

The Silver Snake

by peskipiksi

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Chapter 1 of 1

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'You are not going.' Narcissa and Bellatrix Black stood in the middle of the Slytherin common room, glaring down at their younger sister.

Andromeda glared back. Much as she hated her family's pureblood mania, she wasn't a Black for nothing. 'You can't stop me.'

'You're not in fourth year; you can't go unless you're invited,' Bellatrix sneered.

'I've been invited. By Ted Tonks.'

Narcissa was less snide than Bellatrix, but just as formidable. 'We have informed Tonks that you have changed your mind.'

'You can't do that!' cried Andromeda, stricken.

Narcissa drew herself up, looking scarily like her mother. 'You are a Black; you are a Slytherin, and you are not going to the Yule Ball with a Hufflepuff Mudblood. And that's final.'

'But just to make sure...' Bellatrix drew from behind her back a crumpled ball of black velvet, and threw it at her sister.

Andromeda stared in horror at what had been the most beautiful dress she'd ever owned, and was now only fit for dusters. Then she ran up to her dormitory, threw herself on her bed, buried her face in the soft fabric and burst into tears.

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It was the worst Christmas Andromeda had ever had. She had nursed a ridiculous hope that one of her presents might contain a new set of dress robes, but since she hadn't dared tell her parents why she needed them, that wasn't going to happen. If she'd admitted she'd been invited to the Yule Ball by a Muggle-born wizard, they'd probably have stormed up to Hogwarts to take her straight home.

And she had to endure Narcissa and Bellatrix swanking about the common room in their dress robes, stealing each other's make up and jewellery and trying to outdo each other. Bellatrix was dressed in green satin, and Narcissa in silver silk which set off her blonde hair to perfection. Feeling sick with jealousy, poor Andromeda thought again of her ruined black velvet, and turned disconsolately to her holiday homework. At least she would have the common room to herself and might stand some chance of getting it done. What a horrible way to spend Christmas night.

Then, at half past seven, everyone left the common room in a cloud of perfume and giggling, and Andromeda was left alone. She threw herself into the best armchair by the fire and began to cry.

'Excuse me, Miss?'

Andromeda squeaked in shock, and raised her tear-stained face from her hands to see a house-elf gazing up at her in concern. She wiped her eyes hurriedly. 'Can I help you?' she asked.

'Oh no, Miss! Dorry is here to help *you*.'

'What?'

'Miss must go to the Yule Ball. Master Tonks was very sad Miss was not going to meet him.'

Andromeda's mouth dropped open. 'You've seen Ted?' she asked eagerly.

'Oh, yes, Miss! He is visiting Dorry in the kitchen and is asking for help. But Miss must hurry. The ball is nearly starting!'

She motioned for Andromeda to stand up, then clicked her fingers. Immediately, Andromeda's school uniform was replaced by a beautiful satin dress in sunflower yellow. Hufflepuff house colour, she realised, wondering what her older sisters would say when they saw her. Another click and the outfit was completed with gold sandals and topaz jewellery.

Andromeda twirled on the spot, loving the way the dress swirled around her. She stopped hastily when she saw the final piece of jewellery Dorry was holding out to her. It was a silver bangle shaped like a snake.

'What's that?' she asked suspiciously. 'Why's it got my family crest on it?'

'It is made especially for Miss Black,' Dorry explained, beaming.

'I'm not wearing that! I don't even want to be a Slytherin! I'm only here because the rest of the family is.'

'Miss must wear the bangle! It is house-elf magic. When Miss is wearing it, no-one will recognise her. Dorry must keep Miss safe from her sisters.' Dorry clasped the bracelet around Andromeda's wrist it fastened by the snake biting its own tail and Andromeda was ready.

As she hurried towards the portrait hole, Dorry tugged urgently at her new robes. 'Dorry must tell Miss,' she squeaked. 'Dorry's magic is tied to the school rules. Miss must be back here by nine o'clock, or the bangle will stop working!'

'Nine o'clock!' exclaimed Andromeda. 'But that only gives me an hour!'

'Nine o'clock is the school curfew, Miss. Dorry apologises.'

Oh, well, thought Andromeda. Even an hour at the Yule Ball was better than not going at all. She'd better get down to the Great Hall as fast as possible!

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Ted was delighted to see Andromeda approach him in the Entrance Hall. He hadn't believed for a minute that she had dumped him willingly he knew how horrible her older sisters could be, and had gone straight to the house-elves for help. He didn't recognise her, of course, because of the Concealment Charm on the bangle, but Dorry had explained all about this, and had told him what Andromeda would be wearing. And the house-elf had done her proud. She looked like a princess.

The only thing which worried him slightly was that all through dinner she kept sneaking glances at his watch. What in the name of Merlin was that all about?

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Bellatrix and Narcissa were equally delighted with themselves. Not only had they stopped their pure-blood sister disgracing the family with a Mudblood, but the Mudblood in question seemed to have forgotten her entirely. He was dancing the first dance with a beautiful girl they hadn't seen before. She was tall and elegant, a Hufflepuff judging by the colour of her outfit, and seemed several years older than Dromeda. Lucius and Rodolphus weren't happy their girlfriends were paying more attention to the mystery girl than to them, but that didn't matter. All that mattered was committing every detail of the girl's beauty to memory so they could taunt their sister with it tomorrow.

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Andromeda was in heaven. She hadn't even known how to waltz, but Ted had steered her around the floor like a pro and lifted her as though she weighed no more than a house-elf. Her heart missed a beat. A house-elf! Dorry's warning! She sneaked a panicked look at Ted's watch. Two minutes to nine! She had to go now! She wrenched herself out of his arms and turned to flee.

He caught her wrist. 'Hey, where are you going?'

Andromeda was breathing so hard it hurt her chest. 'I'm sorry, Ted; I have to go!' She pulled her hand out of his grip, and, as she did so, the clasp of the snake bangle caught on Ted's wristwatch, and it clattered to the floor, but Andromeda didn't notice; she was too intent on getting back to her dorm before curfew. She ran from the Hall as fast as she could, Ted's cries of 'Come back, my love!' ringing in her ears.

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The Yule Ball was still the sole topic of conversation in the Slytherin common room the next day. Bella and Cissy were in full flow about the beautiful girl who had danced with Ted Tonks, deliberately trying to upset their younger sister and delighted that it seemed to be working. Andromeda was curled up in an armchair, not joining in the babble of chatter, and looking miserable. Her sisters thought she was jealous, but in reality she was brooding on the silver snake bangle. She realised she must have dropped it as she fled from the Ball, but the Great Hall would have been cleared by now; she had no idea how to go about finding it, and without it she would never be able to sneak out to see Ted again.

Silence suddenly fell as the common room door appeared to open and close on its own. Andromeda looked up, surprised out of her misery, as Dorry made her way through the crowd.

Dorry was, once again, on a mission of mercy from Ted. He had picked up the silver snake bangle and, knowing he would never be able to get into the Slytherin common room without the password, had gone to Dorry again for help. They had decided that she should return the bracelet to its rightful owner, as for a Muggle-born Hufflepuff to venture into the Slytherin common room, even with house-elf protection, was tantamount to suicide. Dorry had intended to go straight to Andromeda, take her up to the dormitory on the pretence of collecting some robes and give her the bangle there, but to her dismay she was accosted by Bellatrix Black before she had even spotted her target.

'Where did you get that?' demanded Bellatrix.

Dorry quailed as Bellatrix's eyes flashed sparks. 'Dorry is finding it in the Great Hall when Dorry is cleaning,' she squeaked.

Bellatrix snatched the bangle out of Dorry's trembling fingers. 'Give me that! It has our family crest on it. It's mine!' She proceeded to try and open the bracelet by grabbing hold of the two hinged sides and wrenching them apart. To her utter fury, the bangle wouldn't open. It even appeared as though the snake bit its tail even harder.

'Desist this instant, Bella,' commanded Narcissa smoothly. 'You'll break it. If you can't open it, it is evidently meant for me.' She plucked the bangle from her sister's hands

with her elegantly manicured fingers, and dug red-painted talons into the clasp, which resolutely refused to budge. Flinging the trinket to the floor in disgust, she turned on Bellatrix, her earlier sang-froid dissolving. 'You stupid, clumsy cow! No wonder it wouldn't open for me; you twisted it out of shape!'

'I'm the oldest,' screeched Bellatrix. 'It was meant for me! I'd have got it open if you hadn't grabbed it from me, you bitch!'

Under cover of their furious bickering, Dorry slipped through the gawping, sniggering crowd, to find Andromeda in the same chair by the fire as she had been the night before. There was no need to slip up to the dormitory; everyone's attention was turned to Narcissa and Bellatrix, whose argument had escalated to screaming pitch.

The bangle swung open at one touch of its rightful owner's fingers and fitted snugly around her wrist. Unnoticed by anyone, Andromeda left her sisters to their howling, and slipped out to meet Ted.

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A/N: Fairfield's SND prompt asked for Andromeda Black as Cinderella. According to The Harry Potter Lexicon's Black Family Tree, Andromeda is the middle sister, so I'm afraid I had to use artistic licence to make this work.

In Rossini's opera, the role of fairy godmother is fulfilled by the Prince's old tutor, Alidoro, hence Dorry's name.