

Taking the Feline Approach

by karelia

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: If it comes as a surprise to you that I don't own the characters, you're clearly from a different planet, in which case I commend you for your grasp of our form of communication.

A knock on the door interrupted the conversation. "That's Hermione. You better transform," Severus told his friend.

"Oh, Severus, what an adorable cat! Where did you pick her up?"

"*Him*, Hermione, *him*." Severus cast an amused glance at the cat and added, "Some friend asked me to take care of him, as she's no longer able to. Since I owed her a favour, I was in no position to refuse."

Hermione noticed his almost regretful expression. "I love all cats, but this Persian here is absolutely gorgeous," she said softly. "If you don't want to look after him, I'd be happy to." She sounded far too hopeful, even to her own ears, and entirely missed Severus's smug grin.

"Oh, really? Well, to be honest, I'm in a spot of... trouble. The Grand Potions Masters' Conference is starting on Friday in Paris, and I have no idea what to do with him. Can't take him with me, and can't leave him here all by himself."

The cat chose that precise moment to jump on Hermione's lap and started to purr when she scratched his head softly. "I'd be happy to take care of him, Severus," Hermione said.

"Oh, no, I couldn't possibly ask you, especially as it's the weekend! You'll be busy with friends and all. This cat," he cast a glance at the feline in her lap, "is rather needy where human contact is concerned."

A harsh laugh escaped Hermione. "Where would I go at the weekend, Severus? Babysit for Harry and Ginny's children? Get bored to death having lunch at The Burrow? I'd rather stay home with a good book, thank you very much." She frowned at him.

"Hermione," his voice softened, "why? Surely, one bad experience with a man, more than a year ago, can't stop you from ever being happy again, can it? You are young; you're pretty and desirable—"

"It's not that it was a bad experience, Severus, to the contrary," Hermione cut him off. "Anyway, if you need someone looking after him while you're gone, I'll be happy to." She stood up, ready to leave.

Severus had become a good friend over the past few years, but she did not need him to try and convince her *to get a life*. It was enough that Harry and Ginny kept trying to set her up with various men, and they didn't even know the reason for her lack of interest.

One night, one glorious night, was all it had taken for her to not want anyone else. If she couldn't have him, so be it. There'd be no replacement for him, and she was perfectly willing to spend her life on her own.

"All right. I appreciate your offer. I'll bring him over after work on Thursday if that's okay with you." He closed the door softly behind her and returned to the study.

"There is your chance. I doubt you'll have to work that hard to win her back. Silly girl. If it were me I'd make you work your arse off. Although... I think you do need to show her what exactly she means to you. If you hurt her, you'll have to answer to me." Severus glared at his friend.

"You do care for her, don't you..."

"Of course I do. She's been a good friend, and I enjoy her company. I know she's lost her heart to you, however undeserving you are." He glared again.

Late Thursday night, Hermione was sitting on her sofa, a book in one hand, the Persian cat on her lap, purring as she scratched him softly. "You know, Severus never told me what your name is, the silly man." She looked fondly at the cat. "I think," she pondered, "you rather remind me of Lucius. So perfect-looking, so regal... I think I'll call you Malfoy for now." The feline rewarded her with a loud purr.

When Severus returned Sunday night, she opened the door with a sigh. "I'd have been happy to keep him longer, you know."

He offered an uncertain smirk. "Hermione... the cat is *not quite* what he looks like."

Hermione frowned. "What do you mean? Aside from a suspicion that he's part-Kneazle because he's incredibly perceptive, I found absolutely nothing strange about him!"

Severus glared at the cat. "Don't you think it's about time to show yourself?" Then he made an abrupt exit, leaving a startled and speechless witch behind.

The cat's eyes met Hermione's. "Meow."

"What is it, Malfoy? What are you hiding?" She frowned at him, and then her eyes widened as the cat transfigured into human. "Lucius." It was less than a murmur.

Lucius closed his eyes momentarily. "Hermione... I realise there is no way to make up to you for the way I left last time, but I... I wanted, felt the need... to give you some comfort that was from me and yet... not from me..." He looked gorgeous and pathetic and beautiful and loveable.

She remained silent for a while, just looking at him, digesting his words. "Do you mean to say you're not quite as sorry as you insisted you were after that night?" Hope, ridiculous hope, sneaked its way to the forefront of her mind.

"What I mean to say, Hermione," he watched her closely, "is that I regret—deeply—the way I hurried away, and even more that I never had the courage to come back and tell you my regret." He took a step towards her. "And I am sorry for my shortcomings in that respect."

She took a step back. "Lucius... I don't know what to say..."

He took another step towards her, this time a rather large step, but when she took another step backwards, he retreated, too. Then, he stretched his hand outward. "My name is Malfoy, and I'm delighted to make your acquaintance."

Tears formed in her eyes and trickled down her face as she replied, "I'm not sure I'm delighted, Malfoy, but as a cat, you showed promise, and I think I might give you a chance."

When he took quick steps towards her this time, she did not move. His mouth crushed on hers and remained locked until air became an absolute necessity. "Oh, Hermione." He transfigured back into the Persian cat, climbed up her jeans, and when she stretched out her arms to him, he purred.

A/N: Prompt issued by LuciannaMalfoy: Lucius' Animagus form is a Persian cat, much like this one, <http://mine.icanhascheezburger.com/view.aspx?ciid=4141828>. What does he do? Does he use it to his advantage or does it cause him trouble?

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