

Monsters

by ayerf

Slight expanded version of my answer to the 'Monster under the bed' GS100 challenge.

One-shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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AN: Many thanks to septentrion for betaing.

This was originally written for the Monster Under the Bed challenge on GS100. The first 300 words were not posted there due to the 'include both Hermione and Severus' rule.

"Crooks!" Hermione gasped, pulling her hand out from under the bed, gingerly inspecting the angry bleeding scratches freshly inflicted on her hand.

A hiss from the corner answered her, where the glow from her wand revealed Crookshanks curled up on her robes, having clawed them down from where she had hung them up.

"Oh. But if you're there, then what scratched me?"

Hermione cautiously peeked under her bed, wand held tightly in her shaking hand. A pair of eyes narrowed balefully at her. A furry paw shot into the light, claws raking across her nose before she could get away.

"Gah!" Clutching at her poor nose, Hermione waited until the pain had receded to a pervasive sting before renewing her attempts to get the monster out from under her bed. Not wanting to risk further scratches, she Summoned her dragon hide gloves, wondering why she hadn't thought of them before.

Crookshanks joined in the fray as Hermione finally managed to get a firm grip on the struggling creature under the bed. Unfortunately for her, the previously loyal half-kneazle sunk his talons into her unprotected back.

Thoroughly exasperated, Hermione let go of the monster. Crookshanks jumped off, scabbling under the bed.

Breathing deeply in a futile attempt to calm herself, Hermione winced as the movement pulled on the deep scratches Crookshanks had just made.

Removing the gloves, she picked her wand up again, firing two weak Stunners under the bed, mindful of the difference in size of the beasts to a wizard. Checking to see that Crooks and the monster were unconscious, Hermione reached under her bed to retrieve them.

"I thought as much. What are you doing here?" Glowering at the interloping animal, Hermione rolled her eyes before peering back under the bed.

Her eyes widened at what she saw.

Severus opened his door, bleary eyed and scowling. He had only just dropped off to sleep when he was rudely awakened by someone pounding at his door.

"What?" he demanded, only to involuntarily step back at the sight before him.

Hermione Granger stood before him, almost unrecognisable due to the bruised, scratched mess of her nose and the surly look on her face. She shoved the bundle of fur in her arms at him.

Severus's bad temper returned as he registered that it was his missing familiar. "What have you done to Matilda?"

Hermione sniffed. "That thing has a name?"

"Of course she has a name!" Severus cradled his purebred kneazle close to his chest. "What did you do to my familiar?"

"It's more like what it did to me," she muttered. "For your information, she was hiding under my bed. I don't know how she got into my quarters. For all I know, you let her in there as some sick prank."

"A likely story!"

"Whatever, Severus Snape. If that monster's yours, these are too." Hermione reached into one of the pockets of her dressing gown and held a kneazle kitten out to him. "There are four of them."

Wide-eyed, Severus stared at the kitten in Hermione's hand, a vein pulsing rapidly in his forehead. The colouring of it was a dead giveaway of the monster who had dared defile his precious familiar.

"I'll kill him," Severus hissed. "That ginger brute is as good as dead!"

"You so much as look at my cat in the wrong way and I'll give him your balls to play with," she said conversationally, tickling the mewling kitten behind its ears.

Severus blinked, rather puzzled by the half hearted vitriol expressed.

"I don't suppose you have any cat scratch fever salve?" Hermione asked.

"What, pray tell, are you implying about my kneazle?"

"Actually, I'm more concerned about Crookshanks; he tried to stop me from extracting your beast from under my bed."

"Huh. Perhaps I misjudged him, if he tried to defend Matilda." Severus heaved a reluctant sigh, before stepping aside and allowing Hermione inside his quarters.

With the new mother and kittens safely ensconced in the cat bed before the fire, Severus turned to Hermione, who was gingerly inspecting the scratches scored across her nose, muttering to herself about the need to see Poppy Pomfrey for the second time in as many days.

After retrieving his salve for occasions when he outwore Matilda's non-existent patience, Severus eyed Hermione with a calculating air.

"You know, for the Head of Slytherin, you're being transparent," Hermione commented. "Anything to get your hands on me after our latest spat. But incidentally, I can't reach all of the scratches myself."

"Then perhaps, O mighty Head of Gryffindor, I will assist you. If you ask nicely."

Glowering darkly at her on-again, off-again lover, Hermione gestured towards the door. "After you threw me out last time, you have the nerve to say that? Forget it. I'll just go to Poppy."

"For the love of..." Severus growled, grabbing Hermione's arm. "You know that I have never apologised for anything, not even to Albus when I was forced to kill him. I should not have told you to leave..."

"More like yelled," Hermione muttered, jerking herself out of his grip only to hiss at the pain caused by the movement.

"Regardless, you accepted my mutual dislike of your friends when we first became involved. I am positive that Potter had something to do with Matilda's disappearance. Your stubborn refusal to believe me over Saint Potter was just the last straw."

"Severus, your continual paranoia about Harry is going to turn you into Moody's twin one of these days. He's promised to leave you alone if you leave him alone, so if he did expose your kneazle to Crookshanks and hide her for a month, you must have done something to him."

"I had nothing to do with his uncontrollable stuttering when he proposed to the unfortunate Miss Weasley."

Hermione just gave him a sceptical look. "Right. Like you had nothing to do with him tripping over when he collected his Order of Merlin."

"Of course. However, enough talk of Potter!"

"Enough talk in general. Goodnight, Severus."

Severus was inclined to agree, but not for the same reasons. He waited until Hermione had stepped towards the door to grab her, twisting her around to face him. A startled sound escaped her as he brought his lips down. A strangled moan escaped her throat as he teasingly nibbled at her lips, but before their kiss could become truly passionate, a pained cry escaped Hermione.

Flinching away from him, she shrugged out of his grip.

"When I said that I couldn't reach all of my scratches, I meant they were on my back!"

Having cajoled her into his bedchamber, Severus found that massaging healing salve into the scratches inflicted on Hermione's face and back went a long way towards repairing the rift between them.

"Hermione?" Severus asked as he stroked a long, balm carrying finger down her spine.

"Hmm?"

"What did you need to see Poppy Pomfrey about?"

Lulled into an unsuspecting doze, Hermione didn't have her wits about her. "Our baby."

"Our WHAT?"

Her back stiffening under his rigid hand, Hermione twisted around to face him, eyes wide with panic. She swallowed hard, but refused to look away from his apoplectic gaze.

"But you know that children are the fourth Unforgivable!"

"I thought that you said that Harry was?" Hermione reminded him, smiling weakly.

"I am going prematurely grey due to the children I am forced to supervise in this forsaken place."

"Severus, when you threw me out, you accused me of being the reason for that."

"Hermione, I don't know how to be a father..."

"That is irrelevant. We're not together; I don't expect you to be anything other than a sperm donor. Harry and Ron will be happy to be fatherly figures."

"Potter and Weasley? Never! I can learn."

Severus threw everything at his disposal to court Hermione over the following months as her stomach rounded with pregnancy. He suspected that she eventually accepted his umpteenth proposal just to get him to shut up.

Knowing virtually nothing about pregnant women, Severus was surprised by how randy Hermione was on their wedding night. He managed to keep his thought about her uncanny similarity to Matilda in heat to himself, only to wish that he had said as much when she muttered:

"I still think you put that monstrous Matilda under my bed."

"I must not hex my wife," he breathed.