in order to assist Druella with preparing the bride for her wedding. The mother and older sister enjoyed the opportunity to do all the little things that must be done, but the middle sister went numb at the thought of it all.

As she had foreseen, Andromeda stood for a fitting at Madame Malkin's, looking beautiful but wanting to cry. As a child, she had imagined nothing less than a tall, dark, brooding prince who would sweep her off her feet. That was definitely not going to happen. Rabastan was a bit on the tall side, and brooding, but the prince in her dreams was brooding about the love he had for her. She wasn't sure what the dull wizard thought about, but she hoped it wasn't her.

Her mother and sister looked ready to cry over her. Druella did actually start to tear up, she was smiling so much. Trixie was tearing up because her wedding had been more rushed than this one, and she didn't get quite so nice a trousseau. More than crying, however, Trixie was smiling, because she got the nicer of the two brothers and she knew what Andie was about to suffer. Suddenly Andie started to tear up, herself. The best part of her life was already over, and she was barely nineteen years old.

Druella was in her element. She ran Andie up and down Diagon Alley. After the wedding clothes were ordered, there was the wedding stationery. Andie looked at every sample in the engraver's book and finally selected the one she sensed Mother wanted. She received a half hug for her effort and then it was off to the caterer.

She thought she would be sick eating just one bite of so many cakes. Then there were countless hors d'oeuvres and biscuits. Whenever she looked up to beg for mercy, Mother handed her a glass with a splash of some different wine. Finally, Andie answered all the questions correctly and was given a reprieve, although a dubious one. They went to register for gifts.

It didn't matter that she and her fiancé were expected to live with his parents at least until the first baby was born. Registering was something a girl in her position did, so she endured the discussion between the sales clerk, her sister and her mother about the relative merits of Wedgewood versus Limoges. That question being answered, there was then discussion about silver, crystal, and a host of other things that would spend the next twenty years in packing crates in an attic.

Then it was back to Madame Malkin's for a final fitting of the dress robes for the engagement party that night. Andromeda looked in the mirror at herself in the pale green silk that would be set off by some heirloom pearls. Her hair would be piled up on her head by a house-elf. The neckline of the gown was cut just above the limit considered proper. It fit snugly around her bust and waist and then flowed down to her ankles. She had to agree that she would look good. As she twisted around to see every angle, she happened to look through the shop window and saw *him* standing outside. He simply looked at her, and their eyes met. His face was full of an intense desire that caused her hand to flutter over her chest. She turned and looked in the mirror, listening as Madam Malkin fussed over her.

She asked to put another dress on from before, and was told to go ahead. She didn't dare look out the window, but she could see Ted Tonks in the mirror as he gazed at her in her wedding garment. It was then that she realized why she wanted to put it back on. She would never forget his eyes in that moment as long as she lived. Suddenly the prince of her dreams didn't brood at all. He was an ordinary fellow with sandy-colored hair, but when he looked at her, she could see the adoration in his face. Her life wouldn't be over if she could have something like that for the rest of it.

"Are you done, yet?" asked Trixie. "I need to get home and change. Rudolphus is going to meet me, and we want some time together."

"Yes, of course," answered Andie, shivering at the thought of what her sister would do during that time. "I just wanted to see what it was like, again. *I wanted to see what it was like if the right man admired me as a bride*, she thought. *Perhaps if I imagine it's him tonight, I can get through this horrible event.*

"Trixie, be nice," Mother was saying under her breath. "I'm glad Andromeda wants to enjoy this moment. I've worried that somehow she will ruin everything."

Throughout the entire evening, Andromeda imagined that the man she was going to marry was Theodore Tonks. It worked when she was dressing, to imagine those brown eyes encouraging her and making her feel strong. It worked when she greeted all of her parents' guests and received their congratulations to think of the way he smiled just because he thought she was pretty. It almost worked when Rabastan put a possessive hand alongside her face and settled it on the neck that was too exposed because her hair was pulled up onto her head. It worked all through dinner and all through the speeches. She even managed it when her fiancé stood beside her and put some Lestrangle family heirloom on her finger.

It worked until a late arrival came up to her in the drawing room after dinner. "My congratulations to the future bride. Miss Black, you are as charming as your sister, and I shall enjoy your friendship as much as hers." She couldn't understand how he made that greeting sound so sibilant, but it went down her back like a reptile. Despite that feeling, she was shocked to realize that she was also quite drawn to this man, who was as old as her parents but still somehow extremely attractive.

"I wonder..." he began with a smile that was all charm and no warmth. "I have found ways to make myself useful to many of the people in your family. I wonder what I can help you obtain." He looked from Rabastan to Andromeda. "Perhaps a bridegroom more to your liking?" All at once, unbidden, she pictured Ted Tonks as she had seen him through the window at Madame Malkin's. She had a suspicion that he did, too. "A Mudblood? Surely there's someone else? Someone more worthy of your family's stature?" The chains she had felt for weeks now clanked in her mind as she lost her composure. Suddenly she realized that she was the guest of honor at a party to celebrate a fate she didn't want.

She wasn't sure how she got away from him and could only hope that she had been gracious in doing so. As she made her way to the bathroom, she passed Narcissa, who was glowing on a love seat next to Lucius Malfoy. "I tell you, this wizard knows more dark curses than anyone I know, and he's only going into third year..." he was saying. Cousin Regulus happily nodded at every word.

She passed Mother, who was standing near Father, Aunt Walburga and Uncle Orion. "Andie's a good girl. She and Regulus will restore order to the family," came out in a whisper. It didn't really matter who was saying it to whom. They all agreed with that conclusion and were breathing a collective sigh of relief.

She went into the bathroom and splashed water on her face. After carefully blotting herself dry with a towel, she went and sat on the staircase, where she took deep breaths for several moments. It was hardly a dignified position to be in, but she needed a minute to think about a few things. What had Rabastan hissed in her ear before introducing her to that man, anyway? Were such things even possible? She hoped not from the sound of it.

The new question on her mind was why, if both wizards wanted essentially the same thing, did Ted Tonks's look of desire make her belly go all hot while Lestrangle's look made her go cold with revulsion? Maybe Rabastan just made those comments as a way to retaliate. She had leaned away when he tried to kiss her after the toasts at dinner. She should apologize for embarrassing him.

"Hiya, Andie." She looked up and saw her cousin Sirius in the hallway. He and his brother had come back from Hogwarts that afternoon with Narcissa. The school year had ended in time for them to come to this party.

She smiled. "Hi, Sirius, what are you doing out here?"

"Oh, the grownups are too stiff, so I'm just hanging out. Do you like these parties?"

"It's what's expected of me. There's this one and then one next week at the Lestrangle estate. What are you doing out here?"

"I'm trying to figure out how to get in touch with my friend James."

"Is his family here?"

"Are you kidding? Our parents consider his parents to be blood traitors."

"Oh." She thought for a moment. "Are they?"

"I guess so. James is, anyway. He's dead gone over a cute Muggle-born girl."

"If you think she's cute, why aren't you interested? Is it because she's a Muggle-born witch?"

He scoffed. "As if that was a good reason not to date someone."

Andromeda was curious. "It's not? Would you marry one?"

"If I loved her I would."

"But what about the children?"

"It's the 1970's, Andie. No one cares about that stuff any more."

"Our parents do. They act like Trixie is practically a Squib."

He gave her a disappointed frown, and they were quiet for a minute or two.

"So if it doesn't matter that she's a Muggle-born, why don't you chat up the cute witch?"

"James saw her first and he's my mate. Besides, I like to play the field."

Andromeda crossed her arms and looked sideways at the young wizard in front of her. "At your age, just how much 'field' do you play?"

"Aw, come on, Andie, you know how it is, or do they do things differently in Slytherin?"

"Perhaps I don't want to know."

He shrugged. Older girls had strange ideas, sometimes. "Are you really going to marry that guy?"

"I'm officially engaged, now."

"I'm sorry to hear that. I thought you were different."

She sighed and nodded her head. "I thought I was different, too. It never comes out the way you expect, I guess. Look at Trixie."

He scoffed. "I'd rather not. She's gotten pretty strange, hasn't she?" He barked out a laugh at his own pun.

Andie was glad for a reason to giggle. "Oh, Sirius, be nice. It's been a difficult year for her."

Rabastan came and claimed her at that point, so she went back to the party and smiled at the guests. She said the correct things at the right times in the conversation and shook hands all around. She couldn't get away from the feeling of the one man. Whenever she turned he was looking at her. She felt a sort of desire emanating from him, but it was nothing physical. That man wanted nothing to do with her body, yet everything to do with her soul.

Theodore Tonks went through the same week in a tumult of emotions. Work was comfortably predictable, but he worried about Andromeda Black. There was another witch who thrust herself upon his attention, but he tried to ignore her.

"Teddy!" It was the voice that could drive a wizard to take his own life.

"What can I do for you, Dolores?"

Her eyes glittered with delight as she looked him up and down. "Well, I heard that you were the one who caused the committee to be broken up. I got demoted over it, you know."

He put his hand over his heart. "That was not my intention. I'm very sorry about that."

"After I had time to think about it, I realized you were right, just like you were right about the N.E.W.T.s. That survey was far too obvious."

"I'm glad you came to see it that way." He tried to keep a straight face.

"A-nyway, as luck would have it, I got transferred to the records department. Guess what I can do?"

"Do tell."

She held up a marriage license and giggled. "Wouldn't this be wonderful? What do you say if I fill it out with our names?"

He thought furiously and hoped the frown on his face looked serious rather than disgusted. "Or... suppose we leave it blank for now. You never know who might see it and do or say something we don't want. I can keep it for the time being."

"Oh, Teddy! You have far better ideas than I do. I can't wait...I'm going to start planning right now!" She handed him the heavily engraved document and skipped down the hallway. He could only be grateful that she hadn't pressed him for an actual affirmative answer, nor a date.

Ted took a deep breath and folded the marriage license. She had been holding onto it for a while. It would be valid starting in a few days. He would have to find some way to extricate himself from her plans, but without this document she couldn't do anything to him for the time being.

He checked his watch and whistled. He was running late, now, after this impromptu meeting with Umbridge. He was supposed to mingle with the afternoon crowds. Much as he would like to take a shower after the looks she had given him, he hastened to the Atrium and left by Floo to Diagon Alley instead.

Ted Tonks walked down the street that afternoon and wanted to hurt somebody. After the day in the ice cream parlor, he had tried to forget Andromeda Black. Today he was simply walking through the neighborhood, keeping an eye for things that might be useful for Dumbledore to know. He didn't expect to see her. Yet he couldn't keep himself from watching as she, her mother, and sister went to Madame Malkin's and a few moments later she was standing on the footstool and being fussed over by the seamstress.

As she turned back and forth to look in the mirror, he saw every side of her and loved each one. The feelings that pounded on the door of his heart burst out full force, and he simply looked at her with all of his emotions on his face. Then their eyes met, and it was all he could do not to rush into the shop, push all of the other women out of the way and carry her off. He wanted her. It was as simple and as complicated as that. He could see that she understood what he was thinking as she turned and watched him from the mirror. She spoke to Madame Malkin, who smiled and nodded. The young witch went into the dressing room and when she re-emerged, she was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen.

It must be her wedding robe, he thought to himself. She was all white and lace, and her dark hair cascaded down in the midst of it. The older woman fussed about hem length and tightening the waist, but Andromeda looked for his reaction in the mirror, and he gave it. He held his hand to his heart and then out to her as though to offer it. She smiled shyly and then looked down. The spell was broken, and she answered some comment made by her sister. A few minutes later the three started to come out of the shop and Ted slid into a nearby alley. She looked around, he thought maybe to see if he was still there. It was a good sign.

"See anything today?" It was Kingsley, coming from the other end of the alley.

"No, I have to admit I was a bit distracted."

"We all have days like that."

"Hey, can you tell me anything about Rabastan Lestrangle?"

"He was a few years ahead of me, but I'll tell you what I know."

An hour later, Ted wished he hadn't asked. From what Kingsley had observed and heard at school, Lestrangle made up for a lack in intelligence by acts of cruelty. He was not popular with the girls once Vivian Rosier came back from Hogsmeade in tears one Saturday. He came from a family that was magical for several generations, but he had no refinement or strength of character that Ted could see. The thought of Andromeda being tied to something like that all her life was distressing. He had to get her away. The only thing that came to mind was Dumbledore. Maybe the Headmaster of Hogwarts could help him find a way.

When he went to the next meeting with Dumbledore, Tonks was encouraged to keep his eyes open and look for ways to help Andromeda, but he was told the group at large could do nothing for the situation. Preventing Voldemort from gaining further ground with the Wizarding community was more important for the greater good. Ted looked so forlorn that Kingsley told him he could assist with the surveillance of a party at the Lestrangle home the following weekend. They were hoping to get an accurate count of Voldemort's followers.

They arrived at the Lestrangle estate when the party was in full swing. They wore their own dress robes so that if anyone saw them they would blend in. Kingsley had given Ted strong instructions that he was supposed to keep to the shadows where he was expected to blend in and not be seen. It was torture, to stand in the garden quietly, knowing that Andromeda was in there somewhere. His every instinct told him to go into the party where all the lights were and look for her. It wouldn't do either of them any

good.

One of the French doors opened and a couple emerged from the house. The wizard held the witch's arm and dragged her out into the middle of the roses. "When I kiss you, I'm going to kiss you. When I touch you, you're going to enjoy it. You are not going to flinch away as though you are frightened or hate me. Do you understand? I was very embarrassed, just now."

"Y-yes, Rabastan. I'm very sorry. I'll try..."

"No, witch, you won't try. You will do as I say unless you want to be under an Imperius."

Ted gasped at the same time as Andromeda. "You don't have to. I'll be good. Truly." There was a sound of fabric giving way.

"You know, I'm not sure I can trust you."

The big wizard took out his wand as Ted slowly walked toward the pair. As Lestrangle started to utter his spell, Ted sent a silent body bind his way and he slowly fell over. Andromeda looked to see who was there and gaped in shock, but then smiled.

"Come with me." He held out his hand and she put her own in it. He wanted to kiss it, to hold it to his heart, to tell its owner how he felt, but it wasn't the right time. He simply started to lead her toward their hiding place.

"My luggage..." He sighed and walked back over to Lestrangle, whom he nudged into the light. Then he stared at him as hard as he could and concentrated. A moment later, he looked up at Andromeda.

"Well? Do I look right?"

"It's uncanny," she said. He had managed to morph into someone who, in the dark of night, would look very much like Rabastan Lestrangle. His clothes weren't the same, but close enough to fool a person who didn't look carefully.

They walked up toward the house and he told her what to do. As they reached the patio, she summoned a house-elf. Using a voice as much like Trixie's as she could, she said, "Pack my suitcase and bring it to this wizard." The elf disappeared with a crack.

He spoke into her ear. "Now, walk down that path. Do you remember Kingsley Shacklebolt? He's there in the grove of trees." She was most of the way through the garden when the elf returned with the suitcase. He took it and restrained himself from saying "Thank you." He then walked quickly through the garden himself.

He heard a voice saying, "I just saw Rabastan on the patio. Maybe he's heading toward the garden," and quickened his pace.

"Do you have everything, then?" It was Dumbledore's voice.

Ted looked at Andromeda. She nodded and said, "Yes, I believe I do."

"Here then," said the older wizard. He handed them a small planter. "Just stay where this takes you. I'll be there soon after. Three... Two... One..."

Ted tightened his grip on both the suitcase and the planter and hoped Andromeda was holding on, too.

Thank you for reading! This has been beta-read by Trickie Woo.

The Rescue

Chapter 7 of 19

"Very well, then, Mr. Tonks, I'm inclined to receive your suit favorably."

He looked happy, but cautious. "Does that mean something in the language of pure-blood witches?"

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

The parents, transported with joy, embraced their future son-in-law, calling him their deliverer and the saviour of their house, and the virgin, both cause and reward of the contest, descended from the rock. Bulfinch's Mythology, Book XV.

When she regained her bearings, Andromeda discovered that she was standing in some sort of back garden next to Ted Tonks. He still looked somewhat like Rabastan Lestrangle. She pointed it out and then looked around. "Where are we?" she asked.

"I couldn't say," he answered. "I didn't even know Dumbledore was at the Lestrangle Estate. I have no idea where he would have sent us." He looked in a hand mirror and stared hard at his face until it looked normal.

"Mr. Tonks?"

"Please call me Ted."

"Ted, then, thank you. I was so frightened. I've been trying to figure out how I would ever submit to that man. I imagine I'll have to go back and he'll probably place me under the Imperious Curse so that I'll do whatever he wants, but thank you for this reprieve and for however many minutes of sanity are left to me."

"Miss Black, I'm not sending you back." He set down the items he was holding and opened his arms. She hesitated, so he stepped closer to her and pulled her into a hug. "I'm not letting you go back if I can help it."

She couldn't remember the last time she had been held like this. Maybe it was when her parents dropped her off at King's Cross at the start of second or third year. It was quite pleasant. "Oh," she sighed. "I feel so safe like this with you."

"I was worried about you, back there tonight. I thought he would hurt you then and there."

"I think that was the plan. I wasn't as attentive to him as he wanted at the engagement dinner, and I kept flinching whenever he touched me this evening. I think he wanted to use this weekend to force me into a position where I had to marry him."

His answer was to pull her tighter to himself. For a second, she rested there with her head on his shoulder. Then she tried to pull away enough to see his face, but he held her close.

"He won't do that again. I will devote my life to keeping you safe."

"That's so kind of you to say, but you don't need to try to be nice. I'll have to go back, sometime. I really don't have any way of avoiding it."

"Of course you do. I meant what I said at Florean Fortescue's. I want to marry you. Everything I've said still stands. We can find that cottage to live in, and we can live a quiet but happy life for all our days. On the other side, I'm still willing to have a marriage in name only if you would prefer. As soon as you decide you have a better option, we can get the marriage annulled. They'll stop hounding you once you've taken the step of marriage to a 'Mudblood,' I'm sure, so it's up to you. If I had some place where you could hide, I would offer it, but I don't think you would be as safe."

She took a step away. "You are the real thing, aren't you?"

"It's a genuine offer." He looked a bit affronted.

"Even with the Mud...I mean Muggle...upbringing, you can come to me like the mythical hero to rescue me from the serpent and save me? Is it as easy as that? My parents aren't like those of the mythical Andromeda, you know. They will not be grateful for what you have done tonight, and they will not approve a marriage between us. There will be more battles to fight."

"Why shouldn't it be easy, and if your parents can so easily send you to that wizard, do we need their approval? Miss Black, I have strong feelings for you, and not just because I can rescue a maiden from her fate. It interests me, the way you love your family and your heritage, but you instinctively pull away from the darker aspects of it all. You have such an integrity about that, and I admire your dignity. Plus, I've always thought you were pretty."

"So you keep saying." She twisted her mouth as she thought for a few minutes. There wasn't very much to think about. She'd already decided at the ice cream parlor when it had suddenly been dashed away like a dream. "Very well, then, Mr. Tonks, I'm inclined to receive your suit favorably."

He looked happy, but cautious. "Does that mean something in the language of pure-blood witches?"

She tilted her head up at the sky and laughed. He absorbed the sound of it greedily. "It means yes. I will marry you, Mr. Tonks."

"You really should call me Ted, then."

"And you should call me Andromeda." She looked at him shyly as he rested his hands on her shoulders. He started to pull her closer, tilting his head to the side. She found that it was hard to breathe evenly, but she had no instinct to flinch with him.

"I'm pretty sure they're in the back garden. I heard them arrive, anyway." A woman's voice came from the nearby house. Andromeda stepped away from Ted with an embarrassed giggle. A second later, Dumbledore and Kingsley Shacklebolt were standing there with the witch who must have spoken. The last person to emerge was a wizard Andromeda never expected to see.

"Uncle Alphard!"

"Ah, Andie, my child. I hear you've flown the coop. I hope you're prepared for the fallout." He came forward to squeeze her hand. "Albus told me what happened at the Lestranges' estate. If your father had asked me, I would have suggested one of those Prewett boys for Bellatrix, but he insisted on that Lestrangle young man. He always felt that Ignatius Prewett was a mistake for poor Cousin Lucretia, as though she didn't bring her problems on herself. But that's family laundry and where are my manners? You know Albus, of course, and Shacklebolt seems a nice enough lad. I take it this is Mr. Tonks? You have my gratitude, young man."

Dumbledore cleared his throat. "Andromeda and Theodore, this is Arabella Figg, and this is her home."

Andromeda held out her hand. "I'm pleased to meet you, Mrs. Figg. Thank you for your hospitality."

"Call me Arabella, dear. I never got married, being a Squib and all. Please, come inside. There's no telling who's out and about, even here."

They all went inside, to Miss Figg's parlor. Ted and Andromeda were seated together on a sofa. He patted her hand from time to time, and she couldn't figure out why it should make her feel comforted. Dumbledore and her uncle sat on chairs across from them, while their hostess sat in a chair a little way apart. Kingsley Shacklebolt stayed near the edges of the room, occasionally looking out of one window or another.

"Where is here, exactly?" asked Andromeda.

"Gretna Green. It seemed as good a place as any for a young girl to flee to," answered the Hogwarts Headmaster with a twinkling eye. "The more important question is what is to be done with Miss Black, now that she has been removed from her family."

Ted cleared his throat. "Actually, it's been decided. That is, if it's ok with everyone, especially you, Mr. Black, since you're her family--"

Andromeda cut in. "Ted asked me to marry him and I agreed to it." It didn't sound like such a big deal when she said it quickly. She hoped the pat from Ted's hand signaled that he understood.

Uncle Alphard cleared his throat. "Under the circumstances, I'm not sure..."

"I've discussed this already with Ted," said Dumbledore, who turned and looked at Andromeda over his glasses. "This does solve your problem rather neatly, but you understand what you are doing?"

She nodded solemnly. "I don't know Ted extremely well, but I'm convinced that I won't find a kinder or a better man to be my husband. I'm content with this choice."

Arabella clapped her hands in delight as Uncle Alphard said, "I think we need to speak for a minute, my girl."

They were shown into a back room. "Andie, Albus told me a little bit about your predicament, and I was prepared to offer for you to move into my home. Are you sure you would rather marry Tonks?"

She smiled up at him. "It's a very kind offer, Uncle, but I don't see any way out of this other than marriage. If there's something in it, they'll run me to ground wherever I am, but if I stain myself with marriage to a Mudblood, the pure-blood wizards will want nothing to do with me."

"Then you're not planning for it to be a marriage in name only? If it can be annulled, they will do so."

She nodded as she thought for a minute, trying to find the right words. "Ted really wants me, Uncle. I know without a doubt that he's ready to be married to me forever. Even with those feelings, he offered to be platonic within our marriage. Of course, I know as well as you do that it wouldn't work. I don't know if I feel as strongly about him as he does about me, but I think I will enjoy our marriage. He interests me in ways that Rabastan Lestrangle repulses me."

"Can you be fair to him, then? I would be disappointed if you got out of this problem only to decide you would rather follow your parents' plan for you after all."

She looked up. "I mean to try. I'm certainly not interested in anyone I've met, and I know I can never go back to my parents. It's not that I can't love Ted, it's just that I never thought of it, before. I can love him at least as much as my parents love each other."

The wizard smiled gently. "All right then, young lady. My offer still stands. You and Tonks are welcome to live with me in my cottage until such time as other arrangements are made. In fact, I'm going to do something for Dumbledore for a week or so. That will give you a little time to get used to each other."

"Thank you, Uncle."

"Who knows? There might be children someday. Evie and I had such hopes when we married and built that cottage...."

Andromeda stiffened at that. She hadn't thought about children, and the idea suddenly scared her. There was no time for it, because Arabella knocked on the door. "Miss Black? I noticed your dress was ripped along the shoulder. Would you like to change? I have your suitcase right here."

The wizard opened the door and stepped out. Ted was there, too. "Would you like to do it tonight, Andromeda? It turns out that Headmaster Dumbledore can officiate for us."

She smiled shyly. "I suppose we might as well." There was no point in waiting and getting nervous about it. The sooner it was over with, the sooner she could get on with her life, whatever that would be.

Uncle Alphard smiled sternly. "I'll talk to Mr. Tonks and Dumbledore then. You make yourself pretty for your groom."

When the witch and her hostess came out of the back room and into the parlor, Ted's chin dropped. She was wearing the wedding robe he had seen her modeling just the other day. He wondered, in passing, what else was in that suitcase. Without a window in between, and without the desperate look in her eyes she had on the other day, she was breathtaking to him. Her uncle jumped out of the chair where he was seated and walked over to the doorway. He led her up to where Ted and Dumbledore were standing.

The old wizard smiled kindly. "It seems we had a few interesting coincidences come together this night. Ted actually has a marriage license, so we won't need to fudge anything there..."

"Were you so sure of me?" Andromeda asked her bridegroom.

He shook his head. "There is nothing in this world I have wanted so much and been less sure about. The license was purely by chance. It seems there's a witch who thought I would put her name in as the bride."

She became worried. "If there's someone else..."

He shook his head emphatically. "Absolutely not. I have never seen the witch as a woman, certainly not as a woman I would ever marry. I've told you, you're the prettiest witch to me."

Arabella sighed somewhere in the background. Dumbledore cleared his throat.

"To continue, we have a license, and as it happens, we are in the town of Gretna Green, where marriages are done with...shall we call it...a more relaxed formality." He paused to see the effect of his comments on the group before him and also to find a small book in one of his pockets. "Let's begin, then..."

Andromeda had a chance to look around at the tidy parlor in which her wedding was held, at the witnesses, and especially at her groom. He looked distinguished in dress robes, but what amazed her was the radiant look on his face as he gazed at her. She got caught in his eyes and almost forgot where she was. There was a pause in Dumbledore's speech; he was waiting for her to say something. She whispered "I will," and the rite continued. She and Ted answered all of the questions and repeated the vows as directed.

When it came time for rings, Ted pulled out a chain from within his robes and unfastened a lovely gold band with Celtic knots worked on it. "It was my grandmother's," he whispered as he slid it upon her finger. As it settled into place, it seemed to glow.

Right then, Uncle Alphard stood and walked over to the couple. He removed his own wedding band and handed it to Andromeda, nodding toward Ted. With a lump in her throat, she placed it on Ted's hand and whispered the words Dumbledore said for her to repeat. At the very end, Ted was told to kiss her, and the moment that nearly happened in the back garden was upon her.

Once again he gently held her shoulders and drew her close. His face tilted to the side, and she started losing her breath. As his lips touched hers, it was a bit awkward to begin with. Then something seemed to flow from his mouth to hers, and she was warmed all at once. His kiss became more firm, and she started to feel something in her tummy. There was something within her floating around as she pushed her lips back into his. She lost consciousness to the world around her and just wanted to continue that kiss.

Suddenly there was a cracking noise outside. Andromeda and Ted moved apart as Kingsley spoke for the first time that Andromeda noticed that evening. "Nox!" he said as the front door to the little house burst open.

This has been beta read by Trickle Woo. Thanks to everyone who's been reading and reviewing!

The Jilted Suitor

Chapter 8 of 19

"Are you comparing me to Rodolphus Lestranger?"

"No, of course not, but Bellatrix is my sister, and if she can't..."

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Phineus, the betrothed of the virgin, with a party of his adherents, burst in, demanding the maiden as his own. Bulfinch's Mythologies, Book XV.

Andromeda gasped to see her father and erstwhile fiancé come into the room. That drew their attention, and they moved toward her. She stepped backwards, further into

Ted's arms, as Kingsley cast a Shield Charm between them. The two had to stop moving, and then she saw that they were not alone. Voldemort was right behind her father.

"I now pronounce you husband and wife," Dumbledore was saying.

"I don't know what you were doing, you meddling old fool," started Cygnus Black, "but that girl has been contracted to Rabastan Lestrangle. Andromeda, we're here to save you from a terrible fate. Be a good girl and come here. This marriage doesn't need to mean anything. Your Uncle Orion and I will straighten it all out, and everything will be fine."

Her father's demeanor was more... fatherly... than he had been in years. Tears smarted in her eyes as she wished it was real. She felt a breath of something reaching for her. Voldemort was staring at her intently. She moved still closer to Ted and he steadied her. She shook her head at her father's orders.

"The girl did not give her consent to that marriage," said Dumbledore coolly. He looked as though he were at a debate society meeting rather than in a small room with three wands pointed at him. "She did give her consent to this one, and the thing is done."

"She's mine!" screamed the jilted wizard as he raised his wand. "I'll see her dead before I'll see her married to some Mudblood!"

His new attempt at "*Imperio*!" was again foiled by Ted's "*Petrificus Totalus*!" and he fell to the floor. His brother moved into the room at that point, followed by Bellatrix.

"Well, well, little sister, I should have found out exactly what you were doing with the Mudblood on Diagon Alley. I admit I was convinced by your little show. Just how much of an actress are you? Was white really the best color for you to wear tonight?"

Something very much like a growl came from Ted's throat. The fight broke out, then, with Cygnus battling his brother; Kingsley, Ted and Andromeda fighting against the Lestranges; and Voldemort casting spells at Dumbledore that were easily parried. As he fought, Voldemort worked his way closer and closer to Andromeda. He sensed that if he could carry off the young witch, he would win the day and the complete alliance of the Black family, which was a prize he craved. However, even a highly talented person will occasionally make a mistake. His was to assume that Ted Tonks was insignificant.

When Voldemort laid his hand on Andromeda's arm in an effort to capture her, Ted went a little mad. He, and others, had gone to great lengths to keep the witch from this man's followers. After having just exchanged vows with her, he would protect her at any cost to himself. First he cast a disarming spell upon the other wizard. The Stunning Spell he cast next dropped the other wizard on his back, unconscious, just as Shackbolt hit the Lestranges with an Incarcerous. That left Cygnus and Alphard as the only remaining combatants in a family conflict that had neither started nor was likely to end that day.

"Tonks, take her and go where I told you," said Alphard, judging that once Andromeda was gone the fight would end.

"Yes, Sir," answered Ted. He pulled his bride close and whispered "Trust me," just as he summoned great determination and turned.

Andromeda didn't open her eyes when they Apparated. She trembled in the arms of the man who was now her life partner and buried her face in his shoulder. He made soothing noises and patted her back. She noticed, offhand, that she liked the way he smelled. Lavender, mint, and something else, she decided. Finally she took a deep breath and looked around herself.

"This is Uncle Alphard's cottage!" she said.

"He explained how to get here to me," answered her new husband. "He said he put it under Fidelius Charm years ago."

"And he's the Secret Keeper?"

"Along with your cousin, Sirius," he answered.

"Oh, my goodness!" she said. "They must have done that two summers ago. Aunt Walburga blamed his being sorted to Gryffindor on his visit to Uncle Alphard that year. She couldn't figure out how to find our Uncle in order to complain. Do you like it?" she asked.

"I haven't seen much, but it seems nice."

"Let's look around, then. I wouldn't mind searching the kitchen for a bit of a tea or something. I couldn't eat at the Lestrangle's tonight, and we've been rather busy ever since. Uncle has a house-elf somewhere... Birdie, or Binnie, or Bennie..."

"Here I am, Mistress."

"Oh! It's Bennie, then?"

"Yes, Mistress. What can Bennie do for you?"

"If you wouldn't mind, a bit of a tea would be good. Could you bring it to the sitting room? This is Master Theodore. We're going to look around a little bit and then we need a bit of comfort."

"Yes, Mistress. Master Alphard tells me to fix the front bedroom for Mistress. You can go see it if you like."

Andromeda brightened. "Oh, thank you! We'll go there, first."

The elf disappeared and Ted laughed. "You are very kind to house-elves."

She put her hand on her hip. "Some of us are, Mudblood...oh." She put her hands over her face in shame.

"Andromeda," he said.

She shook her head, so he grasped her wrists and gently moved her hands. "Andromeda."

She looked up at him, guilt in her face.

"I can't pretend I don't find the word hurtful, but I know that you say it out of habit, that you don't mean to offend me."

"I'm so sorry, Ted. I was thinking about the other day at the ice cream parlor. All those times I said that to you. I hit you, too..."

"And it was a brilliant way to ease your sister's suspicions. It was forgiven the instant it happened. Now I can be proud that such a quick-thinking witch is married to me."

"Oh, Ted." It was getting easier to step into his arms, and even to slide her hands around his waist to his back.

He enjoyed the moment. "So you have a room here?"

"It's the nicest room in the house. Would you like to see it?" He nodded, and they went up the stairs together. She brought him to the room, which was decorated in soft blues and greens, but not in such a way that was overly feminine. Instead it reflected rest for those who stayed within it. There was a queen-sized bed and a love seat that looked toward French doors.

"The afternoon sunshine gets filtered through a walnut tree outside. It's wonderful," she sighed.

"It is beautiful."

"Ted, Uncle Alphard offered for us to stay here. He said he wouldn't be here for a week or so, and that we can stay here now, and even afterwards, if you like. It's safe, since the family can't find it..."

"It is wonderful. He told me all about it when you were changing, and I already accepted on behalf of both of us, if you don't mind."

She smiled brightly. "I think we will like it here."

They went back downstairs to have the tea that was laid out and found that Bennie had made them all sorts of pastries and sandwiches to go along with the biscuits Andromeda had figured upon. The elf waited by the door. "Master Alphard is here with Old Master Mugwump. They goes down stairs for wine."

"You needn't have done that," called Andromeda.

"Nonsense!" said the older wizard, who overheard her as he came up the last of the stairs from the cellar. "Albus and I are here for just a few minutes. We wanted to reassure you that everyone is fine, even your father and your sister, girl. As soon as you and Ted left, they lost interest in the fight and left, themselves. We brought your suitcase, which contains all of the worldly goods you now own, I'm afraid. We'll just have a toast to celebrate, and then we're off to stretch our legs while you two become better acquainted."

"It's your house, Uncle."

"It's your home too, for now, and it's good to have family in it, Niece." He poured glasses of sparkling wine and passed them around, and then proposed a toast. "May we all be glad to have participated in tonight's events."

"Here, here!" said the Headmaster as everyone sipped from their glass.

The room was quiet for a few minutes as they all ate. Andromeda got more and more thoughtful. Ted watched a pucker form between her eyebrows. He thought to himself that if they were alone he would try to kiss it away. Finally, she couldn't take it anymore.

"What exactly did Father say?" asked Andromeda.

"He's going to give you some time to come to your senses, but he feels you have left him no recourse other than to remove your name from the tapestry."

She fell back into the couch, with a lost look in her eyes. After a minute or two, she nodded. "I guess I should have expected as much. It seems a bit odd to hear it, though, as done and settled. Is Miss Figg all right?"

Ted's head whipped around at this change of subject. It was the first discovery of the means his wife used to handle things that could cause her to lose control of her emotions. While he longed to pull her into his arms and soothe the hurt she must feel, he had to admire the way she smiled and stiffened her back with resolve.

Dumbledore nodded in response to Andromeda's question. "Yes, they aren't interested in Arabella in the least. She moves around quite a bit, anyway. I often find her little jobs to do for my small group of helpers. She's not nearly as defenseless as one would think, either. Now," he said, exchanging a glance with Alphard, "it's time for us to leave you two alone. I'll be filing this tomorrow, Andromeda, which sets certain things in motion. I suspect you had better be on your guard as well, Theodore. A woman scorned and all."

With that, the two older wizards left, and the newly wedded couple were left sitting on the couch together. Ted put his arm up around her shoulders, and she settled into his side. How, in the space of a few hours, had this become such a natural and comfortable thing to do?

"Do we need to help clear up?" he asked quietly.

"No, Bennie would slap my hands if I tried, although I'm going to have to learn how to do more than I currently know. You've married a woman who's not much of a housekeeper." She thought for a minute. "I'm now a woman without a family or anything else, either. Uncle is right. Everything I have in the world is in that suitcase. It has a good many things in it. I packed it well when I realized why they wanted me to stay at the Lestrangle's estate over the weekend, but that's all there is. I hope you don't mind that I'm poor and not much good at anything. I'll learn what I can, Ted, I promise."

"Andromeda, you're going to be cut off by your family because of me. If you're poor, it's my fault. I should promise to make up for it to you."

She lifted her chin. "It's not as though belonging to such a family was any great treasure. It was the only one I had, though."

They sat on the couch a little longer. It was comfortable and comforting. She reflected that so far she had come off well in the trade between a family and a husband.

Eventually he stirred. "Perhaps I should head up to bed. Can you tell me which room is to be mine?"

"It's the front one, that I showed you."

"That's your room."

"Yes," she answered without looking at him.

He sat up at that and turned her to face him. "Are you sure, Andromeda? There's nothing I want more right this minute, but are you absolutely sure?"

She looked back into his eyes and smiled. "As soon as the license is filed, they will try to get proof of nullity so they can dissolve it. If we wait, then all of this will have been for nothing. Besides, Ted, I want to.

"With me? A Mudblood?"

She nodded as she put her hand over his mouth. "With you, and without any other notation than you're a man and I'm a woman. I really want to, Ted."

He pulled away from her hand. "You're absolutely sure?"

"Would you kiss me again?"

He didn't have to be asked twice. His lips found hers, and it was everything they had found together before. Soon it wasn't enough, and Ted stood, bringing her with him and holding her tight. The feel of their bodies molded together was surprising to Andromeda, and she gasped. As her mouth opened, so did his. Their tongues, shy at first, became bolder as they explored. Finally Ted ended the kiss and came up for air. "Shall we make use of the best bedroom in the house, then?" he asked. She nodded.

They went up the stairs holding hands, and stepped into the bedroom. As the door shut behind them, Andromeda jumped a little. Then she blushed and giggled at herself. "I guess I'm nervous," she admitted.

"So am I," he said. He watched as she went around the room, blowing out the candles. He admired the line of her back as she bent and the way her cheeks puckered as she blew. At the last candle, she was facing him, and the neckline of her dress fell a little bit away from her body. His mouth went dry. She looked up and caught his eye

and then smiled and looked back down at the candle. The room went dark.

"I wonder if you would help me with my dress?" she asked him.

"Of course," he answered.

There were twenty-four little buttons on the back of that gown. He knew because he counted each of them as he unfastened it. He thought he would die each time his knuckles brushed the skin of her back. The shivering response under his hands told him that she felt something as well. When he finished, she held the dress up and moved toward the bed. He took the opportunity to unfasten his own robes and move toward the other side of the bed.

They moved under the covers on their own sides and then looked at each other. Andromeda started to giggle, and then Ted started to laugh, too. Their eyes had adjusted to the moonlight by now, and Ted could see her dark hair against her creamy skin. He felt as though he couldn't move. "Andromeda," he said in a pained whisper. He picked up a lock of her hair and smelled it. The pain only increased. He moved closer to her. Then, as he had wanted to do for a long time, he buried his hands and his face in her hair. He breathed it in until she turned her face and they were kissing again.

After a while, he didn't think he could take any more. "Andromeda," he whispered.

"Oh, yes," she responded. "Yes."

There was a bit of a gasp at first. He stopped moving so that she would have a chance to catch her breath. She surprised him by putting her arms around him and moving. Then he was lost. She surrounded him with everything he had imagined in this moment and more. There was nothing to do but lose himself to it, to her...

Moments later, as he caught his breath, he became aware of her looking up at him expectantly. He smiled and kissed her face. "I'm sorry, I couldn't seem to help it. I should have waited, somehow..."

"Can we do it again?" Andromeda had been so eager for this. His looks had made her feel all swimmy inside. She felt as though his kisses had lit a fire within her. Then it had been uncomfortable, but the fire had quickly returned. Just as she was starting to feel as though she was getting the hang of it, his face had taken on an indescribable look and it was over. Maybe she just needed more practice.

"I'm not sure," he said. He kissed her and discovered that they could. This time there was no discomfort. She moved with him and felt something calling to her, but it never got very close and it was over fairly quickly again. She looked up at him thoughtfully as he looked down in remorse. Maybe practice wouldn't help.

"Maybe I'm just one of those women who doesn't," she said with a shrug.

"I don't believe that," he said. "I promise you tonight was my first time and I know it was yours, too. I think we just don't know what we're doing, yet."

"Some women just don't," she responded. "My sister..."

"Are you comparing me to Rodolphus Lestranger?"

"No, of course not, but Bellatrix is my sister, and if she can't..."

"I refuse to believe, on the strength of so little evidence, that you will never enjoy it. This is too new to us. It took years to get used to magic."

She became thoughtful. Maybe she would have to learn how to control and enjoy this the way her husband had needed to become accustomed to the magical world. "What do you propose, then?"

He whipped the covers off and laughed when she tried to cover herself. "I propose to learn and study and experiment until I know exactly what you enjoy."

"Does that go both ways?"

His predatory look was a surprise that intrigued her. "I certainly hope so."

He proceeded to explore her body, mapping it and tasting it for future reference. She squealed at the feelings he gave her. "Ted, oh, Teddy..."

He was able to act with more restraint this time. He took his time and watched for her reactions to his caresses. As she succumbed to their passion, he watched her eyes change from concentration to delight. It gave him a feeling of pleasure and accomplishment, and he quickly became lost himself. When they were finished, she looked at him with wide-eyed wonder. "That was..."

"Yes, it certainly was."

"Oh, yes. Yes, indeed." They were quiet for so long after that she wondered if he had gone to sleep.

When he spoke again, it was almost conversational. "I think I've found the way in which we can measure our marriage."

"You have?"

"I can count your shrieks of delight as I make love to you."

She burst out laughing. "You wouldn't."

"It's just between us," he said consolingly. He leaned up next to her on the bed and tilted her face toward his. "I knew it would only take hours, Andromeda. I have fallen utterly in love with you."

"Oh, Ted..."

"You don't have to feel the same way. I know you don't."

"I don't, but I do feel... Ted, you're amazing. You're some ordinary guy, but you saved me from a fate that very well might have been worse than death. I think I might love you a little bit. I'm certainly willing..."

He pulled her close and buried his face in her hair. "I can't ask for any more than that, Andromeda. Not after the way all of this happened. I know it's too soon and that I'm not what you ever had in mind."

"Maybe not, but now you're the only one I can imagine."

A/N: Thanks to Trickie Woo for Beta Reading.

The End of the Beginning

Chapter 9 of 19

"It wasn't a dream, after all. Are you disappointed?"

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Ted's first thought as he woke was that it was Saturday, and he was glad he wouldn't have to work. Before he even opened his eyes, he became aware that the light in the place he was differed from that of the bedroom in his flat. The bed was different, and the sheets were softer. As he realized that there was a soft form clasped within his arms, it all came flooding back.

He opened his eyes and could only see shades of brown. There was a very pale brown in some places that could almost be called blond, there was a shade of dark chocolate, and it seemed there was every tone of mahogany, coffee, or hazelnut in between. It was relentless, the way her hair had worked itself around his face, between his lips, around his throat, and everywhere else. He raised a hand to extricate himself and gently pushed it back toward its own head.

She stiffened beside him in fear as his motions woke her. She looked up at him warily and then shyly smiled. After that, she slid away from him and pulled the sheet around her as she sat up. She knew he had seen it all in the dark, but it wasn't the same. Her hair tried to settle in a cloud around and in her face, so she pushed it back.

"Good morning," he said.

"Good morning."

"It wasn't a dream, after all. Are you disappointed?"

"No."

He smiled broadly. "Neither am I."

"If it was a dream, I would still be engaged to Rabastan."

"Oh." Of course, their marriage was entirely to keep her out of Lestrangle's grasp. He could feel himself going cold.

Her cheeks took on a pink hue as she took a deep breath. "And if it was a dream, I wouldn't have had that incredible experience with you last night."

His blood went flooding back to several places that now became quite warm. "You enjoyed it, then?"

She looked at him shyly. "Yes."

"I'd like to, that is, would you like to, er, what if we..."

She slid closer to him on the bed. "Yes, I would. Like to, that is."

He pushed her hair back and started kissing her. When he tugged at the sheet, she claimed modesty, so he let it go and simply kissed her. There was much he wanted to do and now a lifetime to do it in. With his hands he stroked the outline of her face and slid his fingers into her hair. After a while, he slid his lips to her chin and then her throat.

She held the sheet with one hand as she braced herself on his shoulder with the other. His skin was soft, and she ran her hand all along the one shoulder up to his neck and back. Her actions were a bit mechanical, because Ted was doing something with his lips along her collarbone that made her weak.

By the time his lips moved lower, she grasped his other shoulder with the hand holding the sheet. She moaned as the sheet fell, and Ted availed himself of the opportunity to look at her. Her soft skin was already pink because of his kisses, but she flushed darker under his gaze. He looked at her for a moment and then gently brushed a curl of hair away from her eye.

"Did I say pretty? I was completely wrong. You're beautiful, Andromeda." He bent down and used his fingers and mouth in ways that caused her to arch her back. Her own hands moved around his shoulders to caress and hold his head to her. She kissed the top of his head, loving the silky feel of his hair as it slid between her fingers.

"Oh, Ted," she whispered as a string of words, sighs, and whimpers started to erupt from her. A delicious ache started within her as her body slid against his, looking for something she didn't really understand, yet. Her movements became more intense and her moans more insistent. He reclaimed her mouth as their bodies became one and she moaned more loudly around his lips.

He tried to move slowly, but she was unable. She pushed and slid and arched her body against his. He thought he might regain control when she whispered his name and her legs tightened around him. Control winked at him and left the room. It wasn't long before he was in a place beyond noticing what happened.

They were both breathing heavily. It was all he could do to gently move to her side and put an arm around her middle. "Love you... 'Dromeda..." Did he have the energy to actually say it aloud?

"Oh, Ted, the things you made me feel..."

The next time he awoke, there was a new smell in the room: toast and eggs and tea. Andromeda sat on the love seat at a little table, wrapped in a dressing gown. On her lap was a plate full of breakfast, and her mouth looked all the more delicious for the crumbs scattered on her lips. He sat up. There was a dressing gown for him at the foot of the bed. He tied it on and walked over to his wife. He kissed the crumbs off her lips and she said, "Oh, Ted, really."

He sat beside her and filled his own plate. As he did, he quietly watched her. She was thinking as she had the night before, that pucker between her brows just starting to deepen.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Do you think he would really rather see me dead?"

"Who?"

"Rabastan."

"I don't know. Is that the sort of thing a wizard just says, or do they really mean it?"

"I wish I knew."

He leaned over to kiss that pucker, as he had promised himself he would do if he got the chance, but she backed away from him.

"We should eat our breakfast and perhaps do some things or make plans, before we do any more of that." She looked shyly at the bed.

"That wasn't what I was thinking," he said. "You look so worried. I want to soothe it away." He leaned in and she again leaned away.

"Why shouldn't I be worried?"

"You should be," he acceded. He realized that with the crisis over, she would perhaps be a bit prickly. She probably wasn't used to physical affection. He slid his hand over and placed it on top of hers. Her whole body jumped. After a moment, her hand relaxed and softened under his. He was able to grasp it and slide his fingers between hers.

"I just want to comfort you," he said, "but I don't want to force affection upon you. I'd rather not do something that makes you more uncomfortable."

She looked away. "I'm sorry. I'm horribly new at this, and I'm not used to anyone wanting to just touch me."

He withdrew his hand and started eating. "You're probably thinking that you shouldn't go out in public much, at least for a while?"

She nodded as she looked pensively out the window. "You, too. They might use you to get me to agree to what they want. I know the marriage will be considered valid, now, but I don't know what they will want to do to punish me, besides removing me from the tapestry."

"I'm sorry about that."

"I knew it was coming, and I don't think it would have been a fair trade for touches, but I have to admit it hurts. Suddenly it's like I don't exist any more."

He touched her hand again, and this time she let him. He wrapped his fingers around hers and lifted them to his face, kissing and rubbing her hand against his cheek.

"I shall need to go back to work, but I think we can limit our other exposure." He enjoyed the crunch of the toast and amended his statement. "I will also need to run over to my other flat to pack it up and give up the lease."

"Could I help with that?"

He wiped his mouth and fingers on a napkin and slid his arm around her waist. This time she allowed him to pull her close and even put her head on his shoulder.

"It would be better if you did not. If I were somehow the cause of your death or something else..." He cleared his throat. "I just don't think that's a good idea."

"How will you avoid them catching you? They'll probably be waiting for you at your building."

"I can Apparate directly in and out of my flat. No one else can."

"You can't bring me by Side-along?"

He looked at her. This brought him to the crux of the matter at hand. "Actually, I probably could, but I would rather you not see where I have lived as a bachelor."

"What do you have there you don't want me to see?" she asked, the wrinkle on her forehead growing.

"Nothing at all. I just would rather you not see what a small, run-down place I've been living in."

"Do you think it makes a difference?"

He chuckled. "I'm not entirely sure what to think of you."

"I'm not sure what to think of me, either, but I know I don't want to be away from you."

He sucked in his breath at the implication. "Are you frightened?"

"No, I don't think so. I just want to be with you."

He insisted on pulling her close and kissing the wrinkle away. She let him and started to smile as his lips kissed other parts of her face as well. When he got to her lips, she turned and waved at the table.

"You have some mail. I think it's from the Ministry."

There were two letters on the table. He opened the Ministry scroll and read his boss's terse script:

Tonks,

Congratulations on the marriage. Take the next week off to honeymoon.

Anderson

The second was a bit more:

Tonks,

Heard you got hitched, you dark horse! And that you snatched her out from under VM's nose! You'll have to tell us all the details (and we mean ALL). There's a bit of a write up in the Daily Prophet. You should make sure you read today's issue.

It appears that you may be in for a sticky time. If you could use some back up as you arrange your affairs, let us know.

Gideon Prewett

"Dumbledore must have told them all about the wedding. Gideon's note says they'll help us if we need it."

"Let me come with you. I promise I won't turn to dust at the sight of Muggle things, and I can't imagine that there's anything that can make a difference in how I feel about you."

"How exactly is that?" He regretted the question as it left his lips.

Her face was thoughtful. "You're the person I can trust most in this world. I feel safe when you're near me."

"What about your uncle, or Dumbledore?"

"I've been taught since infancy not to completely trust Dumbledore, and I don't know about Uncle Alphard. I don't know where the line between his family loyalties and anti-loyalties lies. For that matter, I don't know where my line is right now. I don't know if I trust myself."

"I trust you."

"I hope you don't ever regret it."

"Somehow I don't think I will."

Ted saw the newspaper on the table and remembered Gideon's comment about it. He picked it up and started scanning the headlines. "Have you read it?" he asked Andromeda.

"Oh," she answered. "I didn't really notice it was there. I was so hungry..." she blushed when she said it and trailed away.

"Gideon Prewett seemed to think we should read it." Ted paged through the paper until he came to one small item on page four.

Socialite Disappears at Lestrage Soirée

Friends will no doubt be distressed to know that Andromeda Black disappeared from the Lestrage estate last night during an affair to celebrate her engagement to Rabastan Lestrage. According to her fiancé, she was kidnapped from the gardens as the two were taking a stroll to get some air. This reporter has learned that the kidnapper battled Mr. Lestrage to the ground and then copied his features before absconding with the young witch. Ministry officials are looking through the records of known Metamorphagi as this story goes to press.

"Oh," groaned Andromeda into a cushion. "They won't let it go until he has me back. Society expects me to do who knows what, much of which is illegal or at least flat out wrong. When they discover my marriage to a good, noble wizard, they're going to tear me to pieces."

"You think I'm noble?"

"That was a rather Gryffindor stunt last night."

"Was that a Slytherin who took advantage of it, then?"

"We're trained to recognize a good opportunity when we see it."

"I'm glad that I was a good opportunity."

"I can't possibly tell you everything you've become to me in just one sentence, and it's only been twelve hours, Ted." She looked at the article. "I wonder who all these 'friends' are that they assume I have? My parents' friends, no doubt."

"Hush," Ted soothed her. "You're getting all wrinkly again." To prove his point he used his fingertips and lips to ease the concerns from her face. The tie of her dressing gown had relaxed, and the garment gaped open, proving to be too much of an invitation to ignore.

"Please forgive me, but I can't seem to stop myself," he said.

"Oh... please..." she sighed, twining her arms around his neck. They slid down on the love seat and then fell to the floor as their kisses and caresses became more intense.

Some time later she was heard to sigh, "I'm also greatly enjoying the married parts of our relationship."

"That makes two of us."

Ted needed his clothes quickly, so they sent an owl to Gideon as soon as they finished their breakfast. He owed back that some people were available to help in the early afternoon and gave an indication of where to meet. Ted was reluctant to take Andromeda, but she told him that otherwise she would follow and wait for him at the Leaky Cauldron. He considered that the least safe of the options available and finally consented to bring her with him.

"If there's any sort of fighting, I want you to come straight back here. All right?"

He looked so earnest and worried and cute that she had to agree. "I can handle myself, you know."

He kissed her. "I'm sure you can, but we've been practicing dueling and Magical Defense. We're sure their lot have been, too."

"Who, exactly, is 'we'?"

He shrugged. "Dumbledore has a group of us keeping an eye out, watching some things. That's what I was doing the day I saw you at Florean Fortescue's."

She nodded. "And the day I was fitted for my clothes?"

"Yes. I wanted to come in there and carry you off. Then, when I saw you in your wedding robes... Oh, Andromeda, I never dreamed you'd wear them for me."

"I carried the look in your eyes around with me for days. It was the only way I got through the engagement party."

"Was it?"

"It worked, most of the time. I could think to myself that my real fiancé was just in the other room. It was just when Rabastan was near me, and when that...that wizard wanted to talk to me that I couldn't remember you."

"Voldemort spoke with you?"

"He told me he would help me obtain my heart's desire. Then I thought of you. Somehow he saw you, too. It was as if he looked through my mind to find you, and he knew you're Muggle-born."

Ted came back to one point. "I was your heart's desire?"

She smiled shyly. "Yes, you were."

"Then you're fond of me."

"At the very least."

He pulled her close and kissed her, promising himself that he would do a more complete job when they returned from his apartment.

Andromeda found Ted one of Uncle Alphard's older robes to wear over his own trousers and shirt. She dressed in the least flashy robes she had with her, thinking that her mother would never let her into the family home to pull a few things together. She had considered the possibility that she would leave the Lestrangle estate only after she'd been married, and so had her entire trousseau with her, but none of her comfortable clothes had been packed. Somehow, she would have to figure out her wardrobe without costing Ted any money.

They walked, hand in hand, through the front garden and out the gate. Ted pulled her close to Apparate. When they arrived in a dark corner near Diagon Alley, he pulled her closer still and kissed her. "This could become my favorite mode of travel," he said. He kissed her again.

"All right, you two, break it up! Do you think this is your honeymoon or something?" They looked up, startled, to see Fabian Prewett standing near by. He laughed and shook hands with Ted. Then he took Andromeda's hand, pulled her close, and kissed her soundly. She pushed away from him and stood close to her husband, who put his arm around her waist. "Don't worry, Mrs. Tonks, I'm just kissing the bride, you know."

"Oh." She would have felt silly and stupid, except she could tell Ted wasn't completely amused, either.

"Well, then, you'll want to get to your flat, Tonks. We've been watching it since last night. No one's been by, even the Ministry. Of course, Moody's been to help watch, and he's with the Ministry. Maybe he's taken care of that end."

He walked them down a street and over to a building. "I'll wait down here. Gideon is up there with Kingsley."

Ted held Andromeda's elbow as they went up the stairs. They walked down a short hallway and came to his door. As they did, two wizards came from the shadows. Ted pushed Andromeda into the doorway and stood in front of her with his wand out.

"Relax, mate, it's us." He relaxed his stance when he saw that it was Kingsley and Gideon.

Kingsley said, "I didn't get a chance to congratulate you last night, Mrs. Tonks."

"I understand completely," she answered. "Thank you, for the congratulations and also for your quick thinking when it all happened."

"You're welcome. It's what I'm trained to do."

Gideon didn't say anything before he snaked his arm around Ted and pulled Andromeda over to himself. He gave her a smacking kiss before she could push him away. "No offense, just kissing the bride," he said.

"That's what your brother told me," she answered, stepping close to Ted as she had before.

"All right, then," said Kingsley. "We should do this as quickly as possible. We haven't seen anyone around here, but there's no telling for sure. Go ahead and take care of what you need, Ted, and then get back to where ever you're staying. I've been told that under no circumstances are you to leave that place until you go to work next Monday."

"I understand," said Ted. He opened the door to the apartment and followed his wife inside.

"Here it is," he said.

"It's not so bad, really," she answered. "It could do with a good cleaning..."

"Housekeeping is not my strong suit."

"Mine, either," she reminded him. "I'll have to force Bennie to teach me some things." She looked around. "Well, what goes and what stays?"

There wasn't much, although Ted was surprised to find that the detritus of his bachelorhood was more significant than he had believed. Andromeda washed and put away the few dishes, which belonged to the flat, and then went to help him with his clothes. She went through the dresser and removed all of the shirts and pants and laid them on the bed. She came upon his Ollivanders box and looked inside it, wondering if he had more than one wand.

"Ted, why do you have two handkerchiefs in here?"

He came to stand by her. "You'll think it foolish."

"I doubt it."

"Well..." He brought her to sit on an area of the bed that wasn't cluttered. "This clean one is the one I lent you at Hogwarts that day, and this other one is from Florean Fortescue's."

She felt something deep within her shift. "You kept it all that time? I just dropped it in the laundry, figuring the elves would know where it went."

"They did, and I've treasured it since then."

Once again she was struck by just how far back and how deep his feelings for her ran. "Ted, I don't know what to say," she whispered. Her lips looked for his and found them.

A blissful moment later he answered her. "That was exactly the right thing to say."

They managed to pack the things Ted should have immediately in two large suitcases that they could carry that day. The half dozen boxes would be brought by other means. Ted looked around the rooms one last time and then at his wife. "I spent so many lonely hours in this flat, Andromeda, and dreamed that I could have a future with you. I hoped and wished for you, and then I learned about Rabastan Lestrangle and I went around for three days in a near panic about you. I'm so fortunate."

"I was in a near panic over Rabastan those same days. I'm fortunate, too."

They kissed again, leaning against the door and holding each other tight. It occurred to them that it had been hours since they had finished their breakfast and gotten dressed.

"We can be much more comfortable elsewhere," he said into her hair.

"Oh, yes, I agree."

Ted opened the door a crack and then opened it wider when he saw the Prewett brothers outside. "All right, then?"

"Yes, it's fine. Moody's downstairs."

Andromeda looked from one to the other of the brothers. "I gather you have done a lot for Ted, and I assume much has involved me. Thank you."

Gideon spoke. "It's fine, Mrs. Tonks. We're glad to help and anything that sticks one in the eye of...well, you know...is our pleasure."

Fabian looked at his watch. "We're going to walk with you back down to the alley. It'll just be a group of friends, running errands together."

They emerged from the building and were met by the much-injured Auror. "Ah, you got a pretty one, Tonks."

Andromeda's face turned pink.

"She's the prettiest witch I've ever spoken with, sir."

She could feel her cheeks blazing red at that.

"You get 'er home, then, and stay 'ere till next Monday. I'll find you at the office an' go over your protection."

"Do we really need it, sir?" asked Andromeda.

"Your father and uncle woke the Minister last night and had half the Auror corps out looking for ye. It's what I'm doing now. The Death Eaters won't be by if they think we're doing their work for them." He winked and pinched her cheek. She should have hated it, but somehow she didn't.

She looked at the three of them and at Ted and remembered Kingsley and Dumbledore, too. Who else had been involved in rescuing her from marriage to Rabastan Lestranger? It was a humbling thought.

"Thank you, Mr. Moody. Thank all of you," she said, looking around and including everybody.

The Prewetts walked them back to the dark corner where they would Apparate. Fabian clapped Ted on the shoulder. "Well, Tonks, try to get some rest, this week."

Gideon added, "We won't be surprised if you don't of course."

Andromeda was just turning when she heard Fabian again. "By the way, do you need any advice?"

Several seconds after she arrived outside their front gate, Ted did. "Was it useful?" she asked.

"Was what useful?"

"The advice they wanted to give you."

"On how to please a witch? I think my method of asking the witch in question works much better."

"Oh?"

"Yes, I had to stop and tell them so." He was rewarded with a smile. "Speaking of which," he continued, "would you mind terribly if, after we got these suitcases inside, I reminded myself what is under your robe? Ah, there's a pretty blush."

"You make me feel attractive," she said simply.

"Let's go then."

They went into the cottage and began their honeymoon in earnest.

A/N: Thank you to beta reader Trickie Woo

Making Adjustments

Chapter 10 of 19

"Do you love your husband?"

"I don't know. I care for him very deeply and I trust him more than anyone—even you," she admitted.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Their week long honeymoon was lived in the cottage and its garden. They spent hours comparing their childhoods. There were many differences between Ted growing up as the youngest in his Muggle family and Andromeda's pure-blood childhood between two sisters. They discussed their Hogwarts days from their different perspectives. They whispered ideas about how their future would proceed. This last topic was a bit troublesome. By tacit agreement they didn't discuss their children. Ted was eager to start their family, but he somehow knew Andromeda wasn't ready.

It wasn't that she didn't want children. She had always imagined presiding over her own table complete with a trio of children, but she couldn't get over the idea of them being part Mu-Muggles, she corrected herself quickly. She knew they would be Half-blood, but it somehow wouldn't be the same, and she didn't know how she could deal with that. How many times had she traced her name on the tapestry, wondering whose name would be added beside it and what her children would be like? She had never dreamed that the answer would be something that would never be mooned over by other little girls in the same way. Ted, bless him, didn't bring the subject up.

They spent their mornings lazing in bed together and having late breakfasts. After that, they walked through the gardens, discussing changes they might want to make, if Uncle Alphard was interested. They had small lunches and spent the afternoons in the sitting room, reading and relaxing together. Late in the afternoon, they would move to the upstairs, and after some amount of time they would re-emerge fully dressed for a formal dinner in the dining room. Ted was able to admire his wife in a different color every night as she went through what had been the contents of her suitcase.

Then there was the bedroom. The Muggles had started using the term "compatible" to describe couples who found enjoyment together, and Andromeda definitely found that quality with Ted. She couldn't believe the level of passion she was capable of feeling in her husband's arms. He had told her of his intention to learn everything he could about her body and pursued his education avidly. At times she wanted to weep over the beauty of their lovemaking, while at others they laughed raucously together.

He was patient and tender and careful and at other times impatient and intense. She delighted in keeping up with him.

On Saturday night, they came down for dinner to see Uncle Alphard at the table ahead of them. He smiled benignly upon them as he stood to greet them. Andromeda blushed dark pink as she hugged her uncle, wondering if he knew what she and Ted had been doing just minutes before. Ted shook hands with a smile on his face, fairly certain the elder wizard knew and approved. They sat down to dinner, and Alphard told them what he had done in the past week.

"We started on the continent. There were some places Albus thought Voldemort might have developed a following. He thought perhaps the Black name might get me some attention that he wouldn't get. We visited an old friend of his, as well. So far, it's not very widespread at all."

He told them about some of the wizards and witches he had met and generally entertained them through the meal. They had retired to the sitting room when he introduced the difficult subject.

"On the other hand, I had quite an eventful dinner at Grimmauld Place yesterday."

Andromeda's heart beat a little faster. "Oh?"

"Yes, the old family homestead is just as grim as ever. I was summoned by my dear sister and brother, who proceeded to grill me concerning your whereabouts. I told them that as far as I knew you had disappeared. Since this house is Unplottable, I believe that can be considered the truth.

"Your parents are a little annoyed that you managed to leave the family with so many of your clothes and so much jewelry. Your father says that you have Ursula Flint's emeralds." He looked over his glasses. "You have them around your neck as we speak, I see."

She put her hand over her throat. "What about them?"

"Your parents claim they were to go to Narcissa upon her engagement. They expect that to be within the next year and have asked me to keep an eye out for them. You are to return them forthwith." He sat back and smiled. "That's done my duty by my loving siblings."

Andromeda smiled as she fingered the necklace. "I'll consider it. Right now they're leverage."

"That's my Slytherin girl."

"Was there anything else?"

His smile went away and he reached over to take her hand. "Your father blasted the tapestry. He wanted to do it while your sisters and cousins were there. He made us all watch. He made quite a ritual out of it."

A bleak look came over her face. Ted reached for her other hand and held it as he watched her forehead. She took one breath and then a second. After a few minutes she said, "How is Professor Dumbledore? His group was very helpful to us this week in getting Ted's things."

Ted said, "Andromeda."

"We were going to ask some questions about the garden, too..."

"It's perfectly reasonable to be hurt by it."

She buried her face in her husband's shoulder. "Why did they have to do that? Why couldn't they let me make my own choice? If they had to do it, why do it that way? Do I deserve nothing from them?"

He held her and patted her back. As much as he had given up to be a wizard, he had not experienced this sort of betrayal or abandonment. "Do you want to go back?"

She leaned up and looked at him. He pushed her hair back and looked into her sad face. "My dear, you can go back, erase this whole thing."

She shook her head. "What would happen if I did, Uncle Alphard? Tell Ted what would they do."

He looked at her kindly. "They won't take you back into their house. Since they can't break up your marriage, they consider you to be ruined. They might accept you as their daughter if you go back to the Lestranges, but anything could happen if you did that. Rabastan is not known for kindness."

She leaned back into her husband's arms. "I'm content here, with Ted. I think we'll even be happy together. Why would I give that up on the chance that my parents might relent if Rabastan doesn't act the way he always has? It makes no logical sense, even if I wanted to."

Ted pulled his wife close and kissed her. Uncle Alphard looked on and smiled. "That's my girl. They'll forget about you as soon as Narcissa's engagement to young Malfoy goes through. Meanwhile, you've prevented your parents, aunt, and uncle from joining those Death Eaters. Voldemort had all but promised he would return you to the family fold, and since he failed they have chosen to stay outside his group. It's too late for Bellatrix, but she belongs to the Lestranges, now."

"He looks for ways to ingratiate himself to people, doesn't he?"

"Long ago, he promised me that if I worked with him we would find a way to bring Evie back, but of course that would be impossible to do in any meaningful way. I refused."

"He offered me the husband of my choosing, but tried to convince me it shouldn't be Ted."

"Without the Blacks, his plan will be slowed. You have done more than you may have thought by resisting him and your family." Uncle Alphard leaned back and folded his arms in gratification. Something in his robe crinkled. "Ah! I forgot. The elder of your cousins sent you a message. He figured you would be here, or that I at least knew how to contact you." He handed the scroll over.

Dear Andie,

You didn't marry the stiff after all! How funny of you to ask all of those questions about marrying a Muggle when all along you must have been planning to do it yourself. You should have told me your plan. I would have found a way to help somehow, but maybe it's better if you didn't tell too many people. Your husband is some guy to rescue you like that. Are you sure he was really from Hufflepuff?

I hope Mother and Father will let me visit Uncle Alphard and that I can see you. Are you going to have any kids, soon? Will you name one for me? Ha, ha, just kidding.

Sincerely,

Sirius

PS: Your parents have been here and boy are they hot! When your father blasted you from the tapestry, he made the wall behind it burn. Now there's a black hole in the tapestry and a mark on the wallpaper behind it.

Andromeda burst into tears and laughter at the same time. "Oh, that boy!" She handed it to Ted, who likewise smiled. "I guess the whole family isn't against me, then."

"No, my dear, we are not. Some of us remember what it is to be noble as well as ancient. Purity of heart and purpose are much more valuable than purity of blood."

Andromeda sat up and looked at her husband. "Then Ted's the purest person I know."

Ted went back to work the following Monday and survived to tell the tale. He morphed to look like other Ministry workers to get from the courtyard to the Atrium in case the Blacks were looking for him but morphed back when he got to the Transportation office. His only difficult moment came on Tuesday when a creature that could be best described as a witch-sized rabid toad came to his floor.

"Ted Tonks! You'll pay for this. I had plans, and you used MY marriage license with that other witch! I knew I shouldn't have trusted you! You're just a filthy Mudblood and you're going to pay, if it takes YEARS!"

After delivering her invective, Dolores Umbridge spun on her heels and stormed off to whichever department she currently terrorized. Anderson walked over and handed Ted a job slip. "Bit of a thing out in Devonshire. Maybe you should look after it." Ted looked at the slip. He grabbed his coat and hat and headed to the lifts. As he did, he heard voices start to talk behind his back.

All in all, things at the Ministry settled down after Dolores's tirade. The Prophet published a two line statement about the marriage of one AB to TT in Gretna Green, listing the date and Albus Dumbledore as officiator. With the removal of Andromeda's name from the family tree, the Black family seemed to have accepted that the marriage had happened and would not be reversed. Ted started to relax and travel to work as himself in the morning.

Ted's greatest disappointment was that he was no longer allowed to work with Dumbledore's group. There was a strict policy against using witches and wizards with small children, and it was extended to this young couple because Andromeda was an attractive target for Voldemort and his followers. There was some thought that if she could be delivered to her family or the Lestranges, the Blacks, with their wealth and influence, would join Voldemort, and his organization would be strengthened significantly.

Therefore, Auror Moody spent half an hour per week discussing ways in which Ted could take care of his wife if the Death Eaters somehow found Alphard's house. Ted was instructed to design a way of escape and safe hiding places were established. These meetings never ended agreeably, since Ted always asked if he could help patrol Diagon Alley or some other portion of London, and Moody always denied the request.

A couple of weeks after returning home, Alphard Black watched the younger two at breakfast. Ted seemed a bit glum, while Andromeda was more cheerful than she had been in several days. There was nothing in the young wizard's demeanor that Alphard could fault, but there was simply a stiffness in his manner as he ate his meal and then kissed his wife before leaving.

"Let me guess," said the uncle. "You're pregnant and he doesn't want the baby."

"Oh, no, Uncle, quite the opposite... on the first part at least, I don't actually know about the second part." Andromeda's manner was quite bright.

"You seem rather pleased with yourself this morning."

"Wouldn't it have been too soon?" asked Andromeda.

He sighed. "That's what Evie and I thought. There's always a good reason to wait, but they were all so wrong. If we had started sooner, I might have had someone to console me. As it was, she was pregnant when she was killed. If we'd started just a few months earlier..." He looked at her sharply. "What's the real reason you are so relieved? Is it the Muggle issue?"

She opened and shut her mouth.

"You don't want to have his child because it would be half Muggle."

She lowered her head in shame.

"I know I shouldn't feel this way, Uncle, but I can't help thinking. If I have a child with him, it won't be a pure-blood child. And while I carry that child, I won't be completely pure-blood, either."

"Young lady, do you know how stupid that sounds?"

"Yes." She looked out a window. "I know exactly how that sounds. I didn't ask for this marriage, though. It sort of happened to me, and while it's been quite successful in many ways, there are some things I just can't get used to. I can't just change my ideas about everything overnight."

"Do you love your husband?"

"I don't know. I care for him very deeply and I trust him more than anyone...even you," she admitted.

He patted her hand. "That's as it should be. If you feel all that for him, then why wouldn't you want to bind yourself to him and to have that piece of him to comfort you when he's gone? Why wouldn't you give him that piece of yourself to comfort him if you go first?"

She didn't have an answer.

"Think about it, girl."

"Yes, uncle."

Arrangements were made for another witch to visit a couple of times a week. The other witch was familiar with housekeeping and was not very many years older than Andromeda. She Flooed into the kitchen fireplace one morning and handed Andromeda a squirming little boy before brushing herself off. Then she took the child back and held out her hand. "You must be Andromeda. I'm Molly."

A whirlwind erupted in the kitchen as Molly showed the new wife the best spells for washing dishes and generally setting a kitchen to rights. Bennie left the environs with a sniff, complaining that Mistress shouldn't learn to do so much. The two witches laughed and promised to mess it all up again if that would suit the elf. After teaching Andromeda those spells, Molly showed her how to make bread.

They sat at the kitchen table over a cup of tea and exchanged stories. Andromeda was delighted to learn that the red-haired witch was the sister of the two men who had befriended her husband. "I met them the day after our wedding," she said.

Molly leaned forward. "They're a bit too much sometimes, aren't they?"

"I liked it, but I admit I'm glad they're not Ted."

Her guest laughed. "My Arthur isn't very much like them, either. They're great boys, but not very settled. They enjoy running around like heroes, chasing after those Death Eaters. Thank goodness it's nothing very serious. They'll get tired of it and settle down after a bit."

They chatted about various things. Andromeda watched little Bill, who sometimes watched the witches and wanted to help them and at other times seemed perfectly content to play with spoons. "Do you mind an impertinent question?"

"Go right ahead."

"Are you glad you had your baby?"

"Glad enough to have another one on the way." Molly had her cup to her lips but it didn't hide the dreamy smile.

"Oh, really?" This was something Andromeda hadn't imagined. One child was something to ponder, but another one was something else entirely. She glanced at her guest, who didn't look pregnant.

"Oh, I'm only between three and four months gone. It makes me look dumpy. I'll look pregnant in a few weeks, though, if the first one was anything to go by."

"Don't you worry about what could happen?"

"Yes. I worried at first. Arthur is so outspoken about Muggle rights, perhaps more than is prudent. He's been held back over it..."

"Let me guess, Dolores Umbridge is involved."

"Hm, I think she might be. Do you know her?"

"Ted does."

"Anyway, I just love Arthur so much, and Bill here is such a little dear... I couldn't not have another."

This was definitely something to think about for Andromeda. When her husband came home on that particular night, he was tired and a bit worn looking. He wouldn't say what, but something he had seen at work had worried or upset him. He simply pulled her into his arms and held her for a long while as he took deep breaths.

She thought for a minute and remembered that when he comforted her, he soothed her hair and patted her back. She tried it, and it was a bit awkward at first. Then he started to relax in her arms, and suddenly some instinct rose up in her that made it seem the most natural thing in the world. She made soothing sounds and kissed around his ear. After a few minutes he released his hold on her and smiled. "Thank you," he said, "that was just what I needed." He dropped a kiss on her lips and they went in to dinner.

That night, Andromeda started to explore her husband's body as he had been doing with hers all along. It started innocently enough. She rubbed his tired shoulders and back with a soothing lotion, but once she had done that, her questing fingers led her to new places and she followed. She discovered that she was fascinated by things like the backs of his knees. Ted responded with sighs of joy and pleasure, and that night she knew the bliss of having actively given as much pleasure as she received.

A/N: Thanks to Trickie Woo for beta reading.

Under the Stars

Chapter 11 of 19

Ted was no fool. His wife still thought of him as a Mudblood even if she never said the word aloud.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

The middle of August was approaching as Ted approached the cottage one night. The past month or so had been more difficult than he'd expected. Back in the days he led a lonely existence in his flat, he had imagined the wonder of being married to the right witch. He had now accomplished all of that but somehow it rang flat.

He had asked to be allowed to continue his work with Dumbledore's group, but was refused. Dumbledore and Moody both had refused him, on the grounds that he was now targeted by his wife's family. He didn't see that it mattered, since the chances of actually getting hurt were small, but Moody was adamant. The irony ate at him. He wanted to help remove the danger to his wife, but he couldn't because he was married to his wife.

He had sent a letter to his parents right after the wedding, notifying them of the fact and apologizing for not informing them ahead of time. He received a response, telling him that they were proud of him whatever he did and that they were sure it must have been the best way to do things. They were eager to meet her; would Ted and Andromeda consider visiting?

Ted pondered that question. He owed it to his family to see them and introduce his wife. Safety was the biggest issue in his mind, although Andromeda's response to being surrounded by Muggles was a close second. He wondered how she would like his family. He wrote a noncommittal response and left it at that for the time being.

Andromeda was always a source of odd concerns. As far as he knew, there wouldn't be any children. Ted was no fool. His wife still thought of him as a Mudblood even if she never said the word aloud. He could see it in her eyes as she would look at him thoughtfully and then avert her gaze. There was no telling what she would think of their children, and he would rather not risk it. He knew she had somehow managed to grow up in a home with minimal love, but he jealously desired more for his own children.

For the past several weeks, he had held his wife in his arms at night and started to ask himself whether they shouldn't have waited before marriage. Perhaps with a certain amount of courtship, the issue would have been better resolved ahead of time. The question was ludicrous. Had they waited to marry, the Blacks would have found a way to retrieve Andromeda and made sure that she couldn't get away.

She became a little distant with whatever was haunting her, and she watched him with eyes that were becoming too large and dark. He noticed himself becoming a bit short with his wife, and he could see the dark rings that were starting to form under her eyes. He knew that something was starting to take its toll. Yet in this same amount of time, she had been surprisingly eager to learn more about how to please him. There was a new openness about her lovemaking that surprised him, because during the day she seemed to be more thoughtful and quieter than before. Even as everything became more difficult, he was enjoying their nights together more.

Her visits with Molly Weasley were going well, at least. She was quite proud of the housekeeping spells she was learning and especially her skills at cooking. Molly was becoming a fast friend, and it was a good outlet for a witch who was not allowed to leave the garden around her home. At least Ted got to go to work most days.

There had been a quarrel last night that resulted in him sleeping in the back bedroom. At breakfast this morning, Alphard gave Ted a look but didn't say anything. He watched the younger wizard fix his toast and eat it while the elf pattered about. Ted looked at the front page of the Prophet and started reading. Finally the elder wizard looked at Bennie and asked, "Wasn't Andromeda going to fix breakfast this morning?"

"Mistress is being sick this morning. Bennie does it. Better for house-elf to do it."

The head leaning over the paper stiffened, but nothing was said. Alphard tried again. "Is it serious?"

"Bennie goes to check on Mistress. She lies down on bed and says she is better but she can't make breakfast."

Ted's head lifted high enough to see the hard look Alphard was giving him. He returned the stony stare and went back to the paper. Breakfast was finished in silence. Ted took his plate over to the sink left the kitchen.

He went up the stairs and stood outside the bedroom he shared with his wife. He raised his hand to tap on the door and stopped. Had things really gotten to the point where he needed to knock on his own bedroom door? He backed away and went quietly down the stairs and out of the house. For the first time in his marriage, he went to work without kissing his wife goodbye.

This day was particularly long. There was another major accident between a Muggle and magical train. Ted had been eager to get there and do something, so he was part of the first group that went. As soon as they arrived, his co-worker, Eric, fell to the ground, dead. He saw a wand pointed at him and dove behind some rubble even as the stream of green light went over his head.

Taking out his own wand, Ted moved quickly behind train cars, turning a deaf ear to the voices inside them in order to concentrate on the danger and how to end it. He got a chance to see who was wielding the wand and couldn't tell anything. The wizard, or perhaps a tall witch, was wearing a hooded black cloak and a mask. He heard a voice say *"Avada Kedavra!"* Whoever it was had spotted him.

He rolled away again and thought. He had heard of this spell in Defense class. It was an Unforgivable and there was a trace on it. Magical Law Enforcement would arrive any moment. He needed to take care of this before someone Apparated here and got killed before they realized what was happening. He eased his head up and heard a crack.

"Protego!" he shouted, and a Shield Charm went up before the other wizard had a chance to cast a spell again. The shield didn't work against the Unforgivable, but it gave Alastor Moody time to see what was happening and duck the Killing Curse before it could hit him. The cloaked one saw Ted and aimed his next spell at him again, giving Moody a chance to cast an Incarcerus Spell. Moody walked over to his captive to make sure he was held fast while Ted came out around the train cars to see if he could help.

"That was a close one," said Moody, shaking Ted's hand. "They never used the Killing Curse before."

"Who is it?" Ted asked.

"One of Voldemort's Death Eaters. They're wearing hoods and masks, now."

As Ted watched, Moody cast a spell that sent a shining white light into the distance. Moments later several other Aurors came and took the hooded one. Anderson came with some others from the office, and Ted's team got to work at fixing the trains and Obliterating memories. A pair of Healers from St. Mungo's came and gently took Eric's body.

While he worked, Ted thought of Andromeda. He had very nearly died that day, which would have left her defenseless. He pictured her at the mercy of her family. If they would blast a black hole into the tapestry of her name, he wondered what they would do to her personally. He suddenly understood why Dumbledore and Moody wanted him to stay away from the fighting, yet it made him more determined than ever to practice and become good at dueling. He wanted to stay alive to protect her.

They straightened out the trains and tracks and went back to the office for the endless round of paperwork. Today, in addition to the standard paperwork, there was an inquiry about what had happened on the previous occasion and how it was possible for such a thing to happen again.

Now that they knew Death Eaters were involved, they discovered that the trains had been spelled to crash, although they should have been in the area at different times. Voldemort was hoping to achieve some of his goals with a show of force. He had hoped to kill Muggles, but he also wanted to terrorize the Wizarding community in an effort to get the ministry to enact laws of his choosing.

Ted's least favorite administrative assistant was present. Dolores asked a great many questions about what Ted had done on both occasions, implying that both accidents were somehow his fault. The presence of the Death Eater, identified as a relative to the Wilkes family, changed things, and Dolores's suggestions were dismissed. When the meeting was over, she looked at Ted with narrowed eyes and followed the managers.

The meeting ended late in the afternoon. The paperwork concerning the accident, which appeared not to be accidental, started. As he wrote out the many details on several different forms almost mindlessly, Ted's thoughts wandered back to his wife. She wasn't well this morning, and the things he'd said to her the night before came back to haunt him.

"What's the use, Andromeda? I know you still think of me as a Mudblood."

She looked shaken.

"Oh, you haven't actually said the word since that night, but it hasn't stopped you from thinking it."

The look on her face said she wouldn't deny it. "Ted, you don't understand."

"I understand far too much. I love you, Andromeda, but I need some space tonight."

He had spent the night in a different bedroom, staring at the ceiling and listening for her tears. He never heard them. Perhaps she had been too ill to cry. There was no telling how sick she really was because he had chosen not to disturb her that morning. What if it had been his last chance to kiss his wife? His behavior accused him, and he didn't have much to defend himself. Why did he have to be so stubborn? He had no excuse.

He tried to make a Floo call to the cottage, but he couldn't get through. The kitchen fire in the cottage was out. He told himself that there were a lot of reasons why the fire the kitchen might be out. It was the middle of August, of course. Other possibilities were hard to come by. He kept thinking of how the elf said she was ill, and he worried.

It was a relief to get the work done and go back home. He walked toward the cottage, wondering what he would find there. He had just noticed what looked like a heap of laundry sitting on the front step, when suddenly it jumped up and ran to him. She barely allowed him to get through the gate before wrapping herself around him and kissing him everywhere.

"Oh, Teddy, you're back! I was so worried and it was so awful all day. We heard about it at St. Mungo's. There were whispers, and Uncle Alphard went to find out what was happening. He said those Death Eaters caused two trains to crash. Four Muggles were killed as well as one magical person. I've been so worried ever since."

He shook his head and let her kiss him. "I'm not hurt, Dromeda." She must be better, to come at him like this, and she was covering him with kisses. He couldn't remember a time quite like this. His wife was calming down from the first frenzy of relief, but she continued to talk.

"Ted, I was so worried. I know now what you mean to me, when I thought you might not come home, and when I thought that you might have been the wizard who was killed." She pulled away just long enough to look in his face, her hands on either side of it. "Theodore Tonks, I've realized that I love you."

He put a finger to her lips. "Shush, you're just overwrought. You've been sick."

She kissed his finger and pulled away from it. "Ted, I really do. When I thought maybe I wouldn't see you again, I knew. I knew exactly how I feel about you. You shower

me with kindnesses and affections, and I don't have any idea how to return it, but I mean to try. You're good and honorable, and I can't think of anyone better for my baby's father."

He tilted her head and kissed her briefly. "Are you sure?"

"Absolutely."

He kissed her fully then and found a response that went a little deeper than what he was used to. He put his hands on her shoulders and held her at arm's length. "What about you? You were sick. Are you better?"

"I'm right as rain after the Healers finished with me."

"Healers? Oh, you said you had been to St. Mungo's. Did they say what it was?"

"Yes, and I told you, but I'm not sure you were listening."

He replayed the conversation in his mind. When it came to him, he hugged her closer. "Oh, Dromeda, I do love you."

It was all thrilling, and he was eager to make up for the lost hours of the night before. He took her hand and led her onto the lawn. Pointing up to the sky, he said, "There's Andromeda, waiting for her hero."

She pointed to a constellation near by and said, "There's Theodore, riding Pegasus to come rescue her."

"That's Perseus on Pegasus."

"It will always be Theodore for me from now on."

He put his arm around her and nuzzled his head around her neck, kissing her skin as he went. When he looked up again, he saw the first of the meteors shooting across the sky. "Look, Andromeda, the Perseids are starting." She lifted her head and watched with him. He held her close and chuckled into her ear. "There's the dynasty started by Perseus and his Andromeda, just as ours is starting."

"Happy birthday, my hero," she whispered back. For the first time since leaving home the morning before, he remembered that the day that was just starting was his birthday. He was nineteen years old.

She had wrapped a blanket around herself, and now it was spread on the lawn so they could sit and watch the stars. Ted quietly told Andromeda such bits about what really happened with the trains as he felt he could tell her without frightening her too much. She told him what she had discussed with the Healers and what she would need to do over the next several months.

Neither realized what was happening until it was almost over. They counted meteors and occasionally kissed and cuddled. The caresses that followed were gentle. They lay together in an act that was as delicate as the starlight, their quiet sighs and moans mixing with the sounds of the crickets and frogs. When they were done, they pulled their robes over themselves and kissed each other tenderly.

They continued to watch the meteors until the horizon started to grow light, and they could no longer see them. Ted helped his wife put her robe back on and shrugged into his own and they went into the house, where the elf was starting to make noises in the kitchen. They quietly moved up the stairs and into their bedroom.

"You didn't get any dinner!" remembered Andromeda. "Are you hungry?"

"They got us something to eat while we were working," he answered. "Shouldn't you be eating?"

"Hmm... I think I need sleep first. I'm quite tired, it seems."

"Let's get you into bed, then."

"Oh, I like the sound of that." Her eyes were full of promises. Then her brow wrinkled. "You have to go to work, soon."

"I begged off for today, since I was there so late. Anderson said it was a good idea."

"Oh... then come to bed with me." She smiled invitingly.

They prepared themselves, Ted using the bathroom second. When he got into their bedroom, he found Andromeda breathing heavily, sound asleep. He smiled and gathered her into his arms, happy to have things restored to their proper balance.

A/N: A bit of wordplay is present here, more so than I realized at the time I wrote it. The mythological Perseus's name means "from (per) Zeus" because Zeus was his father. Theodore means "gift from god."

I had picked Theodore as Ted's proper name because I happen to like it. Now that I've thought about it, I have to wonder if JKR hadn't intended to slip one gift from god in for another when she named Ted.

As always, this has been beta read by Trickie Woo. Thank you all who have been reading this. I have enjoyed all the reviews, too!

Andromeda's Caper

Chapter 12 of 19

After Ted kissed her good bye on this particular morning, Andromeda went to work. She carefully put her hair up and put on some light makeup. She straightened her robe as well as she could over her expanding body and went down to Alphard's study. "Uncle, I have to discuss something with you."

He looked up and saw her and nodded. "Today is the day you're going, then?"

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Andromeda stood as straight as she could and sucked in the parts of her tummy that would allow themselves to be sucked. Then she slumped back down. It was no use. She was down to one robe that was cut fully enough to accommodate the changes to her body. Fortunately, it was a shade of green that looked good on her. The others simply wouldn't work. They were all tight across the back and under her arms. Within weeks they wouldn't handle the rising curve of her tummy. She had always known that being pregnant involved losing one's waistline, but what it did to a girl's upper body was in some ways worse. Her underthings were too tight, too. She lifted her chin as she looked again in the mirror. Ted didn't seem to mind this aspect of pregnancy at all. She wondered if all men were so easily impressed.

There was no help for it. She would have to go to Madam Malkin's, and today was the day for it. She had decided long before that she wouldn't tell Ted until it was over. If Uncle Alphard disagreed, she would have to put him in a Body Bind. There was no way to avoid this shopping trip, nor the meeting that she planned to include.

If it was exhilarating to think of this trip, it was also a bit frightening, to think of being out in the wide world after the safety of Uncle Alphard's cottage. At first, she had found the boundaries of her life stifling. There was nothing to do all day but wait for Ted to come home. Little by little, she had started developing some interests. She started reading some books in the sitting room and studying different potions and Herbology. Uncle had let her develop her own plot in the garden, and she was making some simple potions that added to their medicine cabinet.

The addition of Molly Weasley to her family circle was helpful, too. With another witch to talk things over, it didn't seem as though she was quite so lonely or closed off from the world. Andromeda had quickly learned what Molly could teach her, so most of the time they simply sat together and knitted, listening to their favorite singer, Celestina Warbeck. Andromeda had never had a good friend before and enjoyed the companionship of the other witch greatly.

Watching the adventures of young Bill was always fun. It was exciting to think that in just a few years, her own little one would be playing in the same way. Having someone to compare notes with regarding pregnancy was useful, too. Molly could tell her that the odd aches and pains she felt were normal. Best of all, she could tell her what to look for that wasn't normal.

After Ted kissed her good bye on this particular morning, Andromeda went to work. She carefully put her hair up and put on some light makeup. She straightened her robe as well as she could over her expanding body and went down to Alphard's study. "Uncle, I have to discuss something with you."

He looked up and saw her and nodded. "Today is the day you're going, then?"

Her eyebrows shot up. "How did you guess?"

"You had to go sometime, and I knew you would be going on a Thursday."

"It's the day I have to go."

"Yes, dear, I know."

"You won't keep me from going, will you?"

"Not in the least. I thought I would go with you and keep an eye out for trouble."

She sighed in relief. "Would you?"

He stood and put away his book. "Of course. I have one condition, though. If I tell you to, or if you think you're in the slightest danger, you need to Apparate, directly into that back corner of the garden I showed you."

She nodded, grateful for his help. "Yes, I will. Thank you so much!"

He looked her over and nodded. "You look lovely. I will enjoy having you on my arm, today. Do you have a plan?"

"Yes, and if it doesn't work, eventually I'll be twenty-one and it won't matter."

"Why don't you wait?"

"Would you, under the circumstances?"

"No, of course not."

They left the cottage securely charmed against intrusion and Disapparated. They arrived in a corner of Diagon Alley near Gringotts. After spending half an hour with one of the goblins there, Andromeda emerged and headed to where her uncle waited for her.

"All set?"

"Yes, they were reluctant to hold it for such a short time, but I convinced them."

"Are you sure you want to go through with the next step?"

"I have to do it."

"All right, then. You'd better hurry; it's almost eleven o'clock. I'll be in the place we discussed."

Andromeda walked into Madam Malkin's and was met by effusive greetings from the proprietress. She explained that she would be making purchases later in the day and needed to simply do some window shopping in the mean time. Madam was happy to leave her customer to it, since it was the day of the week she put out her new fashions.

Promptly at eleven o'clock, the floor of the shop resounded with the precise walk of Druella Black's high-heeled shoes. Andromeda stayed in a corner. She waited until Madam had greeted her and gone into the back for some samples.

"Hello, Mother."

Druella looked around and saw her middle daughter. "Andromeda! What are you doing here?"

"I'm here to arrange a trade."

"A trade of what?"

"I have the emeralds; I want you to release my trust fund from Grandmother Rosier."

"Never!"

Andromeda brushed some lint from her robes. "The money will be mine in two years, anyway, but if you don't do this now, you'll never get the emeralds. What will Abraxas Malfoy say?"

"You wouldn't do that to your own sister."

"Trixie would."

"She goes by 'Bella,' now." Druella roused herself from her reflective tone of voice. "I could make you give me the necklace. *Accio*, emeralds!"

When nothing happened, Andromeda shrugged. "They're not here. Did you expect your own daughter to be so foolish?"

"We need those emeralds!" hissed the mother.

"I need the money!" her daughter responded.

Suddenly Druella realized her daughter was standing in the maternity section of the shop. "You...you're pregnant?"

A soft smile came over her daughter's features. "Yes."

"I won't have it."

Andromeda sighed heavily. "Mother, it doesn't matter what you do or don't want. The child is coming. Ted and I are quite happy with each other and with the child. Give me the money or don't give me the money. If you do, you'll have the emeralds today."

Druella thought fast and made her decision. The child was a misfortune, but at least would not show up on the family tree. The fact of the child was of great value. Bella was still waiting, and the Malfoys were getting antsy. "All right, I'll release the trust fund. You have to promise me to stay out of sight. I don't want anyone to know about your unfortunate condition. When the child is born, you will let me know."

"Done."

"Tell me what to do."

Andromeda and Druella went to Gringotts together. Under the daughter's watchful eye, the mother signed the paperwork releasing the trust fund that had been established for Andromeda Black although she was not yet twenty-one. Once the goblins confirmed that the money would be transferred to her own vault immediately, Andromeda requested that a certain bag be given to her mother. Druella was so delighted to have retrieved the heirloom necklace that she didn't go back to the dressmaker's shop.

Andromeda crossed Madam Malkin's threshold again, this time with galleons in her pocket. She spent some time picking and choosing her new garments carefully, knowing that her opportunities to come for the next ones would be rare. Madam promised to have everything ready in an hour, and Andromeda left for a sandwich shop. Uncle Alphard met her there.

"Well?"

"The emeralds were critical, but I don't think they were the deciding factor."

"Oh?"

"Somehow, I think it was the baby."

"The baby is proof that it's possible for the girls in your family to have children. Rumor has it the Malfoys aren't sure they want Cissy."

A lead weight fell onto Andromeda's spirits. "Oh, I should have realized."

"You thought she was interested for the child's sake?" Alphard reached for his niece's hand.

She shook her head. "I knew better, really I did."

She had eaten part of her sandwich and was looking mournfully at the rest of it.

"You need to eat."

"I know, but it isn't sitting right. I never expected to have such a difficult stomach over being pregnant."

He smiled, but someone came into the restaurant, and his smile stiffened. "I'm going to stand and walk in front of you. You are going to Apparate to exactly the place we discussed. I'll pick up your things and bring them home. Do you understand?"

Andromeda nodded, her eyes suddenly wide and fearful. She thought of nothing but doing exactly what Uncle Alphard said. To do otherwise would put her child, herself, and her uncle in danger. When Alphard said, "Now, girl," she stood and Disapparated on the spot. As she turned, she caught a glimpse of her older sister.

Bellatrix Lestrange walked toward her uncle. "She was here with you, wasn't she?"

"She may have been, whoever you mean. I've been known to frequent this establishment with females over the years, and it appears a great many witches come without me."

The witch's eyes narrowed and her voice went up in pitch. "I meant my sister, you old fool! You know we're looking for her."

The uncle casually looked around. "I don't see either of your sisters here now, Trixie. You must have been misinformed."

"It's Bella, now!" She all but stamped her foot. "And I want you to tell me where Andromeda is."

"I really couldn't say with any certainty where Andromeda is, my dear. You really don't care about her anyway, do you?"

"I could care less about the little slut, but she's a bad mark on the family and must be eliminated."

"Do you hear what you're saying? Would you actually kill over it? Are you capable of spilling human blood? Of spilling *pure* blood?"

Bellatrix thought for a moment and just looked at him. He patted her hand and said, "Yes, dear, it's been charming to see you again, but I really must be going." Alphard Black passed out of the sandwich shop and down the road. Bellatrix was too bemused to see where he went.

Alphard retired for the night as the dessert was cleared up. Ted looked carefully at his wife. "So you went to town today?"

"You knew?"

"I expected you to, sooner or later. I spoke with Alphard about it."

"I can't believe you already knew. It was making me sick to do this behind your back. I waited as long as I could, but I really couldn't wait any longer. I was down to just the

one robe, and..."

"Do you know how dangerous that was?"

She nodded. "I felt so exposed the whole time I was there. I won't be going anywhere again very soon." She had a thought. "Why don't they come after you at the Ministry?"

"I morph my face when traveling in between. It's always a little different, so they don't recognize me. I don't know why they don't actually come into the Ministry. Perhaps so far they still fear the authorities. A time may come, however, when they won't. We'll have to make different plans, then." He looked her up and down. "How much did I spend on the new clothes?"

She smiled proudly. "Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"I traded the emeralds for the trust fund my grandmother left me."

"You shouldn't have had to do that."

"Well, actually, the emeralds weren't mine and the trust fund is, so I felt it was an appropriate trade. I have all the jewels that were supposed to be mine, at least so far as I know, and now I can dress properly without spending your hard-earned money. It's the real reason I went."

"Our expenses are few enough here, Andromeda. I suspect we could have easily covered the cost."

"There will be plenty of costs when the baby comes. He or she will need furniture and clothes, too. Not to mention, how am I supposed to deliver this baby if I don't leave the house?"

"I'm going to talk to Dumbledore about it."

"What will he do?"

"He will know how to handle things, I hope." He stood and helped her out of her chair. "Bennie, you will be clearing up tonight, won't you?"

"Yes, Master Ted."

"Very good, thank you."

Andromeda looked at her husband through her eyelashes. "What will we be doing?"

"We will be looking through your new clothes, of course," He ran his hand along her tummy and added, "and enjoying them after we douse the lights."

A/N: Thanks to Trickie Woo for beta reading!

Pitter Patter

Chapter 13 of 19

Andromeda dropped what she was doing and went into the kitchen, where she fell into a chair. Her uncle came, and she was trembling so hard that he asked her what happened. She described what she had seen and Alphard laughed, to his niece's chagrin.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

When Molly Weasley went into labor, Andromeda was brought to the Burrow to keep her company. The two witches spent the morning chatting, and Andromeda knitted. They were interrupted at fifteen minute intervals by Molly's contractions, which Andromeda thought might not be so bad after all. Molly simply stopped for a few minutes and breathed heavily as the pains worked through her lower body.

After lunch, the pains came closer and intensified. Andromeda's opinion about the experience of childbirth started to shift a bit. The mediwitch came and shooed her from the room, judging that the first time mother shouldn't be present for the more active portions of the process. Andromeda spent the last two hours chatting with Arthur and caring for young Bill, who was as worried about Molly as she was.

Finally a small cry alerted them to the presence of young Charlie. Arthur jumped up and went to his bedroom to see his wife, while Andromeda hugged Bill until the little boy protested loudly. After a while Arthur came and took his son in to meet his baby brother while Andromeda went to the kitchen and set it to rights.

Arthur and Bill came noisily down the stairs and went out into the yard. They went to a shed, and after a while all sorts of ghastly noises came out. The mediwitch came downstairs and gratefully drank the tea set out for her. She smiled kindly and sent Andromeda upstairs. She walked nervously up the stairs and knocked on the door.

"Come in."

Andromeda went in and did not expect to see her hostess sitting up in her bed. She looked like a radiant queen, although a tired one. As she stepped closer, she could see that the tiny bundle in Molly's arms was nursing. She quietly sat down, and as she watched, the baby fell asleep and shifted his face away from his mother.

"Why don't you hold him?"

"I've never held one, I don't know how..."

"Then don't you think it's time you learned?" Molly laughed. "You'll have to do most of the holding in a few months, yourself."

She took a deep breath walked over to the bed. Molly clucked over the way she held out her hands. "Here, you go. Let his head slide into the crook of your arm, like that,

yes, and steady him with this hand. That's just right."

Andromeda sat down and looked at the tiny human being in her arms. He shifted slightly into a more comfortable position and let out the biggest yawn she had ever seen in her life, all without opening his eyes. She felt something tingle and prickle in her chest, and then she felt something else. From deep within her belly, she felt the slightest stirring of something, someone, whom she already loved dearly.

Andromeda welcomed the approach of Christmas as never before. It was fun to think of surprises for the people in her life and consider whether they would like them. It was also fun to realize that for once she could spend a Christmas that didn't involve Father and Aunt Walburga reciting family trees from Nature's Nobility to each other. There was no worry that they would get to certain families and look her over speculatively, as though considering what her children would look like if she married some scion of the page they were reading. With a start, she realized the answer to such a question resided in the firm bump of her belly, which was starting to push out quite convincingly.

Ted was beside himself with joy. For some reason, toys started appearing at their house, toys that wouldn't be played with for several years, but that the new father couldn't resist. Andromeda found that she had to be the voice of restraint on several occasions as well when he looked through the catalogs. It was hard not to join in his delight, however. Having both been somewhat lonely on previous Christmases, they found this one gave them additional common ground.

It was with great enjoyment, then, that they decorated a tree together and hung mistletoe. Andromeda and Bennie made delicious smells in the kitchen while Ted decorated the rest of the cottage. Uncle Alphard looked on in delight, huge smiles covering his face.

When the day finally came, they lazed in bed a bit, tired from certain celebrations they had started the night before. Andromeda became aware of her husband's body against her back, his hand over her expanding middle, and felt waves of well-being. With a jolt, she realized that he was awake, too, and rolled over to kiss him good morning.

It was some time later that the couple came down the stairs to see Uncle Alphard in front of the Christmas tree. The elder wizard was drinking his coffee and looked at the two with a twinkle in his eye. He bade them to have some breakfast, and then the trio looked at their gifts.

The most impressive one that Andromeda received was a pendant in the shape of a princess, dotted with diamonds. It was when she looked closely at the diamonds that she understood. "It's the constellation!"

He smiled. "My princess Andromeda."

She pointed him to a gift she had gotten him. It was a watch. Behind the hands was a sketch of a young man, similarly dotted with small diamonds. "Perseus," he said smiling. Their eyes sparkled at each other in a shared private moment. The two kissed until a harrumph interrupted them. Uncle Alphard had gotten them both a special clock. It had two hands on it, one that said "Andromeda" and another that said "Theodore". A smaller, third hand, didn't have a name on it. All three were pointing, instead of at a number, at a spot on the dial that said, "At Home."

"Molly has a clock like this," said Andromeda. "She said if any of the hands ever point to, 'Mortal Danger,' she's leaving the country."

After Christmas, most of Andromeda's time was spent in preparing for the baby. Ted worked hard at the Ministry and was allowed to participate in some of the meetings of Dumbledore's group. He was taught some new spells, including one that nearly put Andromeda into early labor.

She was working on laundry one afternoon, when out of the sky a glowing white horse with wings dropped into the garden. It opened its mouth and Ted's voice said, "I love you."

Andromeda dropped what she was doing and went into the kitchen, where she fell into a chair. Her uncle came, and she was trembling so hard that he asked her what happened. She described what she had seen and Alphard laughed, to his niece's chagrin. He then explained that it was a Patronus, and that it must be Ted's. He told her that it was used by Dumbledore and his helpers to send messages quickly. He showed Andromeda the spell and taught her how to use it. After several days, she could make a passable dove appear from her wand.

By the end of April, she was able to use it to send a very important message to the Ministry. Ted was working on end-of-month reports when the white bird flew into his cubicle and said, "It's time." He jumped up and barely hollered to Anderson where he was going as he ran to the Ministry Floors.

"Going somewhere?" asked a girlish voice behind him.

"I have urgent business that requires I be elsewhere," he informed Dolores.

"That's too bad, Teddy. I was coming to tell you how you could make things up to me."

"I'm sorry, Dolores, it will have to be another time."

"All right then, but don't make me wait too long."

When he arrived home, Ted discovered that his wife was in their bed and that a mediwitch was with her. Alphard was in the sitting room with Sirius. The mediwitch had come from Hogwarts, and Dumbledore had asked Sirius, as one of the cottage's secret keepers, to bring her. The group of men waited in the sitting room, eating and drinking at intervals when the house-elf brought food.

Andromeda had no idea her body could do such things to her. All her life she had known her body very well, thank you, and it had done as she had asked. Today it did as nature intended, which had nothing to do with her intentions. The mediwitch encouraged her and instructed her to work with the pains and try to relax, but just as she thought she was getting it, Andromeda was overturned by another pain.

Finally, the mediwitch gave her a potion.

"What is it?" asked Andromeda suspiciously.

"It's a mild calming draught. It won't do much at all, but should help your body relax enough to work with these contractions."

She took the liquid and seconds later was hit by another pain. After a while, they were just as painful, but her body wouldn't let her tense up as before. She found that she was starting to work with the contractions. The pains suddenly hit with a new intensity. The mediwitch checked her progress and decided she was ready.

Teddy was called upstairs and instructed to hold her in a sitting position as she pushed. Andromeda pushed and pushed without exactly understanding what she was doing. Suddenly she could feel where the baby was and what needed to happen. When the next contraction came, she took a deep breath and bore down with new intensity. In less time than is needed to describe it, the head appeared. The midwife gently grasped the head as first one shoulder and then the other came out and the baby slid out with a whoosh and a feeling of great relief for the mother.

Ted gently leaned his wife back into the pillows. Then he leaned forward to look at... the midwife held the baby up and they saw it was a girl. The baby was cleaned up and handed to the father, who carried her over to the mother. Andromeda was so delighted to be done with labor that she was content to see the baby in Ted's arms. The mediwitch concentrated on the afterbirth and clearing up.

"She's beautiful, Dromeda."

"Bring her here."

Ted sat on the bed near his wife and both kissed the little face. Andromeda watched as the light colored fuzz on the baby's head gently turned pink. "Look, Ted, she has your hair."

The mediwitch's next set of instructions for the new mother were met with amazement. "I need to do what?"

"You need to feed the baby. I'm not leaving until I see that the two of you can do this together."

"But, you'll see me."

"I've seen a lot more than that, today, dear," was the practical response.

"I was in so much pain I didn't notice."

"Come on now, this will be fine once you've done it. Listen to her fuss, and see the way she's rooting around."

Andromeda opened her nightgown and held the baby up to herself, just as she had seen Molly do with Charlie. It didn't work, and the baby's fusses became more pronounced cries. The mediwitch came over and twisted the baby somewhat so that they were chest to chest. Then she helped line things up a bit, a process the young mother found highly embarrassing. The baby latched on with gusto and started sucking, making Andromeda jump.

"There you are, that's fine. You need to feed her every two to three hours, and you will probably need to change her diaper just as often. I'll wait an hour or so to make sure you're still doing well, but then I'll leave and come back in a couple of days.. You shouldn't need me, but if you do, contact me at the school."

Andromeda nodded, her eyes watching the little face that was so close to her own, but then she looked up. "Oh, wait. I didn't hear you when you told me your name."

"It's Poppy. Poppy Pomfrey. I was recently certified, and I'll be the matron at Hogwarts from now on."

After the baby finished her first meal and went to sleep, Alphard and Sirius came to meet her. Sirius noticed her pink hair. "Hey, how come she can do that?" asked the boy.

"She's a Metamorphmagus, like her father," answered the new mother. "She can't control it yet."

"I didn't know you were one of them," said Sirius, looking at Ted with new respect. "I wonder if sometime, I could ask you some questions. It's for a Transfiguration project I'm working on with my mates."

"I don't know how much help I can be, but I will be happy to assist you if I can," answered Ted.

The mediwitch indicated that she was ready to return to the school, which meant that Sirius would leave as well.

After a while, the young family was alone in the bedroom. Ted watched the baby's hair turn shades of pink while she nursed.

"She seems to be happy."

"I hope so," answered the tired mother. "Have you thought of a name?"

"Nymphadora."

"Nym what?"

"Nymphadora."

"Where did it come from?"

"Nowhere. I just like it."

Andromeda looked mournfully down at the small bundle in her arms. "Learn a lot of protective jinxes, little one. You're going to need them."

A/N: Thank you to Trickie Woo for beta reading this.

The Order

Chapter 14 of 19

...The Death Eaters are more determined and have been using Unforgivable Curses for several years now. It's a long time since this stopped being a lark. The time has come to take more definitive action..."

Except for OCs, the characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Andromeda's second child was born when his older sister was a two and a half years old. Ted's delight was boundless. Things had quieted down a bit. The Death Eaters caused occasional incidents to remind the Ministry of their existence, but were hiding their presence for the most part. The pregnancy had gone without incident, and the delivery of the child was no more difficult than most women face.

On the day the child was born, Ted looked at him for hours. Andromeda was happy to have given him a son. Ted would never admit it, and he was firmly wrapped around his daughter's finger, but she knew men liked to have a son. Hadn't Aunt Walburga twitted Mother about it for Andromeda's whole life?

Ted looked up at one point. "He makes me think of my Dad. Can we call him Timothy?"

She smiled fondly. The name seemed to fit the boy, somehow. "Yes, I think it suits him."

"Timothy Alphard?"

Andromeda smiled brighter. "Yes, I think that's perfect."

She looked at the man and little boy she loved best in the world and remembered how the previous summer they had sat on a blanket as was becoming their habit on the night of the Perseid meteors. Ted had been so incredibly himself, sitting there, pointing out the shooting stars so she would see them and glancing her way. His smiles had made her stomach swim. She could never define what happened on such occasions, but it had come upon her that she had to be with him in the most intimate of ways right then.

She had sat up behind him and kissed his ear as she unfastened his robe. He had sucked in his breath, and she continued to undress him. It hadn't taken much effort from there to convince him to participate. They had stayed together under the stars and shared their love until the meteors faded from view. Afterwards, they had walked into the house and prepared for the day with a smile that made the witch's uncle smile in satisfaction.

A persistent stomach upset a month and a half later had caused Andromeda to seek the assistance of a Healer in a rare instance of her leaving the cottage. The Healer had confirmed what she already suspected: She was in the second month of pregnancy. They had met this news with as much joy as they had when little Dora, as her father called her, was announced.

Ted brought her back to the present by smiling as he looked at her. "Dromeda, you're still the prettiest witch I've ever seen."

"Nonsense. I'm all worn out from having a baby. My skin is blotchy and my hair is all over..."

She was silenced by a kiss that was altogether more passionate than the situation warranted, given that passion was on a list of things that would be in short supply for a month or so. "I see all those things, but I also see you, that I love so much, and that's always been so pretty to me."

"Oh, Ted," she said, bursting into tears, "you should know better than to say something like that to me on a day like today when my feelings are all over the place. I love you, too."

Poppy had come from Hogwarts again to deliver the baby, and Sirius had come with her. The young wizard spent several minutes telling his little cousin that he must sort to Gryffindor, and that together they would show those Slytherins what was what. Andromeda watched the two boys and hoped with all her heart that the world would adjust and the family rifts could be healed.

Orion and Walburga allowed Sirius to visit Alphard's house during the following summer, even though they suspected Alphard was somehow helping their niece in her scandalous behavior. Sirius had a great deal of fun talking with his uncle and playing with his young cousin. He watched her try to copy his black hair and the shape of his face and laughed loud and long. It was a good week, and Andromeda enjoyed having someone different in the house as much as Sirius enjoyed being away from his parents and brother.

The night before he was to return to his parents' house, Sirius watched Andromeda playing with his toddler cousin and asked about something that had troubled him that week. "He seems a bit... flat... like he's missing a spark. Is there something wrong with him?"

Andromeda shook her head. "No, he's fine. We think he might be a Squib."

"A Squib? How can you stand it?"

She smiled. "He's a member of the family."

"But still..."

"His father and I love each other very much, and our children are part of that love. I couldn't not love this child, Sirius. If he's not magical, we will find a way to have him educated in the Muggle world, to go to university and to live as normally that way as he can. Maybe he'll be better off away from the troubles you and I have faced with our family."

"Hm, you might be right about that," said the young wizard, who was still a boy. "He could hardly be worse off than you are."

"Thanks," said Andromeda, giving her cousin a bump with her shoulder. He bumped her back, and they went downstairs together for Sirius's last evening in the cottage.

Sirius didn't mean to let something slip, but somehow he must have. Rumor flooded the Black family about Andromeda's Squib child, and Alphard was called to discuss it. He returned several hours after he left, quite ill. Andromeda helped him to bed and tried various healing methods and potions.

"They poisoned me, but it won't be possible for you to prove it."

"What can we do?"

"There's nothing you can do, dear. It's not a bad time for me to go where Evie is. You and Ted are doing so well, the kids are wonderful, and I can leave. I know you'll help Sirius when he needs help. Listen, I have left you the cottage and it's contents. Since you have that trust fund, I'm leaving the rest of my estate to Sirius. I've locked it all up tight so that the family can't do anything about it. I think they were hoping that the cottage would revert to Walburga and you would finally be exposed, but it's not going to happen. Don't pay any attention to any letters you might receive."

Andromeda spent the evening caring for her uncle. Bennie took care of the children until Ted came home from work. Uncle Alphard opened his eyes one last time and said, "I love you, child," and then he was gone. Bennie came into the room several minutes later.

"Mistress, Bennie has to leave."

She sat there, her uncle's hand still in her own, and tears running down her face. She didn't understand what the elf was saying.

"Bennie has to leave and to take Master Alphard with him."

"Oh." It hadn't occurred to Andromeda that the house wouldn't include the elf, but it made perfect sense. The elf had belonged to the Grimmauld Place house and only left when Uncle Alphard did. Once he died, the elf would go back to the house.

"I shouldn't keep you, then, Bennie. You've been a very good elf, and I'm sorry that you have to leave."

"Bennie thanks Mistress. But, Mistress, I takes Master Alphard with me."

"Yes, of course." He would be buried from the home of his ancestors. He was still on the tapestry, after all. It was the first time in many months that Andromeda had thought about it, and she really didn't care, but at that moment it caused her to wince.

Ted took a bereavement day and watched the children as Andromeda wore a concealing cloak that left her face in shadow. She didn't go to the funeral, but did attend the service at the place where all Blacks in good standing were buried.

"It's your fault you know."

Andromeda turned and saw her older sister. She looked much older than when she had last seen her, and there was a new and strange light in her eyes.

"I didn't create the world that caused this."

"No, but you made things worse by marrying the Mudblood and having his children."

"I love my husband, and I love my children."

Bellatrix hissed, "They don't matter. My lord will destroy them all, and then you will join him as I have in order to help him rule the world."

Andromeda looked at her sister's face. Her eyes were shining but none of it quite fit. "What have you been doing with him?"

Trixie's chin lifted a bit. "It's none of your business. He and I are on a different plane than the rest of you."

"I think I'm content to be a mere mortal."

"Maybe you should leave and let us mourn poor Uncle Alphard."

Andromeda snorted. "Let you mourn poor Uncle Alphard? That's a bit rich in this family. Were you in on the plot to poison him?"

Her sister's eyes narrowed. "What do you know about that?"

"Do you honestly think he didn't know what happened once it was done? Who do you think sat by his side and held his hand the whole time? Who do you suppose turned him over to the house-elf? Where's Bennie, anyway?"

Bellatrix shrugged. "I heard the elf was resisting his retraining. Aunt Walburga did the only thing she could."

Andromeda resisted the urge to raise her voice. "She...she didn't."

Her sister smiled. "Oh, but she did."

"To kill Uncle was one thing, but the house-elf... he wasn't part of this..."

Andromeda started to back away but Bellatrix reached out and grabbed her arm. "Not so fast, Little Sister..."

"Is it true?" The girls looked up to find that they had been joined by Sirius.

His elder cousin shrugged. "All you need to do is look at the hallway when you get home, Sirius."

He shook his head and hissed angrily. "No, about Uncle Alphard."

"I have no idea what you're talking about," the witch said with an attempt at a demure look on her face that she could no longer achieve. "Of course, if the Mudblood's whore, here, is pushed out into the open by his death... it's a good thing, don't you think?"

Sirius's face turned dark red and he turned on his heel to find his parents. Trixie looked up, a gleam in her eyes at the idea of a scene, and Andromeda took advantage of the opportunity to place a Stinging Jinx on the hand that held her arm. Once free, she didn't waste a second in escaping to her own back garden, hers now that Uncle had willed it to her.

Andromeda and Ted were sitting over coffee in the kitchen, discussing the funeral and their own thoughts about what had happened, when the Floo sprang to life.

"What is it now?" asked Ted as he jumped up and pulled out his wand. As ever, he tried to stand in front of his wife, but she pulled out her own wand and aimed, a spell ready at her lips. They watched the figure spinning into the room and relaxed when it turned out to be Sirius. Soot from the fireplace stuck to the tear-tracks on his face.

"It's true," he said, "all of it, Andie. Uncle Alphard," he swallowed hard, "and poor Bennie, too. They didn't admit it, but they didn't deny it, either. Mother looked positively pleased with herself. How can she call herself his sister?"

"I left. I packed everything I could fit into my school trunk and went to James Potters's house. His parents want me and practically treat me like James. They'll help me get on my feet. I'll find a job after I'm done at Hogwarts, and then I'll have a place of my own."

"Oh, Sirius..." she sat him down and offered him something to eat.

"No, it's ok," he said. "Mrs. Potter is fixing supper right now. They said I might come to you and let you know what happened. Well, if it's just a little..." He sat when she put her hands on his shoulders. His mouth was half full of biscuits when he finally thought to ask, "Wha' will you do whe' th' house goes t' Moth'r?"

"It won't."

Sirius gulped his mouthful down and said, "What do you mean?"

"Uncle told me that night, when he realized what had happened. He said that long ago he changed his will. He left me this cottage and you the rest of his estate."

The boy sat and thought for a while. "He knew them really well, didn't he?"

"He did grow up between them."

"It's hard to picture them as children. Can you imagine my mother that way?"

Andromeda giggled. "Hardly."

"Me, either. I feel like you and I are the only ones who truly knew him. We're the ones who should have a funeral for him."

Andromeda Summoned a piece of parchment and a quill from the kitchen counter. "Who should be there?"

The next evening, a small group of people including Molly and Arthur Weasley, the Prewett brothers, Kingsley Shacklebolt, Alastor Moody, and Albus Dumbledore sat in the sitting room of what was now Andromeda Tonks's cottage. Sirius had brought his friend, James.

Dumbledore stood before them as Ted handed out glasses of firewhisky. "I want to remember as good a fighter as we ever had. Our small group has been much enriched by Alphard's activities. He's been a good spy for our side within the bosom of Voldemort's followers. It will be much harder, now, to anticipate what they might do.

"Besides that, he's been a loving and kind member of his family. Few of you were alive when Evie was taken from him, and I never saw a man mourn harder. We can hope, for his sake, that he's been reunited with the witch he never stopped loving. Since that time, he's taken care of his sister and brother's children as needed, making up for what these two never had at home. Alphard Black, wherever you are, may it be someplace where you can rest on a job well done.

"To Alphard Black!" He raised his cup and everyone in the room did the same.

Stories were passed, then, including some funny ones told by Alastor Moody, who had known Alphard when both were students at Hogwarts. There had been more

interaction between Slytherin House and the other houses in those days, and the two had gotten into a couple of escapades together over the years.

The evening was long from over when Dumbledore stood again. "I must ask your patience, friends, for a few more minutes."

Everyone's eye looked up at the Headmaster of Hogwarts. "We've had a loose organization of sorts, but we're fighting against a strong enemy whose organization has a name and a plan. The Death Eaters are more determined and have been using Unforgivable Curses for several years now. It's a long time since this stopped being a lark. The time has come to take more definitive action.

"I have chosen to let our group be controlled by the preferences of the Ministry. Unfortunately, Cornelius Fudge has concerns that will not allow him to realize what is happening within some of our first families..."

"Too busy counting the campaign contributions," injected Moody under his breath. "He doesn't want to sacrifice his influence with the pureblood families."

Dumbledore cleared his throat. "For whatever reason, he has chosen not to take this seriously. I therefore believe that we must act, within the confines of the law as much as possible. Our organization will take on a more definitive structure. I would like to propose that we call ourselves," he paused to wave his right arm. There was a flash of light and a bright fire-red bird flew into the room and settled on his arm. "I propose we call ourselves the Order of the Phoenix."

Thank you to Trickie Woo for beta reading.

Thank you also to the staff here who selected this as a Featured Story. I'm quite honored!

Family Affairs

Chapter 15 of 19

Ted looked on his dad's nightstand. There was a picture from two summers before when the entire family had gone to Brighton. There were the kids, behaving like normal kids with grandparents, and there was Andromeda, who hadn't been stiff with the Muggles at all. Dromeda, he thought with a pang of longing. More than anything in this moment, he wanted to crawl into bed with his wife and let her soothe the agony he was feeling.

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling.

Over the years, the Order of the Phoenix met in different places. Ted was adamant that only a small group of particularly trusted friends would ever come to their cottage. "I know some of these new kids are hard working, smart, and trustworthy, but there are a couple I don't like the looks of, Dromeda." She accepted his decisions on the matter because he saw more out in the world than she did.

If she was weary of keeping to her own home, she didn't complain. Several of the Order members Ted trusted would pop into and out of her kitchen when they had news to pass on, knowing that Andromeda would get it to Dumbledore. She had a rambunctious pre-schooler and an active toddler to watch. Now she also had to shoulder all of the housekeeping, since Bennie had been removed from the home.

This very last thought somehow hurt her the most. If only she or uncle had thought of it, they could have given the house-elf clothes before Alphard had died. At least one unnecessary death might have been prevented. For that matter, what if she had thought to keep Uncle from going to her Aunt's house that day, or had given him a bezoar before he left? Such were her thoughts as she went around the daily grind of cleaning the house, doing laundry, and tending her garden.

Sirius finished his classes and got his own flat. After a year or two, he introduced her to a girl named Lily. It didn't take too long for Andromeda to realize she was speaking with the Muggle-born girl of a long ago conversation. She was quite a charming girl with reddish hair and green eyes. It was easy to see why both James and Sirius liked her. Having seen the friendship between Sirius and James, which transcended Sirius's one-time friendship with this own brother, it was easy to see why Sirius deferred to James when James and Lily fell in love. Andromeda was proud of the way Sirius took joy in his friend's upcoming marriage, and she hugged him extra tight when he left that day.

"Geroff! Geez, Andromeda, sometimes you're far too much like James's mother."

One night, Ted was contentedly holding his sleeping wife when a large, ghostly bird flew into the room. "Ted, come to your parents' house."

Andromeda, who had just been dozing off, roused. "What's Dumbledore doing in our bedroom?"

Ted was already getting out of bed and looking for his trousers. "It was his Patronus. There's something happening at my parents' house."

She sat up. "Oh, Ted! Do you want me to come?"

"No, you need to stay with the kids. I'll be back soon, and it will be fine. You'll see, Dromeda."

It wasn't fine. When he arrived at the Tonks house, Ted found that the door had been smashed in. Two wizards were standing in the sitting room and glaring at Alastor Moody, who had them bound. Dumbledore beckoned him into the downstairs bedroom. Ted walked down the hallway, swallowing hard the entire time until he stood in the doorway. His parents had been laid on their bed, dead with no visible marks upon them.

"They used *Avada Kedavra* on them."

"Why?"

"Perhaps this is some sort of revenge to them. I don't know exactly, Ted. When they used the Unforgivables, MLE was alerted and came immediately. They didn't have a chance against properly trained Aurors. Do you want to contact your brother and sister?"

"I guess I had better." Ted looked on his dad's nightstand. There was a picture from two summers before when the entire family had gone to Brighton. There were the kids, behaving like normal kids with grandparents, and there was Andromeda, who hadn't been stiff with the Muggles at all. *Dromeda*, he thought with a pang of longing. More than anything in this moment, he wanted to crawl into bed with his wife and let her soothe the agony he was feeling.

He walked out into the kitchen and picked up the telephone receiver. Tom and Sue came within a couple of hours. There was some recrimination, but not much. Amazingly enough, Kingsley Shacklebolt was a calming influence. He knew just the words to say that would soothe the tensions caused by Wizard troubles that had crossed into the Muggle sphere. Tom, Sue, and Ted wept together and made some preliminary plans together. It was the closest he had been to his Muggle family since Professor Morgan had been on their doorstep all those years before.

Ted took a few minutes to look into the faces of his parents' murderers. They were two haughty wizards, old enough to be his father and then some. They were both quite handsome in a way, although contempt for the world they lived in had twisted their features and made them unnecessarily old. Ted looked at the one on the left and realized he was looking at his wife's eyes and mouth. The other looked remarkably like her cousin.

"I take it that you're Cygnus, and you're Orion Black?" he said to each, respectively. "He looked at his father-in-law and said, "I would tell you that it's a pleasure to meet you after all this time, but under the circumstances, I won't lie. I can't imagine why you would want to hurt my parents, who've done nothing to you."

"Nothing?" asked Cygnus Black, stunned into speech. "NOTHING? They produced you, didn't they? And didn't you ruin the plans my family had for the next three generations?"

"I've made your daughter happy, Mr. Black. We have a beautiful life together and two wonderful children. If you can't appreciate how incredible your daughter is in the life she chose, I pity you."

Kingsley stepped into the living room. "The Azkaban guards will be here in a minute or two," he said quietly.

"YOU... pity ME?" The wizard began to spit invective on Ted. "You are the Mudblood who ruined my daughter! When we're done with you, there won't be anything left to pity about you!"

His brother joined in. "You have been encouraging my son in his flight from what's right!" said Orion. "You will be made to pay for this!"

It was too much for the pair of Dementors who had been summoned to this address. The high emotions of those who were to be imprisoned drew them, and rather than taking charge of the two wizards, they instead moved in to kiss them.

"NO!" shouted Ted. "Not like that."

"*Expecto Patronum!*" shouted Moody. Ted pulled out his wand and performed the same spell. The Dementors were dispelled, but the damage was done. The seeing but unconscious bodies of Orion and Cygnus Black were lying on the Tonks family's sitting room floor. Healers would now be summoned to bring them to their homes, where they would die in a week or two. The Prophet would report that they were taken suddenly ill while visiting distant relatives and died quietly at home. The Black family would retreat from their vendetta against the middle daughter of Cygnus and Druella, but they would nurse their wounds and wait for their time to come.

In the meanwhile, Kingsley was keeping Tom and Sue in the back room, where they wouldn't see what happened to the murderers of their parents. When the Muggle authorities came, he worked with them to explain what went on in terms that they would accept. Ted watched the Auror who had been a liaison of sorts for him into the Magical world and wished that the Minister of Magic had more of his finesse and calming influence.

Finally, Ted hugged his brother and sister for the last time and went home. There was nothing more to do that day, although they would have much to do in the next month until their parents' affairs were settled. Dumbledore said he would arrange bereavement leave with Anderson and sent Ted home.

He climbed into his bed and buried his face in his wife's chest. As he told her all about it, she soothed him and gave him the love he needed and expected. Then he realized and sat up. "It was your father and uncle, Dromeda."

Her eyes got big. "Do you blame me?"

"Not at all. It's just that, you've lost something tonight, too."

"Oh." Her voice sounded small and far away. "It didn't occur to me." She sat up with him. "It's not like he's been particularly father-like to me in the past fifteen years."

"Still..."

"Yes. Still..."

They held each other then, whispering and soothing each other. As the sky turned purple and pink, they sought comfort together. They dozed off in a tangle of arms and legs and didn't waken until the children came in, looking for breakfast.

One of the oddest messages Andromeda would get in her life was an urgent request from Narcissa to meet at a Muggle restaurant near Charing Cross Road. Ted looked at the message and went to look at the establishment in question. He could find no reason not to accept the meeting if he went along, so she took out some of her heaviest parchment and answered her sister's note in the affirmative. The Prewett brothers watched the outside of the restaurant while Sirius and his friend Remus watched Dora and Tim.

There was a pregnant blond woman in the back of the restaurant when Ted and Andromeda arrived. Andromeda was surprised to see her sister in that condition, although she knew it must happen sometime. The Malfoys had very specific plans for their son and future grandchildren. She cleared her throat as she approached so as not to startle Narcissa and sat across from her. Ted, morphed to look like a random Muggle, sat at a different table to allow the sisters some privacy.

"Cissy... I can see how you've been. Are you happy?"

Narcissa narrowed her eyes. "Let's not exchange pleasantries, Andie. I need something and I believe you may have it."

Andromeda sat back. "I'm not sure what you're talking about, or why I would bother to help you."

"It's for my baby. Its life is in danger."

"What's the matter?"

"There's a prophecy about a child that will be born this summer, in late July. The Dark Lord has heard of it and is now looking at all the children likely to be born then."

Andromeda forced her face to be impassive. She knew of two children due in that time frame, and now her own niece or nephew as well? "If your lord wills it, shouldn't you make the sacrifice?"

Narcissa's voice was almost inaudible. "That's what Bella says, but he's not my lord. I'm not one of them. It took too long to get pregnant. I'm not sacrificing my child."

A warm rush of feeling toward her sister flooded Andromeda. They had at least this much in common. "When are you due?"

"I'm due in the middle of July, but I've heard your first baby was late. What if he decides my baby is the one, before my baby even does anything? What if he tries something before the baby is even born?"

"What do you expect me to do for you?"

"I hear that you used a potion when your baby was late. I need the recipe."

Andromeda couldn't help smiling at the memory of those days before Nymphadora was born. The baby had been late, and they had resorted to various methods of bringing the child on. She had tried every wives' tale she could find, including several that involved Ted.

"Please, Andie? I'll give you a house-elf."

"What are you talking about?"

"It's Bennie's sister. She's been a bit hostile at times because of what Aunt Walburga did to her brother. We were getting ready to put her on the wall at Grimmauld Place, but if you do this, I'll send her to you... free and clear."

"All right, then. I'll look through my recipe box and send you the remedies I used. Do you have a good Potions brewer?"

"There's one who owes much to Lucius. He's the best to leave Hogwarts in a generation."

"They're not that complicated, although one can be tricky. If he's as good as you say, he'll have no problem. Take care of yourself, Narcissa. You're looking a bit peaked."

"Wouldn't you be peaked, if you were worried about this?"

Andromeda couldn't argue against it. Her sister didn't want to chat, so she paid for her coffee and left. A moment later, Ted joined her on the sidewalk, and they made their way to the Leaky Cauldron.

"Well?" he asked.

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you."

They arrived back at home, and a very excited Nymphadora jumped up and down, wanting to talk to her mother. "Mum! Remus is the smartest wizard in the whole world. When I grow up, I want to marry him!"

Ted and Andromeda looked at each other and laughed. Sirius elbowed his friend, and Remus turned red and looked away. Andromeda looked at her daughter and said, "It's very nice that you've found someone, dear, but maybe you should wait until he asks you."

"You'll ask me, won't you Remus?" The little girl's hair went green and pink and then a sandy brownish blond to match his.

"We'll have to see, Nymphadora. Maybe when you're older and know me better, you won't want me."

Sirius couldn't resist a gibe. "You never know, Moony, maybe she likes furry little problems."

"I *love* furry little problems!" insisted the six-year-old.

The young wizards left soon afterwards, leaving a bemused pair of parents behind them.

"Daddy, what's a furry little problem?"

Narcissa's child, a boy, was born in early June, a full month early. Perhaps she hadn't used any of Andromeda's recipes or techniques after all. The child was healthy, if destined to always be a bit small for his age. Andromeda breathed a sigh of relief that one life was saved, even if it was doomed to live in the Black family. When Birdie arrived at her cottage, she breathed another sigh of relief. A second life was saved, too, and allowed to leave the Black family sphere.

"Mistress says you is my mistress, now."

"I'm Andromeda."

"You is Bennie's Mistress Andromeda?"

She smiled sadly. "Yes, I was very sorry to see Bennie leave. We worked well together."

"Bennie says he is sorry to be leaving Mistress Andromeda, but he belongs to Mistress Walburga after Master Alphard dies."

"Yes, I was very sorry that day."

"Mistress Walburga does not love house-elves."

"No, she doesn't."

The little elf looked around the kitchen. "Where does Birdie live?"

"Well, I had some ideas. Let me show you what Bennie did, and we can discuss other options as well."

"*Discuss with Birdie?*" The elf's eyes were shining. She had heard good things about this cottage from Bennie, through the odd communication system of house-elves. Now she came to work here, herself. The little creature went to bed that night hoping she was not dreaming.

A/N: I have to admit that I giggled when I wrote the scene between Tonks and Remus.

Thank you for reading and reviewing! This was beta-read by Trickie Woo.

The Time of Good and Bad

Chapter 16 of 19

"We knew it was somebody. James and I thought it might be Remus, but it was the rat..."

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

As long as she lived, Andromeda Tonks would never forget the night her cousin came blasting into her house, long after the children were in bed. She never thought of it without fear, distress, and anger. Years later, a bit of pride was mixed in, but more anger had been too. He arrived in the front garden with a noisy crack and immediately started banging on the door. Andromeda could hear Ted getting out of bed and putting on his dressing gown as she peeked out the window.

"Sirius! Get in here and stop making noise. What's the matter with you?"

"James... and Lily..." a sob broke his voice.

He immediately had her attention. The Potters had been targeted by Lord Voldemort and had been in hiding for months. "What's the matter with them?"

"Killed. He found them and he killed them. Dumbledore told Hagrid to take the baby... somewhere."

"Oh, Sirius, I'm so sorry..." She tried to hug him and comfort him, but he threw her off.

"We knew it was somebody. James and I thought it might be Remus, but it was the damned rat. I have to find him. Andromeda, whatever anyone tells you, it wasn't me. If something happens to me...whatever it is, can you take care of my flat? Hagrid has my bike, so that's ok."

Her head made a circular motion before nodding. "Yes, Sirius, anything you need. Shouldn't you go to Dumbledore, first?"

"He'll never understand. I have to take care of this." He hugged her tightly. "Thanks, Andie. I know I can count on you."

She should have kept him at her house. She should at least have made him wait until Ted came downstairs to talk it over. He couldn't go to his parents, and there were ways in which Andromeda and Ted filled that gap for him. That night, they failed him. Days, weeks, months later, she counted off all the spells, potions, and devices that she could have used to keep him with her and prevent what happened next.

She tumbled restlessly through the night. Ted occasionally patted her shoulder and sleepily mumbled, "It will come out all right, Dromeda..." The next day was equally restless, and she snapped at the children from time to time until at last something happened. Dumbledore came and personally told her that Sirius had betrayed the Potters. She refused to believe him and told him so.

"Headmaster, he came here that night after it happened. He told me that he needed to find a rat, that the rat had done it. Do you know who he meant?"

The older wizard, aged decades by the events of the last two days, shook his head kindly. "It's impossible, dear. Sirius was the secret keeper. He was the only one who could betray them, and it's his fault that they died."

"He said..."

"Even if he didn't cause the death of the Potters, there's the fact that he killed Peter Pettigrew and twelve Muggles. Cornelius Fudge had to take Peter's finger to his mother because that's all that was left after Sirius blasted the street apart. Andromeda, a great many things have happened in the past few years. Many people have been affected in ways we don't expect or understand. We need to allow for the fact that Sirius was turned."

There was nothing she could say. She couldn't fit the information Dumbledore gave her with what Sirius himself had said. She couldn't believe Sirius could do such things, but others believed it. Their logic was that he was a Black, after all. She recoiled in horror at that idea. She was a Black, too.

The only thing that Andromeda could figure was that it had to do with the death of his younger brother two years earlier. Reggie had been a quiet boy, and Andromeda didn't get to know him before she left the family. She assumed he didn't ever contact her because he was as ashamed of her as her parents, sisters, aunt and uncle. Oddly enough, the rumor she heard through Sirius was that he had tried to leave the Death Eaters and was killed in retaliation. At any rate, after Regulus died, Sirius had become more thoughtful for a while. Had he started planning his change of heart at that time?

Andromeda followed the events of the next weeks avidly. She read the Daily Prophet every day, looking for information about her cousin. In the end, it didn't matter. Dumbledore's information was damning. Sirius was sentenced to Azkaban, without a trial.

The situation was not without its good points. Lord Voldemort was killed when he tried to kill the baby. Harry Potter had stronger magic than any wizard to come before him. The Killing Curse had never rebounded on its caster, before. That the caster of that spell was so powerful and knowledgeable meant that Harry must be the most powerful wizard ever, perhaps more so than Dumbledore, who was considered to be the greatest wizard since Merlin.

Because he had asked her to, Andromeda went to Sirius's flat to pack up his things. She was surprised at the number of family pictures he had. There were some of her with Ted and the kids, and there were several of Uncle Alphard. She found one of the three Black girls and both Black boys, taken before Bellatrix married Rudolphus, before Sirius started at Hogwarts, before anything had happened to disrupt the family. The children in the picture were jostling each other and arguing.

Andromeda put her hand over the glass and traced their outlines. She could barely remember what was happening that day. Sirius had put his arms around his older two cousins, and they had suddenly started itching. Trixie had discovered that he was playing with itching powder and had gotten angry.

Andromeda hadn't wanted to argue, but she did have to scratch. She sat on the couch with her shoulder twitching uncomfortably. Regulus, who in those days still idolized his older brother, sat on the corner of the couch and laughed at them. Only Cissy sat quietly in the middle of the couch, looking like a demure fashion plate. The Andromeda of a decade later wasn't sure whether to laugh or cry.

The front door opened and closed. She stood and took out her wand, pointing it in front of her as she went into the hallway. It was Narcissa, so she put down her wand. "Why are you here?"

"I came to get his things."

"He asked me to do it."

"It turns out that he belonged to our side of the family after all, and Aunt Walburga wants his things."

Andromeda sighed. Maybe Narcissa was right. Sirius did seem to have changed his colors at some point, if he could betray the Potters so easily. There was no reason at all not to let Narcissa have all the work, except...

"He specifically asked me to do this. I think I had better. If you want to help, that's up to you."

During the next hour, the still-young witches packed up the contents of Sirius's dresser and closet, marking those items for a second-hand store. His books and papers had already been packed up by Andromeda and sent to her cottage with Birdie. Andromeda didn't bring those items up. The sisters spent the rest of the time silently looking at pictures. In the end, they split them. Those of Sirius with his Hogwarts friends went with Andromeda while the family photographs went to his mother.

Andromeda wondered why she cared so much that Aunt Walburga now had those pictures. The older witch had few enough comforts. Her sons had disappointed her, and now she had no prospect of grandchildren, a fact that made her little better in the eyes of society than Trixie, or Bella, or whatever name Bellatrix went by these days.

It was time to go. The sisters stood awkwardly and looked at each other. Finally, Andromeda made the first move. She pulled her sister into a hug and patted her stiff back. She let her go rather quickly. "Take care of yourself, Narcissa."

"Try to remember you're a Black," was the rejoinder.

After Narcissa left, Andromeda went through the flat one last time. Not knowing why, she went to the clothes boxes and took out a couple of robes. She sealed the boxes back up and cast a spell sending them to the consignment store. Then she walked out of the flat and locked the door. She went home and discovered that Birdie, bless her, had fixed a good dinner.

Ted watched his wife carefully as he ate his chicken pot pie. She was quiet and withdrawn. She didn't eat very much, and she was extremely gentle with the children. He watched her negotiate a small spat between them with delicate grace. There was something so endearing about her just then. The father of the family assisted with baths and getting ready for bed, ensuring that the process would not take very long.

Instead of letting her go back downstairs, he tugged her into their bedroom. He unpinned her hair, letting it cascade around her, something that never failed to thrill him. Summoning her hairbrush, he started to ply it, massaging her head and untangling the brown tresses.

After a while she became relaxed and sank into his arms. He slid his hand along the side of her face and kissed her carefully. She responded with hunger. His blood instantly quickened, and he helped her with her clothing. He wasn't sure what happened to his own, only that it was gone quickly. She took from him that night, looking for the proof that she wasn't as lifeless as the members of her family. He gave her the reassurance of their love and the hope that their lives would improve. At the end, she whispered his name as she trembled in his arms. He held her there, kissing her face from time to time and willing her to feel safe.

"I don't understand," she began. "He had so much, with his friends and the respect of everyone. I know why he gave up being an Auror. James had to give it up, and it was only a lark for Sirius, after all, but I don't understand the rest of it. He never had a steady girlfriend and never looked for a day job. All that he ever did was spend time with the Potters and work for the Order. How did Voldemort get to him? What could Voldemort have that Sirius wanted?"

"I don't think we'll ever know," answered her husband. "Sirius had concerns you didn't know about."

"I know," she answered. "Maybe that's what worries me. Am I so tied up with this small cottage and garden that I'm completely unconnected to the outside world? Worse yet, is there something in me because I'm a Black that will cause me to do something like Sirius has? I don't know what to make of it."

"Oh, my poor love," he whispered to her. "You couldn't do something like that. Somehow I think we'll find the solution to what Sirius did, exactly, and why. You just rest for tonight. Tomorrow you'll play with the children as they learn the lessons you set them, and everything will right itself."

She was unconvinced and started to cry. Ted Summoned a handkerchief for her and helped her use it. It made her giggle a little bit and then she relaxed in her husband's arms. She was safe from the world, from confusing family members, and even, if she needed it, safe from herself. He held her through the night, and when she woke from a nightmare and needed his love, he gave it without her needing to ask.

It seemed that the nightmare would never end. A few weeks after the deaths of Lord Voldemort and Lily and James Potter, Bellatrix was arrested. From what Kingsley told her, Andromeda realized that Trixie had completely been lost into this new person called Bella. She had been so distraught over the loss of her leader that she, her husband, brother-in-law, and some poor kid named Crouch went after the Longbottoms. Between the four of them, poor Alice and Frank were Cruciated to the point where they were insensate. Alastor Moody had caught them, and there was to be a trial at the Wizengamot.

Andromeda went to the trial, although she wasn't sure why. Her best answer to such a question was that she wanted to see if she could recognize the older sister who had a mean streak as wide as the British Isles. However, at moments, she had been as kind as she knew how and tried to lend a hand to Andromeda's upbringing. It was a heavy hand, to be sure, but it showed that Trixie had cared, at least.

She wore her most concealing cloak and sat in the back of the trial chamber. As she watched, Barty Crouch was sentenced first, and then the Lestrangle trio were brought into the room. Andromeda recognized her sister's face as being very similar to the one she saw in the mirror, but beyond that, all similarities to her sister, Trixie, were seemingly gone. This woman was a bit crazed.

When Trixie had first befriended Voldemort, he was a still-handsome man. Andromeda had seen him at her uncle's funeral and thought that, perhaps due to some magical experimentation, the man had stopped looking human. She caught a glimpse of the man when she put her head in at her father's funeral and was shocked to see that he had resembled nothing she could identify. Yet, it seemed that the less that creature seemed human, the more Trixie...or rather, Bella...seemed to love him.

The woman in the courtroom cared nothing for what happened, if she could be re-united with her lord, as she called him. Her husband didn't seem to mind, which troubled Andromeda somewhat. The unhealthy tenor of the relationships was difficult to understand. Andromeda watched avidly as the case was discussed. Finally the authorities announced their verdict: guilty, with a sentence to Azkaban. Andromeda watched as her sister's face turned white. For the smallest fraction of a second, there was uncertainty, distaste, and fear in the face of the witch. For that fraction of a second, Andromeda knew that the soul of Bellatrix Black Lestrangle was still alive within her sister. It was the last moment that would ever truly be the case.

A/N: Thanks, as always, to Trickie Woo for her beta reading!

Preparing for the Future

Chapter 17 of 19

"Mum, Mr. Moody is a great Auror, and he's going to help me be one, too!"

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

A week after the Lestranges were tried and sentenced, Alastor Moody was taking his trash to the bins outside his flat when several Death Eaters jumped him. He fought them off and sent his Patronus to the Ministry before losing consciousness. Kingsley Shacklebolt brought the news to the Tonks family. He felt guilty drinking Andromeda's coffee and eating her biscuits as he told the tale, but she was sympathetic and she really wanted to know.

"He's lost a leg and an eye. The Healers have fixed him up, but it will be months before he's able to use the prosthetic ones properly. I hate to think of him in that flat, all by himself..."

Ted's hand was squeezing Andromeda's as she said, "Bring him here."

Kingsley looked up. "I was thinking of having him at my place."

She shook her head. "No, bring him here. He needs a place to go where there will be something to interest him, and we want him. I'm sure you have a very nice house, Kingsley, but you aren't there most of the time. We can look after him and make sure he practices or trains or whatever. We can also provide something interesting for him to see. The children are a constant source of amusement, although sometimes they're rather unexpected."

The Healers brought the broken Alastor Moody to the cottage and set him up in Uncle Alphard's room downstairs. One of them spent the day, showing Andromeda and then Ted what needed to be done and how to help the patient. The patient himself was quiet and withdrawn. He avoided eye contact and simply lay in the bed for the entire day.

He did the same on the next day. Ted and Andromeda went into the room in the early morning and brought breakfast. Ted helped the patient into the bathroom and waited while he handled his business. Then he helped him back into bed and had his own breakfast before kissing his wife and leaving for the Ministry.

Andromeda made several attempts to start a conversation with her house guest. None of them worked. She asked if he was comfortable. He answered that he was well enough. She asked if he would like to move to a different room, or even outside. She wasn't answered. She offered to open a window if he was too warm or start a fire if he was too cold. There was still no response.

The breakfast tray returned to the kitchen, mostly uneaten. The lunch tray was likewise hardly touched. A Healer came and did some sort of therapy after lunch. The mistress of the house kept her distance through that process. The healer came to the kitchen after they were done.

"He's going to need a day or two. It's a difficult thing to lose a limb or something like one's eye. It's hard for the patient emotionally as well as physically. Something will cause him to take interest in life, and he'll come around. Don't worry too much about it. You're doing everything just right."

Ted helped their guest to the bath as soon as he came home from work. There was one last meal tray and then Moody rolled over and pretended to sleep. Andromeda looked in on him and sighed.

"Mr. Moody, if you need anything, just call Birdie, the house-elf. She'll come get Ted or me."

The answer, if it could be called such, was a shrug of the bedclothes.

The rest of the week continued the same way. Moody's trips to the bath became easier, and a little more food was consumed from the trays. Yet there was no real change in demeanor or interaction with the guest in Uncle Alphard's room. Ted watched the crease between his wife's eyebrows and said nothing, although he tried nightly to kiss it away.

"Ted, please! I don't think I can, not when he's suffering so. I feel responsible."

"Is that why he's here?"

"No... yes... maybe?" She looked into her husband's kind face. "If my sister could have left well enough alone, he would not have had to arrest her, and if that had not happened, the other Death Eaters would not have done anything to him."

"Andromeda, it doesn't have anything to do with you." His body was so warm and comforting. She let him pull her closer. "In fact, you did what you could by leaving your family and offering your cousin a haven." She nodded her head, knowing he was right even if it didn't feel true. He cradled her head in his hand and kissed her hair. Suddenly she realized his face was wet.

"Ted, what is it?"

"Oh, Dromeda... He's always been so strong and capable. He was the toughest one of them. I hate that it happened to him..."

She was filled with remorse that she had taken comfort from him without remembering that the wizard downstairs had been a friend and mentor to her husband since before their marriage. She moved up onto her knees, kissing him, but also pushing him back into his pillows. She found the knots in his neck and shoulders and kneaded them out.

Ignoring the hands reaching for her, she proceeded to touch and caress him, knowing after almost ten years of marriage what he would find soothing and what would fulfill his needs. The man in her arms murmured and sighed and groaned as she gave him the love he would so eagerly have given her. His face was buried in her hair when it was over, but there was a smile on his lips. "My Andromeda," he said as he patted her back.

The Tonks household was well into the second week of having its convalescing house guest. One afternoon, after the Healer left to talk with Andromeda, Moody rolled over and found himself face to face with his own visage, which was just a bit higher than eye level. To the side and a little lower was another face that looked quite a bit like his hostess but with his host's eyes.

"Who're you?" he asked, although he knew the answer.

"I'm Nym-pha-dor-a Tonks," answered his own face, drawing out the name in an iambic meter. "And this is Tim. He's a Squib."

"Nothing wrong with that, is there?" Both little heads shook from side to side. "He's got two good eyes. He can still be vigilant." Both children nodded. Moody's good eye narrowed. "What're you doing in here?"

The boy answered. "Mum said it's a shame you're so sad and angry and Dad said you're the toughest Auror ever and you'll bounce back eventually."

"Tim, you aren't supposed to say things like that," said the older sister out of the side of a mouth that was becoming pinker and more girl-like. The hair was turning pink, and the face was sliding into more of a heart-shape.

Moody laughed for the first time in weeks, the sound taking him by surprise. He made a tremendous effort and found that he could sit up in his bed more easily than he thought. A gasp from the doorway of the room caused all three occupants to look over. Two of the occupants looked guilty.

"Children! You weren't supposed to come in here and bother Mr. Moody unless he wanted you. I'm so sorry, Mr. Moody. Have they troubled you?"

"Yes, I guess they did trouble me, but I think they were right to do so. Would you mind terribly if they stayed with me until tea time? I'd like to get to know them a bit better."

She looked startled, but then looked from the children to her patient, and something she saw made her nod. "Certainly. Would you like me to bring you anything?"

"Perhaps some biscuits and milk would be proper. And, Andromeda?" She looked back. "Please call me Alastor."

When she came back, she found the three in the bedroom talking together animatedly. "Mum, Mr. Moody is a great Auror, and he's going to help me be one, too!"

"I'm glad to hear it," answered the mother calmly. Her daughter was quick to make pronouncements about her future, and it wasn't clear just how many of them would come true. She set the tray on a table near the bed and left the room. As she pulled the door shut, she heard Tim ask, "How many Death Eaters were there the night you got hurt? Did you kill any of them?" She nearly went back in to tell them not to talk about it, but heard Mr. Moody...Alastor, she corrected herself...chuckle and answer.

That night at dinner, the children animatedly discussed with their father what they had learned that day. Dora was the most excited. "He says I have to do good in Potions, Charms, Transfiguration, and Defense Against the Dark Arts. Then there's more school after Hogwarts, but I can do that, right Dad?"

"Of course you can, Dora," answered her father, fondly. "You can do anything."

Tim's face was happy on behalf of his sister, but a little sad on his own account. Mum took him aside after dinner. "Is there something wrong, Tim?"

"I just wish I could do what Dora can."

"But, Tim, who would help me with the book keeping? If you were like Dora, you wouldn't be so good at math, and I need your help with that."

He smiled. "So it doesn't matter to you?"

"Not a bit. I need you to be the way you are."

"But when Dora goes to become an Auror, what can I be?"

"Well, we've talked a bit with your Aunt Sue. She's hoping you'll go to the school near her and learn how to be even better at math, and history, and reading..."

"I like those things."

"I know you do. Best of all, Aunt Sue lives far away from the problems Magical people have, and you won't be in as much danger as you are, here. You'll have friends who are more like you, too."

"But won't you miss me?"

"Every day, but we'll write letters and there are tons of holidays."

Two small arms twined around Andromeda's neck and she surrendered to the bliss of his hug. "Oh, my little man, you give hugs just as good as your Dad."

"Do I, Mum? Do I really?"

"Oh, yes."

Dad himself came over to see what they were talking about. "What serious discussion could be going on here?"

"We're planning what I can be when I grow up, Dad. I'm going to have friends like me, and when I'm done, I'm going to come home and take you away from magical people and danger. Then, when Dora's done getting rid of the dark wizards and witches, we can all be together and happy again."

Dad laughed, although his eyes glistened strangely. "That sounds like a fine plan, son. Let's go ahead and do that."

Mum smiled too. Dora came over and tackled Dad. "Can we play Exploding Snap before bedtime? Tim won yesterday, and I want to see if I can beat him."

It took several months for the Auror to accustom himself to the changes in his physique. During that time, he entertained and was entertained by the children regularly. As he told Ted one evening, "They make life seem interesting, somehow. I have a reason to get better and to get rid of Voldemort once and for all."

"Isn't he already dead?" asked Ted.

"Dumbledore says he is but he's not gone, and he would know," answered Moody. "Stands to reason that maybe he isn't. Dumbledore thinks he was working on a way to not be dead. Not many people have heard the full story, but your sister-in-law was trying to get the Longbottoms to tell her where the body was buried. It's thought that they had something they were supposed to do to resurrect him."

Ted recoiled at the idea. "How could that work?"

"It doesn't matter. The body turned to dust as the Aurors went over the house. Dumbledore says it proves that there's mighty dark magic involved and that he will come back, someday. That Potter kid is our best hope."

Ted was withdrawn when he went to his room that night. Andromeda tried to draw him out about it, but he was reluctant to say anything. Finally he asked her, "What if it isn't over, Dromeda? What if You-know-who came back?"

"If we can get rid of him once, can't we get rid of him again?"

"It was just dumb luck," answered Ted.

"Was it? Cissy mentioned a prophecy... Maybe Harry Potter was the child from the prophecy. Maybe if he comes back, Harry Potter can fix it."

"That's an awful lot to put on shoulders younger than even our Tim's"

"Yes it is." She bit her lip pensively. "But he'll have help, won't he? There's Dumbledore, and Alastor, and Kingsley, and of course, my hero."

"I'm not such a hero."

"You did your part when it was there to do. I don't think anyone can be more heroic than that."

A/N: Thanks to Trickie Woo for beta reading

The Beginning of the End

Chapter 18 of 19

"There's something wrong with all of the choices, but this is the best idea we have."

Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

Andromeda Tonks would never know why she agreed to have her home be part of the plan to move Harry Potter. It all seemed a bit hare-brained, to have several Harry Potters flying around England by various means. She wondered who had thought of it. She told Ted she didn't want any part of it. Nymphadora tried next but Andromeda was unmoved. Remus was convincing, but not convincing enough.

Finally, Ted brought out the unimpeachable authority. Alastor Moody came to dinner one Friday evening. He spoke of nothing very much until Ted suddenly jumped up to take the plates out. Andromeda didn't think about it and relaxed with her coffee for once. Then she felt her hands being pulled between those of the old Auror.

"They need to be able to use this house."

She shook her head. "It's such a risky chance. If the Ministry discovers where this house is, then the Death Eaters will know in minutes. Both my sisters will..."

"The risk of not using it is far greater. Hagrid knows how to get here, and he will be bringing one of the Harrys. You simply have to let them in, and they will take a Portkey out within an hour."

"Are you absolutely sure this is the only way, Alastor?"

"There's something wrong with all of the choices, but this is the best idea we have."

"I don't like it."

"I don't like any of it. I think you have fair chances against either of your sisters or brothers-in-law, though. They don't expect you to know what to do with a wand." He pinched her cheek and winked at her as he always did. She should have hated it, but somehow she didn't. Instead she nodded her head in agreement. The Order of the Phoenix would use her house on the night Harry Potter was moved from his aunt's house.

She watched her daughter and brand new son-in-law adjust the protective spells around the house and property so that certain magical items would be allowed. Ever since Sirius had been in jail, Hagrid had the use of that noisy machine. Arthur Weasley had made some modifications beyond the ones Sirius had, and now that motor cycle would be returning to her house, with all of its smells and noises. It was the best means available for Hagrid and one of the Harrys to travel.

The night before the event, Andromeda was extremely nervous. She wasn't used to such things happening over her head, and she somehow felt that it portended an end to her life as she knew and loved it. Ted teased her. "You're Andromeda, not Cassandra. Everything will be fine, you'll see."

She smiled and nodded her head, letting him slide her dressing gown from her shoulders. For some reason, having the plan come so close to their lives made Ted behave as though he were twenty years younger. She didn't care. He held her close as they slept, and at some point she woke up from a bad dream and reached for him, demanding that he prove they were both still very much alive and well.

They were late. They were late, and the hands of the clock for Nymphadora and Remus pointed at "mortal peril". She looked accusingly at Ted, and he patted her hand. "You know it will be fine, Andromeda. They've been through some bad scrapes in their time."

"They were supposed to get here..."

A horrible noise sounded in the garden. Ted ran out the kitchen door, shouting for whoever had landed near the pond. She followed right behind. They realized that they had the real Harry Potter and found Hagrid, unconscious. The motorcycle was seemingly destroyed, hit by every spell in the book. Andromeda blinked back a memory of Sirius, who was so very delighted to show it off with his "adjustments," as he had called them.

Ted levitated the heavy body of Rubeus Hagrid into the downstairs bedroom. Andromeda brought Harry into the downstairs sitting room by similar means. After she healed the injuries she could, she went to the bedroom and began work on Hagrid. The half-giant was soon more like himself and insisted on going to Harry. After doing some damage to her downstairs hallway, he was reunited with his young friend.

The look on Harry Potter's face as he saw her was, frankly, insulting. After she had just helped him recover from some injuries, and after she had allowed him to come to her home, she deserved a little more respect than this. She didn't look that much like Bellatrix. She remembered in a flash what Severus had once said about the boy's tendency to make rash judgments.

With a new flash, she remembered that Severus wasn't really their friend. She had spent a whole Easter Holiday learning to brew Wolfsbane Potion from him. He was a hard, taciturn man, but she thought they had become friends of a sort. There were few enough from Slytherin House who worked with Dumbledore. Yet another pang went through her at the thought of all the losses, of life and of friendships, that Voldemort had wrought, and she was quite angry.

The question of what must have happened to her daughter brought her up short. If Hagrid and Harry looked like this, what had happened to the others? The look on the boy's face said it all. Andromeda's heart went out to him. She had agreed, after all. He wasn't so much younger than Tim, but Dumbledore had said it must be this way. Thinking of all the terrible things that had happened just in the last three years made her doubt it.

Once again she thanked whatever it was that had given her the strength to send Tim away and tell him to stay away for a few years. It broke her heart every time she ate a meal and he wasn't there. She wished every day of her life that she could see his face at her table. However, she knew better than to think the Blacks would accept his existence in the Magical world. As long as they were allowed to believe that he just didn't exist, the better off the boy and the whole family would be.

The boy stumbled all over himself in an effort to reassure her, but he couldn't lie. The Portkey would leave soon, so Ted showed them where it was, in the back bedroom. Andromeda wasn't sure she could stand to look at the boy. At least Grandmother Irma's silver mirror was being put to good use.

There was nothing to do for the rest of the night but wait and hope. Ted tried to be reassuring but he wasn't very sure, himself what could have happened. Several hours later, Nymphadora and Remus arrived. He looked disheveled and unhappy; she was weeping. They were chilled through, and the older couple knew better than to ask any questions before getting something hot and comforting into them. Dora finally threw herself into her mother's arms and said, "Mum, they killed him! They waited for us and they killed him right off!"

Andromeda looked from her daughter to her son-in-law and back again. "Who?"

"Mad-Eye," said Remus, quietly. "Bill said that You-know-who aimed at Mundungus, who Disapparated, and Mad-Eye got a Killing Curse aimed straight at him. He couldn't do anything to avoid it at that point. There was nothing any of us..."

"No, of course not," said Ted.

Andromeda felt sealed off, although she continued to pat her daughter's back somewhat mechanically. She remembered so many events... Alastor Moody pinching her cheek the day after her wedding, Alastor Moody making plots and plans with the original Order of the Phoenix, Moody recuperating in her back bedroom after that terrible incident, Moody pinching her cheek for what turned out to be the last time just this past week...

Remus spoke, although even his usually calm voice trembled. "His body was gone by the time we got a chance to check for him." A shudder passed through the body in her arms. Even after spending an evening as an Auror, working and fighting hard, Dora was a young woman, after all. She had seen and done much in fighting the Death Eaters and other users of the Dark Arts, but she had her limits, and Alastor had been a special friend to her from childhood.

After they settled their daughter down and sent her to her bedroom with her husband, Ted and Andromeda went to their own bedroom, to find what solace was available there. They consoled themselves by telling each other that the worst must be over by now, but they both knew that if the Ministry fell into Death Eater hands, it would get worse still. They gave themselves to each other, hoping to find the strength to stand whatever else must come.

Andromeda had not been away from the cottage for ages. With the Lestranges on the loose, Ted had considered it too dangerous. He hadn't even let her go to Dumbledore's funeral, a situation she deplored bitterly. He finally relented and let her go to Bill Weasley's wedding.

"It's highly secured," he agreed. "Besides, with all the Aurors and ministry officials, you should be fairly safe even if your sister does show up."

She dressed carefully, given that it was her best chance to get out and about for a very long time. She wore a dark blue dress robe that Ted told her was especially pretty on her and the sapphires that were her birthright. When her husband looked at her before they left, the smile on his face told her why she had dressed as she had.

"Prettiest witch I ever spoke to," he whispered as he tried to kiss her neck.

"Ted, please," she said, knowing if she let him start that line of activity they wouldn't make it to the wedding.

The bride was radiantly beautiful. The groom bore little resemblance to the sweet little boy Andromeda had met long before when Molly had thrust him into her arms. He was now a full grown man. The ceremony was lovely, and the party afterwards did homage to Molly Weasley's home making skills. She was dancing with Elphias Doge when Kingsley's Patronus came. It started to speak, and the guests started to panic. Before she could focus on the dark-robed figures Apparating into the garden, a hand was on her wrist and she was being taken by Side-along Apparition.

Her feet found the ground in the back corner of her own garden. Ted sighed with relief and pulled her tightly into his arms, holding her closely. "That was too close. Your sister was one of them."

She hugged him as tightly as he did her. "Oh, Ted, you're in at least as much danger as I am. Your blood status will make you a target."

"That's why I need to leave tomorrow, 'Dromeda," he told her. "Dolores has taken over the Ministry. I know Pius will be the new Minister, but Dolores is going to be able to pursue her agenda and use every Ministry agency to do so. I'm sure I'll be one of the first rounded up. She'll finally get even with me."

"I meant to tell you about the way the new roses came in over near the pond," she said, trying, as ever, to change the subject. "There's one over there that's bright yellow until it opens, and then there's a ring of red..." She choked and buried her face in his chest.

He waited for a minute or two. "There, now. We knew it would come."

"Why? Why must we bow to that vicious woman and her desires? All I ever wanted was a life to lead that I could call my own, and that wouldn't be in danger every minute."

"We've had twenty-five good years, dear."

She nodded her head. "I want twenty-five more, and then the twenty-five after that."

"Well, perhaps we'll find a way to make that happen. We got our first twenty-five, didn't we?"

She couldn't let herself think of the people who helped him on that long ago night at the Lestrange estate, but the memories came anyway. There were the Prewett brothers, dear Alastor, Dumbledore, and Kingsley. Now only Kingsley Shacklebolt was still alive.

They ate their dinner quietly, and he sat at the table in the kitchen and watched her clear up. She set aside a small store of things he could take with him. "I don't know what else I can properly do. Maybe I should come with you."

"I couldn't live with myself if you were in danger. Besides, who's going to help our daughter sort through her marriage? I know I shouldn't judge, but it's going to be as complicated as ours was. You could be the guiding hand there."

They shared a smile. He watched the sway of her hips as she sent the dried dishes back into their cupboards. He couldn't resist walking behind her and kissing the nape of her neck as his hands settled at her waist. She turned, and all of their fears and worry quickly became something else.

They moved up the stairs as quickly as they could, pulling at each other's clothes. He was always so careful of her, and tonight was no different. Passionate as he was, he guided her carefully through the hallway and around furniture, until they were in their bed together, giving, receiving, and finding bliss.

"Oh, Teddy"

"My Andromeda."

It didn't end there. Neither wanted to sleep that night. They didn't want to miss a moment of time together. As they touched each other, they imprinted their minds with memories that might never be renewed. Andromeda spent what seemed like hours on the back of her husband's legs while he studied the curve along her side from her waist to her hips.

When they weren't making love, they shared remembrances. Andromeda told her husband of the time she and Bellatrix had gone after the Prince sisters for saying Narcissa was a shrimp. Andromeda had only been about seven at the time. Ted told her of the time he first realized his eyes could shift from brown to greenish and how people would stare at him. He quickly realized he should keep from looking directly at people because of it.

She whispered to him about how she had come to love him. She had been startled by his openness, amazed by his kindness, and impressed by his heroism on her behalf. She had been completely bowled over by his love for her. He told her about the way he felt smitten from the first time he had seen her and how easy it had been to continue from there.

Ted slid out of the bed too soon and went into the bath for a shower. Andromeda threw something on quickly and went to the kitchen to put something together for him to eat on his way. She met him at the front door. He smiled and kissed her. "They'll be here within a couple of hours, but make sure you get some sleep after they've gone."

She followed him down the path and to the gate. "I love you, Theodore Tonks."

"I love you too, 'Dromeda. It will be fine, you'll see." She nodded although she wasn't sure if she believed him. "You'll always be the prettiest witch I've ever spoken with."

"Oh, Ted, really." It was half a giggle, half a sob.

He kissed her one last time, a tender, gentle kiss. She clung to him, aware that it was dangerous to do so, and yet incapable of letting go. He finally pulled away, and then he walked out the gate.

She watched him, knowing that perhaps he might sneak home again once or twice. Perhaps they would have a chance to spend the night in each other's arms. They wouldn't be able to write, of course, and he wouldn't really have anywhere to stay. They would have to trust to the kindness of others or perhaps stray opportunities to keep up with each other. He walked to a curve in the road and waved. She kissed both her hands and waved them back to him. Through the tears in her eyes she saw him Disapparate.

A/N: This is one of the hardest chapters I've ever written. I like happy stories, and although Ted's optimism is infectious, it doesn't change the canon facts.

Thanks go to Trickie Woo for beta reading.

Under the Stars Again

Chapter 19 of 19

...she sees the first one, way over on the horizon. A little while later, there's a brother and a while longer a sister to them. They start coming, more and more of them, shooting stars, the Perseids, the dynasty to come...

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Today's visitors finally leave, and she has a minute or two to breathe and reflect. She bathes and dresses the baby for the night, singing a lullaby as she rocks him to sleep. He already loves the same songs as his mother, his hair turning bright blue as she hums this particular favorite. She puts him to bed and asks the house-elf to watch him.

She grabs a shawl that's more like a warm blanket and goes out into the garden. The sky is clear and she can see him, tonight. "Happy birthday, Theodore, my hero. You can't know how much I miss you." As she watches the stars, she recalls Kingsley Shacklebolt as he arrived at the cottage that rainy afternoon.

She looked around him, thinking that Ted was just being a good host and would come through the door next. Then she saw the look in Kingsley's eyes, and after that she didn't remember much of anything at all. There was a deep voice telling her how Ted took on the whole Snatcher squad and allowed Kingsley, a goblin, and a boy named Dean Thomas to escape.

She had already known, of course. She had a suspicion when the glowing winged horse had come to her and said, "I love you." It was so like him to give her that last bit of himself. Did he do so at the cost of his life? No, Kingsley told her, his death was sealed before he cast the Patronus. It made no difference except in what comfort it offered the caster and the recipient. She remembered the night she told him she was pregnant with their daughter, the memory he often used for that spell. The embodied joy they had both felt in that moment was standing near her.

She turned to her daughter and son-in-law. "Do you have the means to get a message to your brother? He needs to know." They nodded and then there was blessed darkness.

In the dark she told him of every minute they had wasted, that she had wasted. Of how she should have accepted his attention at school, how she should have run away with him when they met at the ice cream parlor, and how she should have admitted her love for him sooner. His voice in her mind laughingly responded that they were few enough regrets after all.

She dreamed that they were just waking up on a weekend morning. He was nudging her hair out of her face and replacing it with his kisses. He reached her lips and she captured his, kissing him and touching his shoulders, his chest, everywhere.

Nymphadora woke her. "It's time for the funeral, Mum. Your robes are laid out for you. I thought we should try to get there early."

Early was good. They had laid him out so that he looked so very much like himself. He was just so thin. Wherever he had been, he had not eaten very well. They had him in his best dress robes, and she could admire him. Avada Kedavra, they said. She picked up his hand and held it to her face. If only there was some way to revive him. She put a hand on each side of her face and kissed him. She told him one last time, just as she had the first time, "I love you, Theodore Tonks."

After that, more blackness... Uncle Alphard's long-ago voice telling her that her children would be a comfort... The world brightened to a pasty gray. It only left one spring morning when Nymphadora burst into the bedroom. "I think I'm in labor!"

How good it was to have something to do. Hours of back and forth from the kitchen, of arranging and rearranging things so that the laboring mother could be in some comfort, of feeling every pain her own baby felt. Finally the child came and with him some measure of joy. There were some weeks of contentment, of happiness in the midst of grief and fear.

The next disaster would almost take her... Arguing for a full hour with her daughter about the duties of a mother... A sleepless night of endless worry... Wishing every word back the next morning when the news came... The sick sense of satisfaction that came because Molly Weasley had done what she herself would have done but was not there to do.

There was no respite, no comfort to be found in leaving the world for a while this time. At five weeks old, the baby needed his mother. Since the mother wasn't there, he would have his grandmother. Now she could obey Uncle Alphard. Now she could take comfort in the fact that she had given birth to Ted's children and that one of them had left her this small treasure, who would force her to live. She was an automaton, feeding, changing, washing, doing the little things that are required in a household even when there is a house-elf. It was not life but it was survival.

Tim came, and he handled the arrangements beautifully. He was so like his father. He saw that the bodies of the sister he hadn't seen in years and the brother-in-law he had not met as an adult were lovingly cared for. He contacted the officiator, who led the funeral so well. A quiet girl was in the edges of the sphere. She was a pretty girl and sweet, and she looked for ways to assist without pushing herself forward at this time. She would make a good addition to the family Andromeda and Ted started. Perhaps there would be additional magical grandchildren. There was no telling where the magic would show up.

She mentally told her daughter that she was sorry for not understanding her better, for speaking so sharply about things like packing and cleaning, for making Daddy talk her into accepting the werewolf as a son-in-law. Little by little, as the baby started to take notice, she began interacting with him. She told him of his Mum and Dad, who fought so valiantly and helped win the battle. She told him of his bold Grandpa, who never seemed so very different from other men but was extraordinarily heroic at times.

Tonight she whispers all these things, staring at his stars, knowing that somehow her hero will hear. She can almost feel him pat her on the shoulder and say, "There, now, Dromeda, it'll come out." She tells him how much she still loves him, how much she still aches for him at night.

Then she sees the first one, way over on the horizon. A little while later, there's a brother and a while longer a sister to them. They start coming, more and more of them, shooting stars, the Perseids, the dynasty to come that started with a now-dead daughter. She wants more. She wants his hands in her hair and his breath on her collarbone. She wants to wrap her arms around him and exchange the passion they share together. She knows this is all he can do.

She wraps the shawl tighter and leans a bit into the summer breeze. It ruffles her hair, a little like his fingers would do. She's reminded of their first words together, their first

kiss, the first time she found bliss in his arms. There's a hush and a sigh. Dawn will come soon, and already it's too light near the horizon to see the meteors any longer. She goes back towards the house, as lonely as ever, but a little refreshed.

A/N: This scene is actually the first of this story that came to my mind. I was looking at some old mythologies and realized that the story of Perseus is very much like the story of Ted and Andromeda. When I came across a Nanowrimo-style challenge to write a 50,000 word story specifically about this pair, I couldn't resist. I've really fallen in love with the Tonks family as a result.

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