

Je T'Aime, Moi Non Plus

by septentrion

Crookshanks likes Severus very much, but it isn't reciprocal because Severus is allergic to cats. Not a simple situation for Hermione, who will have to choose.

One-shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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Fic written for Ayerf, who was kind enough to give me a prompt.

The title is inspired by this song: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Je_t%27aime..._moi_non_plus by Serge Gainsbourg and Jane Birkin. It means "I love you, neither do I." Though the song has high sexual connotations, the fic doesn't.

I'm very grateful to my beta, Dacian Goddess, for looking over this twice. She's spared you an infinity of horrors.

And of course, there's still the fact that I don't earn money writing fanfiction.

"A-choo!"

Severus glared down at the orange-furred half-Kneazle that was rubbing himself against his calves, leaving large amounts of hair on his black robes.

"Didn't you take an anti-allergy potion before you came?" Hermione inquired from behind him. She was unfastening the deep-blue cloak she'd worn for their outing and was hoping for some quality time with her lover of one month.

"A-choo! I" sniff "did" sniff. Severus drew a very white handkerchief from his pocket and dabbed at his dripping nose. "But it seems quite inefficient" sniff "against half-Kneazle hair."

By the time he was finished speaking, his glare had subsided to a watery gaze and tears were already forming at the corners of his eyes. It was only a matter of minutes before he started shivering and developing a fever, if his reaction to Crookshanks's presence last week was any indication. Hermione quickly scooped up her familiar and took him in an adjacent room.

"I'd better go back home." Severus sighed, disappointed to see his evening being cut so short. Why, but why was he attracted to a witch with a cat?

"I understand," Hermione answered.

"Next time, we'll go to my home, Hermione. I... Your cat... I don't mind you having a pet, but..."

Hermione chuckled wanly. "I told you I understood. Don't be embarrassed for something you can't control. Go home, Severus. I'll Floo-call you tomorrow to check if you

feel better." She kissed him on the cheek and watched him go out with a pang in her heart. Why, but why was she attracted to a wizard who was so strongly allergic to cats?

The next morning found Severus in far better shape. Another dose of anti-allergy potion, a good night's rest, and above all no cat, had done wonders. That didn't solve one bit the small problem of Hermione's attachment to her cat. Severus could tell without needing to consult a seer or a psychologist that she liked the beast very much...at least the cat had been faithful to her, unlike some redhead he would not name even in his mind...but that she liked him very much too...that he knew because he'd been working on securing her heart for the last year. If the cat had been an owl ("Crookwings" didn't sound so bad after all), or even a toad or a jarvey, all would have been fine. But a cat? Severus had successfully avoided cats since he was a child; even McGonagall in her Animagus form had learnt not to approach him. And here he'd let himself be assaulted twice in a week. Well, there was nothing for it; Hermione would have to choose between the half-Kneazle and him. If he'd played his seduction well, of which he had no doubt, surely his soon-to-be-affianced would choose him, right?

"What?" Hermione was rather flabbergasted. "What do you mean by 'leaving my cat into my parents' care'?" Really, Severus's request that she abandon her familiar, for that was how she felt about it, had taken her by surprise.

"Hermione, I can't set a foot in your flat without being ill. The mere presence of cat hair is enough to make me ill." He wasn't whining; no, Severus Snape never whined.

"Where's the problem? All we have to do is to meet at your place instead of mine," she replied reasonably.

Severus clenched his fists and paced on the rug in front of his fireplace; she hadn't got the point at all. "What if we want to spend more time together? Go away on holiday for example? What will you do with your cat then?"

Hermione, her face framed by the green flames of the Floo powder still burning in the hearth, frowned. "Do you plan on taking me somewhere?"

Blast! He hadn't intended to reveal that information so soon. "I had hoped you would accept to accompany me on a cruise on the Nile next spring."

"Really? That's great, Severus! I'll make arrangements." Pure joy was emanating from the young woman's smile, and Severus felt corresponding warmth in his insides. But his problem wasn't solved one bit. In the meantime, Hermione was already preparing their trip. Aloud. "I could leave Crooks with my parents, or perhaps Harry, during that time. Or better yet, at the Burrow..."

Severus stopped listening after that. The Burrow. Where the beast would be able to chase garden gnomes to his heart's content. Where the beast would be able to roam the country with abandon. Where the beast would be spoiled by the Weasleys. In short, the Burrow was a paradise designed for half-Kneazles. All Severus had to do was convince the orange fur ball that he wanted to stay at the Burrow where Hermione would never, ever live permanently. Then, he would move in with Hermione...after a thorough cleaning of her flat of course...because her flat was bigger, more convenient and better situated than his own; the spare room could be transformed into a nursery within the next two or three years, and it was only a two minute walk to Diagon Alley...where he held his business...from there. Perhaps he should have accepted the job proposed by the Ministry; it seemed to pay better than his modest Apothecary.

Hermione had been on cloud nine all day, to the point that her personal secretary had had to remind her of her scheduled meeting with the Minister. Severus planned on taking her to Egypt! It was better than any honeymoon: ancient monuments, sun, old magic, pleasant company, sex: everything a girl like her could dream of. She blessed the day she'd dared enter his apothecary to buy the new perfume he'd created and that *Witch Weekly* had gushed over so much. She'd rediscovered Severus Snape on that occasion, not as the belittling and petty teacher, but as a charming and witty man, knowledgeable on many subjects, never dull and always so attentive to her.

Somehow, she felt she could have something very serious with him, that he could very well be *the* man of her life; if only he wasn't allergic to cats! Which was very annoying, because the only other male she cared for very much (she didn't count her father because, well, he was her father and loving him was a given) was her half-Kneazle, Crookshanks. Hermione didn't want to think it, but in the depths of her mind, she knew she would have to make a choice between them sooner or later. Meanwhile, she had to get ready for her yearly pre-Christmas stay at the Burrow.

"Come on, Crooks," she crooned from her living room, "we're going to the Burrow."

Her familiar darted out of her bedroom and settled himself into his carrier without any outside convincing. He meowed, inquiring if the dark man would be there. As usual, his mistress misunderstood him.

"Of course, Crooks, you'll be able to chase gnomes to your heart's content."

If he could, Crookshanks would have harrumphed; he *already* knew he could chase gnomes at the Burrow. No, he liked the dark man, though it didn't seem reciprocal, and he wouldn't have minded meeting him again. He had the feeling the man would make a good pet to his mistress. Besides, she'd been alone for years, and it was high time she found a mate; and with his skill for discerning who was trustworthy or not, he was persuaded he had found said mate. But why did the man fall ill each time they met? Was Crookshanks such a bad familiar? No, he thought. He'd always done his best by her.

Besides, this had already happened once in the past, with that man her mistress had brought home, another dark-haired one but with blue eyes. He too had fallen ill and had had to leave soon after. Not a great loss, that one. What to do? He knew his mistress wanted kittens and he would never deprive her of that joy. The dark man was perfect for the task. Crookshanks sighed, as much as a half-Kneazle could sigh. He would have to leave. It was a heart-wrenching decision, but his mistress's happiness was worth it. Yes, he would leave her; or, rather... that was it! He would stay at the Burrow! She would visit him as often as she liked to, and life there wasn't that dreadful either. Now, how to convince her?

Crookshanks's attitude had been weird since they'd arrived at the Burrow, Hermione reflected. Her cat had always loved the place but had nonetheless found the time to lounge on her lap while she was reading, and he'd always slept with her. This time, though, Crooks had elected to sleep in front of the hearth downstairs, claiming an old carpet as his. He'd also spent more time with the Weasleys than with her. To say that Hermione was puzzled was an understatement until a casual remark from George shed some light on her cat's behaviour.

"Looks like your cat's making himself at home," he'd said one evening while stroking the purring half-Kneazle spread on his lap. They were sitting in the living-room, waiting for dinner to be ready.

Oh dear! Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear! Hermione remembered how enthusiastic Crooks had been at Severus's arrival. She could have sworn her cat had sported a hurt look at his enthusiasm being rebuked.

"Oh, no," she moaned aloud.

"What?" George asked.

"Do you think your parents would agree to take him in?"

George looked down at the ginger cat. "Sure. He's useful with the gnomes in the garden, and he's a very friendly cat. But why?"

"Because I think Crooks wants to stay here."

George's eyebrows shot up to his hairline. "What makes you think so?" Then, an air of understanding dawned on him. "You have a beau and they don't get along well?" he teased her.

Hermione blushed and averted her eyes. "It's more that he's allergic to cats." No need to deny the truth after all.

"Your cat must really like him, then, to leave the coast clear for another male."

"He does. And I do," she added as an afterthought.

George became serious. "Perhaps you'd rather spend Christmas Eve with him than here?"

"We've agreed on spending Boxing Day together, but... I don't know if he has someone to spend Christmas with..." she trailed off.

"Look, I'm sure you love spending Christmas Eve with us and all that, but it's your first Christmas with this man, right? You can always see us whenever you want, but perhaps you should surprise him and spend Christmas Eve with him?" Hermione could see here the man who had lost his twin rather than the usual practical joker, and perhaps he was right; she should make of this Christmas something special with Severus.

"George, I love you!" she exclaimed. She started to plan right away.

Severus closed his apothecary early on Christmas Eve. His thoughts were on the note he'd received from Hermione the day before. She'd said she had prepared a surprise for the both of them. While he was happily surprised that she'd put off her Weasley evening for him, he was a bit wary. Gryffindor and surprise didn't sound right in the same sentence. That wouldn't prevent him from taking care with his appearance tonight.

As agreed, Hermione picked Severus up at his flat later. She was breathtaking in her deep red dress with a made-to-entice décolleté and a slit that revealed her calves advantageously. What was more worrying was the length of black silk she took out of her purse.

"Hermione?"

"When I wrote 'surprise', I meant it, Severus. Don't fret, I promise it'll be to your advantage." She delicately fingered her dress near the rise of her breasts, her deep red fingernail a contrast to her milky, delicious skin.

Severus gulped. "All right," he croaked and bent his head to let her tie the piece of silk above his eyes.

Hermione took his hand and led him carefully down the staircase, then outside to the Apparition point. He noticed they'd landed directly in a house or a flat. It was unthinkable to act like that unless one was in their own home. Hermione's flat. Cat. Allergy. His mind nearly in panic, Severus tore the silk off his head and saw Hermione's couch right in front of him. He tried to pry her hand off his to fly out of this place as fast as possible. How could she think to mock him like that?

"Severus," Hermione called his name softly, never letting go of his hand. "My flat isn't the surprise. Look closely, please." She pleaded so earnestly that he decided to give in, but not before he'd assessed her sincerity by looking into her eyes. Slowly, he looked around him, made his way around the furniture and finally declared in a clipped tone, "I haven't been here very often, and not long enough to appreciate the decoration, but I can't see that anything has changed."

"You haven't looked closely enough," Hermione replied. "Isn't there something missing?" He heard the nervousness in Hermione's voice by the way it trembled slightly.

And then, it struck Severus. Not an orange hair was in sight. Not one. "Where's your cat?" he asked, puzzled.

She came in front of him. Her brown eyes delved into his black ones. "It seems Crookshanks is a very intelligent and loving cat. He's decided to stay at the Burrow, and the Weasleys have taken him in. Now, you can come by as often as you'd like to."

Severus was dumbstruck. He hadn't yet worked out a way to communicate with the cat and convince the beast he'd better stay away from his mistress, and here the solution to his predicament was literally falling into his lap! Well, that was most convenient, but he wondered if he oughtn't to show a bit of concern. "I... I don't really know what to say, Hermione. It's rather unexpected."

"I guess Crooks knew you mean a lot to me, that I care very much for you..." she trailed off, afraid to reveal too much too early. She shouldn't have worried, for she soon found herself tightly embraced by Severus.

"Hermione... Hermione..." he whispered into her hair, "I care very much for you too."

Hermione chuckled against his chest. "Now that that's settled, we could have dinner first and a nice time in front of the fireplace afterwards?"

Severus readily agreed to the proposition, which didn't mean much since he'd have agreed to any proposition Hermione could have made tonight, as long as it didn't include her cat. And for one evening, he decided to forego the notion that being sappy was ridiculous.