

Blame it on the Cat

by blue artemis

Hermione is bound by the Ministry's new Marriage Law, so Crookshanks helps her pick the right wizard.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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January 17, 2001

Dear Miss Granger,

It has come to the notice of the Ministry that you have not yet married. Since the war, we are in desperate need of more children, particularly those born of a solid bond, as that helps develop the magic. We would prefer that you marry a Pureblood, but if that is not possible, a half-blood will do. You have six months from the date of this notice to comply, or your magic will be bound. Reading this letter is regarded as a binding magical contract.

Sincerely,

Kingsley Shacklebolt

Minister for Magic

"As if I haven't given up enough for the blasted Wizarding World. Maybe I should just go back home and become a dentist!" Hermione Granger ranted at the sight of the letter she had received from the Ministry of Magic.

At her comment, Kingsley Shacklebolt, the Minister, winced, then, putting on his best politician face, took a deep breath and readied himself to speak. "Hermione, love, you can't leave. If you do we will break your wand; you don't want that."

"Don't try that with me, Kings. You and the morons that have their noses up your arse took my research and decided to force marriages on people. Just because the best and brightest of the wizarding world have put off getting married, doesn't mean that you have the right to force us to do so."

"Your wand, Hermione; we will break your wand."

Hermione smiled evilly at Kingsley then walked toward the Atrium. She reached the podium with Kingsley trailing after her.

"Good people of Wizarding Britain. I have come to tell you that I resign as Assistant to the Minister. How a good man with an Auror background can be such a spineless politician is beyond me. I will not comply with the Marriage Law as written. There most certainly needs to be more choices involved. The Minister has told me that he will break my wand if I do not comply. Well, here goes nothing." Hermione took her wand out of her sleeve and broke it in half. "I refuse to have anything to do with you or your government until you fix this. And by the way, I don't *need* a wand." She handed her wand to Kingsley, waved her hand at the podium, which reset itself into the floor and

stalked out of the Ministry.

Kingsley Shacklebolt did not last the afternoon as Minister. Unfortunately for him, Hermione Granger was the only witch in Britain that had to comply with the law, seeing as she was the only one to read the letter. He was hoping that if he could force her compliance, then the rest of the witches would follow suit quietly.

Lucius Malfoy was voted in as the interim Minister. Narcissa was quite delighted to find out that Hermione had to comply with the law. She'd been trying to convince Severus to ask her out for at least two of the three years following the war. Seeing as it was already April, they started to worry for Hermione.

"Cissy, love, what are we to do? Hermione has become a dear friend. I also believe she and Severus would make a good match, but I don't want to force it."

"That is good to hear, Minister. I'm guessing that you like being a man and not a house-elf?" Hermione interrupted the Minister and his wife.

"One of these days, dear, you *will* have to tell me how you did that."

"We are the magical ones, Lucius. Not our wands. We have become complacent as a society, melding ourselves to meet the rules of those who can't, instead of those who can. Many Muggle-borns can use wandless magic. So can many half-bloods. You, Cissy and the Lestranges are the select few among the Purebloods that can do so based on magical strength. Due to the fall in the rates of those who could use their magic without a focus, wands became required, then traced. I am free of that; you should be as well."

"I see. You wanted him to feel for what he had done, and you couldn't think of a better way."

"I do treat him well. But he is a house-elf."

"So, what would you have me do, my dear? Your time is almost up."

"Modify the law. Make it so that in response to considering their suit, my suitors owe me a favor." Hermione's smile would frighten the staunchest Slytherin.

Lucius was no exception.

"As you wish, my dear. But what will be the favor?"

"You can not tell anyone!"

Lucius and Cissy swore a Wand Oath never to tell.

"I'm going to ask them to cat-sit!"

After Hermione had left the office, and Lucius and Cissy had stopped laughing, Lucius modified the law. He was happy to do so, as Crookshanks was the reason that Hermione and Harry had testified for him as well as the rest of his family.

Hermione was pleased when she received her letter stating the modification, and when the notice that Hermione would be vetting suitors in order to comply with the marriage law hit the papers, the owls started flooding in.

Hermione was in her sitting room with Astoria Malfoy, Pansy Weasley, Luna Potter, and Daphne Greengrass. They were helping her vet the letters/marriage offers that were coming in.

To Hermione's amusement, the piles were: Date-worthy, Maybe, No, and Merlin's Hairy Balls what were they thinking?

The letters were flying out of the witches' hands as fast as they were being opened. Unfortunately for Hermione, the great majority were in the No and Merlin category.

"Pansy, why would Ron send in a letter?"

"Let me see that, Luna, would you?"

Pansy took the letter, turned an unflattering shade of green, tapped it with her wand, turning it into a Howler and sent it off, filled with her rather amusing rant.

"How did you know it was Millie, Pans?"

"I lived with her for seven years. I know her handwriting. Stupid bint." Pansy looked over to Hermione. "Honey, he does love you, you know, but he ~~isn't~~ *is* love with me."

"Don't worry, Pansy. I know. And I like it that way."

The rest of the women laughed, then kept going.

When they were done, the maybe pile had three names, Cormac McLaggen, Anthony Goldstein and Blaise Zabini, and the Date-worthy pile had only two names, Charlie Weasley and Severus Snape.

"Wow!"

"Wow, what, Daphne?"

"I wonder how anyone convinced Headmaster Snape to put his owl in?"

"Oh, that is easy," her sister answered. "Lucius called in a poker debt."

Hermione stared at the witch.

"Don't look like that, Hermione. I 'accidentally' overheard the conversation. The headmaster was saying that it was a pity you were forced to marry, because he thought you were the only witch of his acquaintanceship that knew how to carry on an intelligent conversation. He was dithering about sending you an owl, when Lucius took away his choice by calling in his poker debt."

Hermione let out a breath she didn't realize she was holding. "Thank you, Astoria. I didn't want to force anyone else into this marriage."

The rest of her friends smiled in understanding.

"All right, then. Please contact the maybes and see when they can watch Crookshanks overnight."

Cormac McLaggen didn't last fifteen minutes. He petrified the half-kneazle after it scratched his privates then took it to Luna at *The Quibbler*. "Tell Hermione sorry, but I can't marry anyone who owns this cat."

Anthony Goldstein started sneezing the moment Crooks went through his door.

Blaise looked at the cat that Daphne was holding. "So, do I even have a chance?"

Crooks looked at him consideringly, walked around him, sniffed, then walked out the door.

Blaise smiled at Daphne. "Easy way to find out, wasn't it?" Daphne laughed easily with her friend, picked up the waiting Crookshanks and Apparated to Hermione's.

"I take it that was the third no?"

"You may want to reconsider Blaise for part of your research crew, though. He was smart enough to ask Crooks his opinion."

Hermione nodded. "Sounds like a plan, what with Lavender moving to New York with that new lover of hers."

Charlie lasted the night with Crookshanks, but there was no true affection there.

"What's the verdict, love?"

"Oh, Charlie, I adore you, I do. But I have to see what happens with Severus."

"I didn't think it would be me, you know. I don't think you are meant for the wilds of Romania."

"Probably not, but congratulations again on being named the director! And with your Mastery of Dragons and Dragonlore, you really are a catch. I just wish Crooks liked you a bit more."

"I know. But you will be the first one I contact when my book is ready for editing."

Hermione bade Charlie a warm good-bye at her door.

"Do I still have a chance, or are you choosing Weasley?" The dark chocolate over rocks voice of Severus Snape wafted up towards Hermione.

"You still have a chance. I was just wishing Charlie a safe journey back to Romania."

"He is willing to just leave when there is competition for your hand?"

"You make it sound like people actually want me."

"I heard you had 357 offers."

"Yes, and 352 were basically for Hermione Granger, War Heroine. No one was willing to deal with the real me. Or my cat."

"Ah, yes. The cat. It is my turn to watch him this weekend, is it not?"

"You came to pick him up?"

"Was I not supposed to?"

"No, that is fine, let me go get..."

Crookshanks exited the house and jumped into Severus's arms, purring furiously.

"I will see you Sunday afternoon, Miss Granger. You know where I live?"

Hermione was quite taken aback, then, looking at the slight smile gracing Severus's face, she decided he was teasing and teased back. "Yes, I do, Headmaster. I'm quite familiar with the place. And please, call me Hermione."

"As you wish, Hermione. As long as we are not in the presence of my students, you may call me Severus. Hopefully this beast and I will both be in one piece when you return."

Hermione noticed that Severus was petting Crookshanks as he turned to Apparate back to Hogwarts. She smiled.

Sunday afternoon, Hermione was walking up toward Hogwarts Castle from Hogsmeade, when she was greeted by Hagrid.

"Lo, Mione! How are ya? I seen your cat with the Headmaster. He managed to scare Trelawney out of the seat next to him!"

"Crooks or Severus?"

"Crooksie, of course."

"He must like Severus, then."

"Sure seemed like it. Good ta see ya, Missy."

"You too, Hagrid. Say hi to Grawp for me."

Hermione made her way up through the castle to the spiral staircase that led to the headmaster's office. Once there the gargoyle moved to let her pass, and she rode the stairs up to the office.

"Hello, Hermione."

"Hello, Severus. I see Crookshanks has made himself at home."

"Yes, he has. He is a wonderful cat. He went on patrol with me, he scared Sybill away from me, and he brought you here."

"Severus, are you drinking?"

"Why?"

"You don't sound like yourself."

"A bit."

"I would say more than a bit. Why don't you come over here and tell me why?"

"Fine. I like you, Hermione. You were willing to set aside your feelings and make certain I wasn't dead. You read to me in the hospital. And you stayed away when I asked you to. It took me a while to see that you had many qualities that Lily did not, including a more forgiving heart."

"I'm certain that if Lily could know you now, you would be friends."

"See, that is exactly what I mean. Do you know what Lily would be like if she knew me now?"

"No, Severus. How would she be?"

"Jealous that I had a woman half my age interested in me."

"I'm twenty-two, Severus. And you are only forty-one. And if we count that year and whatever that I lived twice due to that Time-Turner, then I'm twenty-three and a half."

Severus laughed. "You know what I mean."

"I think I do. It is hard to let a dream go. But Ron and I managed, and he's happy with Pansy now. He even got over Ginny leaving Harry for Padma, and I never thought he would manage that."

"I always wondered about that. For a girl who spent all of her time in broom closets with boys, she never seemed to enjoy it."

"I like this."

"What?"

"Just sitting here talking about whatever comes to mind."

"As do I, Hermione. Would you like to stay?"

"Yes, Severus, I would."

Severus led Hermione to his bedroom, where they found Crookshanks ensconced on the plush easy chair near the table by the window. Both of them went through their evening ablutions, with Hermione wearing a long silk pajama top that had been a gift from Dumbledore to Severus *who else would give ANYONE silk pajamas with exploding cauldrons on it?* and Severus was wearing black silk pajama bottoms.

"No night shirt?"

"Not anymore, oh nosy one. I find I like these better."

Hermione smiled. "I would have to agree."

Severus and Hermione woke up entangled in each other. Both of them found they liked it, even though there had been no sexual contact--other than Severus's raging erection pressing against Hermione's hip.

"I will go take care of this, then we can go down for breakfast."

Hermione found his candor refreshing.

"Would you like some help?"

Severus stared at the witch.

"Severus, you asked to marry me. If I say yes, we are going to have sex. Why shouldn't we start now?"

Severus held his hand out to the witch, who had seduced him with her bluntness.

They went to the luxurious bathroom, and there undressed completely. Once they got in the shower, Severus reached out and traced his hands along the various scars on Hermione's body.

"Don't."

"Why not? You are beautiful, witch. These scars just show how much your beauty is internal as well as external."

Hermione lost all her shyness after that. She ran her hands up and down Severus's body, showing special attention to his genitals.

He gasped when he felt her hands encircling his cock and gently rubbing his sack.

"You are going to be the death of me, witch."

"You said you wanted this taken care of, didn't you?"

At that, Severus picked Hermione up and held her close. She wrapped her legs around him, and without much fanfare, he impaled her. Hermione gasped at the intrusion, and the fact that she could find no purchase dangling as she was, so she was at his mercy.

"Is this a problem, witch?" Severus growled in her ear.

"Not at all, Severus. But you, ah, are going, ah, to have to do, aaaaahhll the work!"

"I think I can manage, love." Severus smiled as he thrust into her forcefully. When he felt the walls of her passage begin to shudder, he thrust harder, emptying himself into her with a shout.

Severus took Hermione back to the bedroom, and with a wave of his hand, dried them both off before lowering her to the bed.

"I thought we were going to breakfast?"

"We can have the elves bring us food here. I feel I should celebrate Beltane properly, with lots of sex."

Hermione laughed. She snuggled into Severus to go to sleep, then was struck by a thought. "Severus."

"Yes," he replied sleepily.

"What do you think of a traditional binding? We could do it tonight at the standing stones."

"I think it is perfect. And it keeps the Ministry out of our wedding."

"We will need to use the permanent form, not the year and a day."

"It is still perfect. I find I like waking to your unruly hair."

Hermione smiled and asked Severus to call a house-elf for her.

"Hello, there. What is your name?"

"My name is being Manzy."

"Manzy, can you prepare the standing stones for a traditional permanent binding?"

"Manzy can certainly do that, Missy. Who is you marrying?"

"Me, Manzy."

"Oooh! Headmastery, sir! Manzy will get the whole castle involved. She will be so happy that a headmastery is getting married properly!"

"Oh, and, Manzy, after you are done, please go to my house and fetch my elf. His name is Kingsley."

"Manzy has heard what you do, Missy. If he hasn't learned, he will after Manzy is through with him."

Hermione smiled. "Well, then I will leave you to it. I am going to the greenhouses to see if Apprentice Longbottom can help me with the flowers."

Severus waited until all the occupants of his rooms were gone, then threw a pinch of Floo powder into his fire and called out, "Malfoy Manor, Lucius's office!"

"Severus? How can I help you?"

"I was a bit drunk last night, and Hermione returned. We got to talking, then she spent the night. No, nothing happened. Now we have the entire castle going insane getting ready for a Beltane binding ritual."

"You do know that if you have not had sexual intercourse, that binding will not be, well, binding."

"I said nothing happened last night, Lucius. I said nothing of this morning. The binding will be at sundown. I expect you and Cissy there."

Lucius went off to find his wife and found that she already knew, as Hermione had called to get Astoria because she wanted her involved in the ceremony. The Malfoy women headed off to Hogwarts, while Lucius and Draco sat down to discuss the implications.

"It doesn't seem like Uncle Severus to do something so quickly, Father."

"Severus can occasionally be too Gryffindor for his own good. In this case, I think it's a good thing. And this type of binding will meet the Ministry requirements for Hermione, but will keep them out of the rest of her marriage."

"Why, Father?"

"Because in a permanent Beltane binding, the witch and wizard pledge themselves to each other above all others. This means it supercedes any other magical binding. It means that in meeting the basic premise of the law, Hermione will not be subject to any more of it."

"Will it get rid of the Dark Mark?"

"You know, son, I don't know."

That evening, all of Hogwarts' inhabitants, including the elves, were out at the standing stones waiting for the binding ceremony. Joining them were the Malfoys, Harry Potter, most of the Weasleys and all of Hermione's erstwhile suitors.

As the sun began to set, lighting the stones with an ethereal glow, Severus and Hermione walked hand in hand, dressed in simple white clothing, carrying colored ribbons.

The crowd parted, allowing them access to the ring of stones. The two approached the altar stone, and Hermione waved her hand, making a chalice of water, a dish of dirt and a candle appear. The two turned to each other and in turn said: "I choose you to bind myself to above all else. I gift you with myself in the presence of the elements, and I bind you with these ribbons, representing friendship, love and passion." They drank from the chalice, smeared a bit of dirt on their cheeks and foreheads and used their breath to extinguish the candles. As they did that, a flare of magic startled the crowd, and the ribbons they had wound around their left wrists sank into their skin.

Severus looked at his left arm, expecting the binding ribbons to overlay the Dark Mark. He was entirely nonplussed when he realized the Dark Mark was gone.

"Hermione, love, it appears that we have managed to elude far more than the Ministry's mandates with our binding."

"Oh, Severus!"

Hermione greeted this news from her new husband with a rather enthusiastic kiss. No one watching could dispute that there was a true affection between the two, forced marriage or not.

Crookshanks sauntered up to the two, winding between their feet as they greeted their well-wishers. Severus bent down and picked him up, quietly whispering in his ear.

Only Hermione heard his comment, thanking the familiar for helping him snare his witch. She smiled, knowing that it really was the other way around.

The standing stones became quite popular after that, but none of the ceremonies seemed to reflect as much magic as the first.

Prompt(s): Okay, I know it's cliché but I love a good MLC fic. So how about something along the lines of MLC but with some kind of different twist.(whatever that is up to you) I would prefer Hermione to be at least a little bit older, not school girly.

Severus owes Hermione a favor, she asks him to cat-sit Crookshanks. Crooksie takes a liking to Snape and works his kitty wiles to get his two favorite humans together.

Author's Note: Many thanks to Southern_Witch_69 for the beta!