

Understanding

by skybyrd

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Tearing the paper quickly off the package, Hermione wondered again who had sent her the gift, a book from the shape of the wrapping, today of all days. This was never a good day for her. Those close to her knew it and knew she was tired of the platitudes that would leave their mouths only to pierce her heart. He was gone, killed while saving her life, and she would never forget his sacrifice. She couldn't.

He had started as a familiar and become a true companion, always there when she needed him. In her seventh year at Hogwarts, he had screeched and bared his claws before leaping on the dark-robed figure in the corner. She had panicked and ran, her life's only moment of cowardice, a moment that cost Crookshanks his life. She had run into Professor Snape who was patrolling the hallways and led him to where Crookshanks had spotted the figure. They found two bodies: one human, passed out with blood dripping from beneath a silver mask, and one feline, unmoving and breathing shallowly.

The Professor had sent her to fetch Madam Pomfrey. When she had returned with the large woman trailing behind, the mask had been removed from the human casualty, exposing the face of Draco Malfoy. Draco lost his eyes but survived, only to be sentenced to Azkaban. Crookshanks, however, only lasted for a few hours following the attack. He had suffered curses and physical damage so severe that he could not be fixed. To this day, Hermione's sleep was troubled with the memories of the time spent in the infirmary, lightly stroking her companion's fur as he slipped from this life to the next.

She didn't know when her pain would diminish. It had already been five years since that moment, and every year on the anniversary of his death she was an emotional wreck. She didn't even try to stave off the pain anymore. She simply scheduled the day off and spent the day grieving.

This year, her first as the Arithmancy Assistant to Professor Vector, the anniversary fell on a Saturday. She was glad that she didn't have to try to explain anything to the staff. Instead, she would keep to her rooms under the guise of "not feeling well."

When she had awoken today, she had seen the package neatly placed on the table near the fireplace. There was no card, and it was wrapped in plain brown paper. She finished unwrapping the package and looked at what lay inside: the newest edition of *Notable Kneazles Throughout History*, by JR Felis. She had no control over the tears that began to fall from her eyes as she read the title. She wondered whose sick joke this was, and angrily opened the front cover to read the following inscription:

"Miss Granger-

Though time is said to heal all wounds, I know there are some hurts that never cease. I only hope that this volume will bring you some comfort.

Sincerely,

S. Snape, PM

p.s. Turn to page 597."

Comfort?! She gaped at the words, wondering why a reminder of all that she had lost would bring her some comfort. It didn't surprise her a bit, considering the source. She cried harder and let her grief overtake her, sobbing into her hands as the book stayed perched on her lap. It took a bit of time for the grief to subside, and taking a deep breath she turned to the page specified in the inscription. It didn't take her long to find what Professor Snape had intended her to read.

"Crookshanks

Unknown-1997

Crookshanks, a half-kneazle, valiantly protected his witch the noted Hermione Granger by sniffing out the then-unknown Death Eater, Draco Malfoy, who was lying in wait for the young Miss Granger. He launched himself at the attacker, allowing Miss Granger to escape to safety, and during the scuffle managed to take both of young Malfoy's eyes before being mortally wounded himself. If it hadn't been for his timely action, serious harm may have befallen Miss Granger. Given the part she played in the Final Defeat of Voldemort, the forces of good may very well have lost. With his selfless sacrifice, Crookshanks earned his place in this volume and in history. While the loss of a familiar is always difficult, Miss Granger proved her worth by not letting Crookshank's sacrifice be in vain."

There was a picture of Hermione and her dear companion, and fresh tears filled her eyes as the cat in the photo butted the hand of the much younger version of herself, asking to be petted.

Then Hermione noticed the small print under the paragraph: *"Text and picture submitted by S. Snape, PM, Hogwarts."* With a dazed look on her face, she closed the book and stared into the fire, unseeing, as she tried to process the meaning behind the gift.

Hours passed in silent contemplation, and at last Hermione found some peace: someone understood.