

All We Know Is Falling

by MoonlitMeda

"Andromeda was of the opinion that fate was an invention made primarily for the use of people who wanted to give someone a reason not to leave them..."

But whatever Andromeda Black may tell herself about her opinions and intentions, she has no one but herself to blame for her presence in a house she had expected never to enter again.

Chapter One

Chapter 1 of 7

"Andromeda was of the opinion that fate was an invention made primarily for the use of people who wanted to give someone a reason not to leave them..."

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Disclaimer: Andromeda's world belongs to JKR.

A/N: Ta very very muchly to Emma, the beta who makes me feel good about myself, and also my most enthusiastic reader *squishes tight*. Also, thanks for the patience of everyone on MSN who listened patiently when Andromeda and Ted insisted on going their own sweet way, and I had no idea how to end this on a good note, and to the band, Paramore, from whom I borrowed the title of their album.

The gate squeaked much too loudly as Andromeda slipped through into the overgrown garden beyond. The green paint had peeled away, leaving bare wood which deposited a long splinter into her left ring finger. How ironic. Sitting down on a nearby stump, she gently levered the wood out, concentrating on this rather than on where she was and why. Andromeda had learned at a young age to rid her mind of emotion when necessary; Bella had always been a particularly proficient Legilimens and would never forbear to use this against her sisters whenever she felt that it would be beneficial to herself to do so.

Sucking her sore finger, Andromeda rose and passed silently through the tall grass to where she knew there was an old log out of view of both the windows and any passers by. It was only then, when quite certain that she was alone, that she allowed herself to relax. Burying her face in her hands, she let herself disappear into her mind.

Images rushed through her head: her reflection in a tall mirror, wearing a flowing white dress and veil; dark trees before and behind as she raced through a shadowy wood; the taste of mud in her mouth as she tripped on a wide root and sprawled across the ground, which had somewhat diminished the picturesque aspect of her flight; a very familiar red brick house and a faded green gate. This brought her up to the present, but she did not raise her head. Reviewing the day's events in minute detail was a task infinitely more appealing than the alternative: working out what she was to do next, and, in her view more importantly, why she had come to this house, which she had sworn never to visit again.

Andromeda was buried so far in her own thoughts that she did not notice a blond boy appear at the corner of the house, then stop dead when he saw her. Ted laughed softly; she usually criticised his movement as loud and clumsy. When she did not even respond to this sound, he became worried. In his opinion, her acute hearing was one of the very few useful traits she had inherited from her family, although a lot of his experience of it in the past had been in the form of failed mock-ambushes. That she should not respond to the approach of the boy she had jokingly termed a 'great galumphing elephant' was almost unthinkable. There again, so was her return here, which he had given up hoping for.

The grass rustled as he approached, but still she remained perfectly still. Gently, Ted leaned down and tapped Andromeda on her shoulder, which he couldn't help noticing was shaking almost imperceptibly. Immediately, her head snapped up, her eyes full of fear and rage, besides a liberal measure of blind panic.

Andromeda did not know why she was here, staring up into the grey eyes she had never expected to see again. She had not planned to come here, and yet, somehow, here she was. Here in this garden, where she ought not to be. It angered her that in her weakness she should have come here. It was unreasonable to blame Ted, but nevertheless, blame Ted she did. Who else could she blame?

Ted could see that Andromeda was in no fit state to talk. He dragged his eyes away from her face and took in her dishevelled appearance. The white dress, however muddled and torn, told him exactly where she had come from. How could she have almost let that happen to her? Maybe she really didn't care. And yet she was here.

"Ted." The word came out as a strangled, choking sob. Andromeda took a deep, steadying breath, but the next words wouldn't come. "Ted," she repeated. "Ted, I shouldn't be here."

"Yes, you should," he responded immediately, if somewhat illogically, given the fact that someone else had clearly required her presence elsewhere at this moment. Still, Ted liked to believe in fate. He was certain that he and Andromeda were meant to be in a way that only made sense if things *could* be meant to be. Therefore, the place she should be was where he was, which was here. She, on the other hand, took a rather less convoluted view of the matter. She was supposed to be elsewhere because clearly here was not a good place for her state of mind, given that she had barely arrived before collapsing.

"No, you don't understand, Ted. I ran away."

"I can see that. Not many people go hiking in wedding dresses."

At the mention of weddings, Andromeda let out a muffled wail and jerked herself away from him, turning her back so that she wouldn't have to look into his eyes. He touched her shoulder, and she spun around, her eyes flaming. "Get your hands off me!"

"Andromeda, I—"

"I don't need you! I don't! Get away from me!"

"I know that!" Ted finally lost patience. "You made that crystal clear to me last time we met."

"So why am I here?" She shrieked this as though she expected an answer, but there was nothing to say. Andromeda knew that no one could answer that but herself. And she had no idea. No idea at all. Like a homing pigeon, she had returned to Ted without thought or reason. She had to leave now before she did something she would regret.

Chapter Two

Chapter 2 of 7

"Andromeda was of the opinion that fate was an invention made primarily for the use of people who wanted to give someone a reason not to leave them..."

But whatever Andromeda Black may tell herself about her opinions and intentions, she has no one but herself to blame for her presence in a house she had expected never to enter again.

Andromeda was of the opinion that fate was an invention made primarily for the use of people who wanted to give someone a reason not to leave them. She was inclined to ignore anyone who used it as an excuse, which was why she was currently making plans to leave Ted's house by the closest convenient exit if he came up with one more recycled line about things that are meant to be. She had had a long day, and an offer of a cup of tea had seemed reasonably innocuous. She had not expected to have to listen to what she considered meaningless burble at great length.

It was probably better for Ted that she should leave now anyway. After all, she had every intention of doing so in the long run, and she had already hurt him quite enough. She was now utterly regretting her spur of the moment decision to go to Ted's house. It had been neither fair nor kind, and would doubtless have inspired in him ideas that she did not want to hear.

"We should elope. You have the right dress for it."

Like that one, for instance. Taking a deep, measured breath, Andromeda set down her mug and got to her feet. Carefully, one step at a time, she crossed the floor to the door, opened it, stepped out, and closed it behind her, all the time not allowing herself to consider anything other than the correct sequence of movements to produce the result of her absence from the house. The instant that she was invisible to all eyes, she fled across the garden and out into the street.

To her immense frustration, as soon as she rounded a corner she found herself at a dead end which she ought to have known perfectly well was there. Turning back, and feeling not unlike a mouse in a maze, she headed back towards the redbrick house, where she was brought up short by the sight of Ted leaning against the gate and attempting to look like part of the scenery.

"Mild Confundus Charm. You forgot which way to turn."

"Alright, Ted. That is enough. More than enough." Inside her head she was shouting, but there was only a slight wobble to Andromeda's voice. "What makes you think that you have the right to mess with my head like that? I didn't come back here to have you treat me like you owned me, to be forced to stay when I want to leave, to listen to you make idiotic comments about things that you don't even understand."

"What is it that you want me to understand then? What is it that you came back for? You explain that to me, Andromeda Black, because I can't figure you out."

"I'm not a riddle! I'm not something to be figured out. I'm a girl, and I was scared, and I came back to find the one person I thought I could trust, but it turned out that he was just like everyone else, desperate to get me married off."

"You *know* that wasn't what I meant."

"Well, and what did you mean?"

"I just meant... that I was glad you came back."

"Oh yes? And in what sense does 'we should elope' mean, 'I'm glad you came back'?"

"In my slightly twisted mind?"

"And you say that *I'm* a riddle?"

"Actually, it was you that mentioned riddles."

Despite herself, Andromeda was fighting a smile. Ted had always been able to do this to her. It wasn't fair; she was trying to have an argument here. Well, actually, she had been trying to storm away. That hadn't worked out. Andromeda couldn't actually remember the last plan she had had that had worked out. So she might as well give in to Ted for the time being. She didn't think she had the energy for storming away just at the moment.

"Okay, Ted. You win, for now. I'll come back inside. Do you have any other clothes I can wear?"

"Girls' clothes? No."

"Clothes that wouldn't drown me and I could wear without looking utterly laughable?"

"I'll see what I can do."

"Thanks."

"Do you want another cup of tea?"

"What happened to the one I had?"

"You knocked it over storming out."

"No, I didn't," she said with an absolute certainty surprising in one who had not been in any fit state to notice such things at the time.

"Okay, fine, I knocked it over chasing after you."

"Infinitely more likely."

Ted turned away to the kettle and did not reply. He felt that it might spoil the tentative peace they had made to laugh now, even though just the fact that Andromeda was back in his kitchen and behaving in a manner that was at least an approximation of the one he had been familiar with in the past made him find this a lot harder than he would have expected, given the circumstances.

He stared out of the window, afraid to look at Andromeda. She might be here, but she hardly seemed pleased about it, and although she was half-joking now, only minutes earlier she had been quite ready to leave on a distinctly negative note, and former experience had taught him that she could return to this state of mind almost instantaneously. He had never worked out whether her manner hid her feelings or her emotions really were that unstable.

As it happened, neither of these things were exactly true. Andromeda had been forced to spend her life repressing her feelings, but Ted had a way of making her let her guard down which she found somewhat unsettling, hence her rapid escapes into iciness when she feared that she was opening herself to judgement. In addition to this, she had spent much of her time with Ted utterly confused by her conflicting emotions, and his presence gave her the ability to express what she was thinking and feeling, whereas to everyone else she was what was expected of her. The result was an unpredictable and unstable state of mind of which most of her friends or family would never have thought her capable.

It was fortunate that Ted was unaware of this, as had he known the power he held over her, a good deal of his fear of Andromeda's anger would have been removed, and without it he would have been open to a good many more of her bad moods that he would have expected or been able to cope with. As things were, although the situation was not optimum, he behaved as well as might be expected, his only reaction to the sound of Andromeda pulling herself together, a ritual with which he was familiar, involving mainly deep breathes, being smirking out at the garden, until such a time as the water boiled and he was able to aid the process with tea and biscuits.

Chapter Three

Chapter 3 of 7

"Andromeda was of the opinion that fate was an invention made primarily for the use of people who wanted to give someone a reason not to leave them..."

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Andromeda cupped her fresh mug of tea in her cold hands and noted with mild irritation that Ted had not bothered to ask her about her milk, sugar and biscuit preferences.

This, as she knew perfectly well, was because he knew the answers to the conventional questions. Still, for reasons she could not explain to herself, she would have liked him to pretend that he did not. She refrained from dipping her biscuit in her tea, a habit that she had picked up from Ted, and one that she had forgotten to eradicate after she had decided to remove him from her life.

She winced as this thought occurred to her. Despite managing to be remarkably irritating by way of asides and hints, Ted had not yet gone anywhere near any of the many extremely painful topics of conversation that they would probably now have to cover. Running away again did not seem to be an option, firstly because he would only confound her again, and secondly because with hot tea inside her, she was returning to something of a sense of herself, and she was not going to run away from a situation she had got herself into through lack of foresight three times in the same day.

Ted was watching Andromeda drink tea with an expression of understanding and patience that she would not have reacted well to. Fortunately, she had not taken her eyes from her tea since he had given her it. He was working up to an attempt to talk to her and was finding it surprisingly difficult to know where to begin. He thought that she must, at least subconsciously, have come here for a reason, and conversation seemed like a good place to start. Casual references to her appearance had not been well received. The best option seemed to be to be direct.

"Andromeda?"

"Yes." She did not, as would have been natural, give the syllable a questioning tone, but replied more as if confirming her identity.

"Do you know why you're here?"

"No."

"Will you tell me what happened before you came here? What was going on?"

"Isn't it obvious?"

"Well, yes, but how did you get to that? The last I heard from you, to quote, you never wanted to speak to a male again."

"You know that was rhetoric."

"That's not an answer."

"Can you see my parents letting me never speak to a male again? They decided that I'd finally come to my senses, which, in their language, means they had made me agree with them. And their plan for me was marriage. Always has been. You know that."

"So what happened to the famed independence of Andromeda Black?"

"I lost it. I lost the will to argue."

Ted refrained from comment upon this, although it could hardly be taken as unconnected to his absence from her life at this point. "And so?"

"And so I let them get on with planning me a wedding. I barely knew the man, cared less."

"Who...? No, don't tell me. Carry on."

"It was just when I was trying on dresses. I know it looks like I ran away from my wedding, but I didn't get that far. I got scared when I saw myself in the dress, and I wasn't thinking, I just ran. I didn't even..." She trailed off.

Ted sat very still, in an imitation of her, and found it surprisingly easy. She had given him a lot to think about. Since the last time he has seen her, Andromeda's vow that she would be single forever, while he did not accept it as absolute, had without his awareness become an assurance that she was not going to find someone else any time soon. He might have known her parents would take a different view of the matter. It had evidently been all but irrelevant to her whom she was to marry, and this scared him more than anything else she had said. Whatever Andromeda's state of mind may have been, she had always said she would not marry a person whom she did not love. It had been faith in fairytale endings that had protected her from utter corruption at the hands of her parents and had left open the gate for Ted. Had she really been so dependent upon him that when his support was removed she lost not only what he had given to her, whatever that might be, but also her faith in what she had had before?

"I didn't even have to think about where I was going," Andromeda said, so softly that he almost missed it. "Which wasn't fair. I'm sorry, Ted."

"Why?"

"Because I promised you I was gone forever, and then I came back."

"That wasn't a promise. That was a threat."

"It was a promise. I promised that I had finished hurting you and trying to break unbreakable barriers. Some things just can't be, no matter how hard you try to force them, and you and me was one of those things."

"So that's it? You gave up?"

"I let go. It's easier this way, so much easier. Just to let them organise me, to live as they want me to and never mind the rebelling. I didn't give up, I grew up. Now you have to."

"I'm never going to go down that path, Andromeda. That's not growing up, that's apathy, and it can't last forever. Not for you. Your sister, maybe; she could live with that, but not you. Some day you'll wake up and realise what a trap you've let yourself fall into. And you know that. You wouldn't be here if you honestly believed in all the rubbish you're spouting."

"You think you know me so well."

"Well then, you tell me why you're here."

"Because I was weak and pathetic and scared. It won't happen again."

Unexpectedly, Andromeda set down her cup and walked to the window, her back turned to Ted. She knew that if he carried on like this he would crack her, and she couldn't bear to go back in time now. She had made her decisions. Her flight to Ted's house could easily be put down to nerves, and there was no reason why it should not be so. After all, why else would she have gone to a place she associated with safety and freedom from judgment? Why else would she have gone back to Ted now? It was too late to change her mind, no matter what.

Chapter Four

Chapter 4 of 7

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"I need you to listen to what I'm saying."

"And why should I do that?" Andromeda retorted, pacing back to the table without looking at him. "I don't see what you find so incomprehensible in what I'm saying. I made my decisions, I worked through the mess you left me with—"

"Excuse me," Ted interrupted, "I left you?"

She sighed. "I didn't mean that. I just meant... it was difficult to get back to something like normal, after..." she trailed off.

"Why do you find it so difficult to admit that you used to care about me?"

"Used to?" Andromeda queried, and then instantly regretted it.

"What's that supposed to mean? It was *you* who left. It was *you* who wrote me out of your life. It was *you* who came back here in a wedding dress all ready to shatter my life again."

"Well if that's the way you feel about it, I'll leave now."

"No."

"Excuse me?"

"You can't chicken out now. You still owe me an explanation."

"What more do you want?" she asked, stung.

"Look. You came back here. You're honestly telling me that means nothing at all?"

"It means that I still relied on you a bit. I didn't know that. I'll get over it."

"Then explain to me why you had trouble with me saying that you only used to care about me."

Andromeda buried her head in her arms. "Stop going around in circles, you're giving me a headache."

Ted leant forwards and tentatively touched her arm. She didn't move. "Look, Dromeda—"

"Don't call me that."

"Andromeda. Just listen to what you're saying. Please. It's you that's going in circles. You can't let yourself admit that you ever cared about me, but you can't let me say that you don't, even now. You say you don't know why you're here, and yet you're not leaving."

"I am," Andromeda replied, not so much as lifting her head from the table.

"And what are you going to do?" Ted wasn't entirely sure he wanted to know the answer to that one, but much as he would have been prepared to let her stay slumped over his table forever, it was hardly a practical solution.

"Well, I don't think I'm going to get married. But I am going home."

"What will your parents say?"

"I've bought myself some time, I don't have to worry about that for a while."

"And when you do?"

"I'll work something out."

Ted sighed. She had apparently lost all inclination to think ahead, but seeing as in his eyes that was only a loss in that it had always been something she tried to make him do, he couldn't see the point in arguing.

"My turn to ask a question," she said suddenly, and he turned to find that she had raised her head and was looking considerably better.

"Yes?"

"Why *did* you say we should elope?"

"Light humour."

"Ted, I'm not stupid."

"What?"

"It was hardly a humorous situation."

"I was panicking."

"Oh yes?"

“Yes,” he said firmly.

She gave up. “Alright. Well, I’m going. I’ve answered your questions, and now I have things to do. Parents to placate.” She got up quickly before he could argue.

“Okay, okay, I’m letting you go. You probably want to change out of that dress first though.”

“I’d forgotten. What do you have?”

“Um. Clothes?”

“Would it be easier if I went to see what I could find?”

“Probably.”

Ted watched her disappear into a back room, wondering why he suddenly felt like smiling. Despite everything, he and Andromeda kept slipping back into an old and comfortable routine of teasing and quick retorts, and although it made him miss the days when they spent all their time together, it was conclusive proof that the old Andromeda was still around somewhere in the strange and contradictory person that she had become, and could probably be rediscovered with patience. Really, the whole issue of what Andromeda had become confused him. Had he done that? Could he have?

As she rifled through his Muggle clothes in search of a fairly innocuous set of robes, Andromeda’s thoughts were in a similar place. Being with Ted made her notice that she had changed, and that he hadn’t noticeably. She wondered whether she had actually ever had any effect upon him at all. What she was missing was that whereas she had become a different person entirely upon the loss of Ted, he had reverted to what he had been before her, and as she had been familiar with this concept of Ted, she did not see the lack of the changes she had wreaked upon him over time, because they had occurred so gradually.

Dragging her head out of both the past and his wardrobe, she pulled herself together. “Ted! Do you have any robes?”

“They’re in the back.”

“That’s where I’m looking.”

“No, behind the back of the cupboard,” he explained as though it should be obvious, entering the room and waving his wand to move the offending piece of furniture a few feet to the left. This action revealed a crushed pile of crumpled robes, on top of which sat a disgruntled looking tabby cat. “Sorry Libby, I forgot you were sleeping there,” he added to the animal, who stalked away looking as offended as only a cat can.

“Ted!” Andromeda sighed, reaching gingerly for the topmost garment. “These are all creased and covered in cat hairs.”

“Well... they’re not comfortable... so I hid them.”

“Well, of course, the obvious reaction. Lend me your wand for a moment?”

“Where’s yours?”

“I’m wearing a wedding dress. They don’t have pockets.”

“Someone should design one that did; you’d make a fortune selling them to people who—”

“Ted. Wand.”

“Right.”

He watched as she attempted to create something that she would be prepared to wear from his pitiful collection of clothes. After several minutes of what looked like exhausting work, which seemed pointless to him given that she would have to walk back through a thick forest, she ejected him from the room so that she could change. Several minutes later, Andromeda emerged looking fairly presentable, carrying the wedding dress in a small blue bag which he didn’t recall ever having seen in his life.

“And now I really am going.”

“Alright, go.”

“I will.” Andromeda hesitated for a moment, then determinedly pulled the door open and strode outside.

“Andromeda?”

“Yes?” She made an effort not to turn back too quickly.

“Do me a favour?”

“Yes?”

“Write to me.”

Andromeda let out her breath without realising she had been holding it. “I will.”

Turning, she disappeared up the path and away. As soon as she was out of sight, Ted closed the door and collapsed at the table. “That girl,” he said to the cat, who was sitting on the kitchen window sill, “is *not* good for my sanity.”

He picked up her abandoned tea and drained it in one gulp, not even registering that it was now stone cold.

Chapter Five

Chapter 5 of 7

"Andromeda was of the opinion that fate was an invention made primarily for the use of people who wanted to give

someone a reason not to leave them..."

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Ted,

You asked me to write, and so that is what I am doing. You didn't mention what it was you wanted to hear from me, meaning that I am at something of a loss as to how to continue this letter.

I suppose the logical thing to write would be what happened after I left your house yesterday. Needless to say, my parents are hardly pleased with me and have decided that the best policy is to act as though I am invisible. I was at least spared a direct argument. I was greeted with: "Andromeda Cassiopeia Black, go to your room and stay there until I feel able to look you in the face," and I have not heard a word from anyone since.

At some point I am going to have to go and find food, but in the meantime, as I am not especially hungry, I am as happy here as I would be elsewhere; that is to say, not particularly, but what else is to be expected? My parents will assume that my dejection is due to having displeased them, which will speed their recovery from my behaviour.

Andromeda

Ted read the letter through twice and chuckled, resisting the urge to count the number of words in each sentence. He could take a fairly shrewd guess as to what was going through Andromeda's mind. Having now had time to consider, she had decided that writing to Ted would not be a good idea, and was therefore writing at her most cold and formal. He wrote back quickly, his cramped writing looking strange to him after his long scrutiny of Andromeda's round hand.

Dear Andromeda,

I asked you to write because I wanted to know how you were, not whether you were hungry or what your parents said to you. Don't pretend you didn't know that. Anyway, you agreed to write; I didn't make you.

Have you worked out what you're going to do next? A plan of action might make you feel better, or at least more in control. I got the impression you're all about control at the moment. I know you said you're letting your parents sort stuff out for you, but you wouldn't do that unless you were putting all your energy into something else, and I think it's keeping a grip on yourself. Some advice: you'll find it easier if you keep yourself occupied, rather than gazing into space and trying not to think.

Not that I think you're doing the right thing anyway. Pay attention to what your parents are up to before you find yourself stuck for life somewhere that you don't want to be.

Yours,

Ted

PS: Please don't ignore what I'm saying purely out of stubbornness.

Andromeda was not at all pleased to receive this letter. She had had the vague suspicion that Ted would ignore the fact that she was plainly unenthusiastic about continuing a correspondence, but had managed to squash it until, upon her reception of this letter, it became neither vague nor a suspicion, but a fact. In addition to this, he had seen right through her to the person falling apart inside, which she thought was completely unfair. If people who didn't matter could be fooled by her, why should someone who...? Except that he didn't matter either. She decided not to reply.

Dear Andromeda,

What was I saying about not being stubborn? I wish you would listen to me when I'm talking sense. It doesn't happen very often, and you're always listening when I say things I'm sorry about later. Seriously, stop moping and open your eyes. I don't know what your parents are planning now, but I can guess. Use your head, girl.

Ted

Severely nettled by the concluding sentence, Andromeda swiftly and angrily wrote a response and waited impatiently until her owl, unused to much activity recently, could be persuaded to take it.

Ted,

Would you kindly stop writing in the style of the omnipotent ruler of my life? I cannot understand what it is that makes you feel that you have the right to do so. You hold no sway over my decisions and opinions, and as far as I know, you have no qualification which might grant you access to my parents' thoughts, meaning that your analysis of them is useless to me.

Andromeda

Some days later, Narcissa entered her sister's room to find Andromeda staring out of the window.

"What are you looking for?"

"Nothing."

Narcissa looked curiously around the cluttered room, which she had not entered for some weeks. "Where's your owl?"

"Out."

"With a letter?"

"Mmm."

"Who to?"

"No one."

"How can a letter—"

"Narcissa, what do you want?"

"Mother said come and see what you were doing."

Andromeda turned to look at her. No one had disturbed her in several days, with the exception of a house-elf who left meals outside her door and then fled, apparently fearful that she would be caught by Andromeda, although what exactly she expected to happen then was debatable. Probably she didn't know either; as a house-elf in the Black house, she would be unused to anyone not bothering to at least pretend that all was well. The whole family was well versed in what was expected of them.

"What are you going to say to her?"

"That you were staring out of the window waiting for a letter, but wouldn't tell me who from."

"Narcissa!"

"Well, it's true."

"It is not. I'm just looking out of the window. I don't really care whether I get a letter or not, I'm not waiting for one, and if I was, it wouldn't make a difference to Mother, and I don't even want a letter, and—"

"Who's the letter from?"

"There is no letter."

"What shall I tell Mother then?"

"That I was looking out of the window."

"Who's the letter from?" repeated Narcissa, with the slightly smug smile of one who suspects that she is winning an argument. She was certainly incensing Andromeda.

"There. Is. No. Letter."

"Then what shall I tell Mother?"

"Narcissa, for goodness sake, go away and leave me alone. Tell Mother that I'm looking out of the window. I don't see what about my looking out of the window is so interesting to you."

"Who's the letter from?"

"Narcissa, get out." Andromeda stood up, plainly intending to personally remove Narcissa if she did not leave in the next few seconds. Her sister accordingly exited hastily, leaving her wondering whether telling Narcissa about her letter to Ted would not after all have been better than having her mother told that she was waiting for a mysterious letter. There again, as her letter to Ted had nothing whatsoever to do with the fact that she was looking out of the window, it was not really a relevant detail.

Chapter Six

Chapter 6 of 7

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But whatever Andromeda Black may tell herself about her opinions and intentions, she has no one but herself to blame for her presence in a house she had expected never to enter again.

While Andromeda was staring out of her window for no obvious reason, Ted was feeling lonely. This surprised him very much. Although he had lived alone for some time, it had never particularly troubled him before. Unlike her, he was quite prepared to admit that this was probably connected with Andromeda. What he didn't know was what to do next.

Since she had left his house almost a fortnight ago, he had invested a great deal of his time in rescuing his robes from behind his wardrobe and making them fit to wear. He had also spent unreasonably long periods of time, given that he had work to be doing, sitting on the log where he had found her and studying her letters. They did not, on the whole, fill him with hope. Admittedly she had written, but he had lost his initial amusement at her acerbic tone. Fearful of offending her beyond redemption, he had hesitated to reply to her last letter. The phrase "would you kindly stop writing" rung in his ears.

Despite the fact that he had always been the one who maintained hope, and believed in them, doubts were starting to creep in. After all, she had lost herself to such a great extent that he didn't know if his Dromeda could ever be recovered. She certainly did not think so and was clearly attempting to drive him away. So why was he refusing to be driven?

Time passed. He did not write a letter. There was nothing reasonable to write. She knew him well enough to know the things he could have told her, and he knew her well enough to know that she would not listen to things she knew already. With every day he became more convinced that clinging to hope was a wasted effort. And yet...

He couldn't let go. Because, as Andromeda would have said, he was Ted. He still half believed in fate and fairy tales. He still more than half believed that he could still fix this, if he could only work out the right words to turn back time. To make her listen. He now regretted the tone of his earlier letters. This needed more work than he had thought. And yet writing her reams did not seem like a good plan either. Especially as she had clearly said that she was not interested in his opinions.

He borrowed her habit of listing things in his head and came up with a number of reasons to write to her. Most of them he disregarded as sentimentalism, but always he came back to the fact that he was the only one in her life not remotely interested in getting her married off to some rich pureblood. He was the only one who could give her a different way. And how could she possibly be happy in such a life?

She was not happy in such a life. Despite the fact that she had convinced herself that she had not the remotest interest in getting a letter from Ted, she was beginning, almost without meaning to, to take his advice. To re-emerge into her family and pay attention to what was going on. What was going on was that her parents, almost recovered from her flight, were starting to discuss weddings again. To her surprise, she found that she cared. This discovery gave her such a headache that she was forced to beat a retreat back to her room in order to think it through. This resulted in no reasonable conclusion and a headache.

Deciding that no action could be taken until such time as the fog and mush that seemed to have invaded her head subsided, Andromeda gave up her effort to take a little control over her life and retreated to her window.

Ted had not returned her owl. This unreasonably irritated her. An owl carrying no post would have been better than nothing. Although there again, it would have given a silent message of its own, and she wondered whether no news was not good news. Had she not fought for no news? To cut him out of her life and forget that she had ever, in a moment of panic, fled to his door had been her clear aim ever since returning home. So what was she doing now, complaining that he had not returned her owl? It was not as though she needed it at the moment. The headache returned with a vengeance.

Ted also had a headache, brought on by too much time spent staring at her letters and trying to clear his head. Somehow, it never occurred to him that his head might be clearer if only he put the letters down. He hardly ever let them out of his sight, except in moments when he was more than usually convinced that he was being pathetic, at which point he would firmly set them out of sight, only to take them up again minutes later with the odd feeling that they might have changed in that short time. They never had.

Eventually, and predictably more speedily than she did, he came to a conclusion. As things stood, he could either stay silent and risk losing her through lack of contact, or he could speak and risk his neck. Apart from the fact that he refused to lose her in such a way, he had never in his life given in without a fight.

The problem of what to write was eventually solved through lack of choices. His former style had been very badly received, long letters had no chance of working, and he had nothing much to say, except that he desperately did not want to lose her. Not now. But she knew that. It was not worth saying, not after all this time. But what was there to say except things that she knew? There was nothing to tell her, and only one thing he really wanted to know.

Andromeda

He wrote, and then looked at it. If he was risking his neck, he may as well burn every bridge.

Dromeda, are you alright?

Chapter Seven

Chapter 7 of 7

"Andromeda was of the opinion that fate was an invention made primarily for the use of people who wanted to give someone a reason not to leave them..."

But whatever Andromeda Black may tell herself about her opinions and intentions, she has no one but herself to blame for her presence in a house she had expected never to enter again.

Andromeda stared at this missive, outraged. After all the time she had invested in telling herself that she was not interested in getting a letter back, she had at least hoped that the leap of emotion which seeing her owl had produced would either be able to be squashed by anger or, although she would not quite let herself think this, be allowed to grow. Instead, she had this sentence, this question. And she did not know what to do with it. So it made her angry. What right had Ted to go messing with her mind like that? This felt every bit as intrusive as his Confundus Charm.

Because now she was being forced to think. Think about all the things that she had been locking away, and drag every sorry thought and feeling into the light to be considered. First there was the question of her parents and their plans. And then there was Ted and what on earth was to be done about him. And then there was the person she had become, whom even she barely recognised anymore. But most of all, there was the question of whether she was alright. Was she? And if she was, could she continue so? Was there any way of dragging herself out of this mess?

She made a valiant effort to tell herself that she could quite easily bury these things again, but it was a lost cause from the start. She might have changed, but she still had enough of a sense of herself that, having been shocked to life, she was not going to crawl in a hole and hide again. It was time to take Ted's much resented advice and start using her head.

And some facts had to be faced. Firstly, that whether she liked it or not, her trip to Ted's had changed her. He had pointed out to her that she could not drift along ignoring what was going on around her forever. One day she would wake up and wonder where on earth she had found herself. Some day, consequences would have to be faced. And it was better that that day was now, while she could still stop and run as fast as she could in the opposite direction.

Because she did not want to be married off. She had always known this, her flight had conclusively proved it, and yet she had come back home and let herself be caught up again. How could she have done that? With sudden force, it hit her that she had ignored the clearest message her subconscious could possibly have given her. The instinct to run, followed through for a short time, but then abandoned. After that, what else could her mind do but push her back again and again to the window? And in her stubbornness she had very nearly missed the message: open your eyes, and act on what you see.

A sharp knock on her bedroom door broke her line of thought, and without waiting for an answer, the maternal half of the force that had been driving her towards an unwanted life appeared in the doorway.

"Andromeda, I want to talk to you." The option of refusing was not available. It never was with her mother.

"Yes?"

"After the embarrassment to which you subjected our family, your father and I allowed you some time to recover your common sense. I can only assume-"

"Mother, I hardly think that anyone was much embarrassed, given no one but you and Father and Narcissa even-"

"Andromeda, please remember that you are an adult now and have no excuse for forgetting your manners so much as to not only interrupt me but to do so in order to contradict me."

"If I am an adult, why do you persist in treating me as though I have no more right or ability to conduct my own life than an infant?"

"Because you persist in behaving in a way more reminiscent of a small child than a young lady."

"Mother, I-"

"Enough, Andromeda. I came here to talk to you. Upon noting that you appear to have, at least fractionally, regained your senses, your father and I feel that it is time for you to begin again considering your prospects. We gather that there was something unsatisfactory about the previous match, although why you did not voice your objections at the time is beyond me."

Andromeda pressed her lips together tightly to keep from protesting that the likelihood of her objections being noted was around the region of there being a chance of her mother letting her choose for herself who she married. Practically non-existent.

"Therefore," her mother continued, "we have reconsidered. There are several other suitable matches for you, and we have selected from amongst them a man in whom we feel you would find no fault." She paused, clearly waiting for Andromeda to ask questions.

"Mother," Andromeda said slowly, carefully considering her wording, "although I am grateful that you and Father should take such pains over me, may I ask that this discussion be postponed until tomorrow? I do not feel well this evening."

Her white face supported her excuse, and Druella Black rose to her feet and surveyed her daughter, who was not looking at her, but out of the window. "Today I will let the subject drop, but we will talk Andromeda." She left.

Andromeda stayed for some moments perfectly motionless. She saw her future laid out for her in painfully clear plans with which she had no connection. She saw herself losing herself in a way far worse than any which she had suffered as yet. She saw herself growing older, crushed into a person for whom Andromeda Black was just a faint memory, a girl who let her life escape her for too long until it was too late to regain control. And she refused to let that future be her own. Whatever she might face in life, whatever might become of her, that path must surely be the worst one she could ever find herself on.

She looked back at Ted's letter, at the question he posed. And she knew, with an absolute certainty that she barely recognised after her long months of indifference, that there was a different way. A way to bring him back. A way to bring herself back.

Taking up her pen, she turned over the scrap of parchment he had written on, and surveyed the blank space this gave her. It did not look right. She turned it back, and carefully wrote underneath his message. Giving it to her owl, she watched with eyes well accustomed to scouring the skies as her answer flew to Ted on swift wings.

No.

The end. I don't do neat and tidy endings. However, I am writing a sequel, so I might put that up when it's finished.