

Is It Too Late To Try?

by *luvsev*

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Chapter 1 of 1

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"You say it's too late to make it, but is it too late to try? And in our time that you wasted, all of our bridges burned down."

Hermione's head hung as tears fell from her face, landing one by one on the carpet. Her heart broke as she watched his shoulders shake with his back turned. Harry rarely let others see him cry; tears weren't a weakness, but a very private matter, and he wasn't accustomed to sharing his pain, even after years of trying.

'Is it really too late?' Harry choked.

'I just don't think I can anymore, Harry...we've been through too much; we're too broken to make this work.' More tears, both hers and his. To watch his heart break was much harder than she bargained for. She never wanted to hurt him, not after all he had been through.

'I...I...' Harry stumbled as he sat on the end of their bed, the mattress sinking slightly with the weight. 'I understand, Hermione, as much as I wish I didn't. You have to do what's best for you.'

Hermione walked over to Harry and put her hand on his shoulder, giving it a gentle squeeze. He surprised her by pulling her into a hug, his arms wrapping around her waist, pressing his face into the middle of her wooly jumper. 'I hope you'll forgive me one day, Harry.'

Harry didn't say anything for a few minutes, just sniffled and wiped the tears from his eyes. With a sigh, he pulled away. 'There's... there's nothing to forgive, only moments to forget.'

"You can't expect me to be fine. I don't expect you to care. I know I've said it before, but all of our bridges burned down."

The blaring alarm clock announced the start of a new day and thus another shift at the hospital, even though the last had ended a scant five hours previously, but Harry ignored it, preferring to lay wide awake in his bed and stare out the window into the early morning sky...a faint pink hue still hung about the scattered, grey clouds. He wouldn't see any more of the sun today, for his shift would end after sunset, so he wanted to enjoy the natural light while he could. The next thirteen hours would be spent under the harsh glare of fluorescent lights. The night had passed quickly, as it often did when he'd had far too much to do with too little time to do it in and not enough rest to keep the exhaustion from sneaking into his normally amiable state.

I love my job, I love my job, I love my job, Harry reminded himself as he rolled over onto his stomach with a groan, not quite ready for the day to begin, flinging his arm off the side of the bed in an attempt to stop the discordant music making his Muggle alarm pulsate on the nightstand. The vibration on wood and distasteful music made his lip curl in disgust, and he rose to shut it off properly, hitting the snooze button by mistake. He resisted the urge to throw it against one of the brick walls of his industrial flat and watch the plastic fracture and fall to the floor, much like his life. He could fix the alarm with a simple 'Reparo'; his life was another story...it hadn't been the same since

Hermione left thirteen months ago. He'd seen her once since then, and the experience...the subsequent roll in the hay...left him feeling distinctly off, as if it were just another chance at happiness wrenched away. He knew it was a mistake, yet he couldn't bring himself to regret it or to hate her. Sometimes... things just didn't work out the way he wanted.

Harry wriggled out of his plaid sheets and slammed his hand down on the off button with a muttered curse; he thought he heard the alarm whimper a protest, but Muggle technology didn't work that way unless charmed to do so. For once he was grateful it was the only thing in his life that didn't retort; even his half-Kneazle Merk gave him the occasional scowl and warning hiss. Sometimes it seemed nothing liked him, though he knew that wasn't true. He sat on the edge of the queen-sized bed, his bare feet encountering something softer than the grey Berber carpet, the kitten.

Merk raised his head and scrubbed his chin along Harry's foot, giving a soft, happy purr, looking pointedly into the kitchen just beyond the room divider, then back up at Harry.

'Oh, all right. I'll feed you, you great lump.' Merk tilted his head, and Harry could have sworn the orange-and-white half-Kneazle scowled at him. His stomach grumbled as he thought of breakfast. He ignored the rumbling and went to the kitchen to fetch Merk's food, the kitten winding itself between his legs as he walked. 'Merk,' Harry warned, 'if you trip me, I can't feed you.'

Merk scampered ahead to wait patiently at his ceramic navy blue food bowl, his fluffy tail curled around his paws.

'I see,' Harry grouched, 'you're capable of behaving, you just choose not to.'

The kitten gave a self-satisfied smirk, as if to say, 'Precisely, human, now serve me.'

An hour later found Harry standing in front of one of the mirrors in the fourth floor Gents' lavatory at the hospital. He glanced at his reflection in the glass...wan appearance, deeply black half-moon circles under his eyes, the very beginning of crows' feet... Malfoy teased him endlessly about them, saying he was turning into an old man since their days at school had ended. He had a five o'clock shadow on his chin and jaw that never went away no matter how much he shaved. His gaze didn't linger long on his face before drifting to the rebellious mess of black straw that pretended to be hair. Harry combed his fingers through his hair, attempting to straighten it, give it a bit of a professional appearance, but it was useless, it always had been. His hair still resisted shearing and styling...the one thing about him that hadn't changed.

He looked up, startled, when the lavatory door squeaked and Draco Malfoy strode in, his Healer's robes open over a grey button-down (the first two buttons left unfastened, perhaps to allow the pale skin of his neck to breathe comfortably) and slate trousers. Harry reminded himself not to stare, then turned the tap on to splash cool water on his face. Maybe that would wash away the exhaustion. With water dripping off his face, he grabbed a towel to dry off. Just as he expected: still sleepy, however, colder than before.

'Merlin, Potter, when was the last time you bothered to sleep?' Malfoy asked, playfully shoving past him.

'I'll sleep when I'm dead.' The morning was already off to a fabulous start with useless, annoying prattle from Malfoy. No day would be complete without it.

'With that attitude, you'll be six feet under before you're thirty.' Draco removed his platinum thumb ring, slipping it into his pocket, then ducking his slightly pink hands under the spray of hot water.

Harry stood there and watched in morbid fascination... the way Draco dried his long fingers individually, the towel caressing his skin. Nope, no thinking about such things. The idea he would find anything Draco did interesting disturbed him, yet he couldn't look away.

'Anyway, as charming as it is to stand here and chat with you all morning, we have patients to attend, and you have superiors' arses to kiss.' Draco flashed a cheeky grin, holding the door for Harry.

'Surely, you don't mean yourself.' Harry flushed scarlet, imagining just that.

'But of course, Potter. You know I'm never one to turn down such a tempting invitation.'

'Not an offer, Malfoy.' Harry followed a step behind Draco out of the lavatory and into the corridor where visitors were milling about.

'Sure it's not,' Draco said in a singsong tone. 'I have a vintage elf-made wine waiting at the flat. Join me after your shift.'

'Can't,' Harry replied.

'Your shift ends at eight...that's early enough.' Draco fished in his trouser pockets for the ring. He quickly found it and placed it back on his thumb.

'It does, but then there are records to update, and by the time I'm done, it will be past midnight.'

'The hospital has staff for that. There's no need to be married to your work...it's unfulfilling at best, disastrous at worst.'

'It's my responsibility.' Harry responded, heading toward his office. Draco followed him, shutting the door behind them.

'Your choice, Potter, I won't make you do something you truly don't want to do.'

'Huh, that's a switch.'

Draco rolled his eyes, ignoring what Harry said. 'It's obvious you're scared.'

Harry flumped into the big leather chair behind his messy desk...papers and files were everywhere; quills and ink were the only things easily identified amongst the clutter. If Hermione saw it, she'd go into a tizzy, but he didn't have to worry about her seeing it. 'What's to be scared of?'

Draco raised a skeptical eyebrow at Harry. 'Just stating a fact. You clearly don't see it, otherwise you wouldn't be avoiding relationships.'

'Wh...'

Draco held up his hand to stop Harry before he had the chance to protest further, then sat on the edge of Harry's cluttered desk, knocking over a moving figurine of Viktor Krum as he did so. 'Pity doesn't count, by the way. Face it, she's moved on while you've only moved to a different flat and a few years closer to your grave.'

'I know,' Harry said, resigned, and closed his eyes. 'I've been working on it and am mostly over it.'

'Fucking liar. You might be "working on it", but you're no closer to being over her. You've made no attempt to get back into the world.'

'I hate that you're right. You're always fucking right, even when you're being an arse.'

Draco grinned, preening. 'I know. It's one of my many outstanding qualities.'

'That and your glittering personality,' Harry said, his tone dripping with acid as he rolled his eyes.

'I hear your sarcasm, and yet I don't care,' Draco said quite easily, sliding off of Harry's desk. 'Also, don't forget my boyish good looks.'

'You have no modesty, Malfoy,' Harry joked, flicking open a file and reading to jog his memory for the patient in 422. He needed to figure out the best course of action to take regarding the case.

'Not even an ounce. All joking aside, come out with me tonight and leave those,' Draco gestured to the stack of files, 'for tomorrow. It'll give you something to do.' He winked, then laughed, which seemed to imply "besides me".

Harry stood, weighing Draco's invitation and the words he'd said minutes before. Now or never, right? Besides, there's no real way to sate curiosity without exploring it.

'Okay, just don't get me into any trouble.' They both walked out of his office, grinning, and Malfoy gave him a push just past the Secretary's station.

'If I recall correctly, you manage that well enough all on your own.'

AN: Written for HP Challenge Fest on LiveJournal for Deidre_Aithne, who prompted: Harry/Hermione - songfic (as in just inspired by the feel of the song, or a few lines from it) to Payphone by Maroon 5. A huge thanks goes to my superhero beta, Kittylefish for her lightning-fast and superior work.