

Tufted Ears, Bushy Tail

by blue artemis

Hermione uses her Animagus form to rescue Severus from Death Eaters.

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Chapter 1 of 2

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A/N: This story is A/U. Disregards the end of HBP and DH entirely. Written for liagiba84, who gave me the prompt.

Three weeks into his capture, Severus Snape decided that the only thing keeping him sane was the chattering Eurasian Red Squirrel that would come to the tree outside his tiny window and look in on him. Some days she would climb up the tree using those sharp little claws and hang upside down, looking in on him and chattering loudly. Others she would sit and eat bits of nuts or berries. Due to the warding on the little shack where Severus was imprisoned, she could not toss him any food, although Severus swore it looked like she wanted to. He couldn't say how exactly he knew the little red rodent was female, since there is no size difference between females and males, but he just knew.

He had food and water; the table in the shack was spelled to give him basic food as well as enough water to drink, but there was absolutely nothing there to entertain him. He was alone with his thoughts. Severus had been betrayed to the Dark Lord by Micah Fenwick, a new member of the Order of the Phoenix. Not deliberately, no, but he was captured, and Voldemort had broken into his mind easily enough.

Lucius had been told to kill him, but he was apparently hedging his bets and had only imprisoned Severus here in this shack in the middle of an Unplottable piece of Malfoy land. This did rather impressively remove Severus from the equation and was severely damaging to the side of the Light.

Hermione Granger had been given the task of Arithmancer for the Order. She had decided to do as Dumbledore had suggested and do a self-study of the seventh year material along with the sixth year classes she was taking. She was given the Time-Turner to help her complete her studies.

She took her NEWTs along with the seventh years and, of course, passed them all with flying colors. She got extra credit on her Transfiguration exam for her Animagus transformation. Dumbledore found a way for her to register but have it hidden from the public, so very few people knew that she could transform at all.

Due to this intensive bit of studying, Hermione had distanced herself a bit from Harry and Ron. It wasn't intentional, but Ron and Lavender had gotten very serious, and after examining her feelings and realizing that she was jealous of being left out, Hermione had decided to be the better person, and in doing so, she had discovered Lavender was quite a talented witch and a far better match for Ron than she. But Lavender certainly wasn't an intellectual, and therefore, with Hermione so busy with so much study, they had become friendlier, but were not together very much.

Harry and Ginny had given a relationship a go and realized that Harry wanted to have the entire Weasley family, not Ginny in particular. Ginny realized she liked the idea of Harry Potter more than the reality of being with Harry Potter. They decided to stay friends. Ginny was happily dating Dean again, and Harry had paired up with Luna. Although Luna saw far more than people gave her credit for, Hermione still was too busy to truly be a friend. With both boys entangled in their relationships, as long as they saw Hermione was around when they expected her, they did not do too much else to keep as close as they would like.

During this time, Hermione had become much closer to the slightly older members of the Order. Remus had, unfortunately, been killed on one of his missions to the werewolves. Harry had still not forgiven Dumbledore for that one, less after Hermione had shown them an Arithmantic calculation that showed his death as a probable outcome. After that death, Hermione did the Arithmantic calculations for all of their bigger missions.

Hermione had managed to predict the outcomes for many of Severus's missions, and so he began to trust his former student. He had her help him with the potions for the Order, and they would spend many hours just talking about anything, literature, old movies, music. They discovered they were both fans of The Doors and The Eagles. They argued over the romance of Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy. They were quite certain George Lucas had to be a Squib at the very least.

The day Severus was captured, she was devastated. The calculation she had run for that happening had an unknown variable. Of course, that unknown was Lucius. Had he not been involved, Severus would have been able to overpower the Death Eater assigned to kill him and would have returned.

Dumbledore had, of course, declared that they were not to search for him. They still had to figure out a safe way to remove Hufflepuff's cup from the Black vault, although they were leaning toward using Tonks to do so, and they needed to get Nagini away from Voldemort. That was part of what Severus had been attempting to do when he was imprisoned. Luna had figured out an easy way to get the Horcrux out of Harry. She just found a Dementor (no one asked her how) and then, once it had sucked out the piece of Voldemort's soul, she used her Patronus to scare it off. Since the Dementors fed on souls, eventually that piece of Voldemort's soul was destroyed.

Hermione decided to find Severus on her own. She figured out a way to use a piece of his clothing to do a modified Point Me Charm and headed off, once more using the Time-Turner, so that no one would notice she was gone. She found him after three weeks and used her Animagus form to try to communicate with him. But try as she might, she could not break through the Malfoy wards.

Hermione visited Severus every day, sometimes twice if she could. She was not sure how to get him out; there was another unknown variable in her calculations. That changed one day during the fifth week when Draco Malfoy tumbled into number twelve, Grimmauld Place. His mother had apparently asked for the protection for her family and shoved him through the Floo. He had a horrible story of torture and pain, since he had found that he had no stomach for murder. Voldemort had ordered Lucius to kill his son and was giving him permission to have another heir. Narcissa was a bit opposed to the idea. No one was sure what happened to the elder Malfoys after this bit of defiance. They were presumed dead.

At the beginning of the sixth week, Hermione asked Draco to accompany her out to the shack. Her calculations had told her that this was the best day to do so. He helped her to bring down the wards and was pleased to do so because these were his father's magic, and they were still strong, indicating to Draco that at least one of his parents was alive. Hermione instructed him to return to Grimmauld Place. She would return as soon as she had fetched what she came out to retrieve.

As usual, Hermione ran up the tree in her Animagus form, but once at the window, she leapt inside. Severus was startled. He was flabbergasted when she ran up to him and shifted forms. He figured he was hallucinating, that he had missed a poison in the food.

"I'm real, Severus. I'm here, I would never leave you!" Hermione declared.

"I'm surprised Albus gave you permission," he replied, unwilling to believe that this witch had risked all of this for him.

"He didn't."

Hermione looked at Severus, but when he didn't give her any indication, by word or by facial expression, that he was pleased that she had done so much for him, her heart broke. She had spent the last six weeks realizing that she loved the dour man. She loved his wit, his passion for his work and his friendship. She would have risked anything for him, which was why she had done what she did. But after he made no comment, and his expression didn't change, she figured he did not feel the same.

She began to turn around, to lead him out the door and out to freedom, when he reached out for her.

"Hermione, I... I... Please don't leave me!"

"I would never, Severus. I came every day once I found you." She smiled encouragingly at him.

"I know, love. I thought I was insane, thinking a little red squirrel was so much like you, but I guess I was right." Amazingly, Severus was looking rather shy at this.

"Love. You called me love. Do you mean it?" Hermione asked.

"Yes, yes I do. I should have told you earlier, but I thought we had time. But I guess none of us has our days purchased," Severus responded earnestly.

They looked at each other and drew closer and they kissed, and it was awkward and lovely and passionate.

They drew back slowly and headed out the door. They knew they had to return to Grimmauld Place, but now they could do it with lighter hearts.

Dumbledore was unable to keep his righteous indignation flowing when he saw the new calculation showing the war was sure to go in their favor now that Severus had returned.

A/N: I know, Severus is a bit OOC at the end, but he had been imprisoned for six weeks with only a squirrel and his thoughts for company.

Thanks to Annie Talbot for the beta.

If you want it done right, ask the Squirrel

Chapter 2 of 2

A select few rescue the Malfoys.

Lucius Malfoy felt the tingle at the base of his skull that meant that someone had dropped the wards on one of his properties. He hoped that it was Draco, and that someone had found Severus.

He realized now that the Dark Lord was insane. How could he be asked to kill his son? How could he be asked to set aside his wife? Obviously the man had no idea what real pureblood ideals were. Did Voldemort realize that he was basically killing off the Malfoys by asking this of him? The bond he and Narcissa shared involved many vows, one of which was fidelity. He could not cheat on her, which was what it would be, since they had bonded for life. Beyond the punishment his magic would bestow on him,

he actually *loved* his wife.

Unfortunately, he was not sure she was going to survive the latest round of Voldemort's displeasure. The many Crucios and other painful hexes and curses were wreaking havoc on the delicate witch. He knew he would have to ask for sanctuary from Dumbledore, but he didn't know what kind of reception he would get. He was quite willing to play the spy, if it would save his family.

He prepared a note, with both Slytherin and Malfoy codes embedded in the plea for sanctuary. The codes would tell Severus and Draco what really was going on, and verify that he was telling the truth when he asked for help. He sent it off to Dumbledore, and then returned to Narcissa's side, to hold a vigil over his dying spouse.

The Malfoys had paid dearly for Narcissa's defiance of Voldemort. For once in her miserable life, Bella decided to act in the best interest of another, convincing Voldemort that it would be harder on the Malfoys if Narcissa was tortured but not killed. She had explained that any sexual attacks would render both Narcissa and the attacker dead, due to the complicated marriage agreement between the Malfoys and the Blacks. Therefore, Narcissa was beaten, cursed, hexed, starved and hurt in various ways, but only to the brink of death. Unfortunately, the brink of death was coming faster and faster every day. Lucius had to act quickly, or he would not have any chance of saving his wife.

The wards on the Manor could not be completely turned over to someone not of the Malfoy bloodline, so although Voldemort believed he was controlling the wards, he was not. Therefore, Lucius was able to use some of the hidden blood wards to hide his trek to the owlery to send his note. He called on Hermes, his fastest and most distinctive eagle owl, and sent him to Draco. Due to his ties to the family, the owl could get through Secret-Kept wards. As the owl flew off, Lucius braced himself on the railing briefly, hands tightening involuntarily, hoping beyond hope that his message would be deciphered in time.

"Hurry up, I don't want to miss a word!" Harry turned to Hermione as they set up the Extendable Ear in the hallway. The two friends quieted down quickly and sat together to listen to the conversation in the other room.

"I'm so sorry, my dear boy. There is no way we can rescue your parents. We cannot take the risk. Poor Remus has already been lost, and...well, it would just devastate Harry to lose anyone else," Dumbledore said to Draco.

Harry turned to Hermione, his face mottled in rage. "'Mione, please run the numbers. I think Dumbledore has finally let the power go to his head. We lost Remus because of *him*, no matter what he is making it sound like, and I don't think Draco should lose his parents. I saw his and Severus's faces when they read the letter, I'm sure there was all sorts of code in it for them."

"Don't worry, Harry, I already did. We need to go get them. It can turn the tide of the war. But you need to start working on getting Dumbledore unseated. I don't care what you do, we *must* get him out of power!"

Harry nodded, thinking rapidly. He nodded at Hermione. Then he picked up the Extendable Ear and went up to his room.

Ron looked up as Harry entered the room. "What happened, Harry? You practically have steam coming out of your ears, and I know you didn't have any Pepper-Up. Hermione and Snape ruined the last batch because they were snogging."

"Dumbledore is off his rocker. Too many sherbet lemons, I guess. He doesn't want to rescue the Malfoys. Something about another death making me useless. The old man is making me useless. We would be in such deep shite if Hermione wasn't here to keep us on the right path. We need to do something!"

Ron and Harry plotted for a while. They decided to create a diversion in order to allow a rescue party to head out for the Malfoys. Although not one of the Trio had asked Severus or Draco what the letter truly said, they could tell the news was dire indeed.

Harry had Gringotts send him a letter during the next Order meeting. The goblins were not too fond of Albus Dumbledore, and when Griphook explained the reasons Harry had given him, they were more than happy to comply with his wishes. Harry was quite polite for a wizard.

"Headmaster, I'm so sorry. We are going to have to move Headquarters. Sirius had a codicil on his will, and it said that if Remus died because of any action taken in the name of the Order of the Phoenix, you were to be ejected. The goblins verified everything and now...well...you have 15 minutes to get out, or the wards on the house are going to get triggered, and apparently, it can get ugly." Harry looked sufficiently saddened by this turn of events that Albus never once thought this might not be true.

Draco, on the other hand, saw right through the plot, and turned to look at Hermione, the only one of the three that he truly trusted. She smiled and, when no one was looking, winked at him.

She waved her wand in a complex pattern, and all of a sudden, colored dots appeared on the headmaster, as well as the rest of the feathered flock except for Hermione, Draco, Tonks, Severus, Harry, Ron, Ginny, Bill, Luna, Neville, Lavender and the twins.

"I would hurry up if I were you. The dots are those that are going to be, what did this say... oh, yeah, 'forcibly ejected.' I would hate to find out what Sirius meant by that!" Harry exclaimed worriedly.

The headmaster looked stunned at some of the people allowed to stay.

"My boy, why would he allow Severus and young Mr. Malfoy to stay?"

"He says in the letter that he realizes that he needed to grow up, and Severus should be allowed to have a safe haven. As for Draco and Tonks, well, they are Blacks, and the house would shelter them anyway. He couldn't throw them out without disinherit them, and...well, he had just brought Andromeda and Tonks back." Harry was almost rambling. Just a few more seconds and....

All of a sudden the lights in the house appeared to coalesce and start swirling around the headmaster, who was the last of the marked people left, then they seemingly gathered him up and popped him out of the house.

Harry and Ron got rather devilish looks on their faces.

"So, where did you say he was going to end up, 'Mione?" Ron asked.

"He's having a nice visit with Seymour," responded Hermione.

"Who is Seymour?" Draco demanded.

"He is the Giant Squid," said Severus dryly.

Draco blinked, and completely uncharacteristically started laughing hysterically. He turned to Severus and said, "Sorry, sir, but I'm going to kiss your girl!" He then walked over to a giggling Hermione, took her face in his hands and gave her a rather thorough kiss. He broke it off when Severus cleared his throat. Draco did have some sense of self-preservation.

Draco then looked over to the three giggling Gryffindors and held his hand out. "Hello. I'm Draco Malfoy. I'm sure you have heard that there are the right kind of wizards out there. I am not one of them, but I would like to be friends."

The three looked at each other in amazement, then smiled. Ron took a step forward, took Draco's hand in his, and shook it. "You'll do. I'm Ron Weasley and these are my

best friends, Harry Potter and Hermione Granger. Just be careful with her, her boyfriend is scary."

"That is enough, all of you. We have some planning to do," Severus said.

All of those left in the house sat down to talk out their strategy. At the end of it all, Bill turned to his youngest brother and said, "Ron, I'm impressed. I couldn't believe it when they said the plan to oust everyone was yours. I'm going to recommend you to Gringotts. They have a branch of strategic planners for some of the more complex sites that we go out to break curses on, and I would feel much better if you were around to do the planning."

Lavender leaned over and kissed him proudly. "With a job like that, we could start a family right away!" she stage-whispered. Ron turned bright red, even to the tips of his ears. It was obvious that he was well pleased.

Very shortly after that, Severus, Ron, Harry, Bill, Hermione and Draco were headed for the heart of Wiltshire, to get through the wards on Malfoy Manor.

"My father said that I could bring someone in through the rose garden, near the statues. I think it would be best if it were Severus." Draco stated.

"No," said Hermione.

"What do you mean? I would be ideal; I know the Manor," Severus argued.

"No. Now please listen. When I did the calculations, a plan like yours only has a seventy-two percent chance of working. I think it must be the Dark Mark. Harry can't go for a similar reason. It will have to be me or Bill or Ron. The percentages are much better that way, eighty-seven percent for one of the Weasleys and ninety-two percent for me," finished Hermione.

Draco had been looking very thoughtful, when all of a sudden he said, "Of course! You can be a squirrel, and no one is going to notice an animal. We've had lots of them all over the grounds, enough that you would be almost invisible."

"Exactly."

Severus was a bit perturbed at this, but he quickly realized that although she was willing to be his girl, Hermione was not going to let anyone push her around. It was part of what he loved about her, and so he kept his peace.

The infiltrators decided, the rest set up guard points along the perimeter. The rest of those left in Grimmauld Place were being sentries a bit further afield, except for George and Fred, who were to create a diversion.

Hermione looked at her watch then held up her hand. One by one, she closed her fingers: five, four, three, two, one... and then the sky exploded. If you weren't looking too closely, it appeared a Muggle airplane had crashed into the trees right outside the main wards of the Manor. Fred and George had outdone themselves. In the ensuing chaos, Draco ran through the small opening in the wards his father had provided, clutching a small red squirrel in his hands.

As they got through the garden and statues unscathed, Draco set Hermione down. She scampered up the tree nearest to the room Lucius had told his son that he and Narcissa were sequestered in, leaped to the balcony, scurried to the door and peered inside. She scratched the glass of the door to the balcony softly. Lucius looked up from his vigil beside his wife only to see a rather intelligent looking squirrel gazing at him.

He stood up, opened the door and then took a step back, pulling his wand from his pocket.

The squirrel came in, looked around to make sure that there were only Malfoys in the room, then suddenly shifted into Hermione.

"Miss Granger, I can only hope that this means you are part of a rescue party," Lucius drawled.

Hermione recognized the rather Slytherin defense mechanism. She had spent enough time around Draco to know exactly what was going on, so instead of being offended, she just replied, "Of course, Mr. Malfoy. Is Mrs. Malfoy ready to be transported?"

Lucius turned, cast a spell over the bed Narcissa was lying on which caused the upper mattress to form into a cot for transport. He then cast another spell which made the contraption hover and turned to look at Hermione expectantly.

Instead of having them leave right away, Hermione took a couple of snips of hair from both Lucius and Narcissa, mixed them with some clay she had brought, and made a type of golem with the mixture; anyone doing a surface scan of the room would still read the Malfoys as being there.

She then turned and walked out of the balcony door, shifted back into squirrel form and ran back down the tree. Lucius hovered the cot carrying his sick wife down to the ground, then Apparated to join Draco and Hermione.

They quickly, yet quietly made their way back out the way they came in, met up with the sentries and got back to Grimmauld Place in record time.

Once there, they called upon Poppy Pomfrey to help Narcissa, which she did with alacrity. After what seemed like an eternity to the Malfoy men, Poppy informed everyone in the room that Narcissa would recover completely. Lucius turned to Harry and told him that he was quite willing to help him overthrow the madman currently living in Malfoy Manor, but he would not answer to Dumbledore. Harry reassured him that he would not have to because none of those in the room answered to Dumbledore either.

Shortly thereafter, with knowledge that Lucius had, Harry was able to get his team together and defeat Voldemort. Apparently even that depraved man could not withstand being cut into twenty-seven pieces by nine different Sectumsepra spells.

When Albus tried to take credit, he was very quickly set to rights by the combined efforts of Narcissa Malfoy and Molly Weasley. He resigned as headmaster, and slunk off to his cottage in the Highlands, never to be heard from again.

Lucius was overheard asking Draco how the rescue effort had come to pass, and the response made everyone in the room laugh. "Oh, you know, Father, if you want anything done right, you have to ask the squirrel."

Many, many thanks to Annie Talbot for the beta!

Dedicated to all those who wanted to know what happened to the Malfoys.