

Shaggy Little Bugger

by Southern_Witch_69

Hermione copes with possibly losing Crookshanks to a disease: Feline Panleukopenia.

One-shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: I've swiped a couple of characters for a bit of plot to satisfy my own needs.

Thanks go to ladyinthecloak for beta reading.

Just to let you know, this is a little sad, and I dedicate this to anyone who's lost a pet in the past.

"Crooks? Here, boy."

Nothing.

"Are you hiding from me again, you shaggy little bugger? Come on, boy! Where are you?" Hermione made kissing noises with her lips and snapped her fingers.

She hadn't seen her furry familiar yet that morning and wondered if he still felt a bit down. The day before he'd been lying about listlessly and had no appetite. She'd been going over some reports for work and hadn't the time to do more for him... other than trying to cuddle him with comfort on her chest or on a small, soft pallet she'd made for him on her desk.

The few days before that he hadn't seemed too keen on grooming himself, causing his orange fur to appear a little rumpled in some spots, but he'd seemed to be in a good mood. It was nothing that a good brushing hadn't solved. She smiled as she thought of the way he'd arched against her hand and the brush, wanting to be scratched and petted.

"Crooks!" she called again, circling her table and going towards her bedroom. Maybe she'd accidentally closed him inside. Upon looking, however, she saw that he wasn't there either. As she made her way into the living room, she happened to notice a patch of fur poking out from the other side of the curtain.

"Up on the windowsill, boy, having a look?" she asked, feeling better and going to him. "We've got an appointment. Nothing wrong with a little check up, is there?" She opened the curtain and her smile faded.

Crookshanks was sprawled along the sill, gazing out through indifferent eyes. Normally, he watched the birds in the trees intently and pawed at the glass in hopes of getting to them. Now, though, he seemed to not even notice them.

"What's wrong, boy?" she asked softly, running a hand over his side. His ears twitched, and his eyes moved to look at her. "I should have made time to bring you in yesterday. I'm so sorry. Did you eat something not good for you?"

Hermione picked him up and cradled him against her protectively. When had he lost so much weight? Worriedly, she Disapparated with him right away, not even bothering with his pet carrier. The instant she reappeared in Diagon Alley, she made her way to the side street that held the veterinarian's office.

Though she was early for the appointment, the kindly man took her into the back and asked her to place Crooks on the cool, metal table in the center of his room. She watched as he looked into Crookshanks's eyes, ears, mouth, and then as he pulled out a thermometer.

"Hold him. This isn't very pleasant for them."

She laid a steadying pair of hands on her familiar's shoulders. It wasn't necessary, as he barely blinked when the man inserted the thermometer.

"Hmm," he said a moment later, frowning. He pulled his wand and cast a couple of spells, asking Hermione more about the past few days.

"What's wrong?" she asked. She could see that something wasn't right.

"And he's an inside cat, you say?"

"Mostly, yes. I allow him out to play or hunt sometimes, but where my flat is, it's only when I can be out as well. I wouldn't want him to wander too far off or anything."

"Normally cats who have no contact with others don't have to worry about catching certain diseases. Your lad here, though, has something called Feline Panleukopenia, I'm afraid."

"What is that?" she asked, mouth agape. "How's it contracted?"

"Other cats pass it on. It's a form of distemper. Heard of that?"

The blood rushed from her face in shock. "Yes."

"It's very rare that they survive this, Miss Granger. I think you should prepare yourself."

"But... but he's not been around any other cats lately. I would have seen it." There had to be a mistake. "Can we not do anything, sir?"

"How far do you want me to go?"

"What do you mean?"

He pulled on Crooks' fur, and it pulled away from his body easily, stretching up. "He's dehydrated. I could start with some fluids. That would help him. Sometimes, love, the key to their survival is for them to have the will and to eat to keep up strength. Maybe some fresh, cooked poultry?" He nodded at the cat's moving side. "See how he's breathing so fast?"

"That's only just started then."

"I can give a potion to help with his breathing and at least make him comfortable in that aspect." He shrugged and smiled apologetically. "I'm very sorry, but if he's not better in a week, I think you might want to consider just putting him down, honey. It would be better than him suffering."

"What does this Pan-loo-peen-uh do?"

"Panleukopenia. It... To be blunt, it rots their intestines. Sometimes they can mend if it's not very severe, but..." His eyes lowered as he gazed at the cat. "He'll need your help with his grooming. When they feel like this, they aren't in the mood to do it themselves, just feeling so nasty."

"But he's bad off, isn't he?" When he nodded, a few tears made their way into her eyes. "I should have brought him in yesterday. I know that. I was just busy, and oh, Crooks, I'm so sorry, boy."

"You could have brought him in last week, Miss Granger, and the outcome would have been whatever it will be."

"I... maybe he'll be all right though. You say some survive?"

The man nodded and turned away from her to fumble with some phials in a cabinet. Hermione could tell he hated to give her such glum news, but she supposed he'd been doing it many years. *How hard that must be... to tell us our pets are dying* she thought sadly. *And feeling helpless about it.*

Her gaze dropped down to her cat's still form. He was on his side, breathing quickly, eyes wide and staring, tail twitching. How could she have allowed this to happen to him? Hadn't she taken care of him as best as she could? *How could this... disease just creep up on him and take him away like this? He's part Kneazle damn it! He's not just a cat.*

"Crookshanks is how old?"

"I've had him for over eight years, but he was a few years old already. So, he's about twelve, I guess."

"I thought so. That's a good age, isn't it?" he asked softly. "He's had a good life, you know: love, a home, well cared for."

She nodded. "Until I allowed this to happen."

"It's not your fault." He placed two phials into her hands. "One small dose each evening. This much." He pointed to the first line on a dropper in his other hand. "You can have this, too."

"Thank you."

"Do you want me to put him on fluids?"

"I..." she began uncertainly. "Yes, please try."

"Leave him with me, and come back in about three hours, okay?"

She nodded. "I will." Leaning down, she nuzzled her cat's neck. "I'll be back for you."

When Hermione left, she Apparated to the meadow near the Burrow, wanting the comfort of the Weasleys but the peace of a solitary walk.

Crooks might die.

Likely would die.

It was so surreal. Things had been fine up until a few days ago. What other cats had been about? There were none that she could think of. When they went out into the private park behind her building, they'd rarely seen anyone, much less any other pets.

Upon seeing a pretty patch of flowers, Hermione knelt down and picked one up. "Bast, if you hear me, could you please help me? My cat, Crooks, he's very sick, and I want to save him. Please guide me in what to do. I offer this flower to you as a gift and will make an altar for you when I get home. Please help us."

Feeling positive that prayers might help, she bypassed her walk and Apparated to her flat once again. As promised to Bast, Hermione went about making a small altar with a few candles, lovely stones, and a floral arrangement. When she lit the candles, she recited a prayer to Bast in askance for help and guidance. Once she finished that, she moved on to get the flat ready for Crooks's return.

She made certain that the grate had a comfortable fire and plumped and refreshed a cat bed for Crooks, placing it near the fire so that he'd stay warm during the night. After that, she set about baking chicken and chopping it into fresh slivers in hopes of enticing him to eat. She set out a bowl of fresh water and poured dry cat food from a new box she'd bought days earlier. As an afterthought, she opened the curtains on the windows and the sliding glass doors so that Crooks could look out and see if he chose to.

When Hermione fetched Crooks from the office, he was plumped with fluid, but he had a little runny stool draining from him. The man reassured her it was normal at this stage and wished her luck. She brought her cat home and placed him in his bed, making certain he faced the windows.

The next few days passed with little change. He did eat and drink some, but it wasn't much. His trips to the litter box were very few. He seemed to take comfort in her holding him to her chest, rubbing him lovingly, and talking to him. Upon occasion, she would break into song for him, pleased that he seemed to like it. The biggest problem she had was to get him to take his potion in the evening. His breathing was still quickened, so she wasn't all that certain that it was helping anything anyway.

"What will I do without you? You're so weak, my love," she said, checking the clock. "It's nearly time for me to get ready for work. I can't leave you alone like this." She'd been working from home and was going to try to go into the Ministry for a day there, but how could she just abandon him when he needed her the most?

Deciding to just call in, she placed him down on his bed while she tossed a hand of Floo powder into the grate. When it turned green, she stuck her head inside. "Mister MacArthur?"

A moment later, his smiling face came into view. "Hermione, good morning."

"Not so good. My cat is still sick. I won't be coming to the office today after all. I'm sorry."

"I told you not to worry about it. All that can be done here, you can do from your home. Shall I send the files over later?"

"Please. I appreciate that."

"Aye, not a problem, lass."

"Have a good day."

She pulled away from the grate and smiled. She was lucky to have such an understanding department head. Just then a sorrowful wail rent the air, and she turned to see Crooks scrambling out of his bed to stagger towards the couch.

"Crooks? All right?"

He plopped down on side of the couch, breathing quickly, eyes opening wide. Hermione hurried over to him and whispered soothing, encouraging words. "It'll be all right. Just feeling a bit sick, boy." He stretched out his paws and arched his back, coughing slightly, eyes widening even more. And then he went still with a final gush of air from his mouth that smelled like what could only be described as death.

"No... no... but wait... I... no, Crooks, please," she said through sobs, cradling her cat to her, not realizing until much later that he'd had one final bowel movement and that it was now all over her nightgown. *Oh, my shaggy boy... gone from this world.*

Losing him was like losing family. He'd been a part of her life since her third year at Hogwarts and had always loved her unconditionally. And now he was gone. She'd failed him. He still had many years left, and yet, he'd succumbed to something as dreadful as a nasty viral disease.

"I'm so sorry, my love. So sorry. I wish I could have done something for you," she mumbled, finally placing him back down on the floor and discarding her soiled nightgown.

On her way to the loo to wash up, she spied the small altar she'd made for Bast and kicked it over in anger. "Thanks for all the help!" she snarled sarcastically, feeling ridiculous for believing the old ways would come through for her.

After cleaning herself, shedding more tears, and getting dressed, Hermione prepared Crookshanks one last time. Nestling him in his soft bed, she covered him with a furry blanket and placed a cat toy with him. Feeling guilty about knocking over the altar, she went to it, took the flowers and candles from it and Disapparated with them and Crooks in tow.

She went back to the meadow by the Burrow where she knew Crooks would like to have as his final resting place. For many years they'd visited the Weasleys, and he'd roamed about, chasing gnomes and being happy. Using magic, she soon had a hole dug and placed him in the ground.

"I love you, Crookshanks. Thank you for coming into my life that day. I think I needed you more than you could ever know. You've been such a good friend to me all these years...my own family."

With that, she flicked her wand and watched as the earth covered her beloved pet. Once it was neatly packed down, she lit the candles for him and arranged the flowers over his resting spot.

"Be at peace, honey. There's no more pain."

Southern's Notes: I lost a pet, Shaggy, earlier this year (June 2007) to this very disease. It was much like this. Sadly. Since then, I've lost another kitten, Dobby, that I adopted to something similar, and now, a new kitty, Cissy, has showed up at my house in need of a home. The veterinarian tested him for Feline Leukemia. He has it, and so he'll not be here very long. However, I will give him love and a good home until then. It's the least I can do. I love animals, and if you have a pet, go give him or her a big hug from SW69.