

Mourning

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: This is my second fic for the Prompt-A-Thon at nosmutforyou. This time my prompts were: construction, criss-cross, familial, implications and low.

Thank you to my amazing beta, rules_of_jinx. You rock.

The shrill ringing of her doorbell woke Hermione from her fitful dreams. Burrowing her head underneath the pillows, she tried to block out the noise, hoping that whoever was at the door would just give up and leave already.

After five minutes of continuous ringing, the doorbell finally fell silent, only to be replaced by stellar pounding on the wooden door. Hermione groaned.

"Granger, I know you're in there. Open up!" the unwelcome visitor shouted from outside. The pounding on the door increased in volume and in speed.

Abandoning all hope that the intruder would just leave, Hermione dragged herself out of bed and went to answer the door, lest her neighbours call the police because of all the noise.

"Would you shut the bloody hell up?" she hissed even before she had opened the door all the way.

Draco Malfoy looked at her indignantly, the fist he had used to beat on her door still raised.

"What took you so long?" he asked, dropping his arm and pushing his way past Hermione into the flat.

"Come on in. Make yourself at home," Hermione mumbled sarcastically, closing the door. Draco was already wandering down the corridor, curiously inspecting her apartment.

"Good God, Granger. How can you live like this?" Draco asked when he found the living room, going inside. "This flat looks more like a construction zone than a living space."

Draco tried walking straight towards the couch, but found that there were several obstacles, like stacks of books and a basket with laundry in desperate need of folding, in his way, forcing him to walk criss-cross through the room in order to reach the sitting area.

Hermione huffed in indignation. She was aware that she hadn't vacuumed in quite a while and that there were a few things lying about that she hadn't gotten around to putting away yet. And there was this one shelf in the corner which had collapsed due to the insane amount of books she had stacked on it and which she had meant to repair the previous weekend, but hadn't found the time for after all. Nevertheless, Hermione thought that the term *construction zone* really wasn't called for.

"Hermione Granger is a slop," Malfoy announced gleefully, once he had finally reached the couch. He pushed a few magazines off the sofa and took a seat. "Who would

have thought?"

"What on earth are you doing here, Malfoy?" Hermione asked annoyed, ignoring his mocking. She just wanted him to leave already so that she could go back to wallowing in peace. Verbally sparring with her childhood nemesis and co-worker in the Department for Magical Law Enforcement needed to wait until she felt better.

"You weren't at work today," Draco remarked. Hermione rolled her eyes.

"Yes, I am aware of that," she replied sarcastically. "I took a personal day."

"You look like hell," Draco continued, scrutinizing her closely. "Are you sick?"

"No, I'm not sick," Hermione hissed, suddenly remembering that she was wearing her oldest sweat pants and her comfy hoody. Changing now was kind of pointless though; he had already seen her, and besides, it was just Malfoy.

"Why didn't you come to work then?" Draco asked impatiently. "We had the meeting with the Minister of Magic and the Heads of the Auror department. I had to do the presentation all by myself."

"I know that," Hermione answered, her patience waning. "How did the presentation go?"

"Brilliant, of course. Between the two of us, I'm by far the better public speaker anyways. But it would have looked better had you been there, too, and you still haven't told me why you didn't come."

Hermione resisted the urge to roll her eyes again. Barely. Although, if she were honest, she'd have to admit that Draco was right. They should have both represented their department, and he really was better than her when it came to speaking in front of people. It always made her nervous when she had an audience. Malfoy didn't have any problems in that regard. Hermione supposed that having an ego the size of Scotland did have its advantages.

Malfoy was still looking at her expectantly, clearly waiting for an answer. Hermione sighed. After two years of working with him, she knew that he wouldn't ease up until he had gotten his way. She really ought to call his parents and thank them for raising the world's most spoiled brat. She didn't even think Malfoy knew the meaning of phrases like 'personal space', 'none of your business' or simply 'no'.

"If you really must know, I lost Crookshanks yesterday, and I really didn't feel up to going to work this morning," Hermione finally said, desperately trying to hold back the tears that threatened to spill at the thought of her beloved pet's death.

"What's a Crookshanks, and why can't you go to work when you have misplaced it?" Draco asked, oblivious to Hermione's unshed tears.

"Crookshanks was my cat," Hermione explained, her vision blurring. "He died."

"You let me do a presentation alone that we worked on for over a month just because your familiar snuffed it?" Draco asked disbelievingly.

"Merlin, you're an insensitive arse," Hermione shouted, tears forgotten. "I've had Crookshanks since we were at Hogwarts. Excuse me if his death is a bit hard for me. We can't all be cold-hearted, uncaring bastards."

"Don't get your knickers in a twist," Malfoy drawled. "It was just a pet."

"No, he wasn't just a pet," Hermione answered, still shouting. "He was the kindest, sweetest, most intelligent cat. He was my companion. I understand that you are incapable of building any real relations to anyone but yourself. No animal or person will ever be good enough to deserve the *great* Draco Malfoy's affection, but unlike you, I actually have a heart."

"Yes, and I can see how *very* happy it is making you right now," Draco commented, getting up from the couch. Hermione didn't reply.

"I'll leave you to your mourning then." Draco walked to the door, side-stepping the books and laundry basket.

"Why did you come?" Hermione asked suddenly.

"I told you. I wanted to know why you ditched the presentation," Draco replied, not quite meeting her eyes.

"So you weren't here to check up on me because you were worried?"

"Absolutely not."

"Good."

Draco left the flat. Hermione looked after him, not sure what to make of his visit. But thoughts of Crookshanks soon drove Malfoy from her mind, and Hermione returned to bed, hiding her grief in her pillows.

A couple of hours later, she was interrupted again when once more her doorbell rang. Reluctantly, Hermione scrambled out of bed to answer the door.

Nobody was there.

Hermione was about to close the door again, thoroughly annoyed, when a feeble noise caused her to look down. There was a basket sitting on her doormat, which was not only emitting feeble noises, but was also shaking slightly.

Carefully, Hermione bent low to examine the basket, finding a note attached to it.

"Granger, I hope you plan on coming to the office tomorrow; I'm not going to do all your work, Malfoy." Hermione read, shaking her head.

She lifted the lid of the basket and was completely astonished to find a pair of green eyes staring fearfully back at her. It was a kitten.

"Unbelievable," Hermione muttered, gathering up the black kitten and walking back into her apartment. She was rewarded by a set of claws, digging painfully into her skin.

"I guess you didn't care much for being stuck in a tiny, dark basket, huh?" Hermione asked, freeing her hands from the kitten's paws and putting the cat onto the kitchen table. Fetching a small bowl, Hermione poured a bit of milk into it and gave it to the kitten. The kitten eyed the bowl sceptically at first, sniffing carefully. Apparently finding its contents to its liking, the cat began to drink.

Hermione watched it, completely at a loss. She had no idea what she was supposed to think of this. It seemed that the note and the kitten were Malfoy's version of a Get Well card, and Hermione's head hurt just thinking about all the possible implications of Draco's present.

She hadn't even meant to get another cat; not so soon in any case. But as she watched the little black kitten almost crawling into the bowl in order to lick off the last remnants of the milk, a white milk beard around its mouth, Hermione couldn't help but smile. It was kind of cute.

Picking up the kitten again, Hermione went into the living-room.

"Now, do you have a name or should I pick one?"