

Silver Linings

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A tragedy forces two people into a peculiar situation. Will they be able to make the best of it, or will their differences tear them apart?

Chapter 1

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A tragedy forces two people into a peculiar situation. Will they be able to make the best of it, or will their differences tear them apart?

Andromeda Tonks wrung her hands on her cotton apron as she braced herself against the kitchen sink. She glanced out the small window over the sink, focusing on the big oak tree in her backyard. An old tire, the black rubber faded to a grayish hue, hung from one of the thick branches. She recalled happier times when little Nymphadora would swing from that tire. Andromeda's ears filled with her daughter's angelic, innocent peals of laughter as she rose higher and higher into the air. It seemed like it was just yesterday when she was with her baby girl.

She pulled herself away from the sink, composing herself enough to finish washing and drying the dishes. She bit the insides of her cheeks, preventing yet another wave of tears from trickling down her pale face.

Get it together, she scolded herself. It had been two full years. That was enough time. People move on. Life goes on.

Not for Andromeda Tonks.

No one had suffered the same losses. No one had lost so many family members. No one had to raise a baby at the age of 47. No one.

Today marked the second anniversary of the Dark Lord's defeat. Hogwarts, like last year, hosted the soirée. Harry invited her, claiming that some time spent with close friends would do her good. She declined his request. She did not see the point. She did not help bring him down. She stayed at home with Teddy while others went off to battle.

"Dora, wouldn't it be best if you stayed with Teddy tonight?" Andromeda begged as she watched her daughter getting ready for the Final Battle. Nymphadora shrugged on a tan leather jacket and grabbed her wand off the table.

"I have to go," she stressed. "It's my job," she added. Andromeda sighed deeply, wishing that her daughter had chosen a less dangerous career.

"Are you sure? Teddy needs you," Andromeda said, hoping a gentle reminder about her child would change her thinking.

"Yes, I am sure. Please watch him for me," Nymphadora responded. With that, she pulled her mother into a tight hug, kissing her cheek before she departed for battle.

Andromeda slammed her fist down on the countertop, wincing at the sharp pain that traveled up her hand. Why her? Why now? Was this Merlin's way of punishing her for abandoning her family so many years ago?

A soft cry from the nursery pulled her out of her morose thoughts. She swallowed hard, straightened her back and made her way up the stairs.

"Oh, Teddy!" she exclaimed, a false warmth creeping into her voice. "How is my little boy?" She rushed to the crib and picked him up. Her touch silenced his cries. He began to babble happily, twisting her curly brown locks around his tiny fingers. She laid him on a small table beside the crib and changed his soiled nappy.

She placed him back in his crib and spun the mobile hanging above it. His laughter mixed with the mobile's melody. His tiny arms flailed as he tried to catch the toys. She bent down, her slender fingers combing his soft locks. His features were a striking match to her deceased daughter's. She recalled standing over the same crib watching her daughter while her husband looked on.

Oh, Ted! If only you had lived she mused, hot tears forming in the corners of her eyes. All she wanted was one. Just one other person to share the burden. She could do it with one.

But alas, she had to raise the little boy all on her own.

She allowed herself to wallow in her thoughts while Teddy drifted off to sleep. She waited a few minutes to confirm that he was asleep. She then strode over to a large oak dresser that stood in the far corner of the room. She smiled softly as she recalled watching Ted carve the intricate designs into it. He had always been good with his hands.

She pulled out the top drawers and fumbled blindly for the one item that kept her going. She thumbed through the various items, searching for the glossy, thick paper stock. Her fingers grazed the yellowed pieces of parchment containing love notes from Ted and letters Andromeda sent him while away at school.

There you are, she thought, her smile growing wider. She pulled the photo out and clutched it to her chest as to embrace the people in it. She pulled it away and stared longingly at their faces. It was the last photo they had taken. Nymphadora had announced her pregnancy. Ted insisted on taking the photo the Muggle way to capture the moment and set it in stone. He made the camera work in such a way so he was able to come back and be part of it. Their arms enveloped each other while Remus' hand rested on Nymphadora's belly.

She almost wished they had taken a magical equivalent so she could watch their reactions. But, that memory remained etched in her mind. Occasionally, she would play it on a loop. It usually cheered her up. It was one of the best days of Andromeda's life. She wished she could return to that moment, hit stop and live there forever.

But alas, life moves on. Time moves on. People move on.

The moonlight shone through the small window casting a glare on the picture. She squinted her eyes and focused hard, willing them to appear in front of her as they had every night for the past six months. *Perhaps the photo is magical after all*, she thought. *How is it that they show up?*

A cool breeze swept through the room. Three white misty strands filled the space immediately in front of her. Her eyes widened as she watched them transform into the people whom she missed most.

"Mom?" a familiar voice called out, extending a hand to her. Andromeda's hand shot forward, desperate to feel her daughter's touch once more. Her fingers met the empty air, causing her to frown.

"It's me, dear," she whispered, trying to smile at her, but her facial muscles were out of use. It had been a while since she last smiled. "I miss you so much. I miss you all so much," she rasped through the tears that trickled down her face unbeknownst to her.

"We miss you too," the form of her late husband said, flashing his trademark smile at her. "Andi, you are doing a fine job with Teddy," he complimented, gazing at his sleeping grandson.

"You need to keep it up. I know it is hard, but you have to do this for us," Remus' form reminded her. His voice was oddly calming. She studied his face, noting that the scars had faded. In fact, all three of them looked happier. They looked far happier in death.

Death.

The word haunted and terrified her. It symbolized something painful and unwanted. And yet, there they stood. She focused on them again to confirm that they did look younger and happier.

Death.

It symbolized an option that no one would ever willingly select. Many a witch and wizard spent years searching for ways to cheat it. Death symbolized the uninvited visitor that crept up on unsuspecting victims at the worst times.

Death.

And yet, the temptation to join them seemed so sweet.

"Mom? What's wrong?" her daughter inquired.

"I cannot do this anymore. I miss you all so much. It is not fair!" Andromeda exclaimed, tightening her grip on the top of the dresser.

"Life isn't fair, Andi. But, think of Teddy," Ted said, stepping closer to her. She stepped forward, hoping to feel his arms around her. The empty air hugged her back.

"You are strong. You can do this," Remus urged.

With that, the three figures vanished into the night, leaving Andromeda alone. She stared at the photo, willing them back, but her efforts were useless. They were gone.

Andromeda walked back downstairs and placed a sheet of chocolate chip cookies into the oven. Perhaps something sweet would calm her down. She opened a cabinet and wrapped her fingers around an ivory ceramic mug Nymphadora had created for her. She gave it to her on Mother's Day. Unfortunately, art had not been her daughter's strong point. The mug was awkwardly shaped and the clay was somewhat lumpy. The flowers painted on it were rather crude looking. Andromeda loved the mug despite its obvious flaws. She placed a teabag in it and put a kettle of water over the stove. She warmed her face and dried her tears with the streaks of steam that rose from it.

She stood in the center of her kitchen, lost in her thoughts for a few minutes. Eventually, she snapped out of it and picked up a small stool. She carried it to Teddy's room and placed it in front of his closet. She mounted the stool, stood on her tiptoes and grabbed a handful of bed sheets. The sheets, a mix of pretty pastels, once adorned the bed Nymphadora slept in as a child. She got off the stool, carried it to the center of the room and took a seat. Her hands shook as she knotted the sheets together. She walked over to the bed giving Teddy one long, last look.

She walked back to the stool and stood up on it, carefully maintaining her balance. She stretched her arms and tied the sheets from a wooden beam in the ceiling. Her eyes darted back and forth from the crib to the photo, which had fallen to the floor.

"Do I have a choice?" she asked the photo, hoping the figures would reappear.

"You always have a choice," a silky, deep, soothing voice whispered back. "But look at them. They look so peaceful... so happy. Would you like to join them?"

"No, Mom! Please do not do this!" the misty image of her daughter yelled at her. Her husband and son-in-law joined in her desperate cries. Andromeda tried to focus on their images, but the dark voice droned out their words.

"Join us. Come to us. We need you," a chorus of eerie voices whispered over and over.

"Look at them. They look so peaceful... so happy. Don't you want to join them?" the dark voice repeated.

The voices swirled around her until the buzzing became too much. With that, she carefully lowered the noose, slipping it over her neck. The soft cotton brushed against her throat. She tightened the noose and lifted her toes off the stool. A smile formed on her face as she willingly walked into death's open arms. She would finally be reunited with her lost loved ones.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 4

A tragedy forces two people into a peculiar situation. Will they be able to make the best of it, or will their differences tear them apart?

"Are you sure about this?" Narcissa asked, peering into Harry's piercing green eyes. Harry unlatched the lock to the small wooden gate leading to Andromeda's modest cottage. He walked into the front yard and beckoned Narcissa to join him. She hesitated for a bit before entering.

Harry sighed and crossed his arms over his chest. Narcissa had intercepted him on his way out of the soirée. She tugged on his forearm, dragging him into a dark alcove behind a suit of armor. The dim light in the hallway bounced off the metal, highlighting her pretty face. He recalled staring at her dainty hands as she spoke to him. Her painted fingernails matched her turquoise dress. He noticed a miniscule chip on her pinky that made his lips curl into a smirk. She was not as perfect as he originally thought.

She squeezed his forearm to force him into a response. He brought his gaze back to her face. Harry noticed that she was close to tears. Alarmed, he quickly agreed to do whatever she requested. He agreed if only to prevent the waterworks. He did not deal well with crying women.

"Yes, absolutely. She wants this just as much as you do," he replied. He wanted to curse himself for agreeing to this. He had no intention on being the middleman. He stepped closer to Narcissa and grabbed her hand. He squeezed it lightly.

"You can do this. I'll be around if you two need me."

"How do you know?" Narcissa asked, cocking an eyebrow up at him.

"I just do. Now, come on. We don't have all night."

"What if she hexes me?" Narcissa asked, fingering the empty holster in the sleeve of her dark green wool traveling cloak. She took a step back toward the exit.

"She will not do that," Harry insisted, tugging on Narcissa's hand. "Quit being such a coward. Let's do this."

Narcissa sighed deeply before she took a step back to Harry. He offered his arm to her and she took it. They slowly made their way up the cobblestone path leading to the front door.

A long high-pitched cry pierced the cool night air. They listened as the cry turned to shrieks. Harry instantly sensed something was wrong. Teddy never cried like that. Narcissa sensed it too and her body tensed. Harry blasted the door down with his wand. They sprinted into the house, choking on the smell of burning chocolate chip cookies that filled the air. Harry ran into the kitchen and turned off the oven.

"Andi? Dromeda? Where are you?" Narcissa called as she sprinted up the stairs. She passed by the bathroom. No light shone underneath the door. She approached Teddy's room, her heart beating furiously.

"Andi?" she called out again. She pushed the door open and her heart dropped.

Andromeda was hanging from the wooden beam, a noose fashioned out of pastel bed sheets tied around her neck. Her curly brown hair obscured her face. She was clad in a brown house dress with a floral apron around her waist. Her feet were bare.

Narcissa let out a blood-curling scream. She rushed to her sister. The paper bag in her arms tumbled to the floor, littering it with various toys she'd purchased for Teddy. She attempted to pull the body down, hoping perhaps that her sister was still alive. Her fingers wrapped around Andromeda's legs. Her hand burned at the coolness of the pale skin.

The harsh reality of the situation hit her. Andromeda was gone. Narcissa would never see her sister again. She would never get a chance to apologize for her wrongdoings and repair their relationship. It was over before it started.

Tears flowed down Narcissa's face as she sank to her knees in front of the overturned stool. She buried her head in her hands, tugging on the strands of her hair, choking on her screams.

Narcissa's crying only caused Teddy to cry louder. Harry heard the noises and dashed up the stairs. His heart sank as he caught sight of Andromeda. He quickly raised his wand and lowered her to the ground. He gingerly removed the noose from her neck. Narcissa crawled over to her sister and pressed her fingertips on Andromeda's pulse, which was silent. Narcissa placed her head in the lifeless lap. She continued to cry as she embraced her sister.

Harry froze in place for a moment, at a complete loss of what to do. He wanted to comfort Narcissa. He wanted to try to bring Andromeda back despite knowing that it was a lost cause. He wished he had the Resurrection Stone at that moment. He would bring her back without second thought. The two sisters deserved happiness.

Teddy's cries grew louder, spurring Harry into action. The boy's tears soaked the front of his dark blue, footed pajamas. His face was bright red. He clutched a yellow blanket in one hand. A stuffed sheep was in the other. Harry rushed over to Teddy, picked him up and lifted him out of the crib.

He walked out of the room and cast a silencing charm over it. He'd let Narcissa let it all out. There was no way he would let little Teddy stay there any longer. He had seen and heard enough.

"Oh, Andi," Narcissa cried as she brushed back the hair off her sister's forehead. "You could not wait for me, could you?" she asked. The rolled up piece of parchment tumbled from the pocket of her cloak. It unraveled revealing the note she had written to her sister.

My dearest Andromeda,

Not a day goes by where I do not think of you. I think of you often, and I miss you so much. I cannot even fathom what to write in this letter let alone what to say to you if I were to see you in person again. Words cannot express how sorry I am for dismissing you from my life when our family banished you.

Honestly, I did not know better. How could I? Our parents forced those views upon us ever since we were born. How was I supposed to think otherwise? It did not help that I felt even more pressured to please them in your absence.

I have only finally come to understand the error of their ways. You were right all along. I am sorry that I did not believe you. Believe me when I say it, but I would go back and do it all over if I could. I would have stood up to them and stood beside you.

But, the past is the past, and there is absolutely no use fretting over that now.

Right now, all I wish is for your forgiveness and for the opportunity for me to get to know you once again. I'm not expecting free rein into your home or weekly chats over tea. The road to repair our relationship will be rocky, but I am willing to work hard at earning your forgiveness and trust.

Also, I am sure you are facing difficulties raising Nymphadora's son on your own. I would be more than willing to help you with him if you will let me. All I am asking is for a bit of your time to consider whether this is a possible option.

However, I do understand if you never wish to speak to me again. I understand that what happened between us many years ago was extremely difficult for you to go through. But, know that I am here for you if you need me.

You are my sister. You will always be my sister, and I love you so much. Please consider this and reply to me at your earliest convenience.

Love, Narcissa

Narcissa wailed, realizing that it was too little, too late. It was over before it started.

Death claimed another.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 4

A tragedy forces two people into a peculiar situation. Will they be able to make the best of it, or will their differences tear them apart?

Harry gazed at the rolling hills of the lush countryside from the window of Narcissa's car. He hummed mindlessly to the catchy tune on the radio *Who knew that Narcissa Malfoy enjoyed oldies music?* The thought amused him, and he resisted the urge to burst into laughter.

The Ministry had taken away her wand despite Harry's pleas of her complete innocence. She resided in a Black safe house that had been left to her after her father's death. She hid from the people who believed she deserved prison time, the ruthless media and Lucius. They had recently separated, and he was not handling it well. He really lost it when she moved out of the Manor a week before Andi's death.

She did not want to move and wanted to repair their marriage. However, Lucius simply refused to change. Lucius' sentence of a seven-year house arrest did not help matters. Sometimes, the mere sight of him sickened her. The Manor was spacious, yet she could not escape him. He had no concept of her personal space and demanded her constant attention and affection.

He still held his views about pure-blood superiority. In fact, they got worse after the Dark Lord's defeat. She knew he would try to start a third coming if he could garner some support. Thankfully, no one wanted to associate with him since his involvement in the war tainted his once prominent name.

"It's Toby!" Teddy exclaimed, breaking the uncomfortable silence. He waved his stuffed sheep in the air as he stared at the real ones standing on the hill nibbling at some grass.

"Yes, it is," Harry responded. Teddy's innocence warmed his heart. He glanced at the rear view mirror and caught Narcissa smiling as well.

Harry had insisted on accompanying her to the funeral and staying with her immediately after Andromeda's death. He worried about her safety. She was more susceptible to being attacked in her compromised state. She put up a fight, but eventually gave in when Harry mentioned that he really could not take Teddy to the funeral via the Floo Network. He couldn't Apparate Teddy there either for fear of the side effects on a toddler. Unfortunately, they'd barely said two words to each other since that night.

An hour later, they arrived at the small cemetery located near Ted's familial home. Andi would be buried beside her husband. Narcissa insisted that no media be allowed around the cemetery. So they set up wards. They placed Hagrid as a guard, even though he was far too gentle to harm anyone.

The telltale pops of Apparition filled the air as the guests arrived. Narcissa had insisted on keeping the guest list low. She specifically instructed Harry not to mention the cause of death. She feared no one would come if they knew Andromeda had taken her own life. One by one, the guests took their seats on the white chairs placed in front of the ebony casket.

Most of the Weasleys were in attendance. Hermione Granger arrived on the arm of Ron, her eyes already red with tears. Kingsley showed up moments later. He cocked his eyebrow at the awkward pair beside Andromeda's open casket. Harry's hold on Teddy was wrong, and he boy almost fell out of his arms. Thankfully, Narcissa noticed it in time to help Harry hold him upright.

A few other surviving Order members and Ministry workers soon appeared, filling the chairs. Harry sighed as he approached the lectern. Narcissa had tasked him with Andromeda's eulogy. He refused, claiming she knew more about Andi and that she should since Andi was her sister. Narcissa refused in response, claiming that all the attendees would walk out if she spoke.

"Good afternoon, everyone. We gather here today to celebrate the life of Andromeda Tonks, wife to Ted Tonks, mother to Nymphadora Tonks, mother-in-law to Remus Lupin and grandmother to Teddy Lupin. As you all know, Andromeda passed away three days ago from complications she suffered due to the death of her loved ones," Harry began, gazing at the sea of people in front of him. Most seemed engaged. Narcissa scowled at him, clearly displeased by his last words. He swallowed hard and

shook it off. He would deal with her later.

"Andromeda was a good woman who had the nerve to fight for what she believed was right even if it alienated those close to her. Her support for non-pure-blood witches and wizards during that time was incredibly crucial," he continued.

After the eulogy, the guests lined up in front of the casket to pay their last respects to Andromeda. Molly was practically inconsolable. Andromeda and Molly had been close friends and bonded during the early days of the Order. Ted and Arthur had been close friends as well. Arthur placed his arm around her thick waist and guided her to the casket. Molly wiped off some of her tears with the sleeve of her faded black dress.

Harry watched the Weasley matriarch break down, oblivious to those around her. Arthur allowed her to cry for a few minutes before he pulled her away. One by one, Harry watched as each guest became emotional over the loss. Even Kingsley, the tough Minister, broke down, shedding a lone tear.

Narcissa, on the contrary, had not spoken to anyone. She focused on the grassy fields behind the casket with a blank expression painted on her face. Harry wanted to comfort her, but chose not to, unsure of what to do or say.

The guests eventually finished paying their respects. They gathered around the casket. Arthur and Kingsley closed it and carefully lowered it into the ground. Harry convinced them to forgo the use of magic for Narcissa's sake. Arthur and Kingsley grabbed two shovels, scooped up the dirt and dropped the piles on top of the casket. They repeated this motion until the dirt covered the casket.

Harry blinked back tears as he watched Arthur pat down the dirt with his shovel. He then led the small group into a small banquet hall for some light snacks and tea.

Narcissa remained outside. She fell down to her knees in front of her sister's grave. Her fingers trembled as she caressed the engraving on her headstone. The damp ground soiled her dress, but she did not care. She slowly allowed herself to let go of the tears she refused to shed throughout the entire service. Harry's heart hurt as he watched her breakdown.

"Harry?" Molly Weasley asked, placing a hand on his arm. He shook his head and turned to look at her. The redness from her eyes had faded a bit. He nodded at her.

"Are you sure you are ready for fatherhood? It will be hard to balance taking care of Teddy with Auror training. I can help you with him if you want," she offered. She peered at him with a hopeful expression on her face.

Harry pursed his lips, pondering the correct response. He supposed her help would not be a bad thing. After all, some help was better than none. Then again, he knew that she was asking, in part, to escape the harsh realities of her life. Ron and Hermione informed him that she was still extremely depressed over the loss of her son. Her house was empty, and she needed something to fill it.

However, Harry entertained another idea. He knew another person that needed the distraction more. Someone else could benefit from caring for Teddy. He was not sure if this person would accept his idea, but he wanted to give it a shot.

"Thank you for your offer, Molly, but I respectfully decline. I have another idea," he responded as politely as he could. Molly frowned at him, shook her head and sighed loudly as she went back to Arthur.

Ginny approached him immediately after Molly left. She did not seem affected by Andromeda's death. She pulled Harry aside and mentioned that she was departing for Ireland to play for the Holyhead Harpies the following day. She begged him to visit her. She urged him to consider moving with her, prattling on all the fun they could have. He merely nodded his head at all the right points. He had no interest in conversing with her, but he did not want to seem rude.

He focused his gaze past her shoulder. He watched as Narcissa stood up and brushed the dirt off her dress. Kingsley exited the banquet hall and walked toward her.

"Mrs. Malfoy?" a deep voice called out. She turned feeling the Minister's hand on her elbow. She turned to face him, her face covered in tears. He handed her a handkerchief from the pocket of his purple robes. "I'm very sorry for your loss," he began.

"Thank you," she responded politely. She wiped her face and fingered the frayed hem of the handkerchief. What did he want with her? She found it interesting that only he had the nerve to approach her.

"I just wanted to say thank you for your contribution to winning the war. We could not have done it without you. I'm sorry that you lost your wand. I did not want that outcome but unfortunately, the rest decided otherwise." Her head snapped up and her eyes bore into him. She frowned slightly, then cast her gaze to the ground.

"Please don't hesitate to contact me if you need anything. Let me know if you want to take those first steps. I'm convinced that the others will agree to it if you start it," he added quickly, wrapping up the conversation as he noticed the Weasleys approaching him. She nodded curtly at him. She turned her attention back to Andromeda's headstone.

Harry deliberately stayed in the hall after everyone departed. He cleared the tables of the leftover food. He prepared Teddy for the long ride home. He did everything he could to avoid facing Narcissa. The pitter-patter of raindrops on the window caught his attention, forcing him outside. He walked briskly through the grassy field, slowing before he got to Narcissa.

"I'm so sorry, Andi," she wailed, choking on her tears. "Why did you have to do this? Why did you have to leave me all alone? You didn't even give me a chance!" she cried. She punched the ground in front of the gravestone.

Harry slowly approached her and placed a firm hand on her shoulder. She attempted to wipe away all her tears. She didn't want him to see her crying again. Her back remained facing him.

"We should leave. It's starting to rain," Harry said, stating the obvious.

She nodded, stood up and walked back to the banquet hall to collect Teddy. They rode home in silence, neither one of them knowing what to say to the other.

A few hours later, Narcissa parked the car in front of Grimmauld Place.

"Do you want to come in?" Harry asked as he exited the vehicle with Teddy in tow.

"No, thank you," she replied. Harry knew better than to argue. He bade her goodnight, hoping that he would see her again.

The following morning, Harry received a note from Gringotts requesting his presence at the reading of Andromeda's will. He cringed recalling Sirius' will. Luckily, he doubted any more Blacks would bequeath him anything. Narcissa did not seem to want anything to do with him. He folded the note, tucked it into his pocket and finished his breakfast. He dressed, fed Teddy and headed to the bank, curious about what Andromeda had in store for him.

He entered Andromeda's vault, which was nowhere near as large as Bellatrix's. There was far less gold. The bright white light from the single bulb hanging in the vault blinded him. His mouth dropped as he saw Narcissa standing beside the goblin. She clutched the same letter in her hands. He tried to catch her eye, but she quickly looked away.

"We are here to read the will and trust of Andromeda Tonks, née Andromeda Black. She was left with the house and the contents of this vault in the will of her deceased husband, Ted Tonks. Unfortunately, her daughter and son-in-law did not make a will before their deaths. Their only wish was that she care for Teddy if they died," the

Goblin droned on.

Harry tried to catch Narcissa's attention. In addition, Teddy began fidgeting in his pram. The sparkly coins caught his eye, and he wanted to grab them. Harry cursed himself for forgetting Teddy's stuffed sheep. It took him too long to get him ready. *Perhaps I should have taken Molly's offer*, he thought as he tried to quiet Teddy.

"Andromeda hereby bequeaths the house and the contents of this vault to Harry James Potter. Harry James Potter is also appointed as the legal guardian for Teddy Lupin," the goblin continued. The news hardly surprised Harry. He had expected that.

"Andromeda also requests that Narcissa Malfoy, née Narcissa Black, also be appointed as legal guardian for Teddy Lupin. She is to help Mr. Potter care for Teddy. Mr. Potter and Mrs. Malfoy are to work out the arrangements after this will reading. That is all," the Goblin said.

The color drained from Narcissa's face and she finally made eye contact with Harry. Harry was also startled by the news. The goblin set two sheets of parchment, a quill and a pot of ink on a small table.

"Please sign this document acknowledging that you will do your best to fulfill the terms of her will."

Harry walked over to the goblin and signed his name. He handed the quill to Narcissa. She looked lost in her thoughts. A few minutes passed before she took the quill from him. She signed her name in an eloquent script and turned to exit the vault.

"Narcissa!" Harry called out, sprinting to try to catch up with her. She managed to catch a ride back up without him. He sighed as he got into the next one. *Why is she avoiding me*, he pondered.

Narcissa was about to slip out of the bank when she bumped into her husband. Her face flushed as she smoothed out her dress.

"Cissa," Lucius cooed, pleased to see her. He attempted to wrap his arm around her waist, but she slipped out of his reach. "Cissa," he said again, his tone becoming more frustrated. The goblins, interested in the dynamic between the couple, turned to face them.

"Lucius," she said coolly as she tried to move past him. He blocked her path, and she collided into his broad chest. "Please move."

"I heard what happened to your sister, and I'm terribly sorry for your loss," he said in a voice that indicated that he was anything but sorry.

"Why are you here? Shouldn't you be at home?" she hissed.

"They need *my* money," he drawled, shrugging his shoulders. Narcissa glanced at the three Ministry employees that accompanied Lucius. He opened his mouth to add more.

"Narcissa, come, we have things to discuss," Harry interrupted, placing his hand on Narcissa's forearm. "Enjoy your field trip," he said to Lucius as they exited the bank.

Chapter 4

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A tragedy forces two people into a peculiar situation. Will they be able to make the best of it, or will their differences tear them apart?

Harry escorted Narcissa to Rosa Lee Teabag where they settled into a table at the darkest corner in the back of the shop. Her face flushed with anger over Harry antics. *Who does he think I am*, she pondered, biting down hard on her lip to prevent herself from screaming at him. *Does he think I'm some sort of damsel in distress who cannot take care of herself?*, she wondered.

"Thank you," Narcissa responded to the waitress as she set down a white porcelain teacup filled with her favorite peppermint tea. Narcissa took a small sip, savoring the warmth and refreshing taste. Harry took a swig of his green tea and tapped his foot anxiously against the leg of the table. Perhaps dragging her out of the bank was a horrible idea. As usual, he lacked a solid plan. He usually ran head-on into his decisions, stopping to consider them only after he initiated activity.

"Do *not* do that to me again," Narcissa hissed, her eyes narrowing at him. "I am not some rag doll that you can throw around wherever you please." Harry choked on his tea and coughed uncomfortably. Her eyes narrowed, and a snarl appeared on her pale pink lips. She took another sip of her tea and set the cup down gently on the saucer.

"What was I supposed to do? *Ineeded* to get your attention," he defended, crossing his arms over his chest. "Why do you keep avoiding me?"

Narcissa's nose flared as she looked at him. The sheer stupidity of his question shocked her. She did not bother to entertain him with a response. She crossed her right leg over her left and stared at the painting hanging behind his head. She stared hard at it until the colors blurred into one hazy image. A fresh wave of tears formed in the corners of her eyes. She bit down on her lip again, drawing blood this time. She quickly wiped it off with her linen napkin.

"So, what are we going to do with Teddy?" he asked, hoping that reminding her of their little charge would change her demeanor. It failed to work. Her snarl only deepened.

"You are his godfather. You certainly can figure it out," she snapped, raising her chin defiantly at him.

"You have to help. You heard what she had requested in her will. You signed the papers," he bit out through gritted teeth. Her cold façade was getting irritating. He wanted to reach across the table and shake some sense into her. He understood that she was upset over the loss of her beloved sister, but it did not give her the right to treat him like a piece of dirt. She sighed loudly and placed her hands on the table.

"Did I have a choice?" she asked, cocking an eyebrow at him.

"You always have a choice," he mumbled. He took another swig of his tea, wishing it was Firewhisky instead. They sat in silence for a few awkward minutes before Harry finally had the courage to speak to her again.

They divided their co-parenting into weekly sessions. Harry agreed to bring Teddy to Narcissa's home during his overseas training sessions with the Aurors. Narcissa absolutely refused to disclose the whereabouts of her safe house, claiming that it was Unplottable. The last thing she needed was someone to catch Harry visiting her. It was also crucial that its location remain unknown to Lucius.

"So, you propose that we meet you an hour away from your home? What is the point of that? Do you want to add more stress to Teddy's travels?" he demanded, struggling to keep his voice low. Her preposterous demands grated on his nerves. In addition, she requested that he furnish his home with specific expensive items for Teddy, claiming that they were better than whatever he used.

"Absolutely. No one can find my home," she stressed. "Besides, travel by car is far less stressful than travel by Floo or Apparition."

"Fine, we can try your idea. However, if this is too taxing on Teddy, I will be delivering him straight to your doorstep," he replied. Her eyes widened at his statement. She shrugged and turned her attention back to her tea.

"Now, what about the house? I have no use for it. And, I highly doubt that you want to live in it," Harry pressed forward, no longer caring whether she wanted to continue. It was essential that they work this out.

"I obviously have no use for it. Did you think I was living there?" she snapped.

"No, of course not," he shot back. "What do you propose we do with it?"

"We sell it. Actually, I will prepare it for sale. I highly doubt you have any idea the amount of work that goes into selling a home."

"Fine," he responded, clearly put out. He highly doubted she had any idea either. After all, she'd barely worked a day in her pampered life. He finished the rest of his tea and tossed a few Sickles on the table. Her dismissive attitude completely wore him out. "All right then. I will take Teddy while you get the house ready. I shall come to the house in three days to see your progress," he added.

"That's unnecessary!" she protested, throwing her hands in the air. "I do not need a babysitter, Mr. Potter," she sneered.

"Honestly, Mrs. Malfoy, I am past the point of caring what you think. Do not force me to resort to other methods to get through to you," he snapped, his hand resting over the wand buried in the pocket of his jeans. He turned in the other direction and strode out of the shop, not bothering to give her a second glance.

Three days later, Harry arrived at Andromeda's cozy cottage with Teddy in tow. He entered the kitchen, wrinkling his nose as he recalled the smell of the burning chocolate chip cookies on that ill-fated evening. He placed Teddy into his worn wooden high chair. Teddy squealed in delight as Harry placed a coloring book and crayons on the table. Teddy immediately reached for the items. A few seconds later, a page with various scribbles and circles appeared. Harry, pleased that Teddy appeared fully occupied, climbed up the stairs to find the insufferable blonde.

He found her sitting cross-legged on the floor of Andromeda's master bedroom. A handcrafted wood box sat beside her. Its contents covered the plush beige carpet. Tears flowed freely down her face as she stared intently at a photograph in her hand. Yellowed pieces of parchment were strewn about the floor as well. Harry slid into the room and slowly walked toward her.

He peered over her shoulder at the photo. It was of the three Black sisters in their Hogwarts uniforms, complete with their green and silver Slytherin ties. Narcissa looked very young in the picture. Harry guessed that she was in her first year, excited to start school with her older sisters. His gaze travelled briefly to Bellatrix. His ears rang with her trademark cackle as he stared at the demonic witch. He was extremely thankful that she had perished during the Final Battle.

However, the Bellatrix in the photo held a soft, innocent look that was completely opposite to her sadistic persona. A warm look was on her face, and her arm wrapped around Narcissa's slender shoulders. He could sense that her older sisters, Bellatrix especially, had taken it upon themselves to protect her. Narcissa's eyes positively sparkled in the photo. Andromeda looked just as happy as her two sisters, a wide smile adorned her face, and her deep brown eyes twinkled. The resemblance between Bellatrix and Andromeda was uncanny.

Harry turned his attention to the letters at Narcissa's feet. They were all from Andromeda and written at various points in her life. Some of the notes had various Muggle and non-Muggle photos attached to them. He studied the photos, noticing how Nymphadora aged in each of them. There was a note in Narcissa's hand. Her tears started to stain the parchment.

Harry took a seat beside her and touched her knee with his fingertips. She turned to look at him, not caring whether he saw her tears. She thrust the note into his hands, and she buried her face in her hands as a fresh wave of tears overcame her. Harry's mouth dropped as he read the first few pages of the note, which had been written two weeks before Andromeda's death.

Dearest Narcissa,

I know that it has been a while since we last spoke. I remember that day like it was yesterday. We had sat on your bed, huddled underneath multiple layers of blankets, since it was an unseasonably cold winter. You had asked me a silly question about a boy you liked. You had wanted to know how you could get him to notice you. You had always asked me these questions since Bellatrix always brushed you off, claiming that there was more to life than boys. We could not have predicted that she would get involved with a bad boy of her own! If only we had known! We could have tried to stop her before it was too late.

I had answered your question honestly, telling you that you should never have to try that hard to get someone to notice you or to like you. You should never beg for anyone's attention. I had told you not to worry, and that you'd never be without a proper suitor. After all, you were always the prettiest. I bet you have retained your beauty. The pictures of you printed in the Prophet confirmed that.

Not a day goes by where I do not think about you. How have you fared since the war ended? Are you still with Lucius? Or, have you finally come to the light about his devious ways? How is Draco? How has he fared since the war? I wish that little Teddy and I could meet him. Little Teddy could use a friend.

Honestly, I could as well. And, I have a feeling that you can use one too. I'd like to try to rekindle our relationship. You're the only family I have left. Families should stick together. We have gone through so much despite being on opposite sides.

A relationship won't come easy, but I want you to know that I am willing to work hard at it. I love you so much. I never stopped loving you. I can only hope that your feelings toward me have not totally faded based on some silly beliefs.

Please reply to my letter regardless of your response. I understand completely if you want nothing to do with me. Perhaps we can have some tea and discuss everything openly and honestly. You can meet little Teddy. Oh, Narcissa, I'm sure you will absolutely adore him! You always adored babies, and he is terribly cute! He'll change his hair to match yours when he is very happy. It manages to happen often, which puzzles me since nothing makes me happy these days.

Anyway, I'm babbling now. Please reply to me. I look forward to hopefully speaking to you and seeing you soon.

Love always,

Your Sister, Andromeda

Moved to tears, Harry wiped them away with the back of his hand. Everything he wanted to say to Narcissa completely slipped his mind. He exited the room and went back downstairs to sit with Teddy.

Narcissa's fine eye for design and décor helped beautify the cottage. She had created the cozy, homey feel that it lacked. She had replaced the worn furniture with more modern and tasteful pieces. Several buyers wanted to buy the property, and offers trickled in the day after the first showing. The remote countryside location, the quirkiness of the cute cottage and, most importantly, that it was Unplottable, were big draws. Narcissa wanted to sell the house to an older pure-blood elitist couple seeking a safe house. They offered the highest amount for the house. At Harry's insistence, she caved, and they accepted an offer from a younger couple that had supported the Order during the war.

A week after the closing on Andromeda's house, Narcissa visited Grimmauld Place to pick up Teddy. Harry had granted her access and had keyed the wards to recognize her even without her wand. Narcissa took off her boots and padded down the narrow, rickety hallway toward the kitchen where she was to meet Harry and Teddy. She cringed at the sight of the kitchen. Empty takeaway containers had been strewn across the long wood table. The rubbish bin, filled to the brim, was about to topple over. Teddy's toys occupied a corner of the table. A small plate of baby carrots, a spoonful of peanut butter and a handful of peanuts had been left in front of his high chair. Narcissa shook her head and threw the contents into the rubbish bin.

The muffled sound of cursing caught Narcissa's attention. She climbed up the stairs and poked her head into Teddy's bedroom. A small rocking chair had fallen over. Teddy's unpacked overnight bag sat in the middle of the room.

"Come on, Teddy," Harry grumbled, trying to hold him down so he could change his nappy. Teddy giggled, flailing his legs and arms into the air. He picked up the wooden blocks on the changing table and chucked them at Harry. Harry turned his head to the side, narrowly avoiding the blocks. Narcissa watched for a few moments before stepping in.

"Here, let me do it," she said, shoving Harry with her hip. Teddy's laughter ceased as he looked at Narcissa. He stopped fidgeting. "You should probably give him a bath," Narcissa observed.

Harry obliged and carried the toddler to the bathroom. He placed him in the tub and set the water temperature. He walked back to the bedroom to prepare Teddy's overnight bag. He could not find the bag anywhere and tore up the room searching for it.

A loud cry from the bathroom startled him. He sprinted back to the bathroom. Steam rose from the tub. Teddy's skin had turned bright red. He quickly adjusted the temperature. He turned to exit the bathroom, only to see Narcissa standing in the doorway, a look of disgust on her face.

"What is wrong with you?" she screeched. "Are you an idiot?"

"I'm sorry. I got sidetracked trying to pack his bag," he answered, avoiding her menacing glare.

"This bag?" she asked, calling his attention to the bag slung over her shoulder. Harry nodded. He shuffled his feet and stared at the tile floor.

"You could have killed him," she snapped, rounding on him. "What were you thinking?" she demanded.

"Honestly, I *don't* know! I've been really busy with Auror training and, if you haven't noticed, he isn't the most cooperative child," Harry replied, throwing his hands into the air.

"You are so incompetent!" she shot back. "What were you doing feeding him food that he can choke on? You can't even change a nappy properly. Perhaps we should talk to someone to see if I can become his primary guardian. You clearly have no idea what you are doing."

Harry's calm and cool demeanor broke. He grabbed Narcissa's upper arms and slammed her into the door. Her body stiffened, but she did not break eye contact with him. He pushed his face toward hers until mere inches separated them. She shivered slightly, noticing the anger in his eyes.

"You have to cut me some slack," Harry said, tightening his grip around her upper arms. "I am sorry that I have made some mistakes, and I can understand your concern. But, you have to realize that I am doing the best that I can," he stressed.

"You really think..." she began.

"It has been extremely hard for me to balance everything without having much help. But, I'm not giving up on Teddy. Andromeda requested I be his father, and I am going to work hard to fulfill that role," he said, his expression and voice softening.

She nodded slightly, breaking their eye contact and glancing down at his chest.

"So, will you stop playing your silly games and move in?"

"Fine, I'll go get my things," she responded. He loosened his grip, and she slid out from under him. He slammed his hands into the wall in frustration. He took a deep breath and walked back over to Teddy to finish bathing him.

The first few months were difficult for the new parents. Still depressed over the death of her beloved sister, Narcissa was withdrawn and barely ate. Alarmed at her thinning figure, Harry started forcing her to eat meals with Teddy and him. Narcissa initially refused, preferring the comfort of her small bedroom; but eventually gave in upon Teddy's demands that she join them.

Oddly enough, Narcissa fell in love with the little boy and was great with him. Teddy appeared to enjoy Narcissa's care. Harry observed them interacting, thankful that she found someone to make her smile. He quickly relinquished most of the parenting decisions, allowing her to do as she pleased.

One evening, Harry returned home to the overpowering smell of paint. Confused, he climbed up the stairs to see what Narcissa was up to this time. His mouth dropped open when he found her sitting on the floor of Teddy's room. Several scraps of cloth were scattered around her.

"Oh, hullo," she said, noticing Harry. "I hope you don't mind," she said, gesturing to the room. She had redone it and had replaced the worn furniture with newer pieces. She had also repainted the room's walls to a neutral green color. A painting of a lion covered one of them.

"No, not at all. It looks really great," he replied, admiring her handiwork. "I'll be downstairs preparing dinner," he said, turning to leave her to her work.

Over dinner he tried to engage her in conversation, but as usual, she replied with one-word answers or did not reply at all. Harry still could not understand what he had done wrong and why she disliked him so much. He attempted to ask her, but could never get more than a few words or questions out.

The leaves crinkled and crunched under her black dragon-hide boots as she sprinted toward the downed boy. Her hopes for the end of his tyranny faded when she saw the boy hit the ground. She bent down, and her fingertips grazed his chest. She gasped softly upon feeling his faint pulse thudding against her fingertips. She lowered her head and hovered her mouth over his ear. She asked him about her son and was relieved when she saw his nod of admission, confirming that he'd seen her son alive in the

castle. In that moment, she made her decision.

"He's dead!" Narcissa called back to the group of Death Eaters. Voldemort's blood-red eyes bore into her. He glanced at the infamous Boy Who Lived who looked dead. But, something felt off.

"Are you sure?" he inquired in a sickeningly sweet tone.

"Yes, My Lord," she replied, quickly averting his gaze. Her head pounded as he destroyed her mental blocks. He whipped through her memories, each one of them coming to light as her shields fell.

"That is a lie," he responded, sighing deeply. "Oh, Mrs. Malfoy, you have been a very naughty girl," he hissed, waving his hand in the air. A collective gasp from the Death Eaters echoed off the trees.

"Cissy! How could you?" Bellatrix exclaimed, throwing her hands in the air. She took her spot beside Voldemort. Voldemort's hand travelled down to the pocket of his robe. Bellatrix made no effort to stop him. She scowled at her sister.

"I..." Narcissa began, scanning the crowd for Lucius.

"You do know what happens to naughty girls, right?" Voldemort asked, extracting his wand from his robes. He twirled it around his fingers before aiming it at her chest.

"Avada Kedavra!" he yelled, sending a stream of green light toward her.

"Narcissa! Narcissa!" an unfamiliar voice called out to her. "Wake up!"

I can't wake up, you fool. I'm dead, she thought, trying to tune out the voice. *Do people talk to you when you are dead? Where's Andi?*

"Wake up!" the voice called again, more forcefully this time. She felt her body shake. She bolted upright, shocked to see Harry in front of her. She blinked a few times, letting her eyes adjusting to the harsh light.

"You were having a nightmare," Harry said, pulling her into his arms.

"I'm alive? How? He killed me," she whispered, clutching at the hem of his pajama top. A few more tears trickled down her face.

Harry shook his head and wiped away her tears with the pads of his thumbs. He tucked a sweaty strand of hair behind her ear. She fell into him and pressed her head against his chest. The steady beating of his strong heart calmed her down.

"Did you forget that I defeated him?" Harry asked lightly. She shook her head, her hair fanning across his chest.

"It just seemed so real," she whispered.

And then, the floodgates opened. She spilled every single detail to him. She told him about how much she had hated the Dark Lord and how much she had hated Lucius for getting involved with him. She talked about how she did not regret her actions in the Forbidden Forest. She just didn't understand why everyone hated her when she really did not do anything wrong.

"I understand," Harry responded, recalling the many nightmares he suffered at the hands of Voldemort. "He's gone for good. You don't have to worry about that."

She nodded, nuzzling his shoulder. He traced small circles on the small of her back. She sighed deeply, relaxing instantly at his touch. Her eyes closed as he stroked her silky, soft hair.

"He won't come back. But if he does, I'll protect you and Teddy," he whispered into the shell of her ear. "You're my family now. No one hurts my family," he asserted before falling asleep.

The following morning, Harry awoke with Narcissa's face pressed into his shoulder. Her legs and arms were wrapped tightly around him like he was her personal body pillow. His arm tingled, and her hair tickled his nose. He shifted slightly, trying not to wake her. She stirred, loosened her grip on him and rolled on her back.

Harry padded into the kitchen to prepare breakfast, his face flushed from the memory of last night. He settled into the task of cooking, hoping it would distract him.

"Thank you for last night," Narcissa said as she entered the kitchen. Teddy was in her arms, and she put him in his high chair.

"You're welcome," Harry responded, his blush deepening as he recalled what he had said to her. He hoped she did not remember any of them. He set a plate of food in front of her and handed her a mug of tea.

"You didn't have to do that, you know?" she said, taking a dainty bite of a piece of buttered toast. She turned to coo at Teddy who was happily eating his breakfast, seemingly unaware about what happened the night before.

"It's no big deal. You would have done the same if it happened to me, right?"

"Yes," she admitted. Her face flushed, and she focused on her breakfast.

Narcissa made good on her admission a week later, comforting Harry after an awful nightmare where Voldemort rose from the dead and killed both Narcissa and Teddy in front of him. In turn, Harry shared more personal information with her while she comforted him. She spent the night in his bed as well. He found it oddly comforting sleeping next to the beautiful blonde.

After that incident, the two finally let go of their differences. They realized that they had to develop a strong partnership to raise Teddy properly. They both understood that Teddy was very important to them, and they wanted him to have a good life.

And so, the following months passed with relative ease. They were able to converse openly and honestly. Most importantly, Teddy was happy and healthy.